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Adaptability Quotient: Challenges in Keeping Quality Education in the Pandemic

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Abstract: The shift to the online modality during the pandemic caused academic institutions to reckon their best practices to adapt to the new normal, and this shift is undeniably studded with challenges. Through the existing body of literature that clarifies the need for teachers to be adaptable, and the connection between adaptability and effective delivery of instruction, the researcher is attracted to explore the challenges in keeping a healthy adaptability quotient (AQ) among educators. Following a qualitative design, the researcher employed an online group interview with 11 Senior Highschool English teachers at the University of the Cordilleras, using a total enumeration sampling. Results yielded that these challenges can be generally described as restrictions, mismanagement, inconsistencies, negative emotions, and insufficiencies. There are indeed varied challenges that the teachers have faced in relation to the different aspects of their adaptability quotient—some have been formidable at the onset of the transition to virtual education, while others remain challenging but under control at this juncture.

Keywords: adaptability quotient, abrupt paradigm shift, challenges, online learning, quality education

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Introduction

Evolution is a process that drives individuals to adapt to new norms, but it can also lead to the extinction of species. Hargreaves, Stone-Johnson, and Kew (2017) argue that adaptability is essential for learning and survival in today's rapidly changing environment. This paper aims to determine the survival challenges in keeping a healthy adaptability quotient (AQ) among educators during the pandemic-caused online learning.

Review of Literature

Educators face an even more forceful demand to be adaptable as they consider multiple human and non-human factors (Collie & Martin, 2016). This involves proactive management to meet the changing needs of learners and curricula standards, with teacher resilience positively associated with learners' numeracy (Collie & Martin, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic has presented significant challenges against educators, requiring a shift from primarily offline instruction to virtual methods (Harris, 2020).

The sudden shift to online learning is one of the most abrupt educational shifts all countries have had to accept (Toquero, 2020), necessitating calibrated commands for technology-mediated learning platforms and experiences (CHED, 2020). The delayed opening of classes is evidence of the necessary adjustments to fit into the new learning environment (RA 7797 notwithstanding), with the Department of Education of the Philippines devising the BE-LCP as its major response to the pandemic's limitations (DepEd, 2020). Intensive crafting of the curriculum continues within a limited time frame to meet the demands of the "new normal," including K-12

ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:12, Issue:4, December 2023

curriculum adjustments, learning material alignment, delivery modalities, and training for teachers, parents, and guardians (DepEd, 2020).

Through the adaptability of the stakeholders of the school, especially the administration and the teaching staff, however, the abrupt shift of educational instruction is not a threat to still foster learning. Nonetheless, challenges in keeping a healthy Adaptability Quotient (AQ) cannot be ignored; they can be crippling.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative method following qualitative analysis of data gathered through an interview. The paper adopts a total enumeration sampling technique. The key participants of the study were the 11 Senior High School English teachers at the University of the Cordilleras, S.Y. 2020-2021. They were interviewed through a Zoom call to further illustrate their virtual classroom experiences and home-school setup to specify certain experiences on challenges they encountered. Content analysis was employed, while incomprehensible data were clarified through another interview with the respondents before they were reflected in the study.

Findings

The following discussion on the struggles encountered in maintaining high adaptability quotient is divided into five sections, according to the different factors of AQ, namely: Self-awareness, professional and personal development, problem-solving and decision-making, attitude, and knowledge of competence.

Table: 1

Challenges in Keeping Sound Self-awareness

Themes	Frequency	Key Informants
Lack of Internet Access	4	Respondents 1, 3, 5, and 10
Restrictions	4	Respondents 1, 4, 6, and 8

Lack of Internet Access. Students face challenges with access to gadgets and slow internet connection during class, impacting their ability to participate fully in discussions. Some students with weak internet connections are allowed to turn off their cameras and microphones, making it difficult for teachers to monitor their activities. This limitation causes teachers to question their ability to realize their envisioned class objectives, leading to self-rumination, a form of introspection that questions one's self-worth (Morin, 2011, page 809).

