"Bridge Over Troubled Water": Experiences of Retiring Teachers Shifting to a New Pedagogical Milieu in the Time of COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This qualitative study utilized the phenomenological method, which focused on the experiences of retiring teachers in Angeles City, Pampanga during the shift to the online distance learning (ODL) modality at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal of the study is to explore how retiring teachers have perceived the new normal education, the changes they have observed, the challenges they have encountered, coping mechanisms they have utilized, support received and their learning experiences in general. There were six participants identified through the purposive sampling technique and qualified within the criteria set in the study. Data are analyzed through Content Analysis. Findings reveal that participants perceived ODL with negative perceptions. Most of the participants identified changes in the new normal education in terms of instructional materials and preparations, classroom environment, and learning modality. Challenges and struggles identified in instruction are technological, time management and delivery, and motivational challenges; in classroom management are student discipline, student engagement and motivation, and student attendance; while in at the assessment are academic dishonesty, insufficient assessment activities, and irresponsibility among students. As regards the participants' coping mechanisms, in instruction, adaptive instruction, teaching resilience, and social support are noted; in classroom management, enforcing classroom rules and routines, modeling ideal behaviors, home-school partnership, and building capacity; in assessment, assessment accommodations and modifications, positive attitudes towards students, and building capacity. Supports are also received by the participants like professional, social, administrative, and spiritual support. Further, retiring teachers had positive learning experiences in ODL. Based on the findings, it is suggested that support should be sustained, hence, professional support must be strengthened
.
Keywords: Retiring teachers, online distance learning, pedagogy, teaching

Introduction

In 2020, the world was shocked by an unwanted event that no one had expected to happen, a pandemic hit the world. In the same year when the World Health Organization (WHO) announced that the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) had become a global pandemic (WHO, 2020), it has ady affected the education sector drastically where schools were forced to come up with an educational policy (Tria, 2020). In distance learning, one of the modalities which made learning possible is online distance learning (ODL).

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Llego (2020) defined ODL as a learning platform where both students and teachers are remote from one another, yet they meet through an online learning management system (LMS).

Delving deeper into the inner world of retiring teachers in the new normal education, the dearth, and scarcity of literature on lived experiences of retiring teachers was one of the reasons that prompted the researcher to inquire into the subject to fill the knowledge gap in the literature. In addition, the researcher of this study was also motivated to explore and fill in the gaps as to how retiring teachers have perceived the new normal education, what challenges and struggles they have faced, and how they have coped with these challenges and struggles in new normal education and identify their learning experiences in the sudden shift of pedagogical milieu.

Objectives of the Study

This study sought to explore the experiences of retiring teachers concerning the new normal setup the education system is currently implementing. Furthermore, this study aimed to explore how retiring teachers from Angeles City, Philippines perceived the sudden shift in the education system, and to identify the changes they observed as well as the challenges they faced, coping mechanisms, supports received and their overall learning experiences in online distance learning.

Methodology

This qualitative research utilized the phenomenological method. Citing Creswell and Poth (2018), they defined phenomenology as an approach in research that focuses on understanding the essence of experiences. In this study, the researcher understood the essence of retiring teachers' experiences in online distance learning.

In determining the participants, the researcher utilized the purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling technique is a non-probability sampling technique used to get participants who can provide a thorough, in-depth, and detailed understanding of what information they give about the phenomenon being investigated. In using this, the researcher generates qualifying criteria that participants must meet to be part of the study (Marshall et al., 2008 as cited in Palinkas et al., 2015). In this study, six retiring teachers of English subjects qualified as per the criteria set. The following criteria are set in determining the participants: (1) should be a teacher of English subjects either from a private or public secondary school in the Division of Angeles City with an online distance learning modality; and (2) should be a retiring teacher, someone who is aged 55 years and older, and is still teaching (Ben-Peretz, 2010; Keogh & Roan, 2016).

To establish the definition of 'retiring teacher,' in the Philippines, a teacher who reaches the age of 60 must retire from teaching as mandated by the law (Republic Act No. 8291, 1997). Senate Bill No. 738, on the other hand, reduced the optional retirement age of employees from 60 to 55 years old and extended the mandatory retirement age to 65 years old (Senate of the Philippines, 2019). With that having said, to quantify the age of retiring teachers, Ben-Peretz (2010); Keogh, and Roan (2016) mentioned that teachers who still choose to stay and teach even when they reached the starting age of retirement set by the law, is someone who can be considered as "retiring." Therefore, in the Philippine context, it can be concluded that those teachers aged 55 years and beyond who are still teaching are considered retiring teachers.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and then analyzed through content analysis. For the validation of the data, respondent-validation was utilized where the participants got the chance to check the interview transcript; inter-rater validation where three experts in the field of qualitative research

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checked and assessed the themes and categories that emerged; and triangulation where the researcher sought the answers of other retiring teachers from other schools and divisions.

