Lived Experiences of Teacher Education Faculty on Emergency Remote Teaching

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Abstract

Since COVID-19 became a public health crisis, higher learning institutions have been forced to shift the means to deliver content and create a wider arena wherein students can access educational resources and acquire knowledge through emergency remote teaching (ERT). However, some faculty members were unready for this compulsory transition, particularly in the context of teacher education. Hence, this study unraveled the ERT lived experiences of 25 teacher education faculty from a public university in Northeastern Philippines. Findings revealed that the faculty members viewed ERT as flexible, technology-driven, and challenging. Despite challenges such as a lack of technical skills and students' poor internet connectivity and passivity, they have used their agency meaningfully to implement the various instructional processes such as preparation, planning, access, delivery, monitoring, and assessment of student learning. This experience was made possible by enhancing their technological competence, being flexible in terms of time and activities, and demonstrating instructional adaptability. Most importantly, they were able to manifest a caring and nurturing disposition, which is integral in teacher training. Lastly, implications for teacher education policy and practice were presented.
Keywords: agency, emergency remote teaching, lived experiences, teacher education

Introduction

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) has significantly shaken the world since its detection and unforeseen spread throughout countries across the globe. Since COVID-19 became a public health crisis, academic institutions have been forced to shift the means to deliver content and create a wider arena wherein students can access educational resources and acquire knowledge in virtual spaces. These modifications were necessary, but because numerous challenges came with adapting to the shifts, the educational system had to take steps back to make a forward motion. Administrators needed to attune to the ever-changing landscape of instructional innovation, and teachers had to accelerate in accustoming themselves to the technological aspect of their profession (Cardullo et al., 2021). From the transition until the eventual adaptation of distance learning, teachers and students inevitably faced difficulties in many areas of the new terrain they were taking on their academic navigation.

When a crisis occurs, emergency remote teaching (ERT) temporarily switches the mode in which education is delivered (Hodges et al., 2020). ERT, a form of flexible learning, was seen as a viable alternative to bridge the gaps between the fundamental components that make the transmission of knowledge possible. Due to school closures, teacher-student interactions were transposed to online platforms and digital avenues. It began to incorporate other feasible methods of instruction available that are conducive to various academic climates. Moreover, for the teaching-learning process to still thrive despite the trying times, teachers have become instructional leaders and managers of classrooms beyond the usual four-cornered setting. Hence, educators were not only expected to become facilitators of learning; they also needed to stand at the forefront of the gradual adaptation of the new normal in the educational system (Erlam et al., 2021).

Indeed, the COVID-19 epidemic accelerated the adoption of digital teaching and learning (Houlden & Veletsianos, 2020), and teacher educators were not exempt from the effects of the abrupt switch from in-person to online teacher training. To enable teaching-learning continuity and avoid jeopardizing the pre-service teachers' development of essential competencies, a digital pedagogical

pivot (Anderson, 2020) as an emergency remote teaching alternative has to happen swiftly and effectively. Nonetheless, some teacher educators lacked the requisite digital literacy abilities (Dhawan, 2020) and the necessary tools to implement remote instruction successfully. Taking these things into account, it is integral to have a good grasp of the various experiences of teacher education faculty members on remote teaching to gain a multi-dimensional perspective. The fact that many needed to familiarize themselves with the matter emphasizes the necessity of solidifying progressive studies to develop more knowledgeable instructors and better professors. However, there is limited literature and studies that document these valuable sources of knowledge in the context of teacher education.

Conducting research focusing on the perspectives, difficulties encountered, resources used, techniques employed, and insights learned by many teacher education faculty members in remote teaching environment may prove to be transformative in the continuous development of their pedagogical strategies and technological adeptness. Furthermore, magnifying the value of teachers as front liners in the education sector's fight against ignorance, illiteracy, and declining quality of learning, the researchers deemed it imperative to conduct improvement-oriented investigations considering that the community of educators is still in the process of slowly building back better academic structures in the new educational landscape. Hence, the study explored the lived experiences of teacher education faculty in ERT, addressing the following questions:

1. How do the teacher education faculty view ERT?
2. What are the experiences of the teacher education faculty in the following instructional processes: (a) preparation, (b) planning, (c) access, (d) delivery, (e) monitoring, and (f) assessment?
3. What are the enabling and impeding factors in the implementation of ERT?
4. How do teacher education faculty cope with the challenges in ERT?