Restrictions. Schools do not welcome classes to be conducted, which is why online classes have become one of the most plausible resorts for educators to still resume classes. From the initial interview, respondents noted that limitations to the availability of teaching materials and interaction are evident. The lack of readily available materials impedes educators to perform relatively effectively. Similarly, Lapada et al. (2020) concluded that teachers have a high

ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:12, Issue:4, December 2023

awareness of Covid-19's existence and harm. Although they are ready for distance learning, to be fully capable of performing effectively is still in question because of the "lack of facilities, equipment, and capacity building to distance learning education" (page 141). Two of the respondents have specified this restriction, which is why it is worth noting. There is a struggle in the "…availability of resources of instructional materials" (Respondent 1) and "limited resources and references" (Respondent 2) (Online Communication, January 27, 2021).

Moreover, interaction during class discussions is highly restricted in the virtual learning milieu (Clover, 2017). Octaberlina and Muslimin (2020) talked about how this new platform falls short of its capability of catering to some of the learning styles of students since students are still as diverse as they have been. Contact with students is less spontaneous, and there seems to be a lacking dimension in the full experience of student-teacher learning interaction.

As discussed earlier, microphones and cameras are forced to be turned off in order that the reception to WiFI of students' devices is increased, sufficient enough to not be aperiodic to the normal pace of the virtual discussion. The occurrence of both visual and aural divorces with students creates an impactful disconnection already. Such unestablished connection is aggravated by the unreliable interconnection they have. As a result, teachers lose the height of their self-awareness. During the follow-up interview, the respondents corroborated one another's statement regarding the loss of one of the most reliable sources for reflective teaching (Zoom Interview, May 14, 2021). Being disabled to see and hear their students strips them of non-verbal feedback, whether their explanation is understood by the students. Hence, as students are muted, teachers are deprived of getting aural directions.

Table: 2

Challenges in Keeping Sound Professional and Personal Development

Themes	Frequency	Key Informants
Time management	5	Respondents 1, 6, 7, 10, and 11
Pressure of being updated and innovative	2	Respondents 6 and 8

Time Management. According to the respondents, working from home has definitely blurred the lines between their personal and professional lives. The house has become both their workplace, where they prepare their lessons and teach, and their home, where they find rest after work. Specifically, they have a hard time budgeting their time for their family and self, for accommodating students, and for personal and professional planning. This struggle is accentuated by the responsibility to be available for students, especially since they learn by themselves following the new learning method. Respondent 8 said that there is a need "to (be) flexible in entertaining queries of students (Online Communication, February 15, 2021).

Students study at their own pace, so clarification or questions about their modules arise only during students' learning time. Students' message(s) come 24/7 (Respondent 9, Online

ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:12, Issue:4, December 2023

Communication, February 15, 2021). Teleworking is falsely perceived in the ideals that workers are now omni-available to perform any work-related tasks (International Labour Organization, 2020). The respondents feel obliged to respond to students' queries no matter when since they themselves have difficulty identifying which portion of their time must be used for work only. They carry "responsibility and consideration to be provided to all the students" (Respondent 11, Online Communication, March 6, 2021).

Because of this random arrival of students' messages that tempt teachers to respond urgently, their time for their family and self is invaded. That is to say, the efforts they exert for the development of themselves as a person during their family time and me time are disrupted. It is a struggle as it "hampers family time or personal time since students message 24/7" (Respondent 10, Online Communication, March 5, 2021).

They are asked to be ubiquitous in terms of handling work, family, self, and profession. Various personal concerns arose when the respondents were asked to elaborate on how they struggle in budgeting their time for the different aspects of their lives. Some of them are parents who have to take care of their children as well. They do not only feed them or guide them in their everyday routines; they also look after them in learning since they also study by themselves. They must also prepare their meals to feed their dependents or working partners. As employees, they are as well required to attend online meetings with superiors, coordinators, or fellow teachers. All of these happen inside the home, and the time they occur can be simultaneous. As Respondent 1 expressed, there is indeed a struggle to juggle all of these: "having online classes, meetings, discussions, collaborations, and activities in which you have to make yourself available at all times" (Respondent 1).

