Unfolding English Teachers' Dilemma in the New Normal: A Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract:

This paper focuses on the qualitative methods used to examine English Teachers' dilemma in the new normal. The qualitative nature of this study reveals the lived experiences of the English teachers and how they dealt with efficiency of the new modality during pandemic time, also share their insights about their struggles and dilemmas in the new normal. The methods used included administration of pre/post-survey; interviews with the English teachers; and analysis. Analysis of the data reveals the proposed flow of data collection procedures which inclined to the phases of Thematic Analysis by Braun and Clark, given: familiarization, generating initial codes, create the initial themes, naming and defining the themes, and lastly writing the final report. The analysis also anchored on Labov's Natural Narrative Model. The implications for this study reveal the English teachers' dilemma and challenges in the new normal through sharing their lived experiences. Various methods used to conduct research in natural setting. Summary and findings of the study expressed the teachers' lived experiences about their struggles and dilemmas in the new normal. The common dilemma English teachers have encountered is the communication between the teacher and the student, the minimal technical assistance, and the learning materials (limited) that should be used to carry out the learning goals.

Keywords: *Teachers' dilemma, Narrative inquiry, new normal, Covid-19 pandemic*

Introduction:

Education institutions are now tasked with producing professionals capable of thriving in an internationalized economy. This demands consideration of various factors related to the readiness to participate and compete in a globalized education environment, including indicators of quality and efficiency within the Philippine education system. For instance, English teachers globally had to drastically adjust their teaching strategies and assessments during the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes, driven by the necessity for digitalization (Rospigliosi, 2020), also highlighted an abrupt shift in pedagogical processes. Teachers faced the challenge of quickly reorganizing their methods while considering the individual traits, needs, and socio-economic backgrounds of their students, making the task even more daunting. Turchi et al. (2020) noted that transferring "classroom culture" to varied home environments added another layer of difficulty compared to the pre-pandemic classroom delivery.

Globalization has significantly influenced individual mindsets and the education paradigm. Complex problems in nation-building have been further complicated by globalization (Banlaoi, n.d.). The onset of the novel coronavirus exacerbated these issues, highlighting the Philippine state's struggle to implement policies that prepare the country for global competitiveness. The Department of Education introduced various learning modalities to maintain educational continuity during the pandemic. These modalities included Modular Distance Learning (MDL), Online Distance Learning (ODL), and TV/Radio-Based Instruction (RM 051 s.2020).

Teachers, however, bore the greatest burden. Unprepared and lacking proper support, they needed significant preparation to use online tools, distribute modules, and manage other logistics. The challenge of verifying student independence in task completion also emerged. The struggles of teachers during this period were both visible and undeniable.

Related studies have highlighted challenges in using these learning modalities. Many students struggled with online learning activities and requirements due to limited or no internet connectivity. Technological challenges, especially in areas without reliable internet, posed significant obstacles to teaching and learning continuity, particularly for institutions that chose online learning (Edizon, 2020). Thus, effective alternative models of learning during the pandemic required a well-designed technical and logistical implementation plan.

This narrative inquiry study aims to explore and document the lived experiences of English teachers during the pandemic. The researcher seeks to provide a comprehensive narrative of how these teachers coped with the various modalities, shedding light on their struggles and dilemmas. This understanding is crucial for fostering empathy and support for teachers facing these challenges.

Strategies and techniques in distance learning present a wider gap compared to traditional classroom settings. Meyers and Jones (1993) stated that strategies engaging students in the learning process stimulate critical thinking and awareness of other perspectives. Although lecturing can be appropriate at times, using a variety of instructional strategies can enhance student learning.

However, implementing effective online teaching strategies requires patience, techniques, time, and consideration. Challenges include lack of motivation in online learning, technical difficulties with online teaching tools, and time-consuming resource management (Best, 2020).