Results and Discussion

1. Retiring Teachers' Perceptions towards Online Distance Learning Modality

Table 1
Retiring Teachers' Perceptions towards Online Distance Learning Modality

Themes/Categories	Number of Responses
Negative Perceptions towards ODL	**8**
ODL introduces difficulties among teachers	6
ODL increases absenteeism among students	1
ODL causes major adjustments among teachers	1
Positive Perceptions towards ODL	**2**
ODL as an avenue for effective learning	1
ODL brings learnings to teachers	1

N=6

Negative perceptions towards ODL. The way retiring teachers perceived ODL was negative. This is similar to the findings of the study conducted by Gurung (2021), indicating that teachers faced online teaching problems when they shifted to ODL due to the pandemic in Maharashtra, India. This indicates that the abrupt change in learning modality caused significant adjustments, introduced problems among teachers, and increased absenteeism among students.

Positive perceptions towards ODL. As an effective avenue for learning, ODL was said to be one of the ways to make learning possible despite the challenges brought by the pandemic. With this, Bahasoan et al. (2020) noted that when they surveyed how effective online learning was during the COVID-19 pandemic, the online learning implemented was effective.

2. Changes Observed and Experienced by Retiring Teachers in the New Normal Education

Table 2
Changes Observed and Experienced by Retiring Teachers in the New Normal Education

Themes/Categories	Number of Responses
Changes in Instructional Materials and Preparations	**3**
Use of online tools in teaching	2
Demanding instructional preparation	1
Changes in the Classroom Environment	**3**
Physical absence of students	1
Limited classroom interactions and activities in ODL	1
Limited space for monitoring the students	1
Changes in Learning Modality	**3**
Shift from face-to-face class to online modality	1
Use of synchronous and asynchronous activities	1
Flexibility in the learning modality	1

N=6

Changes in instructional materials and preparations. Participants mentioned under the changes in instructional materials and preparations were using online teaching tools. Similarly, Wu (2021) stated that

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though online courses existed even before the pandemic, many schools were just forced to use them due to the pandemic.

Changes in the classroom environment. The surge of the COVID-19 pandemic led educational institutions to change their learning environment; that is, they began instituting online classes from traditional face-to-face, making students absent physically in the classroom learning (Jeong & So, 2020).

Changes in learning modality. When the COVID-19 pandemic emerged and spread worldwide, many schools shifted to distance learning, which closed schools in many countries, affecting many children's education (Sahu, 2020, as cited in Mahapatra & Sharma, 2020).

3. Challenges and Struggles Faced by Retiring Teachers in Online Distance Learning

3.1. In Instruction

Table 3
Challenges and Struggles Faced by Retiring Teachers in Instruction

Themes/Categories	Number of Responses
Technological Challenges	**5**
Poor internet connectivity	2
Lack of technological knowledge in teaching	2
Difficulties with online teaching tools	1
Time Management and Delivery Challenges	**5**
Limited days for discussions	1
Absence of cooperative learning	1
Extended working hours	1
Suspension of classes	1
Physical drawbacks	1
Motivational Challenges	**3**
Lack of student engagement	1
Students' inability to understand instructions	2

N=6

Technological challenges. Since distance learning gave way to using technology as one of the partners of teachers in delivering education to students, this also introduced challenges and struggles among teachers. In comparison, Kundu et al. (2021); Gurajena et al. (2021) discussed that the rapid shift to remote learning during the coronavirus crisis is challenging for technology-aware teachers and those, especially technology-skill-deficient teachers, as regards their usage of technology in distance learning. This connotes that, teachers were troubled by the shift to online distance learning since many aspects of technology, especially in using it as a medium for learning, were challenging due to teachers' unfamiliarity in using them.

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Time management and delivery challenges. Asynchronous classes were also conducted as they do without meeting in real-time. However, this has been a problem for teachers since limited synchronous discussion affects the learning plan and objectives set by the teacher (Boyd et al., 2009).

