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JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER'S EXPERIENCES IN THE DELIVERY OF SCIENCE SUBJECTS IN THE NEW NORMAL

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to explore teachers' experiences in the delivery of science subjects during the first school year of implementation of distance learning. The teachers' experiences in the delivery of science subjects served as a reference for formulating innovation to make learning effective in distance learning modality. The data for this study were collected through an interview schedule. It was done through one-on-one in-depth interviews with each participant with the observance of COVID-19 safety protocols. The interviews with all participants were audio-recorded. The data were transcribed verbatim by repeatedly listening to the recorded audio recording. Transcribed verbatim responses were then translated into English. After that, significant statements were determined from all participants' responses. Lastly, themes and sub-themes were generated from the participants' significant statements. Based on the result of this study, the following themes have been generated: preparation experiences, adjustment experiences, and unpleasant experiences. Preparations experienced by the participants were professional development, learning resource preparations, and aligning lessons to MELCs. The participants also had adjustment experiences, including content modification and ICT utilization. Also, unpleasant experiences by the participants were an overwhelming workload, complex communication, problems with assessment, and poor student learning. All the teachers' experiences identified by the Hilongos National Vocational School junior high school teachers serve as the basis for formulating an innovation project. An innovation project for the new normal will address the unpleasant experiences of the teachers. Hence, the innovation project on improving students' learning for science subjects in a distance learning modality must be utilized to cater to the needs of the school's clients, the learners. The study concluded that an innovation project on improving students' learning of science subjects is necessary to equip the Science Teachers of Hilongos National Vocational School with skills to improve the delivery of science subjects in the new normal. It is also recommended to alleviate teachers' workload, strengthen communications, address problems in assessment, and improve students' learning.

Keywords: *delivery of science subjects, new normal, teacher's experiences*

INTRODUCTION

Learning science lessons have effectively been threatened due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought drastic changes to almost every individual in society. Traditionally, education in formal environments has been conducted in schools and within classrooms (Hain, 2020). However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, learning institutions have shifted learning modality from face-to-face learning to distance learning. This is to avoid the spread of the virus and protect the welfare of



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every teacher and learner. As DepEd says about being the last one to surrender, schools have developed continuity plans to ensure continuity and quality of service without compromising the well-being of all school stakeholders for the 2020- 2021 school year. DepEd (2020) established and published the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP). BE-LCP updated the current curriculum and identified the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs) that will be the school year's focus. This offers opportunities for the students to be more expert in 21st-century skills, comprehend higher concepts, and contextualize everyday lessons into real-world scenarios.

With the sudden shift of learning modality and living in the “new normal,” teachers have been affected in the delivery of Science subjects. The research of Hain (2020) entitled “Transitions in Tumultuous Times: Teachers’ Experiences with Distance Learning Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic” reveals that during the periods of distance learning, teachers modified their course content due to imposed time constraints, delivery methods, and desire not to overwhelm students. This explains how primary education teachers make the subject matters discussed in MELCs parallel to the adhering assigned schedule and considering the learners' need to learn each lesson (DepEd, 2020) effectively.

This is why Science teachers’ preparations and workload in the pre-pandemic doubled during the pandemic. Science teachers prepare for a new school year during the pre-pandemic by attending In-Service Training (INSET). In contrast, during the pandemic, they prepare professionally by attending webinars, studying various online platforms, and identifying non-negotiable competencies (MELCs). Before the pandemic, teachers were busy preparing classrooms and instructional materials, but during the pandemic, they have been busy preparing the learning materials for the distance learning modality. Other teachers’ experiences in this sudden shift to distance and hybrid learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic created a need to identify virtual and at-home science experiences (Wolbrink & Sarna, 2020). This made the delivery of Science subjects in the new normal more challenging and thought-provoking than before the pandemic.

Moreover, mandates on the delivery of lessons, programs/and seminars are also given attention by DepEd as stated in the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan BE-LCP). The learning delivery modalities that schools can adopt may be one or a combination depending on the COVID-19 restrictions and the particular context of the learners in the school or locality. These modalities include face-to-face distance learning in three types: Modular Distance Learning (MDL), Online Distance Learning (ODL), and TV/Radio-Based Instruction, blended learning and homeschooling. Distance learning is the crucial modality of learning delivery for the school year 2020-2021, allowing learning to continue in a safe and healthy environment amid COVID-19.

