"The Struggle is Real": Seasoned Teachers' Lived Experiences in Online Distance Learning Modality

Shirly D. Lazatin[1], Renz A. Camaya[2]
shirlyn.lazatin@rcc.edu.ph[1], renz.camaya@rcc.edu.ph[2]
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8954-2767[1], https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5364-2926[2]
Republic Central Colleges, Angeles City, Philippines[1-2]

Abstract

This phenomenology focused on the lived experiences of seasoned teachers of Republic Central Colleges in Angeles City, Pampanga during the shift to the online distance learning (ODL) modality during the time of COVID-19 pandemic. This study aims to explore the perceptions of seasoned teachers towards ODL, the changes they have observed, the challenges they have encountered, coping mechanisms they have utilized, the support received, and their learning experiences in general. There were seven (7) participants identified through the purposive sampling technique. Data are analyzed through Content Analysis. Findings reveal that participants perceived ODL with negative perceptions. Majority of participants identified changes in the teaching-learning process, instructional materials, and teachers' attitudes. Challenges and struggles identified in instruction were technological, instructional delivery, and motivational challenges; while in classroom management were problems towards student engagement and discipline, resources, and control of the learning management system; and in the assessment were problems towards student outputs, assessment activities, and learning management system. As regards to the participants' coping mechanisms, in instruction, adaptive instruction, teaching social support and resilience were noted; in classroom management, presenting positive attitudes and imposing class rules; in assessment, assessment modifications, positive attitudes towards students, building capacity and social support. Support was also received by the participants like social, professional, and administrative support. Further, seasoned teachers had positive learning experiences in ODL. Based on the findings, it is suggested that support should be sustained, hence, emotional and spiritual support must be provided.

Keywords: Seasoned teachers, online distance learning, pedagogy, teaching

Introduction

In the first quarter of 2020, the world experienced an unwanted event, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) happened, which helplessly affected different sectors of society, especially the education sector. It was also in the same year that the World Health Organization announced that COVID-19 is a global pandemic (WHO, 2020). In the Philippine context, the Department of Education (DepEd) instructed schools to be closed and come up with an educational policy to cater the needs of the then-upcoming School Year 2020-2021 (DepEd, 2020). Changes happened and manifested in modalities and learning platforms in the education system, that is, a change in the teaching-learning environment, and a need to adapt to what unprecedented circumstances had brought for education to be suited to the changing needs of the society.

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Exploring the lived experiences of seasoned teachers, particularly how they faced the challenges and struggles in ODL motivated the researchers to conduct the study since the participants might be old yet still gold despite the shift to a new learning modality brought by the pandemic.

Objectives of the Study

This study sought to explore the experiences of seasoned teachers in online distance learning. Furthermore, this study aimed to explore how seasoned teachers perceived the sudden shift in the education system and to identify the challenges they faced, coping mechanisms, support received, and their overall learning experiences in online distance learning.

Methodology

This qualitative research has utilized the phenomenological method. Marshall and Rossman (2016) mentioned that in phenomenology, the experiences of the participants in the study, and those who had the same experiences, will be analyzed as unique expressions and then compared.

In determining the participants of the study, the researchers utilized the purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling technique is a well-known non-probability sampling technique which is used to get participants who can provide thorough, in-depth, and detailed understanding as to what information they give about the phenomenon being investigated. In using this, the researcher generates qualifying criteria that participants must meet to be part of the study (Marshall et al., 2008 as cited in Palinkas et al., 2015).

In the current study, 7 seasoned teachers in Republic Central Colleges were identified as qualified as being seasoned teachers as per the criteria set in the study. Participants had met the following qualifications of being a seasoned teacher (Corpuz, 2019): (1) A teacher who obtained at least 'Very Good' rating in their latest Faculty Evaluation; (2) A recipient of the award in exemplary performance in his/her teaching (School Based, Division Level, Regional or National Level); (3) Must have served as a coach to any organizations or clubs; (4) Bagged awards and recognitions; and (5) A full-time teacher. When it comes to the years of service, Gonzales (2019) mentioned that a teacher should have rendered at least 10 years of service or even beyond.

Researchers gathered data through semi-structured interviews, then analyzed them through content analysis. For the validation of the data, respondent validation was used in which the participants got the opportunity to counter-check the interview transcript; inter-rater validation in which the researchers consulted three experts in the field of qualitative research, they checked and assessed the themes and categories that emerged; and triangulation where the researcher sought the answers of other seasoned teachers from other schools.

