

Exploring instructional competencies of teachers in the transition to online distance learning in the new normal

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Abstract

Teachers play a critical role in student learning and achievement. Thus, the discussion on teachers' competencies to improve the teaching-learning process in school is of great importance, primarily due to the abrupt shift in education brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. This change in the educational setup calls for an assessment of the teaching competencies that teachers find most important yet challenging to fulfill as education shifted to online and printed distance learning. The study explored the competencies necessary to effectively lead and manage instruction using online delivery in the new normal and identified what hindered the maximization of the said competencies. The researchers focused on the experiences and perceptions of the research participants in exploring instructional competencies through the qualitative phenomenological study method. Results revealed that the competencies required for face-to-face instruction are still necessary for online distance learning with only a few additions and changes. Four primary competencies emerged: Instructional Delivery, Classroom Management, Assessment Skills, and Personal Skills. The findings of this study can be significantly utilized for the planning and implementation of continuing professional development of teachers amid the pandemic.

Keywords: instructional competencies, online learning, new normal

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1. Introduction

Learning became more challenging for the teachers and students due to the implementation of New Normal Education. New normal education mandates blended learning approaches. Blended learning combines online and offline learning methodologies using technology (DepEd, 2020). Despite this change, the goal of education remains the same: to keep the students engaged academically to retain what they have learned. A professional teacher is a licensed professional who possesses dignity and reputation with high moral values and technical and professional competence. Teaching is complex and cannot be reduced to discrete tasks that can master one at a time. In the Philippines, there are fundamental requirements to be a professional teacher. One has to graduate from college with a baccalaureate degree, pass the Licensure Examination (LET), be a member of professional teacher organizations, and abide by the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers. In addition, teachers must continue professional development/education (Bilbao, 2015).

In the Philippine Educational system, some factors cause difficulty in implementing objectives. For example, inadequately trained teachers, lack of support from the government or the private sector, lack of solid planning, and lack of follow-up results add to the difficulty (Chin et al., 2022). As a solution to these challenges, education experts formulated the National Competency-Based Standards (NCBTS). It is a framework for all teaching and teacher development programs (Gepila Jr., 2020). It includes the competencies, qualities, and skills a teacher should have to guarantee an efficient teaching-learning experience. In addition, it is concerned with whether teachers are competent in helping the student learn. According to Symeonidis (2015), four areas of competencies make the most significant difference in teacher practices and can be used in building effective teacher development. The four areas are Instructional Delivery, Classroom Management, Assessment Skills, and Personal Skills.

1.1 Background of the Study

The progress of a nation is reflected through its capacity to compete internationally with the demands of time and situation. In addition, the quality of education is one of the benchmarks for global competitiveness. Recently, education has undergone an abrupt shift in its system due to the risk brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, face-to-face education was restricted, thus forcing everyone to implement distance learning.

The sudden transition to online distance learning gave teachers less time to prepare for a new model of instruction. Teachers are believed to be the backbone of any educational institution. Despite the difficulties associated with this profession, teachers must be motivated and committed to achieving their lasting goals to affect their students' lives positively. Teachers play a critical role in student learning and achievement. How teachers instruct and their interactions with students is the cornerstone of building an effective school (Babu & Mendro). Therefore, it is essential to improve the standards of the teaching profession.

Teachers possess and develop competencies to improve instruction, enhancing student performance and the quality of their work experience. Four areas of these competencies can help organize what teachers need to master to maximize their performance: classroom management, instructional delivery, assessment skill, and personal skill. These four categories also provide an essential core around which decision-makers can construct teacher preparation, teacher hiring, teacher development, and teacher and school evaluations.

The primary focus of this study is the teachers. The teachers themselves are obligated to mold students into

aligned with the aim of every educational institution. Therefore, improving the teachers' quality of instruction directly affects the quality of learning. The advocacy to promote academic excellence and quality education in Silay Institute, Inc. College Department made the researchers decide to conduct the study to determine which instructional competencies show success in the new educational set-up, thus providing a possible standard of instruction for teachers. In addition, it aims to determine whether the instructional competencies of the teachers are in line with the pace of transition of our current educational situation. Upon noticing the impact of the quality of education on the students' future, the researchers came up with a standard view that the present condition of the teachers' competencies could still rise higher.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This study focuses on determining the instructional competencies of teachers in Silay Institute in the transition to online distance learning in the New Normal. Specifically, this study aims to: Determine the instructional competencies of teachers in the following areas Instructional Delivery; Classroom Management; Assessments skills; and Personal skills. Inquire about the teachers' confidence in the competencies during the transition as to the given variables. Identify which area of competencies challenged teachers the most in the transition to online distance learning in the New normal. Explore the possible use of the findings in providing a standard of education under the New standard set up that the school can utilize.