Methodology
Research Design

The study used descriptive phenomenology in exploring the embodied experiences of teacher education faculty in emergency remote teaching. This design focuses on understanding psychosocial processes from the perspective of the individuals (Welman et al., 2001), emphasizing their "lived experiences" (Greene, 1997; Ramirez, 2012). These firsthand accounts reflect the reality of the circumstances in which the researchers' participants in a specific study find themselves. They represent people's choices, perceptions, and influences that may impact others (Given, 2008). Furthermore, the phenomenology perspective is used to define the situation in which both the researcher and the participant are engaged in dialogue (Groenewald, 2004).

Research Participants

The 25 (male=14, female, =11) study participants were the teacher education faculty from the different campuses of Cagayan State University (CSU). There were three (12%) full-fledged professors, seven (28%) associate professors, two (8%) assistant professors, 10 (40%) instructors, and three (12%) part-time lectures. Their age ranged from 22 to 57 years and their mean length of teaching service in CSU was 12.92 years. Moreover, the participants were purposively chosen using the following inclusion criteria: The participant must (1) be either a permanent or part-time faculty in the College of Teacher Education; (2) have experienced emergency remote teaching for at least two semesters; (3) have fully adjusted or not adjusted at all in emergency remote teaching; and (4) be willing to participate in the study. Finally, the number of participants in the study was based on data saturation.

Research Instrument

The interview guide was used to obtain the embodied experiences of the study participants. It constituted questions relevant to the participants' views and experiences in remote teaching. The specific questions underwent qualitative content validation from three experts (one professor in qualitative research, one language teacher, and one research teacher) ensuring that the interview guide appropriately addressed the research questions.

Research Procedures

Foremost, the approval of the University for the conduct of the study was sought. When the permission was granted, the researchers informed the study participants through Facebook Messenger about the purpose of the study and obtained their free prior and informed consent (FPIC). Since the study was undertaken during the pandemic, a google form containing the interview questions were forwarded to all participants who were encouraged to write their responses in an intelligible language (English, Filipino, or their mother tongue). To substantiate the responses taken from the google form, limited face-to-face interview was done to few participants following the health protocols at the time of the data gathering. The conduct of individual phenomenological interviews was based on the availability and convenience of the participants. Furthermore, a story-telling method was employed to release the participants from any limits in expressing their experiences and ideas. With the participants' approval, their responses were recorded through note-taking. Furthermore, during the data collection, all judgment were suspended by placing all presuppositions in an "epoche" or bracket, as Husserl (1982) described it.

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were transcribed, read several times, and subjected to thematic analysis. Similarly, Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological analysis paradigm was employed to describe and elucidate the embodied experiences of the participants. Hence, the researchers gave equal weight to all the participants' responses and identified the crucial aspects and uniform meanings of their stories. The textual description (first reflection) was from the themes that have been established, clustered, and synthesized. Following the coding of themes and the formulation of a textual structural description based on recurrent insights (second reflection), shared principles, concepts, and ideas of the study participants' recounted experiences was derived, resulting in the crucial insight (third reflection). Finally, the researchers uncovered the "essence" of the phenomena, which lead to eidetic insight, as Ramirez (2007) claims to be the "nucleus of truth."

Review Of Related Literature
Remote Teaching: Benefits and Challenges

Amidst the pandemic, the call for quality education became increasingly urgent as the teaching-learning process faced unforeseen challenges with the sudden shift to online delivery systems and emergency remote teaching. "Online or remote education" involves physical distance between instructors and students, relying on technology for interaction and content delivery (Hermida, P., 2020). The Rise of Remote Learning (2020) emphasizes digital lessons and blended virtual immersion as key elements of teaching and learning scenarios. This approach allows educators to create engaging technological content, while students can access education conveniently from anywhere. However, Erlam G. et al. (2021) identify certain challenges in this context, including miscommunication from universities, concerns about student access to technology, finding suitable workspaces, lack of digital competence, excessive screen time, managing work hours, and maintaining work-life balance. On the positive side, remote learning offers enhanced flexibility, boosts teacher creativity, increases learner autonomy, and reduces commute time. In this context, the challenge lies in effectively combining facilitative skills with technology and ensuring the content is comprehensible through flexible instructional delivery.

Drawing from their observations and insights amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Huang et al. (2020) proposed valuable recommendations for organizing Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) to enhance flexible learning during educational disruptions. These suggestions encompass various strategies, including ensuring a dependable network infrastructure, employing user-friendly learning tools for information retrieval, knowledge construction, collaboration, expression of understanding, and assessment of learning outcomes in concrete ways. Additionally, they emphasized the provision of interactive and suitable digital learning resources, guiding learners to adopt effective individual or group learning methods. The authors also advocated for the adoption of diverse teaching strategies, such as case studies, open debates, discussions, learners-led discovery, and experiential learning, to organize instruction effectively. Furthermore, they stressed the importance of offering instant support services

for teachers and learners regarding urgent school and government policies, leveraging effective learning technologies, tools, and resources, and fostering partnerships between governments, enterprises, and schools.

