

## **FACING THE TOILS IN TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE NEW NORMAL: THE STORY OF PUBLIC ELEMENTARY TEACHERS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought an enormous change in the delivery of learning. Meanwhile, this created a massive problem among teachers especially in teaching English in the new normal environment. This qualitative-phenomenological study aimed to identify the experiences of public elementary teachers on the challenges they experienced in teaching English among their learners. Meanwhile, it determined their coping strategies and the development of an intervention program which can help teachers in facing these predicaments. Results revealed that teachers need to hurdle problems relative to the presence of non-literate parents as well as in monitoring the progress of the learners. They coped by doing the home visitation, giving of reading materials, and giving of tutorial services. Moreover, they shared that they forged partnership with parents and stakeholders and developed the sense of patience and perseverance amidst the uncertainties.

**KEYWORDS:** Teaching of Reading, Narrative, Challenges, Reading Activities & CFCST

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Rationale**

One of the most challenging part of teaching in the midst of the pandemic is the distance between the teacher and the learners. As the government made its efforts to contain the spread of the virus so as schools are not allowed to open. In this regard, the learners stayed at home where they have to answer their Self-Learning Modules. This is to ensure that learning still continues even in the comfort of their homes.

Some schools utilized the online modality where learners have to connect to different platforms like the Google Meet, Zoom, Google Classroom and Facebook Live (Atmojo& Nugroho, 2020). However, with the current situation of the country there are many constraints on the delivery of learning among the students especially those who are in the remotest areas of the archipelago. These changes in the educational milieu have challenged the educationalists as well as those in the government sectors.

In the global context and even in the Philippines, English becomes a school subject and is required to own a bargain in job position. It occurs as high unemployment exists and English mastery is much appreciated in workplace, business, and tourism. It shows the economic benefits of mastering English to people (Jayanti &Norahmi, 2014). Not surprisingly, the current issues and trends of English Language Teaching (ELT) are mainly concerned by education experts, pedagogical practitioners, language policy makers, and linguists. However, there were reported challenges faced by teachers in the teaching of English language. One of which is on the comprehension wherein they simply submitted their modules unanswered because they could not grasp its meaning. This predicament could add to the dilemma of language practitioners considering that the Philippines is one of the bottoms in their performance in the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) (Macayan, Quinto, Otsuka, & Cueto, 2018

This study connected a gap in the local setting especially on the experiences of public elementary teachers who

have been blamed by teachers in the secondary level on the presence of students who do not have the abilities to read and comprehend. In this regard, the researcher would like to determine the challenges of teachers in fulfilling their responsibilities in teaching English among the young individuals. Hence, this study was explored.

### 1.1.1 Research Questions

What are the challenges faced by teachers in teaching English in this time of the pandemic?

- What strategies can teachers suggest to overcome the challenges in teaching English in this time of the pandemic?
- What pieces of advice can teachers share to other teachers teaching English?
- What intervention program can be designed based on the findings of the study?

### 1.1.2 Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

This study was conducted in the Municipality of Magpet, Province of Cotabato. It will be limited on identifying the challenges faced by teachers in teaching English in this of the pandemic, their coping strategies and suggestions, and the intervention program which can be designed to help teachers who faced the same dilemma. This was conducted during the Second Semester of School Year 2020-2021.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Research Design

This study employed the qualitative-phenomenology. Qualitative research aims to build a holistic, primarily the narrative, description to inform the researcher's understanding of the occurrence of the phenomenon in a social and cultural context (Mayan, 2016). In addition, it was a combination of observations, interviews, and the review of documents. Hence, it gives the significance of finding at the variables in its natural setting in which they are found. The gathering of the data was made through the utilization of an open-ended questions that provided direct quotations coming from. In fact, the interviewer was important part of the research (Denzin &Giardina, 2008).

Meanwhile, phenomenology intended to focus on detailed description of the phenomenon being explored before the researcher could reach at interpreting the descriptions or interpretations (Owen, 1994). It was fundamental to do the summary of findings, discussion of findings, recommendations or future implications to give readers the panoramic perspectives of the study. The purpose of phenomenology is to look closely at the phenomenon under study in order to give an in-depth meaning to the lived experiences of the participants (Hallyar & Griffin, 2005).

This study is qualitative- phenomenology since I focused on the commonality of the experiences of the public elementary school teachers in teaching English in the new normal setting. I I conducted interview with a group of individuals who have first-hand experience of the situation. Then, I read the culled out information from the informants and generate themes. Through this process, I constructed meaning of the situation or experience and arrive at a more profound understanding of the phenomenon.

### 2.2 Informants of the Study

There were 10 informants who participated in this study. They were chosen using the following criteria:

- A public elementary teacher in the Municipality of Magpet;
- Teaching the English subject; and
- At least 3 years in the government service.