Motivational challenges. As mentioned by the participants, it was a difficult transition since they had a hard time motivating the students to engage in the class discussion. This is also similar to what Gurung (2021) has mentioned regarding the challenges teachers face in online distance learning. With this, it can be concluded that teachers faced problems motivating students, where this should be one of the priorities in education since motivation plays a vital role in learning.

3.2. In Classroom Management

Table 4
Challenges and Struggles Faced by Retiring Teachers in Classroom Management

Themes/Categories	Number of Responses
Problems towards Student Discipline	**5**
Difficulty in monitoring students' behavior during classes	1
Teachers lack control among students' behavior	2
Teachers find it difficult to discipline students in online classes	1
Online bullying among students during classes	1
Problems towards Student Engagement and Motivation	**5**
Unwilling students to speak and participate	1
Difficulty in asking students to turn on their camera	2
Students opt to play online games rather than attending classes	1
Teachers find it difficult to motivate students in online classes	1
Problems towards Student Attendance	**2**
Students not attending classes	1
Students lack resources in attending classes	1

N=6

Problems towards student discipline. Since it was virtual and students were not physically present, it was more difficult for teachers to monitor and control the discipline of students. This is similar to what Gurung (2021) has mentioned about the uncontrolled student discipline in online distance learning. Similarly, online bullying has become prevalent in distance learning with the use of technology.

Problems towards student engagement and motivation. Participants noted that in online distance learning, they had difficult times in engaging the students since students seemed to be unengaged and unmotivated due to the feeling of isolation. This is similar to what Chiu (2021) mentioned in his study about student engagement in online learning during the pandemic.

Problems towards student attendance. Absenteeism among students has increased during the pandemic. This finding is similar to the findings highlighted by Santibañez and Guarino (2021) when they studied the effects of absenteeism on academics. Findings revealed that absenteeism is considered chronic.

3.3. In Assessment

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Academic dishonesty. Participants also noted that there were times that students' answers in their activities were sometimes similar, which indicates that copying of answers among students is pervasive. This academic dishonesty has been prevalent during the pandemic, particularly in online examinations. Similarly, Elsalem et al. (2021) mentioned that academic dishonesty/misconduct appeared to be one of the significant challenges with the remote learning modality.

Table 5
Challenges and Struggles Faced by Retiring Teachers in Assessment

Themes/Categories	Number of Responses
Academic Dishonesty	**4**
Copying of answers from the answer key	1
Similar answers among students in their activities	1
Students' answers were copied from the internet	1
Honesty of students with tutors	1
Insufficient Assessment Activities	**3**
Absence of group presentations	1
Omitting quarterly assessment	1
Difficulty in giving various assessment activities	1
Irresponsibility among Students	**1**
Problems with submission of activities	1

N=6

Insufficient assessment activities. Unlike traditional face-to-face teaching, teachers can give various assessment activities to gauge students' knowledge and understanding. However, with ODL, assessment has become difficult. In online distance learning, in-person activities are absent, hence, group dynamics (Fahnert, 2021; Muhammad & Kainat, 2020).

Irresponsibility among students. Students were not submitting activities. This is the problem highlighted in this category. During the pandemic with online distance learning, many students do not comply with submissions and activities. This is what retiring teachers have noted as one of the problems in assessment. In her study, Gillett-Swan (2017) stated that e-learning makes education possible even at a distant place.

4.   Retiring Teachers' Coping Mechanisms from the Challenges and Struggles Faced in ODL

4.1. In Instruction

Adaptive instruction. Adaptive instruction is an alternative instructional strategy using pedagogical techniques, tools, and resources to meet the learning needs (Ikwumelu et al., 2015). Participants mentioned the training for online instruction, which taught them about planning and organizing, scheduling, using gamification in teaching, and utilizing social media applications for instruction. Rony and Awal (2019) support the idea that online teaching-learning is a timely demand for teachers, especially during a global pandemic where many schools have shifted to distance learning using the online modality.

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Teaching resilience. Participants mentioned that accepting the challenges and continuing learning despite difficulties were their strategies for teaching resilience. In connection to this, Edara et al. (2021) conducted a study that focused on the mediating effects of resilience, optimism, and well-being. This indicates that many teachers also rely on optimism and resilience in facing the struggles brought about by the pandemic in teaching.

