

# Exploring higher education teachers' online teaching experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic

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## Abstract

The Lived Experiences of Higher Education teachers in the online practice teaching amidst the Covid-19 were examined in the study. A phenomenological qualitative study that collected data through interviews. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and examined thematically. Themes, sub-themes, and important assertions were identified during the data analysis. In-depth individual interviews were used to gather data. The guide questions were employed by the researcher, who subsequently analyzed them. The Problems encountered by Higher education teachers are passive learners, limited teaching approaches and strategies, online cheating, not user-friendly software, tardiness in submitting requirements, the kind of gadgets used by the students, and maintaining discipline online. Hence, teachers were so stressed, they experienced anxiety, worry and there was fear of uncertainty. As college teachers teaching online during the epidemic, this lived experience prepared the path for their coping strategies. They pursued new interests and hobbies, took a break from social media and listened to inspirational songs/videos. Schools are also being urged to reinforce the curriculum's practices, conduct webinars and virtual meetings regarding mental health and well-being, and craft educational policies to strengthen management and curricular systems of the college /university.

**Keywords:** Coping strategies, Higher Education teachers, Lived experiences, Online teaching

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## Introduction

The COVID-19 certainly alters the way people live around the world. It created fright, ordeal, sadness, and worry for many people around the world. (Talidong, 2020). All of which forced Colleges and Universities to toggle to workable educating and instructing endeavors. The Commission on Higher Education issued a recommendation for the implementation of a new teaching-learning modality (Gocotano 2021). In the case of the Philippines; Higher education institutions offered remote learning as an alternative during the epidemic's peak. (Abante, et al. 2021). As mentioned by Barrot (2021), these happenings ignited the digitization of educational institutions and tested their capability to take action efficiently and swiftly. Many institutions changed their curricula, Online teaching modality became the new norm. Faculty members uploaded their lessons and learning materials in Google classroom, meet students via Google Meet or Zoom, recognized new learning and teaching modality, and implemented new technology. This transition was easy for many countries but, in the case of the Philippines which is a developing country with limited ICT capacity, this was a challenge. Barrot (2021) highlighted that educators who cannot effectively and appropriately use technology were forced to clinch on technology even though they were not tech-savvy or computer literate. This was also supported by Toquero (2020) when he emphasized the true condition of many Philippine Colleges and Universities that are not prepared to execute e-learning. Many people throughout the world have been affected by the outbreak. Kainama & Hendriks (2021) accentuate that the issue has a significant impact on teachers' instructional experiences. Teachers' expertise should be used as a guide for implementing online education. It can be inferred that the instructors' experience shows it is both successful and ineffectual amid the pandemic of 2019.

Presently, in the Philippines face to face classes have not resumed yet after almost two years of living amidst the pandemic. Students continue to study remotely and teaching is still in online modality. Reading through literature, the researcher bank on the recommendation given by Talindog (2020) for a thorough inquiry on the outcome of the epidemic to the psychological well-being of Philippine educators. Moreover, Toquero (2020) recommends to Universities and Colleges to generate studies and put into writing the pandemic's impact on schooling. There were studies conducted in the Philippines about teachers'

experiences in online teaching before the pandemic and during the pandemic, but studies were not from the experiences of teachers in this City . Thus, this study aims to put into writing and to learn more about the experiences of teachers and their coping strategies in the online teaching-learning endeavors while living amidst the pandemic.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The qualitative phenomenological research design was employed in this study. Instead of focusing on causes and interrelationships, this phenomenological inquiry tries to uncover genuine people's stories and narratives of their experiences and feelings (Dukes, 1984). This phenomenological study intended to investigate teachers' lived experiences in online teaching amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Research Questions**

The study aimed to describe the lived experiences of Higher Education teachers in the City amidst Covid 19. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Higher Education teachers amidst Covid-19 pandemic?
2. What are the mental health issues experienced by Higher Education teachers amidst Covid-19 pandemic?
3. What are the coping strategies of Higher Education teachers amidst Covid-19?

### **Data Gathering**

In-depth individual interviews were used to gather data. The guide questions were employed by the researcher, who subsequently analyzed them. The following six steps of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) were used: familiarization, which includes transcribing the data and jotting down initial ideas, coding the data, gathering codes into prospective themes, checking or reviewing themes; defining themes, which involve an examination to filter information of each theme and labeling each theme; and finally, generating an academic essay of the analysis. Participants indicated that it accurately mirrored their experiences and that the summaries were accurate, giving the study credibility. An expert was also enlisted to double-check the coding themes and sub-themes. Participants in this research were ten (10) College teachers /instructors in a State College. The participants were chosen using a purposive sample strategy. To categorize the study participants, the researcher relied on her judgment. The following are the reasons for selecting the study's participants: Easy access of the researcher to collect the data, given the COVID-19 restrictions, those who have personal experience with the topic under investigation and are willing to be interviewed, and teachers who were introduced to online teaching for the first time were chosen as teacher participants. They may be able to shed light on teachers' experiences with online instruction, according to the study.