In this study, the researcher observed that English teachers faced numerous dilemmas in delivering lessons effectively within a flexible learning framework. Teachers employed various techniques to enhance the efficiency of their teaching strategies using different learning modalities, but some strategies were not fully realized. To explore these experiences, the researcher will use Labov's Model of Narrative Analysis.

Literature Review:

This section reviews the literature relevant to this research, providing insights from various articles and studies that support the exploration of English teachers' dilemmas in the new normal. It includes both local and international research on narratives, challenges, strategies, and experiences of teaching during the pandemic.

Several approaches to classroom management aim to create environments that prevent problematic behavior. Banks (2014) describes strategies for developing antecedent classroom techniques to enhance management plans, offering valuable interventions for teachers facing recurring dilemmas.

Dayagbil et al. (2021) investigated the continuation of teaching and learning in Philippine higher education, particularly in state colleges and universities. Using a qualitative approach, they identified emerging themes. Despite the effective implementation of policies in many public institutions, limited or no internet connectivity posed significant challenges for learners. This issue led teachers to make adjustments to meet student needs, emphasizing the necessity for higher education institutions to adopt flexible teaching modalities and recalibrate curricula.

Stakeholder decisions in educational institutions are crucial for meeting demands, especially during the pandemic. The larger the institution, the more complex the stakeholder landscape (Illanes et al., 2020; Smalley, 2020). Frankki et al. (2020) stress the importance of identifying medium- and long-term implications of the pandemic on the education system. Understanding these factors helps address current challenges, making it essential to gather teachers' perspectives on early signs of teaching dilemmas.

Sweeney (2020) argued for ending the focus on assessments and competitions, advocating for greater recognition of teachers' value during the pandemic. This perspective supports the need for an inclusive education system that benefits all stakeholders, aligning with the goals of this research.

Hayat et al. (2021) and Sutton & Austin (2015) outline content analysis methods and data management frameworks used in qualitative research. This study follows these methodologies, presenting the stories of six teachers and analyzing the data through transcribing, coding, and theming. Cross-checking by the researcher and an external review by the research adviser ensures the dependability and consistency of the findings. Recorded data will be stored securely and disposed of after one year to maintain data privacy. The use of both digital and physical records ensures the accuracy and ethical handling of information, adhering to the university's standards.

Methodology:

Design
This qualitative study used a narrative design analysis anchoring on Labov's Natural Narrative Model. As the study aims to tell the dilemmas of English Teachers in developing appropriate online learning strategies in this pandemic time, this objective was attained by gathering narratives through interviews and questionnaires. This model helped the researcher in filtering stories and coding various situations the informants had encountered being English Teachers who have encountered tons of dilemmas and adapted to the new norm of education. Through conducted inquiries in narrative design analysis, the researcher captured personal and human dimensions of experiences over time and take account of the relationship between the individual experience of being in the pandemic times.

Environment
This study has parameters to gather narratives in Maya National High School located at Maya, Daanbantayan, Cebu. Originally, the urban place is from the Northern tip of Cebu. There are six (6) English Teachers. In the adaptation of the flexible management system, the researcher has laid an interest in how the English Teachers deal with the dilemmas and struggles in this pandemic time and how the teachers were able to cope with their dilemmas and struggles.
The qualitative research was conducted in a natural setting. This means qualitative researchers study things as they are. There were multiple approaches used. Purposive sampling was utilized. The process generally involved interacting with people by interviewing them and observing the setting considering the safety measures in this trying time. Through this setting, data-gathering procedures can still be administered without putting any risks on both ends. The research setting includes the physical, social, and cultural site in which the researcher conducts the study.

Informants
For this study, the researcher retained a purposive sampling technique. The purposive sampling technique is also known as selective sampling for researchers use to recruit participants who can provide in-depth and detailed information about the phenomenon under investigation (Stats, Statwork, 2021).

The inclusion criteria in selecting participants are: (a) English Teachers who have been teaching during this time of pandemic (b) have signed the Informed Consent Letter with the willingness to be interviewed.