### 2.3 Locale of the Study

This study was conducted in the Municipality of Magpet, Province of Cotabato. It included the District where the informants were selected. Below is the map of the locale of the study. Since Magpet is dominated by the Obo-Manobo, they comprised more than 50% of the total population of permanent teachers. They presented the important role in education the IP in this part of the Philippines.

### 2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

As the researcher, I followed the following protocols in the conduct of the study. The interview guide questions I went the validation of the panel of experts. A letter of request was be sent to respective informants for their participation in the research. With their consent, an informed-consent-to-participate form will be given to them prior to the date of the interview so that they could fully understand the nature and purpose of the study being explored (O'Neill, 2003)

Also, I wrote a letter to the Schools Division Superintendent, District Supervisors, and school principals. Their approval helped me in the conduct of the study among the target informants and participants. Also, this gave me the signal to begin the interview.

During the course of the interview, the informants were given an ample time to respond to questions to ensure that relevant information will be culled out. After the interview, a token of appreciation was given to them for the precious time they spent. The recorded interview was transcribed in a verbatim manner. More so, the data analyst analyzed the data by extracting the significant themes. Results were presented in tabular and textual forms.

### 2.5 Data Analysis

The informants of the study were interviewed individually where they shared their life's stories in teaching reading in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thematic analysis was used to cull out the themes from the responses of the informants and participants (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2011). Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method was used in analyzing the data.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 3.1 Hurdles in Language Teaching in the New Normal Environment

Indeed, in this time of the pandemic, many things have changed. One of which is the norms of teaching and honing the learners. During the interview, it transpired that one of the challenges faced by the teachers is the presence of the non-literate parents. As shared:

*“For me, the most difficult to handle is the non- reader learners and also the parents because it's very difficult to teach children because they don't know how to read or even though construct a sentence.”* (Informant 6)

In addition, another informant expressed that:

*“The most difficult to handle are the parents who cannot read and understand English because they cannot assist*

*the learning of their children.*” (Informant 7)

In the same manner, it was verbalized by the informant that:

*“The most difficult is their reading comprehension. I will not daily monitor and assist them because of this time of pandemic. It’s hard also for their teacher to assist their children because of their educational attainment.”* (Informant 10)

Moreover, teachers were also challenged in monitoring the progress of their learners. It can be reiterated that some of their learners live in the far-flung places and accessibility is indeed a toil for them. Thus, during the interview they said that:

*“Distance and weather condition are the most difficult one. Pupils are living in different sitios with different distances. Some sitios are not passable by motorcycle so meaning teacher should walk. Some are passable but hard to get through because of the slippery and narrow road.”* (Informant 1)

*“I think, checking the reading comprehension of our learners is the most difficult to handle because not all learners can be reached out or constantly evaluated by teachers because of the distance or the situations that we can’t control.”* (Informant 8)

### **3.2 Machinations in Conquering the Hurdles in Language Teaching**

In order to find better ways to respond to the challenges experienced by them teachers did the home visitation wherein they could have a first-hand experience of the situation of their respective learners who often caused them the burdens because of their performance in learning. Hence, during the interview they raised some of their strategies like:

*“The most effective is communication with parents through home visit with observe health protocols. Because home visit has a big influence on the academic achievement of a learners and the relationship between teachers and learners.”* (Informant 2)

*“For me, the most effective is home visitation because not all learners have gadgets and internet connections, I could have an eye-to-eye contact with my pupils and of course by obeying the health protocols.”* (Informant 4)

In the same vein, these were supported by another informant that:

*“The most effective interventions in overcoming difficulties in teaching English so far in my experience is the home visitation. These interventions allow me to monitor the progress of my individual learners and enable me to identify specific strategies to aid their learning needs.”* (Informant 7)

Meanwhile, some of the informant-teachers revealed that they gave reading materials in order to sustain the needs of the learners with regards to learning the English language during the time of the pandemic. As shared during the interview:

*“I suppose, the most effective way to overcome those problems is through sending out printed reading materials to the learners, mainly because it is the easiest way for them learn how to read certain words or terms in English.”* (Informant 5)

Lastly, aside from the simply home visitation being done by the teachers, some of the teacher-informant did the tutorial to their non-reader learners. It was confirmed during the interview that:

*“The most effective is to tutor them and more patience teaching English especially I am assigned in remote areas it’s hard for me to teach them. I will conduct also a home visitation with following minimum health protocols so that I will know the weaknesses and strength of the learners.”* (Informant 6)

### 3.3 Words of Enlightenment to Teachers

To help other teachers who faced the same dilemma brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, they believed that one of the ways to be done is through strengthening the ties with parents and stakeholders. It was shared during the interview that:

