

## Online teaching challenges confronting private higher education institution teachers in Central Philippines

Pariscal, Dyna Rose ✉

Silay Institute, Incorporated, Philippines ([dynapariscal@gmail.com](mailto:dynapariscal@gmail.com))

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### **Abstract**

Educators amidst the pandemic have to be adaptive to the current educational trends in a very short time. For certain reasons, they experience difficulty as much as students do. In fact, as prime movers of education recovery, the sudden transition from face-to-face to online distance learning can be more demanding in their end as they are the facilitators of the teaching and learning process. However, present studies about education in the time of pandemic tend to focus more on students' experiences and perspectives. Hence, the purpose of the present study entitled, "Online Teaching Challenges Confronting Private Higher Education Institution Teachers in Central Philippines" is to vividly describe the online teaching challenges encountered by the college faculty members of a medium-sized private institution in Central Philippines during the Academic Year 2020-2021. It also sought to determine the intervention initiatives by the school to bridge the gap for the struggling teachers. This study is aimed at examining these challenges in great detail using the descriptive qualitative method through a series of interviews and observations. After a rigorous process of coding and recoding, four primary themes emerged in the findings: Resources, Student Behavior, Technical skill, and Instructional Modes of Delivery. Nevertheless, school intervention programs played a significant role in the teaching-learning continuity by providing free learning management systems (LMS) and technical skills training to equip the teachers. The findings of this research will be valuable to the members of the academe as the world continues to venture towards the new normal in education.

**Keywords:** distance learning, learning modalities, online teaching, learning management system, school intervention

## **Online teaching challenges confronting private higher education institution teachers in Central Philippines**

### **1. Introduction**

This Covid-19 pandemic has severely affected academic institutions, especially those that offer tertiary education. For one, this resulted in the closure of schools, institutions, and universities. This closure has affected more than 28 million learners in the Philippines (UNESCO, 2020), which led to the delivery of instruction through online learning platforms. Thus, teachers and students had to adapt to many changes, including technology-dependent education, rapidly. In addition, according to Bao (2020), the implementation of online learning brings about challenges, risks, and problems to both the teachers and students, especially in the higher education institutions (HEIs). But before academic institutions can thoroughly address students' needs and concerns, it is vital that the identification of these problems begins with the teachers as they are the prime movers of education recovery being facilitators of the teaching and learning process.

Although technology evolution allows many things and serves as an answer to our daily life, the shift to e-learning does not go smoothly as we want it to be. The growth and experience within the utilization of online teaching are not still fully explored (Farmer & West, 2019). Hence, facing the problems of online teaching may be discouraging and frustrating to the teachers who are still very foreign to it. Faced with these facts, teachers have to adapt at a dizzying pace not only to a new teaching method to students but the problems of transforming their classrooms into virtual ones, maintaining connections to students, and making sure they continue to provide meaningful and effective discussion even though in a distance learning mode (Chin et al., 2022).

Gillett-Swan (2017) states that outcome of teaching with technology is not uniform. It varies for each case as opposed to the one size fits all notion. It is affected by factors like types of technology is use at the time and the curriculum content being taught. The incorporation of technology dispenses additional factors for consideration in terms of teaching pedagogy and the construction of learning experiences. The online teaching problems induced by these factors that hamper quality online teaching are primarily discussed in this study.

#### *1.1 Objectives of the Study*

The main objective of this study was to vividly describe the online teaching challenges encountered by the college faculty members of a medium-sized private institution in Central Philippines during the Academic Year 2020-2021. It also sought to determine the intervention initiatives by the school to bridge the gap for the struggling teachers.

#### *1.2 Importance of the Study*

This study has benefited the teachers, administrators, and students. The faculty who served as participants of this study had amplified their worries and difficulties into concerns that need addressing. The administrators have been made aware on how they can better assist their faculty into bridging quality education to students despite the pandemic. Students indirectly benefited from the results of this study as well since their teachers will be much equipped to deliver them quality lessons.

### **2. Methodology**

#### *2.1 Local and Time of the Study*

The study was conducted in Silay Institute, Inc., a medium-sized private higher education institution in

Central Philippines, Province of Negros Occidental, City of Silay during the second semester of the academic year 2020-2021.