Pressure of Being Updated and Innovative. The new norm has, indeed, eliminated a number of traditionally utilized materials because of their inapplicability in the virtual classroom. Teachers have to devise new methods to teach students by trying to maximize the endowments of the online platform. The Department of Education and Commission on Higher Education have focused most of their learning modalities, methods, and materials to be usable in the online platform. There are a lot of adjustments that must be made for the educational system to fit in the virtual classroom (CHED, 2020; DepEd, 2020). These include alterations to the grading system, students' performance assessment and evaluation, administration of laboratory classes and demonstrative performances, etc. (Tria, 2020). Respondent 6 finds this challenging, particularly in professional and personal development. Respondent 6 said, "brought about by this pandemic, as teachers we have to continually upgrade ourselves to new trends in teaching virtually" (Online Communication, February 8, 2021). It is highly recommended that teachers improve in terms of technological and pedagogical domains fitted for the online platform (Tria, 2020). This challenge is essential to overcome.

ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:12, Issue:4, December 2023

Table: 3

Challenges in Keeping Sound Problem-Solving and Decision Making

Themes	Frequency	Key Informants
Meeting Students' Needs and Reconciling Standards with Outcomes	5	Respondents 6, 7, 8, 10, and 11
Making Ends Meet	2	Respondents 1 and 8

Meeting Students' Needs and Reconciling Standards with Outcomes. To cater to the needs of the students is still one of the main goals of education, and meeting these needs determines the success of the teacher as well. New needs have resurfaced, and existing ones have been exacerbated by the coming of the pandemic.

Garcia and Weiss (2020) have enumerated a number of research-extracted results and conclusions that update the current position of the education sector in the midst of this health crisis. One of the unpleasant findings is how the effectiveness of both learning and teaching is dependent on internet connection and availability of gadgets, together with the pieces of training undergone by educators.

The same hindrance to teaching is raised by the respondents. Respondent 11 emphasized the lack of resources and equipment that can facilitate the online learning of students and the online teaching of teachers. The follow-up interview revealed the insufficiency of pieces of training of teachers to prepare them for the new classroom setup and to further equip them with the skills needed to perform competently (Zoom Interview, May 14, 2021). Because of this lack of available resource materials and pieces of training at the onset of their adjustment, the initiative to gear themselves accordingly arose. Respondent 10 said, "I have learned to explore and do ways technically on my own".

Meeting the needs of students is highly far-fetched during this time, especially in the case of the Philippines, where a reliably stable internet connection and fully functional gadgets are either or both not accessible to many students. Since students are allowed to turn off their cameras and microphones, they are out of the teachers' reach. Hence, the latter is uninformed of the former's needs that the former themselves cannot identify on their own.

Moreover, in the follow-up interview, the respondents grieved about the baseless doubts they put about their students' outputs because the possibility that these outputs were not made by them was high (Zoom Interview, May 14, 2021). Since learning now is asynchronous and can be performed by students at their own pace, without the physical presence of a teacher and not necessarily with the guidance of a guardian, modules that are meant to be studied and answered by students can now be accomplished by someone else. Taking into context the instance that students ask others to accomplish their activities, the assessment of teachers would be considered void. That is to say, the needs, struggles, or points for improvement teachers have identified from

ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:12, Issue:4, December 2023

the outputs of the students (since this is one of the concrete data they can get hold of) are invalidated. A few of them also overlook their academic responsibilities, according to the testimonies of the respondents. Students hand in their finished homework and activities beyond the set deadline amidst the numerous reminders to submit them on time.

Consequently, realizing the ideals of set standards by the educational institution itself is prone to nonachievement due to this loose assessment of unreliable student performance and leniency of the implementation of academic rules and regulations. Teachers are facing a dilemma each time they encounter students who are non-compliant, especially during these academic years in the pandemic. There is a myriad of reasons students can enumerate to blame their recalcitrance, such as domestic responsibilities, tampered papers, absence of reliable internet connection, absence of gadgets to make the output, etc. Although these reasons are feasible, they can also be otherwise. Hence, teachers have to be more discerning when it comes to considering accepting students' late papers. There is a struggle in "weighing student alibis/reason when they asked for consideration" (Respondent 10).

Making Ends Meet. Interestingly, it is beneficial for one's adaptability quotient when he or she struggles to stabilize his or her financial reservoir during this pandemic. Gathered data show that trying to survive financially during this pandemic was not healthy for their adaptability quotient at first. Immense layoffs have been a phenomenon in many industries, including the educational sector, which resulted in employees losing parts of their financial channels. Teacher-respondents shared this same concern, but it was more of worrying about losing their job during the transition. The news on entrenchments has caused anxiety among them, which is why how to proceed over the problems they face and will face during the pandemic was unclear. Consequently, credible options were absent to choose from to make a sound decision.