Instrument
The researcher, being the one who conducts the study, became the primary instrument of this investigation and supplemented with an interview guide. The researcher-made questions are guided by the principles of philosophical studies validated by qualitative experts in the field of narrative inquiry. Along with it are a total of eight (8) main questions used to unfold the dilemmas and struggles the informants experienced. The researcher made preliminary questions before conducting the actual interview. The researcher sought validation from a qualitative expert in the field of narrative inquiry on the revisions that have been made. Furthermore, items identifying the type of communication channels and the setting (date, time frame, and location) in the administration of the interview are being provided for recording procedures.

Data Gathering and Procedures
The process started with the preliminary phase followed by the implementation and post-implementation.

Preliminary Phase. The researcher submitted three title proposals to the Dean of the Graduate School Studies. The title approval was given to proceed with this study. Chapters I, II, and III will be checked on the design hearing proposal with the panelists. Suggestions are made to improve the study. For the researcher to gather the necessary data from the prospective informants, the researcher secured a letter of approval from the Dean of Graduate School Studies. The researcher secured another letter to the School Division Superintendent of Cebu Province which granted the permission respectively. Then the researcher secured a transmittal letter to the school head of the target school which granted permission to collect data from English Teachers. Lastly, the researcher gave the informed consent to prospective participants for the involvement of the study, voluntarily. The researcher also sought guidance from the qualitative expert to validate questions that was used for the interview. Along with those preparations, the researcher also provided consent letters to the teacher-informants for the recording of the interview. The identity of the respondents was kept with utmost confidentiality. Pilot testing will be done before gathering the actual data. To assess data rigor, the criteria of credibility, dependability, and conformability were used. Data validity investigated with a triangulation strategy. In addition to semi-structured interviews, note-taking during interviews and long-term data engagement with the respondents was used to validate the data.

Actual Data Collection. The researcher adopts the strategies done by (Hayat et al., 2021) where structured interviews along with field notes are used as data collection strategies. Purposive sampling continues until saturation, meaning no further data is obtained on the topics of interest. To determine the conformability of the findings, all activities were recorded.

The researcher followed the set safety and health protocols, thus wearing face masks throughout the interview and observing social distancing. Permission was given to the informants for the interviews during their free time for about thirty (30) minutes to one (1) hour in one of the rooms of the target school. All interviews were recorded either with a voice recorder, or cell phone recorder that was feasible and comfortable to the respondent's end. Audio recordings were transcribed (verbatim) immediately after they take place.

Data Management. Anchoring in the methods applied by (Hayat, et al., 2021) in their content analysis research, units of meaning directly related to the research question were then filtered and selected. This procedural flow was integrated with the data analysis and management framework (Sutton, J., & Austin, Z., 2015) in qualitative research practice, which follows the interpretation of data -transcribing and checking-reading between the lines -coding -theming in data analysis and management. After that phase, cross-checking was done by the researcher to consolidate the prominent interpretation in analyzing the data gathered, to avoid biased analysis, and to make it less subjective. The results of the data were subjected to review and validation by the research adviser. To determine the dependability of the findings, the views of the research adviser were sought. This external review confirmed the consistency of the results. After the interview, the informants were given a token of appreciation as part of this research study and compromise the safety of the recording that was kept in a flash drive and will be disposed of after 1 (one) year.