With this, the Department of Education, through the National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP), has organized capacity-building programs, implemented last June 2020, that addressed the curriculum requirements in terms of essential learning competencies and content as well as pedagogy and assessment. These have complemented the learning resources already available through the DepEd LR Portal, DepEd Commons, and other LR portals and resources that may be made available by education partners. Capacity-building programs through webinars or virtual seminars also included support for teachers to debrief their classes about their experience with the public health crisis. They also set fair expectations on how learning will take place with the “new normal.” There is also a support mechanism established for teachers and school leaders, including supervisors, to have access to relevant on-demand technical and administrative advice and guidance in the form of a professional learning community through the learning action cell (LAC), resource materials, and other forms of support that made available in natural or virtual platforms/set-up.

Consequently, one of the subjects in the junior high school at Hilongos National Vocational School that is genuinely affected by the distance learning modality is science. Delivery of science subjects has been



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challenging even before the pandemic. It is more challenging today because aside from the fact that this subject is considered one of the most challenging and significant subjects, it also requires laboratory or experimental activities. As the school aims to hone students' scientific skills, teachers' experience in delivering the subject in the new normal must be carefully accounted for and analyzed to innovate new approaches suitable for the new normal learning of Science.

Therefore, it is important to understand better the new normal way of delivering Science subjects through firsthand details of the Junior High School teachers' experiences. This study provided helpful information that help the teacher in this new normal of learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This research assisted science teachers in the formulation of innovation that produced effective learning for students in the distance learning modality. In connection to this, this transpired by identifying the problems encountered by teachers in the new normal education and addressing these problems to benefit students' effective learning. It is one of the recommendations to cater to the effective learning of students that led to the formulation of this innovation. The Project LSS (Learning et al.) aims to produce effective learning for students through remediation programs and activities. Investigating the science teacher's individual lived experience provided the best possible primary source of information to understand the new normal of teaching and learning. Qualitative and phenomenological research methodology was used, and personal narratives were gathered through one-on-one in-depth interviews observing the minimum health protocols. The information within this research is presented in the precise words of the research participants who have first-time experiences in the delivery of Science subjects in the new normal.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Descriptive phenomenology was conducted among the junior high school teachers in the Science Department of Hilongos National Vocational School who handled science subjects in the first school year of implementing the new normal education. This used interview schedule instruments through one-on-one interviews to obtain information regarding the teachers' experiences in delivering subjects in the new normal. These experiences were utilized to describe teachers' experiences in the new normal delivery of Science subjects.

Research Respondents

Phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. So, the inclusion criteria in this research were Junior High School Teachers of Hilongos National Vocational School, teachers who have handled subjects in the school year 2020-2021, teachers in the Science Department 2020-2021, and teachers who have handled Science subjects in the first school year of distance learning implementation. On the other hand, exclusion criteria include Senior High School Teachers of Hilongos National Vocational School, Senior High School Science Teachers of Hilongos National Vocational School, and teachers who did not handle Science subjects in the Junior High School Department in the school year 2020-2021. Teachers who do not have experience in delivering science subjects during the new normal were also excluded.



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Research Instrument

According to Roulston (2016), interviews “provide evidence for claims about what happens in our world.” She explains that the constructionist approach to interviewing is a co-construction of data “generating situated accountings and possible ways of talking about research topics.” Therefore, the main instrument used in this study was an interview schedule focusing on the experiences of Junior High School Teachers in the delivery of Science subjects in the new normal. This instrument has open-ended questions that define the topic under study and provide opportunities for the interviewer and interviewee to discuss topics in more detail. This instrument elicited evidence to answer the research questions and, through careful analysis of the words shared by participants in their descriptions of their experiences, gathered the more prominent themes that the evidence supported.