*“Great things in business are never done by one person. They are done by a team of people. Teachers are not alone in dealing with these struggles amidst the pandemic. Parents have the same scenario. In developing the minds, soul and spirit of young learners, teachers and parents have the same responsibility to attain this goal to the fullest. So many queries that have arises on how should we sustain quality education at this time. One thing comes to my mind, I cannot do it alone. To my co-teachers, let us work together with the parents and stakeholders. Never stop associating with them because we cannot bear it alone. The key for the effective learning and continuous improvement in teaching is to reach out the parents because they have a countless role in the life of the learners particularly in education. Even before the pandemic we are encouraged to foster better relationship and camaraderie with the parents and stakeholders because our department and learners believes we can do great things as a team. The Department leaders are the foundation, teachers are in the implementation and parents serves as the motivation.”* (Informant 7)

And:

*“To my co-teacher let us work together and be a good role model not only to our parents and stakeholders but to our students too. Even before this pandemic we need to build a better relationship as teachers and to our stakeholders also.”* (Informant 9)

Furthermore, they want that teachers have to develop the sense of patience, perseverance amidst the uncertainties. As disclosed during the interview that:

*“To my dear fellow teachers facing dilemma like me I would just to tell you that let us just do the best we can to give on learners an excellent opportunity to learn even in this time of pandemic. Let us not hinder them to reach out their full potential in learning. we need to stand by our profession as a noblest one, and hold on to it even to surpass the barriers that we are facing right now.”* (Informant 3)

Also, it was confirmed by the informant that:

*Love the work this is the part of teaching journey. To face same dilemma is not easy because we encountered many problems because of this time of pandemic.* (Informant 6)

Teacher’s supported further the “word of wisdom”:

*“The word of wisdom that I can give to other teachers are: patience and perseverance are keywords to success.”* (Informant 4)

### 3.4 Implications for Practice

Teaching in this time of the pandemic is indeed a great challenge for the teachers. Assurance is too low that the learners are

motivated to learn and discover the infinite possibilities where they could grow and foster as productive citizens of this country. Learning in the time of the pandemic is indeed difficult not only to the learners but also to the teachers. As they faced these challenges, they are trying to find ways in order to find exonerate the learners from the bondage of ignorance.

Supposedly, learners are guided by their parents in their home schooling. However, it cannot be denied that there are parents who lacked the proper education where they themselves cannot even understand the contexts of the lessons. Hence, they cannot provide the necessary help to their own children. The result would be a big problem for the learners on how they would be able to cope with the lessons that they can hardly unlock. These only manifests that in teaching children need adults or learning partners who are knowledgeable enough to bring them to the pedestal of success.

Aside from this, the results of the study also implied that teachers need to cooperate with the parents and the stakeholders. They have to open the doors and communicate with them so that they could easily make same assessments with regard to the performance of the learners in this time of the pandemic. Eventually, they could design learning strategies that would allow the learners to become independent where they themselves could do the tasks even without the help of an adult or learning partner.

Henceforth, this study widens the horizon of teachers that they have to selfless in all facets of life. As language enthusiasts their main concern is the readiness of their learners in the four macro skills namely: reading; writing; speaking; and listening. Above all, they looked forward to have learners who are capable enough to express themselves in writing, speaking, and in comprehending the written or spoken texts. Teachers have sophisticated talents and skills that can be the elixir to the challenges in these trying times.

### **3.5 Implications for Future Research**

This qualitative study employing phenomenology stresses the importance of the role of teachers in learning. May it be in modular or face-to-face instruction. For future researchers, this study implied that they could expand to different towns in the Province of Cotabato especially those in the far-flung areas where technology and transportation are indeed a challenge. Through this, they could really see the real pictures of struggles not only by the learners but also the parents and teachers.

In the same vein, future researchers could utilize the themes as a guide for creating statements so that a mixed method specifically the exploratory will be designed. However, this has to undergo proper ways so that a good questionnaire could gauge the perception of teachers, stakeholders, and learners. More importantly, a comparative analysis will be drawn with the lived experiences of teachers in the different parts of the province in this time of the pandemic with regards to language teaching.

### **3.6 Concluding Remarks**

Gallivanting in the wilderness of research was indeed an impossible dream. It demanded time, effort, money, and the like. One must be prepared in all aspects of life before facing the mighty sword of the enemies. I equipped myself with all the readiness and I faced all the challenges especially that the threat of the pandemic is still looming in the horizon. Nevertheless, I was guided by my principle and faith in God that I could do everything because I have a dream to fulfill.

As a public-school teacher and a teaching language as well, I can feel the sentiments of my colleagues. I myself experienced and can also verbalize that indeed this pandemic brings a tumultuous number of challenges in the educational

parlance. This may be a lesson to learn and to be reflected so that in the long run this could be part of my system as a teacher.

This journey is full of colors. It made me realized that I am sharing the same stories with teachers whom I interviewed with. Truly, being one of them is a gift because they have dedicated themselves and showed their exemplary talents and skills to bring change into the lives of their learners. Consequently, this study will be of great help to the members of my tribe-the Obo-Manobo that has been deprived with education before and now are trying to flex their muscles so that their children could have a better future.

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