1.3 Materials and Methods

The study used Qualitative research that mainly used a phenomenological approach that involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences (Campbell, 2014). Participants were randomly selected and categorized into two who fall under the following inclusion criteria; college teacher of the Silay Institute during the academic year 2020-2021; have at least one semester of online teaching experience; male or female age 25-60. The first category comprises five college teachers, while the second shall consist of two school heads in the college department. Additional criteria for school head: must be a current or former college department head.

Interview Methodology was used as an instrument. The research procedure began with asking permission from the school's gatekeeper, the College Dean, to conduct the interviews method properly. There were two interview guides: one for Focus-Group Discussion with the teachers and one for an in-depth interview with the school heads. The interview guide was subjected for validation, and the respondents' consent in the recording of the interviews was sought for ethical considerations. After the in depth-interviews and focus group discussions, the outputs were transcribed and cleaned, coded then recorded before the construction of themes. The themes were then analyzed for the translational implications that would give meaning to another field of knowledge.

2. Results and Discussion

2.1 Case Vignettes

Teacher A. She has been in the teaching profession for 30 years and has been one of the college department heads for two years. **Teacher B.** She has been in the teaching profession for 23 years and is a former college department head. **Teacher C** is a focus group participant. She has been in the teaching profession for three years, mainly focusing on Communication subject areas. She also had experience as a high school teacher. **Teacher D** is a focus group participant. She has been in the teaching profession for 30 years. She is also currently teaching in the high school department.

Teacher E is a focus group participant. She has been in the teaching profession for three years. She is a new addition to the college department and also currently teaching in the high school department. She teaches various subject matters. **Teacher F** is a focus group participant. He teaches Social Studies and is also a Public

Elementary teacher at the Department of Education (DepEd) – Division of Silay City. He is a passionate advocate for inclusive education. **Teacher G** is a focus group participant. He has been part of the college department for quite a while. He mainly teaches Filipino-related subjects.

Coding- from the responses of the participants, certain codes were derived which were later grouped into themes. Generated codes are as follows;

- Code 1 is for the answers that show expertise in instructional design and strategy development.
- Code 2 is for the answers that show technology literacy.
- Code 3 is for the answers that show interpersonal skills.
- Code 4 is for the answers that show general leadership and management.
- Code 5 is for the answers that show problem-solving/decision-making skills.
- Code 6 is for the answers that show change management.
- Code 7 is for the answers that show self-management skills.
- Code 8 is for the answers that show professional development
- Code 9 is for the answers that show the limitations.

Table 1

Interview Coding

Interview Excerpts	Competency	Coding
"They have to be very clear and articulate instructions to their students." "...providing reflection questions in the LMS – embedding a simple 5-minute writing or encoding activity on a particular reflective question.	Instructional design and Strategy development	Code 1
"ICT integration plays a vital role in the implementation of the New Normal." "We have to master the use of technology in order for us to be able to transmit what our lessons all about."	Technology Literacy	Code 2
"...communicating with them also on a regular basis – meetings, monitoring." "Building good relationship with co-teachers, community, or students."	Interpersonal Skills	Code 3
"In the first day of class, you already have to set your rules and regulations." "Orient your students of the do's and don'ts in the class." "Make clear of the grading system... of the expectations, ask them what are their expectations for your session or on the session and the teacher should also set or give his/her expectations for the students."	General Leadership and Management	Code 4
"I give a time limit to them, so they have to accomplish in this particular period because if there is a time limit if there is a time restriction, it is hard for them (to copy). "We should be witty or clever enough to know when we're being fooled by our students and when they're being sincere to us."	Problem-solving/Decision-making skills	Code 5
"We need to adapt to the new system, especially those who are not into the technology." "...cope up with the changes." "... step up my game for the 2nd semester...." "We should not dwell with the expectations or things we want to happen for our classes, but we should deal with the reality... be ready for the reality."	Change Management	Code 6
"Time element has to be considered during synchronous, sometimes teachers need more time. We need to avoid being late	Self-management Skills	Code 7

or exceeding time... time management."

"It's very exhausting... whole day you'll be facing the computer if you have class from morning until afternoon."

"All teachers conducting online classes have to undergo orientation – how to go through with the system."

Professional Development

Code 8

"We should not be contented with what we know – stagnant; we need to upskill and explore available resources, tools for us to answer the issues we are currently having and will have in the future."

"I find it hard to teach my subject using online delivery since it is a performance-based subject."

Limitations

Code 9

"The demeanors of the students and teachers' beliefs are also sometimes hindering the teaching-learning process."

2.2 Themes constructed

The responses of the conversation partners were analyzed and coded. The responses' appointed codes were classified into significant themes, as shown in the following presentation.

Instructional design and strategy development – teachers are aware of various methods of designing and developing formal and informal learning solutions. It includes effective pedagogy, knowledge of the subject, educational theories and design principles, and strategies.