Table 6
Retiring Teachers' Coping Mechanisms from the Challenges and Struggles Faced in Instruction

Themes/Categories	Number of Responses
Adaptive Instruction	**7**
Planning and organizing of online instructional materials	2
Capacitating oneself with skills and knowledge in instruction	2
Using gamification in teaching	1
Utilizing social networks in teaching	1
Scheduling of classes	1
Teaching Resilience	**2**
Accepting and embracing challenges	1
Continuing learning despite difficulties	1
Social Support	**2**
Support from students	1
Support from colleagues	1

N=6

Social support. Retiring teachers said that when they were facing the challenges and struggles in instruction, support from colleagues and students helped them face the dilemmas. Sumer et al. (2021) highlighted when they conducted a study about academic development during the pandemic pointing to social support.

4.2. In Classroom Management

Table 7
Retiring Teachers' Coping Mechanisms from the Challenges and Struggles Faced in Classroom Management

Themes/Categories	Number of Responses
Enforcing Class Rules and Routines	**4**
Always checking students' attention	2
Imposing classroom policies	2
Modeling Ideal Behaviors	**4**
Being kind and more understanding to students	1
Having patience and humility towards students	1
Engaging with students	1
Establishing parental role towards students	1
Home-School Partnership	**2**
Using social media and phone calls as modes of communication	2
Building Capacity in Classroom Management	**1**
Capacitating oneself with skills and knowledge in online classroom management	1

N=6

Enforcing class rules and routines. Online classes, like face-to-face classes, need effective management so that they do not get out of the teacher's control and students have valuable and meaningful

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learning. Ghateolbahr and Samimi (2021) conducted a study to identify teachers' methods and strategies and review the most appropriate techniques for planning and refining effective online classroom management strategies.

Modeling ideal behaviors. As per the study participants, this coping mechanism was utilized through being kind and more understanding, having patience and humility, engaging with students, and establishing parental roles. Herrmann and Gallo (2020) cited in their writing that in this time of crisis, being kind to students has helped teachers in understanding their situations since everybody is trying to give their best amidst difficulties.

Home-school partnership. Due to the shift to online education, communications with parents were also diverted to online, using social media applications. In the context of distance learning in the pandemic, Bordalba and Bochaca (2019) emphasized the importance of digital communications between teachers and parents since education uses distance modalities. They mentioned that using digital media for family-school communication is an efficient and effective way of communication.

Building capacity in classroom management. Learning many things about classroom management through training and webinars was also a helpful way for retiring teachers to cope with the challenges in classroom management. This is supported by the findings in the study conducted by Rony and Awal (2019), who mentioned that training and webinars helped teachers face challenges brought by the urgent shift to distance learning, particularly with the use of online distance learning modality.

4.3. In Assessment

Table 8
Retiring Teachers' Coping Mechanisms from the Challenges and Struggles Faced in Assessment

Themes/Categories	Number of Responses
Assessment Accommodations and Modifications	**4**
Setting up rules for assessment	1
Using online tools for assessment	1
Assigning student-leaders in compiling outputs	1
Scheduling of activities to conduct in class	1
Positive Attitude towards Students	**2**
General knowledge of student learning output	1
Consideration of students' outputs	1
Building Capacity for Assessment	**1**
Capacitating oneself with skills and knowledge in online assessment	1

N=6

Assessment accommodations and modifications. It was highlighted that teachers used online applications and tools for assessments like Google Forms, Canvas, Quizizz, Schoology, and more. This is what Darmawan et al. (2020) stated when they conducted a study about using various online tools and applications in dealing with student assessments.

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Positive attitude towards students. Understanding the students is what this category has emphasized. With this, highlighting what Herrmann and Gallo (2020) mentioned, being kind and considerate to students, especially to their submissions of activities and outputs, has helped teachers understand their situations since everybody is trying to give their best amidst difficulties in the time of a pandemic.

Building capacity for assessment. Participants in this study stated that attending webinars, online training, and workshops has equipped them with the necessary skills to give assessments online. This is supported by the findings in the study conducted by Rony and Awal (2019), who mentioned that training and webinars helped teachers face challenges brought by the urgent shift to distance learning, particularly with the use of online distance learning modality.