Data Analysis

Referring to what Hain (2020) did, the study employed a structured method of thematization, although it was intuitive. It began by encoding each category based on the raw Excel data. Then, the notes were manipulated to begin to see the themes. Although this was a tedious and time-consuming activity, with multiple attempts at organization, this method aided greatly in identifying the prominent themes, their interrelationships, and a logical process for presenting them in the findings.

The categories were developed in subsequent readings of the interviews and continual review of the codes assigned, including the emerging themes. A process of continually testing the raw data against the themes was employed. If no new themes emerge, it suggests that primary themes have been revealed. Once identified, specific excerpts were chosen from the interview data, which were deemed to exemplify best and provide evidence of the validity of each theme. In this manner, the findings arose inductively from the raw data in the interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This descriptive phenomenological study described individual lived experiences and collective statements of the Hilongos National Vocational School Science teachers in delivering science subjects in the new normal. In terms of preparation, the Science teachers, like other teachers, had to prepare for all vague things since it was a first-time experience. The Science teachers made personal preparations while waiting for the directives of the Department of Education (DepEd) and the school administration upon knowing that the school year 2020-2021 will open, adapting the distance learning modality. Preparation aids teachers in designing relevant courses of action before implementing distance learning. Walking through a maze of learning, readying print and non-print learning materials, and making lessons parallel to MELCs were the three areas being prepared by the Science teachers as they brace themselves for the new normal.

The significant theme generated from this study was bracing for the new normal. In describing this bracing for the new normal, two sub-themes were developed: (1) walking through a maze of learning, (2) readying print and non-print learning materials, and (3) making lessons parallel to MELCs. The second theme generated in this study was adapting to the new normal with the sub-themes: (1) fitting content to the new normal and (2) maximizing ICT for virtual learning. The third and last theme was bumping into the downsides of the new normal that had developed three sub-themes: (1) getting into a breathtaking workload, (2) waning communication in the new normal, (3) obstacles on learners' assessment, and (4) backslide on students' performance.

1. Bracing for the New Normal

According to De Villa and Manalo (2020), preparation helps teachers plan relevant courses of action before implementing distance learning. This manages teachers to equip themselves with sufficient knowledge and skills, attend to the needs and understand the status of learners, acquire relevant



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materials and resources, and adapt the curriculum developed by DepEd to suit the new normal education by making lessons parallel to MELCs.

Walking Through a Maze of Learning

They were sure they needed to equip themselves with knowledge and skills in new normal education, so they attended webinars, read articles, and studied online tutorials for new normal education. Concerning their experiences of bracing themselves for the new normal by walking through a maze of learning, participants shared:

I attended orientation in the school and different webinars to prepare for distance learning.)
Lines 1-5- 008

I did it through research and watching educational videos that could somehow tell me how this new normal of education occurs.
Lines 6-12- 007

Based on the participants' responses, they spent time and effort participating in varied professional development activities to prepare for the new normal education. They went the extra mile to gain knowledge from varied webinars and training and even explored for them to be guided on what will happen and what to do in the new normal education. Hain (2020) emphasized that every school in the Department of education must examine how best to prepare for the educational disruptions that could impact their professional experiences.

Participants acknowledged that it is in these trying times due to the COVID-19 pandemic that they need to be open-minded and optimistic to be involved in professional development and training. They gained knowledge and skills to fully prepare themselves in the first school year of implementing the new normal education. In addition, based on teachers' responses, they did not rely on the webinars organized by DepEd. However, they made an effort to have self-paced exploration and maximization of ICT that eventually aided them in preparation for the 2020-2021 school year. Their exploration of YouTube and other internet websites has helped them grow professionally during the first implementation of distance teaching and learning in Hilongos National Vocational School.

According to Agaloos et al. (2020), the online training attended by teachers certainly helped them cope with the alteration of the education system brought about by the pandemic. It was their guide in taking the step-by-step process of the new normal education. In addition, these online training or webinars were considered a response to the new normal of learning. With these professional development activities, they have participated in, they were able to gain ideas on what to do in a new normal education and walk through a maze of learning.