Technology literacy - all interviewed teachers said that ICT integration is vital with the current educational set-up, and proficiency with essential tools like LMS, Google meet, and Microsoft office is advantageous to teachers.

Interpersonal skills - teachers said that building trust, communicating effectively, and demonstrating emotional intelligence such as understanding help them in online delivery.

General leadership and management – classroom management during online classes now consist of solid leadership and organizational skills. It includes the set of rules and regulations and classroom management.

Problem-solving/decision-making skills – teachers overcome unexpected situations during online classes by having the ability of excellent judgment and discretion and the ability of initiative, and resourcefulness.

Change management - All interview participants mentioned that teachers must adjust quickly to the new educational set-up. Teachers need to learn to traverse the difficulties they experienced the first day and not dwell with expectations that they want to happen; instead, they face reality.

Self-management skills respondents develop the skills to be flexible to perform tasks and complete duties for self-improvement and personal skills to be an effective teacher.

Professional development respondents should seek professional development to respond to career improvement.

Limitations – these shows the struggles and challenges encountered in teaching using online distance learning.

3. Discussions

Based on the gathered data, internal and external limitations hinder the teachers from fully maximizing their online distance learning competencies. Internal limitations are limitations within reach of the teacher and can be avoided however were not given attention. On the other hand, external limitations are difficulties beyond the teacher and student's control, such as the instability of the internet connection.

Along with that, eight (8) competencies emerged as necessary to consider in effectively leading and

managing instruction using online Delivery in the New Normal: instructional design and strategy development, technology literacy, interpersonal skills, general leadership and management, problem-solving/decision-making skills, change management, self-management skills, and professional development. Therefore, to give light to objective no. 1 of the research – Determine the instructional competencies of teachers in the following areas: Instructional Delivery, Classroom management, Assessment skills, and Personal Skills – the researchers came up with Table 2.

Table 2

Area of Competencies

Area of Competency	Competencies
Instructional Delivery	Instructional design and strategy development Technology Literacy Change Management Professional Development
Classroom Management	General Leadership and Management Interpersonal skills Change Management
Assessment Skills	Problem-solving/Decision-making skills Change Management
Personal skills	Technology Literacy Interpersonal skills Change management Self-management skills

Based on Table 2, Technology Literacy is classified under instructional Delivery and Personal skills. Technology literacy plays an essential role in delivering instruction on the online set-up and is an ordinary personal skill that everyone must have nowadays due to technological advancement. Another competency under two areas is Interpersonal skills under classroom management and Personal skills. Interpersonal skills involve communication and interaction, two essential factors in effectively managing class and everyday life. Finally, change management is under four areas of competencies. Due to the implementation of New Normal, there has been an abrupt transition to online distance learning and a profound change in the educational landscape.

The researchers inquired about the teachers' confidence in the New Normal, as stated in Objective no. 2 of the research. According to the participants, Teachers' confidence is just a tiny portion of a teacher's. Every teacher is confident enough since they honed them through rigorous years of study and experience. Teachers' confidence usually comes out naturally through how they prepare and deliver their lessons and connect with their students.

Objective no. 3 of the research aims to identify which area of competencies challenged teachers the most in the transition to online distance learning in the New Normal. The researchers found out that teachers struggled with Classroom Management since the interaction is minimal and is usually interrupted by various limitations like the instability of internet connection for both the teacher and the student. In addition, Instructional design and Strategy development, Technology Literacy, and Change Management are essential competencies that an effective online teacher must develop.

4. Conclusion

It was found that the instructional competencies required for face-to-face instruction are still necessary for online distance learning with only a few additions and changes. Also, it emerged that out of the four areas of competencies that make the most significant difference in teacher practices (Symeonidis, 2015), Instructional Delivery and Personal Skills are the areas that teachers have the most competencies for online distance learning. All participants claimed that Strategy Development, Technology Literacy, and Change Management are essential competencies that an effective online instructor must develop since the competencies mentioned above are aligned with the pace of transition our educational landscape has undergone (Stronge, 2018; Eagleton, 2017).

Furthermore, the adjustments the teachers and students had to go through along with the transition were grueling. The changes they are experiencing and the negative tags labeled to the new educational set-up are highly unrewarding. Thus, we need to understand and help one another, given that there is no definitive date as to when or if the situation will go back to the way it used to be.

Translational Implication: The findings implied that teachers took time to adapt to the changes and find it difficult to adjust from what they are used to, but they are willing to do so and accept the changes. Despite the limitations, such as the instability of the internet connection that serves as our primary delivery portal, the readiness, the distractions, and the demeanor of both the teachers and the students, it is surprising how the teachers value their dedication to teaching. Most of their struggles are out of their control. Furthermore, most of them believed that it would still take a while before everything went back to how it used to be.

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