Results and Discussion

1. Seasoned Teachers' Perceptions towards ODL

Negative perceptions towards ODL. ODL required technical knowledge and resources which most of them are new for seasoned teachers. It was also noted that ODL was not effective as compared to the traditional face-to-face teaching. This is related to the findings presented by Gurung (2021) in his study indicating that teachers faced problems in using online teaching when they shifted to ODL due to the

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pandemic in Maharashtra, India. Similarly, Delamarter and Ewart (2020) mentioned in their study that teacher participants expressed fears about distance learning since they were pedagogically prepared but very unsure and anxious about how they will conduct classes in a remote teaching environment due to the adjustments when it comes to the teaching and learning process. These indicate that ODL brought dilemmas in the teaching and learning environment among teachers. Problems were experienced, too, and these made teachers perceive the new normal education with the use of online distance learning modality in a negative manner.

Table 1
Seasoned Teachers' Perceptions towards ODL

Themes/Categories	Number of Responses
Negative Perceptions towards ODL	**9**
ODL brings problems among teachers	5
ODL requires technical knowledge and resources	1
ODL is not effective as compared to traditional teaching	1
ODL portrays non-readiness of social support	1
ODL makes students passive	1
Positive Perceptions towards ODL	**2**
ODL stirs positive feelings	1
ODL makes teachers as facilitators of learning	1

N=7

Positive perceptions towards ODL. Despite the negative perceptions in the new normal education among seasoned teachers, positive perceptions still exist. This was noted when seasoned teachers mentioned that ODL stirs positive feelings and it made teachers facilitators of learning. This is supported by Dickler (2021), stated that there were positive lessons for teachers with regard to the benefits of new technological understanding since teachers learned new skills, particularly with technology, and pedagogical adaptations in using ODL as a platform to make education still possible in the time of the pandemic. This concludes that despite negative perceptions towards ODL, positive perceptions were still existing among teachers, yet, still, negative perceptions dominated.

2. Seasoned Teachers' Challenges and Struggles Faced in ODL

2.1. In Instruction

Table 2
Seasoned Teachers' Challenges and Struggles Faced in Instruction

Themes/Categories	Number of Responses
Technological Challenges	**5**
Lack of technological knowledge	3
Time-consuming in preparing online instructional materials	2
Instructional Delivery Challenges	**4**
Limited online teaching strategies	1
Teachers are not physically active	1
Limitations in expressing oneself	1
Attaining one's privacy	1
Motivational Challenges	**3**
Difficulty with student engagement	3

N=7

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Technological Challenges. As pointed out in the study of Schrum et al. (2005) as cited in the study of Crawford-Ferre and Weist (2012), many teachers had little training in pedagogy for online instruction. Furthermore, they might be less likely to participate in online teaching (Crawford-Ferre & Wiest, 2012). Similarly, Gurung (2021) identified that lack of technical or software knowledge among teachers was one of the challenges faced by teachers in online distance learning. This implies that teachers had a difficult time in terms of instruction due to their lack of technical skills.

Instructional Delivery Challenges. This posed a challenge to the seasoned teachers because of their limitations in terms of knowledge in using online strategies, freely expressing themselves, and privacy or personal space. To support, this was mentioned by Markel (2021) as asynchronous and synchronous methods of instruction are integrated into online learning.

Motivational Challenges. One big challenge experienced by seasoned teachers in ODL is the engagement of the students during synchronous meetings. Getting the interest of your students is one and keeping them engaged throughout the discussion is another thing. Lisciandrello (2020) specified that one problem in managing online classrooms effectively aside from the use of technology is students' engagement and connections with other groups. With this, it can be concluded that teachers faced problems with motivating students where this should be one of the priorities in education since motivation plays a vital role in learning.

2.2. In Classroom Management

Table 3
Seasoned Teachers' Challenges and Struggles Faced in Classroom Management

Themes/Categories	Number of Responses
Problems with Student Engagement and Discipline	**4**
monitoring students' attendance	1
monitoring students' engagement	2
requiring students to open their camera	1
Problems towards Resources	**2**
problems with devices and internet connection	2
Problem towards Controlling the Teaching Environment	**1**
controlling background noises as disruptions to students' learning	1

N=7

Problems towards Student Engagement and Discipline. This is one big challenge for all not only the seasoned teachers but also young ones. Teachers cannot force students to answer and be active in the interaction. Participants noted that they faced difficulties in monitoring and controlling students' discipline in online distance learning. Since it was virtual and students were not physically present, it was more difficult for teachers to monitor and control the discipline of students. In addition, Chiu (2021) mentioned in his study about student engagement in online learning during the pandemic.