Readying Print and Non-print Learning Materials

Since the school will hold a distance learning modality, the teachers will ensure that their varied learning resources are ready. They utilized printed materials from different sources and online resources to help them prepare for the new normal. About their preparation experiences, participants said:

In Science, we have prepared modules for each student, the self-learning modules, worksheets, or activity sheets provided for each student for two weeks.
Lines 1-6- 002

Aside from the MELC, we will research and use our internet connection to have helpful content that you can use to enrich your subject matter.
Lines 77-82- 006

Based on the participants' responses regarding their experiences in readying print and non-print learning materials, they prepared modules, worksheets, or activity sheets provided for each student. They also researched other resources so that fast learner students, especially the slow learners, will be considered. Teachers did not rely on only one source but considered varied printed, digital, and online



resources to prepare for the new normal. They used the internet to find helpful content that enriched the subject matter.

Preparing learning resources allows teachers to acquire relevant materials and resources (De Villa & Manalo, 2020). Since the school will hold modular classes, they ensure all modules are prepared enough for all learners. They also referred to one printed or digital learning resource and varied learning resources, whether online or offline, that assured the quality of modules and learning tasks they had prepared. This step taken by teachers has assured learners that varied needs were catered to with the varied relevant materials and resources acquired by the science teachers.

Specific measures such as adopting remote (Dixon & Kirmes, 2020) and flexible learning (Huang et al., 2020) be considered to maximize available learning resources. With this, it was evident in teachers' responses that they have considered maximizing learning resources by utilizing online learning resources that have positively affected the teaching-learning process in the new normal education. They utilized internet connections to enrich and improve their content in science subjects, which are suitable for the new normal education.

Preparing relevant materials and resources have made teacher more ready to deal with learners in the new normal education and eventually produced good performance of teachers in the new world of teaching Science subjects in the new normal. Proper and excessive preparation of learning resources by teachers have capacitated teachers to perform better despite the vagueness of this new normal. Eventually, this better performance of teachers has no doubt had a domino effect on learners' better learning experiences despite their first time being in this situation due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Making Lessons Parallel to MELCs

DepEd was organized and adjusted immediately when former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte announced that the 2020-2021 school year would open through flexible learning modalities (online and other alternatives) and no face-to-face classes until a vaccine has been created. One of the primary considerations in the delivery of science subjects was the curriculum. It led to creation of the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs). The Science teachers prepared the curriculum by revising and condensing it by including the non-negotiable competencies. Based on the guidelines given by the school, they modified the curriculum by identifying only the most essential lessons. Participants pointed out:

Seriously, of course, I based on MELC. And then search a little. It is a thorough research so that the activities will fit the curriculum guide or the MELC, which is our basis for preparing the lesson.

Lines 4-12- 003 59

Based on the participants' responses on their preparation experiences regarding making lessons parallel to MELCs, they have utilized and followed the Guidelines on the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs) issued by the DepEd. This is in response to the new normal education in our country. Being seriously affected by the COVID-19 pandemic did not hinder continued education and ensure the welfare of learners in primary education. If learning stops, we will lose human capital.' Thus, meeting the needs of the most vulnerable populations in these times is essential to achieving SDG4 (UNESCO, 2017). The Department echoes UNESCO's belief that educational quality, access, and system strengthening cannot be compromised in times of crisis (UNESCO, 2017), and doing the opposite will negatively affect human capital. Consequently, DepEd's Bureau of Curriculum Development ensures that learning standards are relevant and flexible to address the complex, disruptive, volatile, and ambiguous impact of COVID-19 in the Philippines, particularly in the primary education sector.

Working on the said premise, the Department now releases the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs) to be used nationwide by field implementers and private schools for SY 2020-2021 only. Curriculum guides are non-negotiable, so the same is true with the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs). With this, teachers' responses in the study imply that MELCs were the basis of every step they took. It seems to be a crime not to align lessons and learning tasks to DepEd's Most Essential Learning Competencies. It was a must and will always be to make all lessons, learning tasks,



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learning environment, and the whole teaching-learning process itself with the Most Essential Learning Competencies, no more, no less.

