SEEING THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM THROUGH AN ADAPTIVE LENS: THE PEDAGOGICAL UNDERPINNING FOR TEACHING STRATEGIES OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHERS TOWARDS THE NEXT NORMAL

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ABSTRACT

This basic research aimed to identify the pedagogical challenges and best practices of select Junior High School English teachers at Mamplasan National High School during their modular distance learning for the school year 2021 – 2022. The qualitative data for this study were gathered through Key-Informant Interview and Focal Group Discussion. Based on the in-depth analysis, the challenges encountered by the English teachers in the distance learning are implementation, students, financial hindrances, lack of technical skills, limited strategies, and resources. On the other hand, to improve their students' linguistic skills, the best practices executed by the participants are strengthening teacher-stakeholder relationship, maximizing social media presence, and employing self-assessment tools. Thus, the key results from the research objectives were utilized as analytical grounds by the researcher to concoct his self-conceptualized strategic framework in improving the linguistic skills of the students through the four suggested activities. They are Hello, Students for listening skills, Virtual Café for speaking skills, Gen Z Lit for reading skills, and The Journal Project for writing skills.

Keywords: *Language Classroom. Modular Distance Learning, Linguistic Skills, Junior High School English Teachers, Mamplasan National High School*

INTRODUCTION

With the onset of COVID-19 pandemic, all sectors in our society, including the academic world, are greatly challenged (UNESCO, 2020). Consequently, the students directly suffered from this crisis that has abruptly shaken the whole system. This situation was unprecedented, and the teachers, with the guidance and support of all educational sectors, had to stand firm to their core in providing continuous learning for their students through a contingent and feasible plan. This is when the Philippines was introduced with the distance learning.

Although distance learning has been executed to some schools and universities (Bates, 2018), it was only in the school year 2020 – 2021 that it became part of our academic norm. All public and private schools adjusted their scholastic strategies in order to ensure that amidst restricted protocols and limited resources, the students could still resume from their learning journeys. (Armstrong-Mensah et al., 2020)

In the Philippines, two types of distance learning were employed, and they are Modular Distance Learning (MDL) and Online Distance Learning (ODL). These two learning modalities were implemented as they displayed to have the most practical and achievable platform for learning continuity. For MDL, the students are given self-learning modules, printed or digital, that they can utilize for individualized instruction. The teachers give concrete instructions to the parents and students through Weekly Home Learning Plan (WHLP), and the parents act as the "para-teachers", or the home partners of the school in facilitating the students to their learning needs.

On the other hand, ODL offers internet-based system of learning where teachers and students can interact synchronously or asynchronously. The teachers stand as the main facilitators of their learnings in which they hold series of online sessions through various virtual classroom platforms. Thus, the students are given learning tasks where they can work and submit them online based on the schedules set by their teachers. (Akram et al., 2021)

However, although learning continuity is being pushed through, there are still numerous pedagogical dilemmas that both teachers and students encounter during the distance learning. For example, MDL exhibits little-to-none interaction between teachers and students (Huang, 2021). There are no group activities, classroom discussion, or physical peer interaction that happened for the whole pandemic school year. Moreover, with ODL, there are students who could still not learn properly due to poor internet connective, non-conducive learning environment, or lack of school gadgets. These few situations exhibit the academic struggles English teachers experience that harshly

affect their students' linguistic competencies. (Özudogru, 2021)

Even with the reopening of school, one can infer that there are still pedagogical concerns that need to be addressed. The pandemic is already a huge challenge for English teachers, yet their creative and salient response are being tested more on how to cope with the unparalleled circumstances. To start with, academic transformations have shown to be significant as the conventional teaching strategies do not match the needs in a remote learning setup. Hence, regardless of the learning modalities, English teachers need to adjust their practices and be inventive to keep the students away from linguistic fatigue. (Barron, 2021)

At Mamplasan National High School, one of the public Junior High Schools in Biñan City, the struggles are real for its English teachers. The school is implementing Modular Distance Learning, but they are encouraged to maximize the use of online platforms to facilitate their students in their learning activities and concerns. However, based on their 2021 Learner Enrolment Survey Form, 51% of their students have no access on internet, and 62% of them lack available gadgets and learning equipment at home. These gathered data limit the English teachers to interact with their students even online.

Upon knowing that the aforementioned pedagogical situations pose a big threat to teachers and students, how can the students still improve their linguistic skills amidst this academic adversity? This question made the researcher strive to seek answers and provide tangible solutions for this underlying problem.

Statement of the Problem

This phenomenological study aimed to investigate the condition of the language classroom through the adaptive lens of English teachers at Mamplasan National High School. Thus, it targeted to address the challenges and uncover the best challenges of the participating respondents to concoct a strategic framework in improving the students' linguistic skills in the distance learning.

Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:
1. What challenges have English teachers encountered in the implementation of distance learning in their school?
2. What are the best practices that the English teachers pose during distance learning?
3. What strategies in improving the linguistics skills of the students can be employed based on the experiences of the participating English teachers?

METHODOLOGY

This study intended to listen to the pedagogical voices of the most affected beings in the pedagogical

sector, which are the teachers. In consequence, six participating English teachers at Mamplasan National High School were purposively selected to be the respondents of this study. The respondents were handling different grade levels, from Grade 7 to Grade 10, in the research locale.

To unveil the necessary information for this case study, Key-Informant Interview and Focal Group Discussion were conducted. The research instruments were conceptualized by the researcher himself, which were validated by one research specialist and two linguistic experts.