Problems towards Resources. With the sudden shift in pedagogy, the participants being not digital natives find it difficult to use the different applications in google classroom. Kundu et al. (2021); Gurajena et al. (2021) discussed that the rapid shift to remote learning during the coronavirus crisis is difficult for technology-aware teachers and those, especially, technology-skill-deficient teachers as regard to their usage

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of technology in distance learning. This connotes, that teachers were troubled by the shift to online distance learning since many aspects of technology, especially in using it as a medium for learning, were challenging due to the unfamiliarity of teachers in using them.

Problem towards Controlling the Teaching Environment. This is another factor that gives the participants challenges in handling their classes using ODL. Since students are at home noise disruptions are inevitable. This happens because some students do not have their study space at home and they are attending classes while in the kitchen, living room, or any part of the house. When the teachers asked questions and students answered, background noise can be heard which disrupt the class at times. Chere and Kirkham (2021) conducted a study on how noise negatively impacts students when they are having classes at home.

2.3. In Assessment

Table 4
Seasoned Teachers' Challenges and Struggles Faced in Assessment

Themes/Categories	Number of Responses
Problems with Student Outputs	**7**
Academic dishonesty	4
Problems towards Assessment Activities	**2**
Preparation of assessment activities	2
Problems towards the Learning Management System	**1**
Lack of teachers' control of the LMS with students' submission	1

N=7

Problems towards Student Outputs. Majority of the participants shared the same concern about this topic. The authenticity of the outputs of the students cannot be verified by the participants. Moreover, they cannot say for sure if the students are the one answering the test questions during examinations or if the students do not open other tabs while taking the test. This academic dishonesty has been prevalent during the pandemic, particularly in online examinations. Similarly, Elsalem et al. (2021) mentioned that academic dishonesty/misconduct appeared to be one of the major challenges with remote learning modality.

Problems towards Assessment Activities. As for the assessment activities, the participants listed one problem which is the preparation of assessment activities for students. This is congruent with the study conducted by Baticulon et al. (2021) where he stipulated that many teachers faced difficulties with the use of online learning platforms in preparing and giving assessments to the students. In online distance learning, there is the absence of in-person activities, hence, group dynamics (Fahnert, 2021).

Problems towards the Learning Management System. This was highlighted by one participant since giving assessment activities as regards due dates cannot be controlled by the teachers. Students can still access google classroom and can accomplish and submit their activities anytime even the due date was already passed. This is similar to what Gurung (2021) has mentioned about Learning Management Systems used by teachers, where some are uncontrolled by the teachers; some which are integrated into other applications are paid and with high value.

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3. Seasoned Teachers' Coping Mechanisms from the Challenges and Struggles Faced in ODL

3.1. In Instruction

Table 5
Seasoned Teachers' Coping Mechanisms from the Challenges in Instruction

Themes/Categories	Number of Responses
Adaptive Instruction	**6**
Capacitating oneself with skills and knowledge in instruction	4
Using gamification in teaching	1
Using teaching routines	1
Social Support	**3**
Asking assistance from others	3
	3
Teaching Resilience	
Believing in oneself	3

N=7

Adaptive Instruction. Adaptive instruction is the first category that was recognized in the present study. The participants named three strategies they employ as a coping mechanism in teaching like capacitating oneself with skills and knowledge in instruction, using gamification, and using teaching routines. Seasoned teachers recognized the fact that teaching nowadays also means adapting and equipping themselves with the changes in the modality in order for them to stay in the academe. Training and workshops have become part of their professional development. Adaptive instruction is an alternative instructional strategy with the use of pedagogical techniques, tools, and resources to meet the needs for learning (Ikwumelu et al., 2015).

Social Support. Support coming from the significant people in the lives of the participants was one of the coping mechanisms they valued so much. Family members as well as colleagues played a big part in the transition in teaching that the participants have gone through. This is what Sumer et al. (2021) highlighted when they conducted a study about academic development during the pandemic pointing to three aspects, one of which is social support. Results showed that collegial support is significant and should be maintained and encouraged to develop resilience and well-being among teachers in the time of the pandemic.