The release of the MELCs is a response addressing the challenges of the current pandemic. However, releasing the MELCs does not degrade the standards set by the K to 12 curriculum guides. These serve as guides to teachers as they address the instructional needs of learners while ensuring that curriculum standards are maintained and achieved in the new normal education. This is evident in the participants' responses as these MELCs are carefully picked to be suitable for no face-to-face interaction within the four corners of the classroom.

2. Adapting to the New Normal

Teachers have adjusted and adapted many changes to the new normal education. There were things they modified, removed, and improved to cater to learners' needs in the new normal education.

Fitting Content to the New Normal

Even before the pandemic, teachers considered engaging students in learning science challenging. Though science may be perceived as complex, teachers can make it enjoyable by applying the appropriate teaching methodology and designing activities. From their classroom experience, knowledge gained from training, and readings, teachers have adjusted their methodology to a great extent in delivering science subjects through content modification to cater to learners' needs in the distance teaching-learning modality. Participants shared:

So, it is quiet; there was a significant adjustment in the preparation and the strategies to conduct the lesson or topic for the students.

Lines 34-39-008

In terms of localization and contextualization of content, a participant shared:

For experiences like during the new normal, you need to make a localized topic or one that is more approachable to the students. So, you can think of activities like the available materials inside their community or in their house that they can easily use in their performance tasks. Then, you can also think of some scenarios that are easier for them; it is either they have experienced already or more accessible for them to relate to so they can readily catch up on the tackled topic.

Lines 39-55-009

Based on the participants' responses on adapting to the new normal through content modification to make the delivery of science subjects suitable in the new normal, they have applied all necessary adjustments and adapted strategies to make learning more effective in the new average education. Teachers have found ways to simplify and make content and learning tasks suitable for distance learning.

Today, we are experiencing a time of constant evolution in the field of education in which students require more resources and tools to obtain the information and construction of knowledge. However, there are times when the student does not understand the material because of the form it is represented, making it necessary to have more options to facilitate the understanding of content through different ways that may be more attractive to the student, achieving more active participation in the subject that will lead to a better learning experience (Ferrer & Kirschning, 2014). With these, participants' responses implied that making the content and learning tasks as simple as possible and learner-friendly was able to achieve more effective learning among learners despite the situation.

The participants' responses also imply that modifying content to motivate learners enabled learners to be actively engaged in learning tasks. In fact, according to Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory (SDT), student motivation and engagement are linked that impact intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on students' different engagement types. If motivated, learners will eventually be engaged



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in any learning environment, including distance learning. This implies that teachers' efforts to modify and simplify science content have motivated learners to engage actively in teaching-learning processes.

The participants' responses further imply applying the inductive teaching method, a student-led teaching approach. In the inductive approach to teaching, teachers provide learners with examples and allow them to arrive at their generalizations or conclusions. According to Prince and Felder (2006), inductive methods are consistently found to be at least equal to and, in general, more effective than traditional deductive methods for achieving a broad range of learning. One participant shared this about giving first easy learning tasks, then difficult ones until learners can generalize.

In terms of contextualization and localization, teachers have adapted these methods to ensure learners can relate to the content and learning tasks that will consequently make learning effective. Learning becomes effective as learners can relate more to the content, for it is modified to what learners can relate to and can be found in their local areas. This has been found effective because the content was adjusted to fit in the context of distance learning without the teachers' direct supervision of learners.

As Ferrer & Kirschning (2014) said, the student must not adapt to the learning activity; the learning activity must adapt to the student. This adaptation implies the design of learning activities with the same learning objective but with different representations according to the student's preferred style. Based on participants' responses, they modify content and, of course, learning tasks that are suitable to learners in this new normal education. Learners were not the ones who adapted to this new normal education, but it was the teachers' initiative to make content and learning tasks to adapt to learners' needs.

Maximizing ICT for Virtual Learning

Science teachers were highly engaged in using technology in teaching during the pandemic. Teachers have adjusted their teaching methods to utilize ICT for greater learning impacts among students in the new normal education. This also maximizes the advantage of technology in today's current situation. Participants shared:

I would stick first to the video because you could have it as enrichment if you have the face-to-face.

Lines 236-239-006

I just added more inputs through our GC. Then, I also had this in the later part of that school year. I also had those video lessons.