## **Results and Discussions**

### **Problems Encountered by Teachers in Online Teaching**

#### **Passive Learners**

“Learners are not participative, they do not interact, not active learners”

#### **Limited Teaching Approaches and Strategies Used**

“I cannot use cooperative learning approaches, it is difficult, I cannot implement varied strategies”

### **Online Cheating**

*“Students are cheating; activities submitted mirrored the name of the classmates”*

### **Software not user friendly**

“In downloading software is not user friendly. Sometimes students also find it difficult to use the software because they are not oriented to use it. “

### **Tardiness in submitting requirements**

“Students cannot submit on time their requirements “

### **Gadgets used**

*“Many students are using cell phones, hence difficult to access lessons”*

### **Maintaining discipline online**

“It’s difficult to impose discipline among students, while teaching online”

### **Unstable Connectivity**

*“Either myself or the students will leave the meeting anytime because of poor connectivity”*

### **Described experiences in online teaching**

One of the issues that teachers had when teaching online was the type of learners they had, which were mostly *passive*. Students were not participative; they did not interact with other students. In the study of Hung (2008), the result showed that most of the students were passive, with the majority of their online learning activity consisting of reading or viewing course materials. Given the fact that the course was intended to highlight peer collaboration with a clear framework and sufficient instructions, students did not actively seek collaborations as evidenced by their online learning activities. As a result, according to Sun (2020), teachers should invest more time and effort to prepare for online courses, as well as developing and devising lessons that would increase students' focus span. Teachers must also slowly turn students from passive recipients to active participants in interactive question and answer sessions, examinations, lectures, and open conversations. Moreover, there were *limited teaching approaches and strategies used*, it is difficult to implement different strategies. The study backs up the premise that online courses operate best when they're intended to take use of internet technology's learning capabilities, rather than when they're utilized to supplement traditional teaching methods (Oliver, 1999). According to Bao (2020) in traditional in-class instruction, insufficient pre-class study preparation, limited participation in class discussions, and inadequate discussion depth are all common occurrences; similarly, those difficulties should not be disregarded in online education.

Another problem that emerged was *online cheating* even to the extent that activities submitted mirrored the name of the classmates. Many institutions reported major cheating in online tests in spring 2020, according to Bilen & Matros (2021), and the problem got so widespread that it was even publicized by the media. Because online tests do not require face-to-face proctoring, students can utilize their notes, the internet, and other resources to aid them in answering questions. They can also discuss and collaborate during their tests by teleconference (or some other technique). Students who do not cheat on online tests suffer as a result of this cheating. Teachers also had to deal with the problem of software that was not user-friendly. Students may also find it difficult to operate the software since they have not been taught how to do so. An additional problem encountered by teachers was the problem that the software was not user-friendly. Sometimes students also find it difficult to use the software because they are not oriented to use

it. In many cases, the use of different software also needs strong connectivity. Sing & Arya (2020) made mention in their study that because of the poor internet access in far-flung portions of emergent nations, voice alone with animated PowerPoint slides had a better response with no necessity for an instructional video. For most pupils who had better internet connectivity, however, the delivery was boring. According to Quezada et al. (2020), research has shown that synchronous learning is more successful than asynchronous learning for students who struggle with higher-level cognitive demands in the academic setting. This can be explained by the fact that the rigid structure of education, along with infrequent and low-quality interactions, increases distance barriers and communication gaps. Teachers also experienced *tardiness of students in submitting requirements*; they cannot meet deadlines on requirements. In the article written by Flaherty (2020) a teacher had a change of heart because, during the pandemic, a teacher spent an unusual amount of time attempting to find down students who hadn't checked in or missed deadlines. He discovered that they were going through a lot of difficulties, including unemployment, extra care giving, hospital jobs that left them feeling overwhelmed or afraid (or both), and poor or no internet connectivity at home. In addition, *many students are using cell phones and it's hard for them to access the lessons because of limited features in phones than on laptops*. However, in the report of Wang et al. (2005) they made mentioned that although mobile device use in education is still in its early stages, there have been a few notable examples of successful implementation in schools. Shanghai Jiaotong University's (SJTU) E-learning Lab, for example, has successfully provided a sample broadcast of its online courses to cell phones. Finally, there's the issue of maintaining discipline while online. Gelles (2020) also underlined the importance of professors in aiding students in their adaptation, but that students also felt a feeling of ownership over their own learning. Time management, being "present" in ways that remote learning enabled, removing distractions, and setting limits were among the behaviors that students found to be most effective for them. The overarching approach of self-control influenced many of these actions. Most students could identify time management as a crucial part of self-discipline when it came to remote learning. In addition, even though each teacher's concerns are unique, certain stressors recur regularly, according to Jakubowski (2021). These include workload/time pressure, low student motivation, and discipline issues.