In Finnish education, remote teaching demonstrated success from both an epidemiological and curricular standpoint. Basilaia and Kvavadze (2020) conducted a case study in Georgia, which revealed a smooth transition to online education, providing valuable experience that can be applied in the future. However, this shift to remote teaching also brought forth significant challenges and the potential to widen existing achievement gaps. Rodriguez-Muñiz, Luiz et al. (2021) conducted an exploratory study on secondary Mathematics teachers, indicating that they showcased adequate digital competence and technological pedagogical content knowledge through the use of numerous digital resources and self-developed materials with educational software. Nevertheless, the sudden transition to emergency remote teaching compelled teachers to slow down the pace of instruction and reduce the content covered, while also experiencing challenges with technological equipment inadequacy. Kevser and Sibel (2021) conducted an internal case study on emergency remote teaching in a private school, where teachers notably highlighted issues related to devices, infrastructure, connection, applications, technical difficulties, and student challenges.

In the study conducted by Kraft and Simon (2020) examining teachers' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic while working from home, significant differences in the challenges of transitioning to remote teaching and learning were highlighted. Mid-career teachers, especially those with children at home, faced considerable struggles in balancing work responsibilities with their personal lives. Veteran teachers, on the other hand, were more than three times as likely as early-career teachers to express discomfort with the technological tools required for remote teaching. Notably, schools with more supportive working conditions were better equipped to help teachers maintain a sense of success during the pandemic.

Similarly, the study conducted by An, Yunjo et al. (2021) revealed that teachers faced significant challenges during the early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic while adapting to online teaching and utilizing various strategies and tools. Key challenges encountered by educators included lack of student participation and engagement (or lack of parental support), students lacking access to technology, concerns about students' well-being, the absence of face-to-face interactions with students, difficulties in achieving work-life balance, and the need to learn new technology.

Experiences of Higher Education Faculty in Remote Teaching

The global higher education landscape has undergone a rapid and profound transformation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Johnson et al. (2020) examined the swift transition to emergency remote teaching at public and private post-secondary institutions in the United States during the early weeks of the pandemic. Faculty, whether experienced in online teaching or not, reported adopting new teaching methods, and a majority of them made adjustments to their assignments and exams to accommodate the new mode of delivery. Quezada et al. (2020) explored how a California liberal arts college and its graduate teacher education program prepared their faculty for this significant shift in education setting and teaching methodologies in response to COVID-19. Faculty members displayed resilience in adapting to remote education's imminent changes in teaching delivery modes.

In Saudi Arabia, Al-Freih Maha (2021) conducted a phenomenological study that delved into instructors' perceptions of online learning and future teaching practices amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Higher education faculty expressed concerns about supporting active student engagement in the new learning environment, leading to increased awareness of online learning's educational benefits and limitations. Faculty members expressed a preference for blended learning and a desire to incorporate more technology tools in their future courses, rather than opting for fully online teaching. Diaz and Perales (2021) conducted a study involving language faculty members, who shared their experiences and emotions related to emergency remote teaching. While most faculty members reported negative feelings due to challenges such as content delivery without sufficient interaction and limited internet

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access, language teachers with online education training reported better experiences. These studies offer valuable insights into the dynamic impact of remote teaching on instructors' practices and experiences amid the pandemic.

In the realm of medical education, numerous scholars have explored the challenges and future prospects of online learning in their field. Goh and Sandars (2020) emphasized the need for technological innovation to sustain teaching in the evolving global medical education landscape, proposing the potential use of artificial intelligence for adaptive learning and virtual reality as future trends. Sheng-Yi (May 2021) conducted a case study that identified common instructional behaviors among teachers at all levels, highlighting roll calls, lectures with presentation screens, in-class task allocation, and whole-class synchronous video/audio-based discussions. The study categorized these behaviors into four instructional stages, shedding light on teachers' approaches to navigating the teaching environment, conducting classes, and evaluating learning effectiveness. Amidst the challenges of the pandemic, Filipino teachers demonstrated remarkable commitment to teaching, employing online and self-paced module modalities to deliver quality instruction (Business Mirror, 2020).

