*Proposed study:* Teaching through a pandemic: Challenges of Secondary English teachers in the new normal learning setting

CHAPTER I

**INTRODUCTION**

**A. Background**

The educational system in the Philippines has always been lacking. This can be seen in the quality of education. Despite being seen as ‘strict’ with 8-9 hours in school when compared to a typical American High School’s 6-7 hours a day, the Philippine educational standards have deteriorated to such an extent that Filipino children are ranked the least proficient in *reading* among 87 nationalities evaluated (PISA, 2018). The decline is alarming when even the Department of Education’s own National Achievement Test (NAT) 2019 results show that Filipino students fall below the minimum proficiency score of 75 percent. This flawed system has been highlighted even more during the pandemic when schools are forced to open by the government despite having no concrete plan and budget for the institution, the teachers, and the students. Faced with the effects of the pandemic plus topping it off with school responsibilities unprepared, students are not the only faction that suffers from it, the teachers also took the blow—probably even more. Though this is not to compare the struggles of which faction, this is to emphasize that the teachers’ roles in this new learning setting are critical in ensuring that students learn successfully, especially, in this context, for English teachers.

Many institutions moved their learning activities online to keep up with the government’s back-to-school mandate, however, aside from online learning, most public schools especially in remote areas employed modular instruction through printed self-learning modules. Additionally, most students (Cos et al., 2021; Manlangit et al., 2020; as cited in Agayon et. al., 2022) and parents opted the modular distance learning among other alternative modalities. As a result, teachers’ capacity to give high-quality training and preparation for students was challenged. In this new learning setting, teacher/student communication does not have the same effect as face-to-face learning. Teachers can’t provide effective washback (feedback needs to be delivered immediately) which is important for English learners. Teachers can’t also incorporate activities that could significantly help English learners because it is not conducive for online/module learning. Though there are tens of alternative activities out there, there are still some that can’t replace certain activities. These are some of the challenges (English) teachers faced but we can already see how the pandemic really drove teachers with a crucial role in facilitating and monitoring the student’s development even in this new learning setting. Dangle and Sumaoang (2020, as cited in Agayon, 2022) also asserted that the key challenges that occurred were the shortage of school finances in the creation and delivery of modules. Moreover, Cardullo et al. (2021) added that teachers were caught off guard for emergency remote instruction owing to a lack of distant education expertise as well as computer literacy.

Most often than not, society subconsciously directs its blame to the teachers whenever there is an issue with education. The society failed to realize that teachers also face different challenges due to the Pandemic and the changes it brought. This is an interest that leads to the researchers’ reason for choosing the topic. Exploring deeper and identifying the challenges of English teachers during the pandemic provide solutions to improve and create teaching strategies and alternatives. Moreover, to address the issue of the educational system in the Philippines, exploring these challenges is more productive as the teachers are the ones who teach, and with effective teaching comes with effective learning.

**B. Problem(s) Statement**

Learning through pandemic isn’t providing positive washback. Instead of giving the quality that the children deserves, the teachers are finding a way on how to make the quality education effective. Pandemic challenged a lot of students and teachers, emotionally, mentally, and physically. To alleviate Secondary level English teachers’ challenges, the purpose of this action research is to find solutions and alternatives in the new learning system. And with that, we will be able to practice effective teaching and learning. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the barriers or challenges that Secondary English teachers face during the pandemic?

2. How can we alleviate the burdens Secondary English teachers experience during the pandemic to ensure quality education?

**C. Research Objectives**

This study examines the concerns and obstacles in teaching in the midst of the pandemic through the experiences of Secondary level English teachers, with the goal of developing strategic actions for teaching continuity. The objectives of this study are the following:

1. Identify the difficulties and barriers to a learning that teachers faced during the COVID-19 crisis.

2. Recognize and employ the most effective approaches and modes for learning engagement and motivation of students.

3. Develop emerging themes from the experiences and challenges of teaching amidst the pandemic.

**D. Research Significances**

To ensure quality education in the midst of pandemic, effective online instruction is needed. Some universities offer modular and some are via virtual interactions, in this way the learning will continue despite the challenges the pandemic brought. The present study will be beneficial to the Philippine government, as this will uncover unseen situations from the teacher's point of view during the new normal setting and new educational processes which they could cite for improving the educational system. Similarly, universities and learning institutions will benefit from this study as they will be aware of the circumstances English teachers faced during the new normal setting, thus helping them provide solutions to the said challenges which in turn could lead to quality education. Most importantly, the results of the present study will be beneficial for teachers as the solutions will give them better teaching experience(s) that alleviate their burdens (e.g. less administrative work, better alternatives). Lastly, the present study will give way to the future researchers who wish to explore and/or improve the same area of problem as they could cite and review the challenges discussed to their study.

**E. Research Scope**

With how the pandemic affects the lives of the Filipino people, it is only natural that many sectors undergo unfavorable changes, one of them is the education sector. In view of this situation, this action research aims to identify the challenges teachers face during the pandemic. To fully analyze and comprehend the issues, the present study limits its scope to 10 Secondary level English teachers from Cagayan de Oro City, Misamis Oriental, wherein their challenges in teaching the English language in the new normal setting is being identified. Data will be gathered through open-ended narrative that allows the participants to share their experiences towards the new normal teaching setting, highlighting two key points 1) challenges encountered 2) alternatives employed. To this end, data gathering is expected to span around one (1) month depending on the availability of the participants. With such limitations, there is a need for further research related to identifying the challenges of teachers as the present study only covers English teachers and their challenges. The present study do not and could not present the challenges of all the teachers in the secondary level.

**F. Operational Definitions**

**Pandemic** - An outbreak of an infectious illness, in this case COVID-19, that has spread across a broad area, such as multiple continents or the entire world, impacting a significant number of people.

**New Normal** - It is the state in which an economy, society, or other entity settles after a crisis, when this differs from the one that existed before the crisis began.

**E-Learning** - A learning approach that is based on formalized instruction but uses electronic resources. While teaching can take place in or out of the classroom, E-learning is defined by the use of computers and the Internet.

**Virtual Learning Environment** - It's a comprehensive software solution that supports and delivers an online learning environment. Digital media are used in the form of videos, chats, audio, and podcasts. The software tool allows users to communicate with one another and submit assignments.

**Online Class** - A class that is delivered through the Internet. Students can view their class syllabus and academic progress, as well as communicate with their classmates and course teacher, using a learning management system.

**Modular Learning** - As the name suggests, modular learning employs learning modules that allow students to learn independently. Modular learning is a type of distance learning that uses Self-Learning Modules (SLM) based on the most essential learning skills (MELCS) created by teachers with the assistance of curriculum developers.

**Educational System** - An education system includes all of the laws, procedures, and regulations that go into educating public-school kids at the federal, state, and local levels. Public financing, resource allocations, and funding mechanisms

**Challenges** - These are the things that require a lot of mental or physical work to do and hence put a person's abilities to the test.

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