The Key-Informant Interview was employed to have an in-depth approach in understanding the pedagogical experiences of the respondents in dealing with the new normal education. The interview consists of three areas – behavior, strategies, and evidence of success. As the researcher is closely working with his respondents, he has the opportunity to have first-hand observation with them, and he carefully analyzed the pedagogic deeds of his participating teachers.

For the Focal Group Discussion, the researcher conducted a virtual conference with his six participating respondents. The session happened via Zoom and was recorded to accurately transcribe the answers from the given questions. The discussion focused on two contents: (a) the challenges the English encountered in the new normal education and (b) the best practices they acted in response with their pedagogical adversities.

The following are the ethical considerations that the researcher strictly followed to adhere to the research principles set by the university:

1. The researchers secured the permit from the participating school to ensure that the conduct of the study was legally established.
2. The participants signed an agreement letter to ensure their full approval to participate in the study.
3. The researcher held a virtual orientation with the participants to concretely explain the process of the research implementation.
4. The researchers provided a certification of data privacy and protection to the respondents to guarantee that the participants remain anonymous, and the result of this study is confidential and will be used for research purposes only.
5. The researchers conducted a post-conference with the participating respondents to present the results of the study conducted.

RESULTS

The following are the summary of findings based on the qualitative results of this study:

1. The first objective of this study was to determine the challenges that

the English teachers faced when distance learning was implemented in their school.

The first identified challenge is the implementation of distance learning. The English teachers had struggled to adjust with the turning point of scholastic events as they were not equipped to implement and facilitate the English learnings of their students.

The second challenge focused on the problems encountered by the students. If the teachers had a hard time adjusting with the scholastic changes, the students had more harshly arduous adjustments faced during the distance learning. Some of them include lack of available gadgets or equipment, insufficient data allowance, unstable internet connection, physical distractions, conflict with household activities, difficulty in independent learning, and health-related conditions.

On the other hand, financial hindrances were also highlighted. Although the school had funded most of their learning resources, there were circumstances in which teachers opted to use their personal finances to suffice the needs of the students in terms of materials and references.

Another challenge emphasized is the lack of technical skills. Since the teachers were used to holding classes in in-person discussion, they had to drive themselves to be familiarized and knowledgeable in certain technical and online platforms that are more needed in this new normal.

Limited strategies were also illustrated as one of the challenges posed during the modular distance learning setup. The English teachers struggled to facilitate the learnings of the students because of several factors they had to consider to be more inclusive in providing teaching services to their students.

Lastly, their limited means of providing strategies became tougher as lack of resources professed as another challenge to the respondents. As much as they wanted to provide strategic intervention materials, they were hampered by the fact that the school also struggled with financial incapability.

2. The participating English teachers shared their best practices to cope with the teaching-learning shenanigans they had to encounter during their modular distance learning.

First, they revealed that in order to survive and thrive in providing technical and financial resources, the participants strengthened their relationship with the stakeholders. They mentioned that without the help of their key stakeholders who they treated as community partners, their exigency plan would not be successful.

Furthermore, maximining their social presence also helped to cope

with the academic situations. Social media aided the teachers to have continuous communication with their home partners and their students.

Finally, the employment of self-assessment tools amended the scholastic reality that teachers were physically absent during their learning process. The self-assessment tools bettered the students' understanding on how to be more responsible for their own learning.

3. To ensure the continuous learning of the students, as well as the improvement of their linguistic skills, the researcher crafted a strategic framework that consists of four linguistic activities catered for modular and online distance learning.

Hello, Student! is an activity that targets both the listening and speaking skills of the students. The procedure is as simple as calling the students through mobile phone, and engaging them with a casual conversation.

Moreover, Virtual Café is an online speaking hub that will be the students' safe space to converse freely using their target language.

In contrast, Gen Z Lit involves creativity and innovation from the teachers. They will adapt literary works from the past and metamorphose them to self-conceptualized 21ST century literary piece.

Finally, The Journal Project is a written activity that intends to improve the writing skills of the students through reflective journal. The students are provided with self-conceptualized journal that they will fill up weekly by answering various self- reflective activities.

DISCUSSION

COVID-19 pandemic reshapes the educational system that made academic field to mobilize strongest action against the invisible enemy. As it becomes more challenging, English teachers shall pose a resilient, adaptive attitude towards surpassing scholastic crises. Thus, no one shall be left behind.

English teachers are honed to be linguistic warriors whose core responsibility is to ensure that they will never surrender in molding their linguistic soldiers. They must show that they possess empirical-based creativity that can expand their horizons even with the limitations and restrictions caused by various adversities. Their armors are their pedagogical souls that can uplift the morale of their students, and their shields are their torches of minds that can elevate the burning desires of the learners.

The pedagogical challenges such as implementation, students, financial hindrances, lack of technical skills, limited strategies, and lack of resources, are achievable to be resolved. The challenges are inevitable, but what matters the most

is how a teacher conquer, surpass, and utilize it to better the craft he or she has chosen.

Pedagogic camaraderie is also significant. During these trying times, no one can relate to you other than the people you share the same struggles with. Consequently, there is no better way than to collaborate with your scholastic companion. It does not make you less of an effective teacher if you seek help. Instead, it proves that you understand your role, and you make your actions become more purposeful and relevant.

As an English teacher, we are equipped to mold our students to become the best versions of themselves. Anchored on the evidenced-based strategic framework in improving students' linguistic skills, English teachers can be equipped to employ, capacitate, and support their students in their learning journeys regardless of their learning modality.

No pandemic shall hinder our duties. After all, there is no greater purpose in life than to achieve greater heights.

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