Lines 46-50-007

Based on the responses made by the participants, they have adjusted to make learning more interactive by maximizing ICT. Science teachers know science curriculum choices and resources and apply technological developments to enhance student learning (Hassard & Dias, 2013). The participants applied their knowledge and skills in technology as they shared. They utilized technology to motivate learners and make them understand the lesson more despite face-to-face classes.

Studies also found that using technology has a positive effect on students. In addition, some students reported that they preferred watching video lectures outside of class and appreciated more active approaches to learning (Leo & Puzio, 2016). Another study confirmed that teaching science subjects with technology increased the students' interest in learning, improved their achievement scores, and helped them do their homework more efficiently than traditional teaching methods (Nawzad, 2018).

In addition, Arrieta and Agbisit (2020) emphasized that teaching and learning will become more creative, interesting, and engaging if technology integration is extensively implemented. So, with teachers' experiences, they have maximized technology to make students learn more. These were done by making lessons and supplemental videos, linking to online resources, and creating FB Groups, FB Pages, or FB Group Chats to make them more accessible to learners. This implies the teachers' effort to cater to learners' needs in the virtual world of learning. Lastly, teachers were able to maximize the utmost advantage of technology.



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3. Bumping into the Downsides of the New Normal

Teachers have anticipated the fundamental challenges in the new normal in teaching and learning even before the 2020-2021 school year started. However, it is different when one experiences and encounters them. They shared that an overwhelming workload, complex communication, issues, problems with assessment, and poor student performance were the main problems they encountered.

Getting into a Breathtaking Workload

Excessive workload, one of the downsides of the new normal experienced by teachers, has somewhat impeded teachers' effectiveness in teaching. In one way or another, it also affects students' learning as the teacher becomes overloaded with work that he/she cannot work on making effective learning materials for the students. Participants pointed out the following:

It is constantly making modules, so you must be on time. Preparing the grades, checking many answer sheets, and overlapping answer sheets to check because you do everything.

Lines 163-169- 002

Sometimes, we do not have enough time to make video lessons, so they cannot be regular because we have much checking, other stuff to do, and advisory class concerns that could hinder the most effective way of delivering the lessons.

Lines 156-163-007

Based on the participants' statements, teachers' effectiveness in work has been dramatically affected by their workload. According to Jomuad et. Al (2021), workload has an impact on teachers' performance as well. This implies from the participants' responses that as they were overwhelmed with work, their time spent preparing and making video lessons was sacrificed. With the time sacrificed doing the tasks mentioned earlier, teachers could not provide a quality learning environment for students in this new normal education. It is more necessary to provide quality learning materials such as modules, learning activity sheets, and video/supplemental videos to learners in this time of new normal education.

Jomuad et al. (2021) also added that teaching is a rewarding but demanding profession and that teachers are prone to burnout due to long teaching hours and a heavy workload. With this new normal education, the workload is somewhat doubled as teachers spend more time checking students' outputs without students, preparing modules, and many other additional teaching-related tasks that arose due to this distance learning modality. Nevertheless, teachers still perform in their respective jobs. No matter how tired they feel, they always do their best to fulfill their duty.

Waning Communication in the New Normal

With technology, communication is still tricky in distance learning because not all students have gadgets for online learning. It was challenging to give feedback on students' performance without a face-to-face. Teachers were having difficulty contacting learners, especially those living in far-flung barangays. Communication is challenging in this new normal, as experienced by the teachers. Participants indeed pointed out the following:

It is challenging for us to talk; you cannot talk immediately to the students, especially those problematic with other subjects, especially with my advisory class. If you have urgent questions for them, they cannot be answered immediately because they are far from me. There is a need for you to travel far. Communication is tough.

Lines 154-162- 002

Ahm, having distance learning, wherein you cannot interact face-to-face with your students, is difficult.

Lines 61-64-004



Based on what the participants shared, interaction is really needed to have more effective learning, but it was not possible as physical classes were not allowed. They had a hard time communicating with the students about their academic concerns. Teachers could not address problematic learners immediately since communication is difficult, especially if the concerned learner lives in a far-flung barangay without a gadget. Without good communication, learners may be left behind and have academic problems. This is because that learner cannot immediately ask the teachers what part of the lesson, he is having difficulty understanding.