Teaching Resilience. The third category given by the participants is teaching resilience. Resilience is the ability to adapt and face a difficult situation and bounce back. In connection to this, Edara et al. (2021) conducted a study about the mediating effects of resilience, optimism, and well-being as to the religiosity and contentment among teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines. Results showed that resilience and optimism helped teachers face the challenges brought by the pandemic.

3.2. In Classroom Management

Presenting Positive Attitudes towards Students. Imbibing a positive attitude towards students may result to active performance which will shape their learning experiences. Two positive traits that were showcased by the seasoned teachers towards their students are being considerate and making them feel genuine concerns for them. Herrmann and Gallo (2020) cited in their writing that in this time of crisis, being kind to students has helped teachers in understanding their situations since everybody is trying to give their best amidst difficulties.

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Table 6
Seasoned Teachers' Coping Mechanisms from the Challenges in Classroom Management

Themes/Categories	Number of Responses
Presenting Positive Attitudes towards Students	**5**
Being considerate to students	4
Making students feel the teachers' concern	1
Imposing Class Rules	**3**
Rules in the class	3

N=7

Imposing Class Rules. Although classroom management is not something new to seasoned teachers since the modality has changed somehow, teachers need to adjust also on how they approach and handle their classes. Online classes, like face-to-face classes, need effective management so that they do not get out of the teacher's control and students have valuable and meaningful learning. Ghateolbahr and Samimi (2021) conducted a study to identify the methods and strategies used by teachers and to review the most appropriate techniques for planning and refining effective online classroom management strategies. Results showed that having effective classroom management, and managing synchronous and asynchronous discussions helped teachers in having orderly managed classes in an online setup. This implies that even in the online distance learning modality, class rules and routines should be enforced since they are important in maintaining order and discipline in the class.

3.3. In Assessment

Table 7
Seasoned Teachers' Coping Mechanisms from the Challenges in Assessment

Themes/Categories	Number of Responses
Assessment Modifications	**3**
Using various assessment activities	2
Scheduling of examinations	1
Positive Attitudes towards Students	**2**
Being considerate to students	2
Building Capacity for Assessment	**2**
Capacitating oneself with skills and knowledge	2
Social Support	**2**
Asking assistance from others	2

N=7

Assessment Modifications. In ODL, preparation of assessment is quite challenging on the part of seasoned teachers because of the intricacies of google classroom. One thing that helped them survived the challenges is the use of different assessment activities as well as the departmental examination schedule being followed in the high school department. Moreover, video outputs were required from the students in checking the authenticity of their outputs. This was done by using online tools for assessment, then setting up rules. In supporting online assessments, it is necessary to use information technology. This is what Darmawan et al. (2020) stated when they conducted a study about the use of various online tools and applications in dealing with student assessments.

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Positive Attitudes towards Students. Part of being a teacher is to extend maximum consideration towards students regardless of the modality being employed by the school. Due consideration is given by the participants to their respective students because they recognized the importance of building positive climate in the classroom. With this, highlighting what Herrmann and Gallo (2020) mentioned, being kind and considerate to students, especially to their submissions of activities and outputs, has helped teachers in understanding their situations since everybody is trying to give their best amidst difficulties in the time of a pandemic. This indicates that teachers have become more patient, understanding, considerate, and caring to students in the time of a pandemic since it has been a need that emerged due to the shift in pedagogical platform.

Building Capacity for Assessment. Webinars and trainings were of great help to the participants in capacitating themselves for them to cope with the challenges of online teaching. This is supported by the findings in the study conducted by Rony and Awal (2019), mentioned that trainings and webinars helped teachers in facing challenges brought by the urgent shift to distance learning, particularly with the use of online distance learning modality.

Social Support. The participants also identified the role given by their colleagues in assisting them to cope with the new trend in teaching. This is similar to what Sumer et al. (2021) noted when they studied the academic development during the pandemic pointing to three aspects in which social support was one of the factors. It was revealed that collegial support is significant and should be maintained and encouraged to develop resilience and well-being among teachers in the time of the pandemic.