Nonetheless, teacher-respondents, in the follow-up interview, expressed their gratitude to the school for not cutting their salaries (Zoom Interview, May 14, 2021). Respondent 9 pinpointed that "financial constraint" is, indeed, a challenge that she was facing, but this has allowed her to be more adaptable in terms of problem-solving and decision-making.

Teachers have expounded their claim on how working from home has been financially edifying, in fact. Testimonies of them include saving money from commuting and meals. Since they do not need to report to the school physically, teachers do not need to spend for taxi or jitney fare as well as for their meals and snacks during work hours which used to cost them more than a hundred pesos a day. Hence, on the bright side, they have saved enough funds for other purposes. The studies of Belzer et al. (2002), Siu and Sheck (2010), and Nigro (1996) underline the relationship between decision-making skills and anxiety (as cited in Cenkseven-onder and Colakkadioglu, 2013). Their anxiety has been mitigated by the assurance that they still have their financial resource and that their funds are sufficient to survive the present predicaments thrown by the pandemic.

Table: 4

ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:12, Issue:4, December 2023

Challenges Encountered by Teachers in Keeping Sound Attitude

Themes	Frequency	Key Informants
Pessimism	4	Respondents 1, 6, 7, and 8
Impatience	3	Respondents 5, 7, and 10
Fear	1	Respondent 2

Pessimism. Consequently, teachers establish a pessimistic attitude toward their work and personal life. Respondents have clear goals for their future and classes. However, the uncertainties brought about by the pandemic strip them of their confidence, especially when the plans they have set are in danger of being sabotaged. Respondent 1 had difficulty being "pessimistic when plans do not go as planned," while Respondent 8 found it hard to "stay positive with the current issues that we are experiencing now" (Respondent 8, Online Communication, February 15, 2021).

They lose their positivity in processing their plans and executing them. Respondent 6 noted that they need a positive mindset in order for them to deliver the lessons effectively. It is necessary that they are geared with a positive attitude for them to influence their students and fellow to continue looking forward for the betterment. Itao (2020) inscribes the lingering gloom in the educational sector wherein teachers and people involved in education grope for hope and optimism in the ocean of bleakness and lugubriousness.

Impatience. In relation to this pessimistic attitude, teachers have a hard time sustaining a patient approach to the present setup of learning and teaching. Respondents 5, 7, and 11 singled out impatience as particularly attacking their positive attitude at this time of the pandemic. Aside from the fact that it takes much patience to prepare for the class (of completing modules, reading enriching materials, checking students' outputs, structuring presentations, etc.), teachers are also tested of their patience when accommodating their students during and outside class hours.

The previous discussion bears testimonies of how teachers are forced to be omnipresent in dealing with students' concerns. Moreover, they need to be hyper-considerate amidst students' non-compliance and poor performances. They are also expected to be lenient in reminding students about their academic obligations and requirements, even when these have been repeatedly asked to be noted. Teachers are restricted by the pandemic to fully express and execute their duties, knowing that these duties were easily achievable and appreciated in the pre-pandemic times. Nias (1996, as cited in Jones and Kessler, 2020) purported that teachers are highly attached to their professional territories that they negatively respond to intruders, causing anxiety, impatience, distress, depression, and anger to surface.

Fear. There is no doubt that fear is rampant at this time when many aspects of one's life are at risk. This can be one's health, family, job, or life itself. Similarly, the pandemic has stirred the peace of mind and focus of teachers, wherein their fright of uncertainties drowns their positive attitude toward functioning as an individual and a professional. Such findings were also reflected

ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:12, Issue:4, December 2023

in the study of Carreon et al. (2021), corroborating that teachers are exhibiting fear emanating from the coronaviruses. Respondent 2 said, "(I) fear for my health, fear for my future just in case I might lose my job coz of the pandemic".