## 2.2 Data Collection

This qualitative research study employed descriptive phenomenology to determine the online teaching challenges that the college teachers of Silay Institute have experienced. Using purposive sampling, the researchers conducted a survey based on the inclusion criteria set: college teachers who experience difficulty in online teaching to determine the participants. After the survey, ten (10) participants were identified. The researchers wrote a letter to the participants to seek voluntary participation. Informed consents were then sent to all the participants through emails, Google forms, and other social media platforms that served as the modes of communication. The interview guide was subjected for validation. The collection of data was done through a series of interviews and observations using the google meeting as an online meeting platform. The researchers also sought consent from the participants in keeping recordings of the interviews to ensure ethical considerations were highly observed.

## 2.3 Data Analysis

The gathered data kept through recordings were then transcribed, cleaned, analyzed, coded, and recorded to construct the themes. Colaizzi's (1978) method was used to find, understand, describe, and depict the experiences of the participants as well as reveal emergent themes.

## 3. Results and Discussions

In the midst of pandemic, the Commission on Higher Education has ensured that college students are provided with quality education by releasing a memorandum setting the guidelines for the conduct of flexible learning. CHED especially encouraged Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to maximize the use of technology to support learning. Thus, online classes were offered by Silay Institute as a primary learning modality after ensuring the capability of learners for such. But this sudden shift to online distance learning can be difficult and stressful to the college teachers of the institution who play an integral part in the continuity of education in the new normal.

Discussed below are the challenges they have encountered where were mainly categorized into four themes: **Resources, Student Behavior, Technical skill, and Instructional Modes of Delivery.**

**Theme 1: Resources. Table 1 shows the challenges encountered by teachers in terms of Resources.**

**Table 1**

*Challenges of teachers in terms of resources*

Challenges of Teachers	Teachers' Experiences
No access to strong internet connection	Internet connectivity problem, insufficient load or data especially when the school WiFi is down..." "The main problem is the internet connection..."
Poor-quality gadgets	"There are times that my phone and laptop would fail to load certain apps and I would be disconnected..." "Sometimes students would complain that their gadgets cannot access the prescribed platforms and sites..."
Limited books and other information sources	"Since face-to-face classes were suspended due to pandemic, only few books were acquired and are accessible from the library..." "The list of internet resources we can access is very narrow because most reliable sites incur charges..."

Based on the table above, it can be seen that the teachers' challenges in terms of resources are related to internet connection, gadgets, and sources of learning materials. Primarily, poor to no access to strong internet

connection causes disruption of classes and lessens teaching effectivity. Cakrawati (2017) states that a good pedagogy will be nonsense if there are problems in technology access. Furthermore, their inability to access high-end and quality gadgets also hinders effective teaching. Undeniable, private school teachers do not enjoy as many benefits as those in the public schools. Also, when the pandemic happened, cities closed their borders that made the delivery and purchase of non-essential goods difficult. Books for instance, were not given priority in the first year of pandemic. Moreover, teachers only rely on free websites which sometimes provide limited information.

**Theme 2: Student Behavior. Table 2 shows the challenges encountered by teachers in terms of Student Behavior.**

**Table 2**

*Challenges of teachers in terms of student behavior*

Challenges of Teachers	Teachers' Experiences
Poor attendance of the students	"I have experienced that out of more than 30 students only five would attend my synchronous class..."
Poor to no participation from the students	"The problem is a lot of them are absent during my class..." "The class almost always seems like a monologue by the teacher..." "When I ask a question and call on names, the student called will suddenly leave the meeting..."
Student apathy	"The students are always very hesitant to participate..." "There are students that no matter how many times you remind them of their outputs, they would simply refuse to maybe because of lack of interest and motivation..."

As indicated in the results above, teachers struggle with students' poor attendance, lack of participation and even complete apathy. In some cases, less than 20% of students attend the synchronous classes. This is most likely associated with their lack of interest that results to their failure to participate in class discussions. They even show refusal to engage by automatically leaving the meeting when asked. These result to teachers feeling frustrated.

**Theme 3: Technical Skill. Table 3 shows the challenges encountered by teachers in terms of technical skill.**

**Table 3**

*Challenges of teachers in terms of technical skill*

Challenges of Teachers	Teachers' Experiences
Limited knowledge and skills on the navigation of school's learning management system	Since the Access LMS is still new, I find it difficult to use..." "I feel like my knowledge in our Access LMS is still very narrow that's why I can't maximize its use and features..."
Poor operational skills on online platforms used in synchronous and asynchronous classes	"The class almost always seems like a monologue by the teacher..." "When I ask a question and call on names, the student called will suddenly leave the meeting..." "The students are always very hesitant to participate..."