Furthermore, An et al. (2021) revealed a positive outcome of the online learning environment, as the spring 2020 emergency remote learning transition provided an opportunity for teachers to explore technology-enabled learning. Many teachers embraced new possibilities and innovative teaching approaches through this transition. Standerford et al. (2020) examined the experiences of faculty members whose classes were shifted to online/distance delivery due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study highlighted the varying levels of faculty experience with online course delivery and the range of emotions they expressed in response to the abrupt change. Despite the challenges, faculty members demonstrated commitment and adaptability, swiftly transitioning to new teaching modalities to ensure quality education during these extraordinary circumstances. Nevertheless, the sudden shift to emergency remote teaching required faculty to revise courses rapidly, leaving little time to develop teaching and learning activities that fostered all types of interaction in such urgent circumstances.

Discussion

This section answers the research questions in the light of the findings presented above. Through the first research question, the study found that the faculty participants viewed emergency remote teaching as flexible, technology-driven, and challenging. Generally, remote teaching is considered an alternative or remedy for the continuity of learning amid a contingency such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This perspective is akin to the findings of Erlam et al. (2021), reporting that university faculty consider flexibility as one of the significant benefits of emergency remote teaching as it allows both teachers and students to learn at their pace and design their learning environment that tailors to the arising needs of the moment. Also, the present study affirms the findings of Cameron-Standerford et al. (2020), emphasizing that university faculty have optimized the opportunity to customize teaching and learning in their transition from face-to-face to emergency remote teaching despite the challenges faced along the way. Indeed, this scenario became possible because of the availability of technology as the backbone of remote teaching. With technology, it would be possible for teachers to have delivered instruction and develop essential learning competencies (Education Technology, 2020).

Through the second research question, the researchers explored the processes undertaken by the teacher education faculty in emergency remote teaching regarding preparation, planning, access, delivery, monitoring, and assessment. The findings revealed that the faculty participants were internally driven to perform their various instructional tasks despite evident limitations posed by the remote teaching structure. The challenges, such as poor connectivity, lack of technical skills, and learners' passivity, cannot impede their desire to give their best in discharging their functions. They were prepared to go beyond restrictions, and Giddens (1984) described this as having "agency" in his structuration theory. In this analytical framework, he particularly highlighted the significance of agency in maintaining social practices that make up institutional structures or in developing new structures. According to this perspective, the teacher education faculty's agency motivates them to create or modify

a thriving distance learning environment for the institution. They could tolerate and surpass the limitations and challenges they faced, which allowed them to participate meaningfully in educational activities through the exercise of their agency.

Interestingly, the faculty's lived experiences in remote teaching instructional processes demonstrated their nurturing character as formators of future teachers. This disposition became evident in their initiatives and commitment to plan for the content carefully, review the curriculum and standards in recalibrating activities, adjust their instructional approaches and techniques, monitor students' learning progress, and instill integrity in the assessment of learning to ensure the development of students' competencies and continuity of learning. This point is consistent with Haapanen's (2014) notion that faculty of teacher training are expected to model a caring and nurturing attitude, which they need to pass on to the pre-service teachers who are expected to be affectionate professionals and engaged community members within the classroom and through the larger community.

Through the third research question, the study uncovered the enabling and impeding factors experienced by the participants in emergency remote teaching. The availability of gadgets and online platforms and resources, technical assistance provided, and the faculty's resilience enabled the teacher education faculty to implement remote teaching successfully. These factors corroborate the assertion of De Vera (2021) that during the COVID-19 pandemic, Filipino teachers have survived through their resilience and the presence of online platforms and gadgets that facilitated their instructional activities. Also, it has been noted that schools provided technical assistance to teachers, especially those who needed to be more techno-savvy. This move allowed the teachers to develop technical competencies to increase their teaching productivity (Hernadez-Malipot, 2020).

On the one hand, the impeding factors include poor internet connectivity, lack of technical skills, and learners' passivity. Notably, the findings are consistent with the report of An et al. (2021), claiming that teachers' major dilemma in remote teaching refers to deficient competence in utilizing ICT, students' lack of access to gadgets and the internet, and poor class participation. Undeniably, remote teaching presents its fair share of challenges, and it can be especially problematic for faculty members who find it difficult to adjust because of technical aptitude (Philipsen et al., 2019). On the other hand, the study participants considered planning and preparation essential to providing adequate training, and remote learning is no exception. Hence, with this outlook, they will go a long way toward avoiding some of these difficulties with remote learning by taking the necessary time to organize and keep participants informed.

Through the last research question, the researchers examined the coping strategies of the teacher education faculty on emergency remote teaching. The study revealed that the participants embraced the flexibility of activities and time, enhancement of technical skills, and instructional adaptability to cope with the challenges they experienced in implementing remote teaching. Indubitably, the faculty members have demonstrated resilience in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. Their resilience became a psychological resource enabling them to teach their students with unyielding dedication. This finding supports Lagat's (2021) study pointing out that Filipino teachers have been highly hopeful, optimistic, and adaptable amidst the pedagogical challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. This perspective has paved the way for teachers to manifest deep commitment to their profession, facilitating and creating a nurturing remote teaching environment (BusinessMirror, 2020; de Vera, 2021).