Data Analysis

The present study will apply Thematic Analysis (TA) notably hallmarked (Braun and Clarke, 2017). Thematic Analysis is a flexible and non-research design-specific data analysis. It generates themes from the data gathered in the interview that lie befit for narrative analysis research (Stats, Statwork, 2019). In line with this, the researcher followed the procedural framework for the data collection and analysis. While the narratives were organized in line with the orientation of Labov's Narrative Model, the proposed flow of data collection procedures were inclined to the phases of Thematic Analysis by Braun and Clark (2013), given:

1) Familiarization – this is done with the repeated action of reading the transcribed data to get a thorough overview of the data gathered before analyzing individual items;
2) Generating initial codes – this is done by highlighting essential information to filter similar data and to generate codes from it;
3) Create the initial themes – after grouping the data, the patterns are identified in the totality of codes to initiate a theme;

4) Name and define the themes – this part starts the understanding of implication per code and themes, such as analyzing the struggles and dilemmas the informants have experienced; and

5) Write the final report – the last action marks the interpretation of results and formulation of discussion.

These are the proceedings that would move the researcher in the composition of conclusions and recommendations.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher fully complied with the guidelines and requirements prescribed by the University in the conduct of the study. Ethical principles were used to guide the research in addressing the initial and ongoing issues arising from qualitative research to meet the goals of the research as well as to maintain the rights of the research informants. The informants of the study are the English Teachers.

Findings and Discussion:

In this part of the study, the researcher interpreted and analyzed the narratives of the six teachers. The narratives were analyzed using thematic analysis to extract the underlying dilemmas of the teachers during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The proposed flow of data collection procedures is inclined to the phases of Thematic Analysis by Braun and Clark (2013), given:

Codes	Organizing Theme	General Theme
1.Implementation of new normal was least effective.	Least effective	Efficiency
2. Implementation of new normal was least effective.	Least effective	Efficiency
3. Implementation of new normal was least effective.	Least effective	Efficiency
4.Different learning modality successfully carried-out	Successfully carried-out	Efficiency
5. On the process of adjusting phase	Adjusting phase	Efficiency
6.The implementation was successful but unsatisfying.	Successful but unsatisfying	Efficiency

The final report is all about the lived experiences of the English Teachers and how they dealt with the efficiency of the new modality during pandemic time.

Labov's (1972) model for the analysis of narrative macrostructure of stories relating to personal experiences has been suggested as a possible universal measure of narratives and has been applied to a variety of narratives. While applying Labov's (1972) model, it is deemed possible to see the underlying structure of experiences and demonstrate its continuous ability to provide valuable insights. Following the coding of this model, the researcher carefully transcribed and analyzed the gathered data to present the most comprehensive and large-scale study of teachers' perceived stories about their dilemmas in the new normal. Below is the presentation of the results and discussion.

- **Abstract**

The study with a sample of 6 English Teachers from Maya National High School reveals that due to the immediate implementation of a nationwide lockdown and the total shift to distance learning (online and modular), teachers have dilemmas and struggles adapting to the implementation of new normal policies that require strict implementation- safety protocols (i.e., wearing of face mask and face shield, washing of hands, and social distancing) thus, affects the students' progress. The informants were mainly concerned about their dilemmas in the new normal in the field of teaching. They also shared that they were feeling anxious and frustrated about their ways of scaffolding and evaluating the students' performance considering the new normal way of learning. English teachers carried out the implementation of the learning modality. "It is really frustrating since I cannot really assess my students' performance.". As per the informants, implementation is successful but somehow unsatisfying on their end.

- **Orientation**

The disruptive effects of the COVID-19 outbreak have impacted almost all sectors in the Philippines and higher education is no exception. To analyze stories/narratives, Labov's orientation believes that narratives make use of temporal junctures where the order of the events matches the order of the narrative clauses (2006). For the orientation, the questions given would invite the informants to express and narrate their dilemmas and struggles in the new normal. According to the data gathered, four (4) of six (6) informants have experienced hardships and frustrations in assessing and evaluating students' performance and progress. However, two (2) of the informants take their lived experiences as a challenge in their profession. One of the informants stated that "At the onset of the pandemic, I offered extra time every Saturdays to have classes to supplement learning.". The informants offered alternative techniques and strategies in teaching in learning performance of the students in this time of pandemic.