Fear is defined as "an unpleasant often strong emotion cause by anticipation or awareness of danger". The intensity of such a feeling is bothersome, and its presence disturbs the whole countenance of a person. This explains the current predicament of teacher-respondents as they are prone to losing their focus, knowing that they can be contaminated with the virus. Some of them have their spouses work in the field, which makes them more exposed to the virus. However, this is not the main reason they fear about.

Follow-up interviews revealed that getting infected with the virus can result in their losing their job or their temporary dismissal from it (Zoom Interview, May 14, 2021). That means they would lose a source of income or a financial source that provides for the needs of their family. Some of the teacher-respondents are parents who have children to feed and rear. In case this happens, the situation would lead to emotional, financial, health, mental, and social drain. Understandably, the fear of such pending danger, which is potently lethal, tampers with their optimism, which is a more recommendable attitude for the present time. Janis and Feshback (1935, 1954) found in their research that “high fear arousal produced less adherence to recommendations” (page 20, as cited in Leventhal, Singer, and Jones, 1965).

Table: 5

Challenges Encountered by Teachers in Keeping Sound Knowledge of Competencies

Themes	Frequency	Key Informants
Limited Sources and Digital Competence	5	Respondents 1, 7, 8, 9, and 12
Lack of Trainings, Seminars, and Orientations	3	Respondents 1, 9, and 10

Limited Sources and Digital Competence. These insufficiencies in knowledge and skill feeds for teachers have, thereupon, unsatisfactorily enabled them to perform in the online platform, at least in their own reflective assessment.

> High technology skills but not really a problem on the basics or on Zoom or Canvas (Respondent 2)
>
> Limited references (Respondent 3)
>
> Not enough resources (Respondent 10)
>
> Making sure to achieve an essential competency through online discussion and activities (Respondent 7)

ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:12, Issue:4, December 2023

Lack of competencies accommodating online classes (respondent 8)

The adjustment to using technological gadgets is not as difficult as using them for educational purposes. Teachers' creativity enables them to perform well in their own profession. Nonetheless, factors such as low connectivity of students, the applicability of material in a platform, and applicability in the online platform must be considered, and these factors impede the creativity of the teacher compared to his/her performance in the offline setup. Citing their struggles in their Self-awareness, teachers question their competence due to these limitations and unevaluated or under-appreciated efforts and interventions. They cannot gauge their current level as an educator in the online classroom; ergo, they are clueless about the adjustment they have to make. The root of such low confidence in their competence and performance is their relative under-performance in the digital platform.

The study of Pouezvara, Ryan, and Bazer (2020) found that teachers have not been optimally utilizing the technological gadgets present in school for learning, teaching, and informing purposes, which also contributes to the low ICT or digital competence among them.

Lack of Trainings, Seminars, and Orientations. The adjustment to the new normal of teaching is characterized as immense and difficult; at the same time, it is urgent and painful. The previous discussion on Problem Solving and Decision-Making factor expounded on the absence of available materials for professional development and class instruction at the onset of the educational shift. Educational institutions had to restructure their curricula and learning modalities for each subject according to the kind and manner each should be taught.

Tria (2020) emphasized the adjustments in assessment methods, how performance- and experiment-based subjects are limited to paper-and-pen performance tests, how extracurricular activities are restricted accordingly, etc. Webinars which are growing in number and accessibility, have helped a number of educators in their adjustment. Nonetheless, the nature of training and workshops of being more effective when hands-on and demonstrated makes them more challenging to be conducted for teacher development during this pandemic. Schools also grapple with the new classroom setup's requisition to adjust expeditiously, which leads them to orienting their teachers and other faculty members sparsely. Consequently, teachers are left unsure of the practices and measures they employ. "Lacks trainings and seminars for teachers; and Non-thorough orientation of the school regarding the transition" were all challenging (Respondent 10)

Conclusion

Based on the findings, teachers' challenges in the transition to online classrooms are both emanating from internal and external sources. Technological restrictions, physical and social limitations, health threats, and overall uncertainties are gravely descriptive of these challenges.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Teachers should fearlessly identify these challenges and struggles in order they understand their situation and environment. By doing so, they are more aware of their standing amidst these

problems and be more capable of identifying potent strategies to overcome them. It is also recommended for future researchers to consider other contexts outside education. Other populations or locales should be considered, for they may be facing unique struggles compared to teachers.

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