Although the current study contributes significantly to the body of literature, it has several limitations, particularly in exploring and documenting the actual experiences of teacher education faculty engaged in emergency remote teaching. In addition, the data were gathered from only 25 participants from the same geographic area in the Philippines; therefore, they may only accurately represent some Filipino faculty members in public teacher education institutions. However, based on the results, this study is an initial attempt to comprehend experiences of emergency remote teaching in the Philippine context, where a future framework for emergency remote teaching in teacher education can be developed. This framework explains factors that may enable and impede the implementation of a remote teaching in education necessary for policy input and programmatic actions.
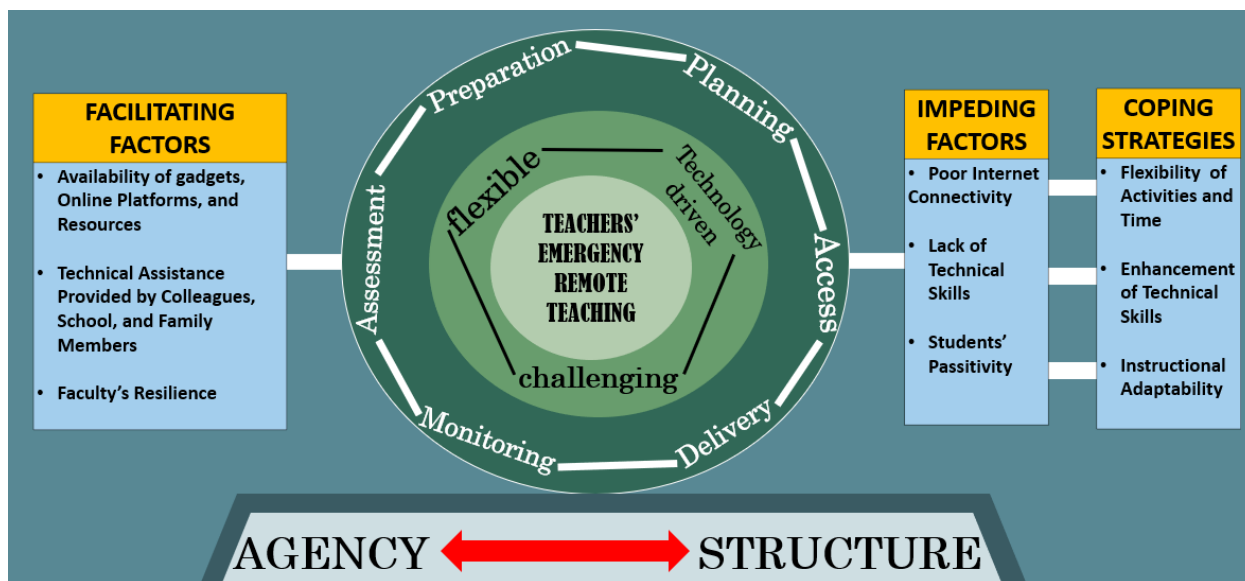
Conclusion

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the teacher education faculty played significant role in creating a vibrant learning environment particularly in the context of emergency remote teaching. Their favorable view of remote teaching being flexible and technology-driven has given them the impetus to use their "agency" to display commitment in carrying out their duties and responsibilities in various instructional processes covering preparation, planning, access, delivery, monitoring and assessment. For them, remote teaching becomes successful if there is the availability of gadgets and online platforms, provision of technical assistance, and display of resilience in a given circumstance. Despite the challenges and constraints experienced such as lack of technical skills, students' poor internet connectivity, and students' passivity, the teacher education faculty were able to cope with them. This was made possible by enhancing their technological competence, being flexible in terms of time and activities, and demonstrating instructional adaptability. Most importantly, they were able to manifest caring and nurturing disposition, which is integral in teacher training.

Recommendations

Based on the results, the following are suggested:

1. For teacher education faculty, the university may integrate in the continuing professional development program several interventions such as ICT competence enhancement, mechanisms on instructional flexibility, and development of instructional activities to address learners' passivity.
2. For the teacher education students, the College may provide opportunities to improve students' engagement for them to become more active and independent learners in a face-to-face or remote learning modality.
3. The Office of Student Services and Welfare may provide financial assistance to students with poor internet connectivity in case of remote instruction. Also, the Guidance Office may promote interventions on help-seeking behavior and well-being to address learners' passivity.

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