## **Mental health issues experienced by Higher Education teachers amidst Covid 19 pandemic?**

### **Stressed**

**"I am stressed because there are times I cannot connect to my students because of load problem and internet connection"**

### **Anxiety and Worry**

**"I'm upset if I can be infected because we are reporting to school every day"**

### **Fear of Uncertainty**

**"I don't know what will happen"**

## **Teachers' mental health experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic**

Teachers' stress is primarily related to connecting issues and the inability to connect with their students. Teachers' stress levels are between a medium and a high level, according to Jakubowski (2021), and this is partly due to the transition of education to the virtual realm. Findings in the research article of Jakub Šrol, et al. (2021) stressed the fact that anxiety and a sense of loss of control are linked to a higher perception of COVID-19 risk and a lower faith in institutions' response to the epidemic. Added to this mental issue is the fear of uncertainty. In the article of Coelho C. et al. (2020), they made mention intolerance of uncertainty, health anxiety, the risk for loved ones, and consulting additional information sources as independent

predictors of fear of the corona virus. Moreover, this could be because when teaching online, teachers face a range of obstacles, including insufficient technical resources, disruption to families, a lack of training, a lack of clarity and direction, and a lack of technical expertise (Joshi, 2020).

## **Coping strategies of teachers in Higher Education Institutions amidst Covid-19**

### **Pursuing a new interest**

*"I'm into baking cooking, crafting, planting, exercising, playing with my fur baby"*

### **Break from social media**

*"The more I will open my face book and messenger, the more I will get anxious because of the death news, so I log out from facebook"*

### **Listening to inspirational songs/videos**

*" I listened to Christian songs"*

*" I watched inspirational videos"*

In the early months of the pandemic, academics' lives appear to have been considerably affected, with frequent shifts to remote work and concomitant long periods of working from home (Leeuhen, 2021). While under quarantine, Filipino teachers have discovered a new interest: using social media to communicate with friends, students, and colleagues, as well as read COVID-19 news updates, which can help them stay informed during a crisis (Talidong, 2020). To cope with concern, they spend time with family, pursue new interests, or engage in social media activities, according to Jakubowski (2021). Teachers are into planting that created the so-called "plantitos" and "plantitas", others are into baking, cooking, exercising, mountaineering, and playing with fur babies." Another coping strategy that teachers used is a break from social media. The news in social media about deaths of friends and relatives brought anxiety to teachers, thus breaking from social media and getting offline helped them cope with anxiety. This was also proven by Graham et. Al (2021) that taking a break from social media can help one sleep better, which in turn improves well-being. According to Przybylski, *et al* (2021), Concerns over the effects of social media use on well-being have led to the practice of "digital detoxing," or taking a brief break from social media platforms in the hopes of repurposing the time formerly spent on social media for other, presumably more fulfilling pursuits. Moreover, others cope by *Listening to inspirational songs/videos*. Music listening has been found to be one of the most efficient ways for young people to cope with stress, according to research (Vidas et al., 2021). These coping techniques, according to Robosa (2021), enabled them to overcome online learning challenges and continue teaching in the face of pandemics.

## **Conclusion**

The absence of real classroom experience, passive learners, limited teaching approaches and strategies, online cheating, not user friendly software, tardiness in submitting requirements, the type of gadgets used by students, and maintaining discipline online were the biggest problems, according to teachers' personal experiences. Teachers were so pressured that they experienced anxiety and worry, as well as apprehension about the future. As college teachers teaching online during the epidemic, this lived experience prepared the path for their coping mechanisms.

## **Recommendations**

1. Schools are also being urged to reinforce the curriculum's practices.
2. Conduct of webinars and virtual meetings regarding mental health and well being.

3. Craft educational policies to strengthen management and curricular systems of the university..

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