4.   Supports Received by Seasoned Teachers during the Shift to Online Distance Learning Modality

Table 8
Supports Received by Retiring Teachers in Coping with the Challenges and Struggles they Faced in ODL

Themes/Categories	Number of Responses
Social Support	**10**
Assistance from colleagues with ICT	6
Understanding from family	3
Support from the Student Council	1
Professional Support	**5**
Webinars and trainings for teachers in ODL	5
Administrative Support	**3**
Monetary support in acquiring gadgets	3

N=7

Social Support. The participants being old in service and quite of age knew and appreciated the assistance extended to them. The support provided by the young teachers as well as the family members gave comfort and confidence to the participants which made them continue and stay in the service despite the challenges of time. In connection to this, Novitasari et al. (2021) also studied the effect of social support (supervisor, peer, and family support) on teacher performance in Indonesia. In this study, teachers were interviewed about the support they received during the COVID-19 pandemic. Results showed that all social support factors consisting of supervisor support, peer support, and family support had a positive and significant effect the on performance of the teachers.

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Professional Support. Webinars and trainings became the call of the game during the transition from face to face to ODL. The participants were appreciative of the initiative of the administration in holding in-house trainings and webinars for capacity building. At the time of shifting to online distance learning up to the implementation of it, teachers have been receiving professional support using the trainings, as mentioned by Rony and Awal (2019). In this study, researchers cited that online teaching-learning training for teachers is a timely demand in this time of a global pandemic. The findings of the study showed an effective change of mindset and perception in the faculty members for online teaching learning training, class conduction, and assessment.

Administrative Support. Administrative support has been a significant predictor of teachers' job satisfaction in the academe and was also noted that it was significant in predicting teachers' intent to stay (Ferri et al., 2020). During the shift to online distance learning during the pandemic, participants received administrative support through the teaching resources they used in online teaching.

5. Learning Experiences of Seasoned Teachers in Online Distance Learning Modality

Table 9
Learning Experiences of Seasoned Teachers in Online Distance Learning Modality

Themes/Categories	Number of Responses
Positive Learning Experiences	**8**
ODL makes teachers technologically-equipped	2
ODL proves learning as a continuous process	1
ODL stirs positive feelings	2
ODL requires self-initiative for transformative teaching	1
ODL promotes collaboration	2
Negative Learning Experiences	**1**
ODL demands preparation in teaching	1

N=7

Positive Learning Experiences. Some of the positive learning experiences shared by the seasoned teachers were more of being equipped technologically. According to them they transformed into technologically inclined teachers because they were forced by the circumstance. They also shared that ODL made them realize that learning is boundless and ageless. Moreover, the values of collaboration, camaraderie, and unity were heightened because teachers helped one another to be of better service to the students. Seasoned teachers described ODL as a platform which can be used to make learning still continuous despite the pandemic. This is supported by the findings in the study of Dayal and Tiko (2020) when they explored the effectiveness of ODL in teaching. Success stories were given an emphasis, and they highlighted that success is visible in terms of making teaching and learning possible despite the crucial times brought by the pandemic.

Negative Learning Experiences. With all the affirmative expressions experienced by the seasoned teachers, negative undertaking was also noted in terms of preparation. Activities, lessons, and power point presentations are just some of the things that require much time in preparation. Participants noted the

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demanding instructional preparation in ODL. This was supported by Gurung (2021), that, according to him, teaching online courses was definitely different from the classroom teaching. He also added that in online teaching, more time is required in preparing course content and lessons.

Conclusions

A majority of the participants viewed ODL negatively due to the challenges and struggles it posed. They observed and faced changes in the teaching and learning process. Challenges in instruction, classroom management, and assessment were noted, yet, they utilized coping mechanisms in facing the said challenges. Supports were also given to them. Overall, their learning experiences were described to be positive despite all the challenges posed by the online distance learning.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are presented:

1. Schools should have orientations to be conducted pointing out the positive side of online distance learning modality, hence, they should also present concrete plans in supporting teachers particularly the seasoned ones so that negative feelings would be eradicated.
2. Trainings and workshops should be strengthened for seasoned teachers in using a learning management system particularly with regard to online tools, crafting learning plans aligned to online modality, and implementing these plans in online teaching which were the salient changes in the new learning modality. Dry runs before opening the classes for online teaching should also be conducted with evaluation and assessment towards them.
3. Seasoned teachers should be oriented about the use of adaptive instruction and how it is done in classes especially in crucial times like a pandemic.
4. Department of Education (DepEd) and Schools should strengthen partnerships in supporting seasoned teachers in the new normal education. Furthermore, there is a need to highlight spiritual and emotional support among teachers especially during trying times where emotional stability and spiritual guidance are an essential need.

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