- **Complicating Action**

Complicating action is the third category of Labov's model of narrative analysis where the real story begins with narrative clauses. (Johnstone, 2001). "A clause of complicating action is a sequential clause that reports the next event in response to a potential question, 'And what happened?' "(Labov, 1997:5). It builds tension to keep the audience listening. (Johnstone, 2001).

The complicating action from the informants' responses are those having different and similar responses to each question. Technically, there were 6 informants. Some of the informants' responses were the same and some are not. Two (2) of the informants were having hard time providing feedback to students stating "I have been struggling in assessing my students' performance. I also cannot observe my students' level of understanding." Four (4) of the informants were having multiple dilemmas and struggles in modular learning modality, one said "At the beginning we struggled in producing large number of printed modules for the students, there were limited material/resources to be used" on the other hand, one said "Students fail to follow the instructions on the modules while some say they are confused about some tasks/activities."

Generally, the informants faced lots of challenges dealing with the new normal way of learning and its modalities. Thus, other complicating actions dealt with this sudden shift away from the classroom in many parts of the globe, some are wondering whether the adoption of new learning modalities will continue to persist post-pandemic, and how such a shift would impact the worldwide education system.

- **Resolution**

As the result of the story is revealed, things become simpler, and the audience's tension is lifted. "What finally happened?" is the narrative query in this section. The narrative function is to recapitulate the story's final key occurrence, and the linguistic form is expressed as the last of the narrative clauses that initiated the complicating action.

Generally, the informants had numerous difficulties when coping with the new usual style of learning and its various modalities. Social media and other online devices can be utilized in getting information and communicating. Through constant communication and reminders from the teachers, perhaps learners adapt and scaffold themselves in the new normal by the guidance of teachers. Efforts must be exerted to overcome the perceived dilemmas such as conducting home visitation, providing constant feedback virtually or in-person, and sending more enriching activities. Persevering the challenges to be adaptable is sufficient to handle the diverse duties and explore other choices, to orchestrate ahead of time.

- **Evaluation**

Evaluation in Labov's Narrative model is defined as the functions to make the point clear. (Simpson, 2005). In 2003, Akilokt quoted that evaluation is seen in the narrative event as information on the consequences of the event for human needs and desires" (Labov, 1997: 5, in Akilokt, 2003). The narrator may evaluate events by comparing them to an alternative reality, which did not occur, might have occurred, or would rather occur as an evaluative purpose. In this research, the questions given invited the informants to pose suggestions on what management systems or programs their institution

should adopt that would cater to the needs of the students while the effects of the pandemic are still evident.

In consolidation of all the narratives from the six (6) selected informants, their suggestions focus on the following categories, namely: a) learner-teacher constant communication; and b) implement limited face-to-face classes.

The overall data reflects four (4) informants who recommend the learner-teacher constant communication about the expected learning goals. Specifically, English teachers have had hard time in scaffolding students' performance in the new normal. A study by Buffet (2019) shows that learner-teacher relationship is important in the short term because it creates a thriving classroom environment, helps students develop self-worth and improves student mental health. Due to technical problem and other matters that teachers can no longer control (i.e., no internet connection, no cellular phones, and strict implementation of safety protocols) there are times that teachers can't check the progress of the students. Thus, constant learner-teacher communication is recommended to experience high-quality education in the new normal.

In addition to this perspective, there are two (2) informants who suggested to start the limited face-to-face classes as soon as possible. An informant specifically directs her suggestions with the statement "I believe there are no other forms can replace the efficiency of teachers in providing meaningful teaching-learning experience. The learners will come to school by batch still and will adhere to the health standard set by the IATF." Other than that, an informant also shares her opinion about the efficiency of virtual classes in this time of pandemic. This implies that teachers have hard time adjusting to the different modes of learning.