One of the common problems of faculty members as shown above are the poor technical skills especially on the navigation and use of the school's learning management system (LMS) and online teaching platforms. These are caused by their lack of online teaching experience (Bao, 2019) since the shift to online distance learning has been very fast.

**Theme 4: Modes of Instructional Delivery. Choosing appropriate modes of instructional delivery in a virtual classroom can be very tricky. Below are the challenges that teachers encountered in selecting the right modes to deliver their instructions.**

**Table 4**

*Challenges of teachers in terms of instructional delivery*

Challenges of Teachers	Teachers' Experiences
Limitations on the learning activities	"Since it's online, we don't get to see our students in person so obviously, it is quite difficult to materialize some learning activities..." "There are activities that we can do in face-to-face classes that are not applicable in online classes..."
Difficulty in creating an engaging conducive learning environment	"It is very challenging to set up a and conducive virtual class that would be appealing to the students..." "Most of time, I feel like my modes of instructional delivery are boring no matter what teaching strategies I use, students always show little to no interest at all."

Based on the table above, the challenges in terms of modes of instructional delivery include limitations on the learning activities and difficulty setting up an engaging and conducive virtual learning environment. This is where teachers really felt nostalgic of the pre-pandemic era since there are a lot of interesting activities during the face-to-classes which cannot be implemented in an online setup. Although they explore other means to make the class engaging, some students still see the class as boring.

### 3.1 School Intervention Programs

With the sudden shift of education to online distance learning, the lack of pedagogical preparedness (UNESCO, 2020) resulted to problems and challenges in teaching being inevitable. Nonetheless, as a higher education institution, initiated programs that aided the teachers. These efforts significantly contributed in the continuity of learning amidst the pandemic. As stated by the respondents of the study when asked if the school provided help and support:

*"Yes of course, somehow it helped us."*

*"Yes, it helped us a lot to become prepared."*

*"Yes, it really helped us and made our life easier..."*

*"Yes of course without the helped of the school the teacher would have difficulty in sharing knowledge to the students, without the internet connection provided by the school and also the seminars for us to be prepared."*

*"For me the school does its best to help us cope with this situation."*

The major intervention programs provided by the school to address teachers' challenges in conducting online classes include free learning management systems (LMS) and technical skills training to teach the teachers the basics in operating the major online platforms used by the school. The school also required the teachers to attend In-Service trainings for pedagogical equipment.

The results also showed that teachers, despite the challenges, still exhaust all means to deliver the quality education they promised their students. As stated by one of the participants in the study:

*"So what I do in my classes, I utilize all online learning platforms that I could. In my case, I use Facebook group, the LMS, YouTube and other online platforms just to compensate for my students' performance tasks that are better done in person. I utilize videos. We also do virtual classes as often as we could, just to make sure they still learn something from me as an English*

*teacher and I think that's all I've done so far, utilizing everything that I could just to ensure that I'm able to deliver classes to students. In return there are also able to submit their performance tasks and somehow do perform learning activities."*

It is evident that the school provided ways to ease the struggle of the teachers which are also visible for them as the data have shown.

#### 4. Conclusion and recommendation

Based on the study, teachers have encountered different online teaching challenges. From the responses, four major themes emerged: **Resources, Student Behavior, Technical skill, and Instructional Modes of Delivery.**

Majority of the respondents claimed that poor internet connection and negative student behavior in class are the primary challenges they have encountered. Nevertheless, teachers also emphasized that they have been exhausting all means to deliver quality lessons online despite the challenges they have encountered.

The school on the other hand has shown visible support and designed programs to assist the teachers and ease their struggles especially that online teaching is new to everyone. The assistance provided by the school are mainly on technical and pedagogical skills training. These efforts were made to help the teachers ensure learning continuity in the midst of the pandemic.

Thus, the researchers recommend that teachers need to explore and be creative in delivering their lessons online. Innovating new, interesting, and relatable activities and materials can encourage students to participate in class better. The school authorities shall also strengthen their WiFi system enough to cater all the teachers. Seeking partner donors who are willing to provide teachers with high quality gadgets would also solve most of their mentioned difficulties and problems. These steps in addition to the already installed initiatives could better help the teachers in providing quality education to learners as the school promised. The researchers also recommend that further studies be conducted to measure the effectiveness of the school initiatives in addressing the challenges, problems, and difficulties encountered by the college teachers.

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