5. Supports Received by Retiring Teachers in Coping with the Challenges and Struggles they Faced in ODL

Table 9
Supports Received by Retiring Teachers in Coping with the Challenges and Struggles they Faced in ODL

Themes/Categories	Number of Responses
Professional Support	**7**
Trainings for teachers in online teaching	6
Believing in oneself through independent learning	1
Social Support	**3**
Understanding from the family members	2
Technical assistance from the son	1
Administrative Support	**3**
Teaching materials from the school	1
Equipment needed in teaching from the school	1
Gadgets from the local government	1
Spiritual Support	**1**
Webinars for spiritual needs	1

N=6

Professional support. When shifting to online distance learning to its implementation, teachers have been receiving professional support through the training, as Rony and Awal (2019) mentioned. The study's findings showed an effective mindset change and perception in the faculty members for online teaching-learning training, class conduction, and assessment.

Social support. Retiring teachers mentioned that during the shift to online distance learning and its implementation, social support, i.e., family, colleagues, and friends, was their support. This is similar to what Sumer et al. (2021) noted when they studied academic development during the pandemic, pointing to three aspects in which social support was one of the factors. It was revealed that collegial support is significant and should be maintained and encouraged to develop resilience and well-being among teachers in the time of the pandemic.

Administrative support. During the shift to online distance learning during the pandemic, participants received administrative support through the teaching resources they used in online teaching. It

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was mentioned by Ferri et al. (2020) that the abundance of resources from schools and administrations leads to quality instruction.

Spiritual support. Participants noted that spiritual support was given to them as they attended webinars for spiritual guidance. With this, de Diego-cordero et al. (2021) emphasized the vital role of spirituality in moments of crisis like the situation during the pandemic, and should be considered. Hence, they mentioned that this spiritual support helped professionals strengthen their faith and be motivated to get through.

6. Learning Experiences in ODL of Retiring Teachers

Table 10
Learning Experiences of Retiring Teachers in ODL

Themes/Categories	Number of Responses
Positive Learning Experiences	**8**
ODL promotes continuous learning	1
ODL makes teachers technologically-equipped	3
ODL stirs positive feelings	3
ODL promotes collaboration	1
Negative Learning Experiences	**2**
ODL limits classroom discipline	1
ODL instigates physical drawbacks	1

N=6

Positive learning experiences. Retiring teachers described ODL as a platform that can make learning still continuous despite the pandemic. Though it was difficult at first for the participants, in the end, they have come to realize that ODL makes learning still possible. This is supported by the findings in the study of Dayal and Tiko (2020) when they explored the effectiveness of ODL in teaching. Success stories were given an emphasis, and they highlighted that success is visible in terms of making teaching and learning possible despite the crucial times brought by the pandemic.

Negative learning experiences. With the negative learning experiences of the participants, limitations in terms of classroom discipline and physical drawbacks were mentioned. In ODL, due to being remote, retiring teachers describe it as a platform that limits the teachers' control towards classroom discipline. Since it was virtual and students were not physically present, it was more difficult for teachers to control the discipline of students. This is similar to what Gurung (2021) has mentioned about the uncontrolled student discipline in online distance learning that teachers realized after taking classes online that students' behavior and actions were difficult to control, leading to limited classroom discipline.

With all these learning experiences, it can be concluded that despite challenges and struggles faced by retiring teachers in ODL, positive learning experiences dominated their whole experiences in online teaching. This signifies that teachers find their experiences in ODL as learning-filled and full of positive feelings like fulfillment, achievement, and success.

Conclusions

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A majority of the participants viewed ODL negatively due to the immediate and sudden shift to this learning modality. They observed and faced changes in the teaching and learning process. They faced challenges in instruction, classroom management, and assessment, yet, they utilized different strategies as to how they could have coped with the challenges. Supports were also given to them. Above all, despite the challenges and struggles the participants faced and the changes encountered, positive learning experiences were more predominant.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are presented:

1. Orientations for retiring teachers must be provided and conducted focusing on the positive point of view in using ODL and highlighting the support to be given to them to lessen the feeling of fear, anxiety, and stress which could make them view ODL negatively.
2. Training and workshops in using a learning management system particularly about online tools, crafting learning plans aligned to online modality should be strengthened, and implementing these plans in online teaching which were the salient changes in the new learning modality. Dry runs before opening the classes for online teaching should also be conducted with proper evaluation and assessment.
3. Department of Education (DepEd), School Heads, and Local Government Units (LGUs) should strengthen partnerships in supporting retiring teachers in the new normal education. Furthermore, there is a need to highlight spiritual support among teachers especially during trying times when emotional stability and spiritual guidance are essential need.
4. The present study is limited to the experiences of retiring teachers during the shift to online distance learning modality. Future research undertakings may also further explore their experiences once the shift to going back to face-to-face classes happens in a post-pandemic situation.

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