When it comes to the dilemmas and struggles of the English teachers in this time of pandemic, various opinions were gathered. There are some who see these dilemmas as one of the challenges being an educator. In opposition, other informants take this as hassle and less efficient so they suggest to have an alternative way such as implementation of limited face-to-face classes. An option of having a face-to-face class was suggested "to clarify all the things that the student didn't understand in the module." According to Dayagbil (2021), technological challenges like internet connectivity especially for places without signals are seen as the greatest obstacle in teaching and learning continuity especially for academic institutions that have opted for online learning as a teaching modality. Other evaluative narratives of the informants talk about the efficiency of other learning modality and how they overcome the dilemmas and somehow find alternative ways to continue learning amid pandemic time.

- **Coda**

The coda is the last part of the model that reflects the totality of the narratives. As reflected in the informants' experiences, there were six (6) informants who have different struggles and dilemmas during the adjustment phase of the new normal in the field of education. As stated, the informants have tons of dilemmas yet somehow managed to overcome and evidently carried-out alternatives in order to deliver meaningful learning amid pandemic time. As the pandemic continues, the English teachers have made overall insights related to their lived experiences as an educator in this time of pandemic, that is to strive more and be flexible in order to overcome the hurdles and battles that might come on the way in the field of teaching amid pandemic.

However, as for the implementation of the various learning modalities, the adaptation and adjustment phase in the middle of the pandemic has made the teachers unleash their highest potential as an educator for they are tested by time and situation. According to them, these lived experiences taught them how to be innovative and resourceful as an educator—also motivated and challenged to enhance themselves not only in their field but also in other matters that will make them significant in this time of pandemic.

Conclusion:

This study explored the dilemmas faced by English teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic by employing a qualitative narrative design analysis, anchored in Labov's Natural Narrative Model. The

research aimed to uncover the personal and professional challenges experienced by teachers as they adapted to new online learning strategies and faced unprecedented disruptions in education.

The literature reviewed highlights several key insights. Banks (2014) emphasizes the importance of developing antecedent classroom strategies to improve classroom management, which can be crucial when addressing recurring dilemmas. Dayagbil et al. (2021) reveal that despite effective policy implementations in Philippine higher education, challenges like limited internet connectivity have significantly impacted teaching and learning. This study underscores the necessity for flexible teaching modalities and curriculum adjustments to better meet student needs.

The research further identifies the complexities involved in stakeholder decisions within educational institutions, particularly during the pandemic. Illanes et al. (2020) and Smalley (2020) highlight that larger institutions face more intricate stakeholder dynamics, which can influence the effectiveness of educational strategies. Frankki et al. (2020) advocate for understanding the long-term implications of these challenges to better address the current issues within the education system.

Sweeney (2020) argues for the need to value teachers and shift away from excessive focus on assessments and competitions, which aligns with the study's goal of recognizing and addressing the dilemmas faced by teachers. The study's methodology, guided by Hayat et al. (2021) and Sutton & Austin (2015), involved rigorous data collection and analysis, ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings.

The data collected from six English teachers at Maya National High School revealed that the shift to distance learning and the implementation of new safety protocols significantly impacted their teaching practices. Despite the success of some new modalities, teachers expressed frustration over their inability to effectively assess and support student performance. Challenges such as limited resources and technical difficulties were prevalent, with some teachers advocating for a return to limited face-to-face classes to enhance teaching effectiveness.

Labov's narrative analysis framework effectively captured the teachers' experiences, revealing a complex interplay of frustrations, adjustments, and adaptations. The study found that while teachers faced numerous challenges, they demonstrated resilience and resourcefulness in overcoming these obstacles. Teachers recommended constant communication with students and the gradual reintroduction of face-to-face classes as potential solutions to improve the learning experience during the pandemic.

This study highlights the need for continued adaptation and innovation in teaching practices to navigate the ongoing challenges posed by the pandemic. The insights gained from teachers' narratives provide valuable guidance for future educational strategies and underscore the importance of flexibility, communication, and support in maintaining effective teaching and learning environments during these unprecedented times.

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