With the said communication challenges, according to Rwodzi (2018), teacher initiatives are a crucial part of adaptive resilience, as teachers need to adjust to shortages of digital technology resources and connectivity. Participants' responses imply that teachers do not rely on only one way of communication. If one method of communicating with learners is not possible, other ways are used by the teachers to have an effective teaching-learning process. Teachers promptly make appropriate decisions to alleviate the disadvantages brought by this COVID-19 pandemic in the education sector of society.

An effective combination of media and technology is necessary to ensure the effectiveness of the open and distance learning system (Team, 2020). So, using social media was a great help to alleviate the communication challenges. The teacher made use of Facebook Messenger and Group chat to maintain communication among students. Indeed, teacher initiatives like social media communication and other digital literacy practices are essential.

Obstacles to Learners' Assessment

Assessment is one of the ways to know whether students have learned the lessons or not. The participants opened up some issues and concerns of teachers regarding assessments. Participants shared:

Some other questions are hard for them, and they are easy, but I do not know if they only copy that one.
Lines 86-89-002

Regarding assessments' reliability in the new normal education, participants pointed out:

For me, it is not that reliable because somehow, we cannot; I cannot trust the assessment results among the students even though they have submitted them individually because there are many students, and I was not there during the assessment.
Lines 85-94-008

Referring to the participants' responses regarding their experienced challenges in assessment, its effectiveness and reliability concerns arise. Assessment, as the participants shared, was ineffective because learners cannot answer, especially if it is an open-ended or even an object-type question. This implies that learners needed a guide and thorough discussion of the content for them to be able to answer the assessment. Learners will not be able to answer assessment questions if, in the first place, learning did not occur as they struggle to learn things in this new normal education only by themselves and without the physical presence of teachers.

Participants' responses further imply that assessment in this new normal has issues regarding academic dishonesty as teachers are not present during the assessment. It can be that the learners themselves are not the ones answering the assessment given to them and even just copied it from their classmates. In fact, according to Arrieta and Agbisit (2020), distance learning is certainly more prone to cheating because of its many limitations. They also added that students will be tempted to cheat since there is no teacher personally proctoring the test.

According to Hain (2020), understanding the core of assessment and its essential role in education, teachers acknowledged that the abrupt and drastic change in how teaching and learning were being carried out resulted in an abrupt and drastic change in assessment. Intentions to do quizzes as assessment of student's comprehension changed during distance learning. With the participants'



responses, instead of giving open-ended questions and essays, they opted for a more objective assessment.

Backslide on Student's Performance

Students' learning indicates that teachers have effectively done their duty. When students learn, a teacher can say he delivered the lessons effectively despite the distance learning we adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, teachers were experiencing challenges in student's learning in the new normal education. Participants shared:

The learners had difficulty in understanding since it was written in English. So, no one can explain well that you cannot tell if they understood what they were answering.

Lines 19-26-001

Challenges in learning: learning in a way that most of the students' answers do not conform to what you expect since they can answer those questions based on their level of understanding. Even though they are given modules based on what they have understood in that module, their answers will be different if there is a discussion with the teacher.

Lines 163-176-008

Referring to the participants' responses regarding their experienced challenges in students' learning, poor levels of understanding were evident. This implies that learning inside the four corners of the classroom is better because you can have a thorough discussion. Students also need to have teacher-aided instruction so that they will learn. Based on the participants' responses, comprehension is one of the reasons why learners cannot understand the content, especially since the English language is the medium of instruction in science content.

According to Lansangan and Gonzales (2020), students' homes were suddenly turned into learning spaces with limited interaction with their teachers. Parents are now given the challenge to become their children's second teachers. Parents' roles became analogous to the responsibility of the teachers when they were at school. However, based on the participants' responses, some parents became not a facilitator of learning as they were the ones answering the learning tasks of their children. Here comes the fact that assessment in this new normal, especially in the modular distance modality adopted by Hilongos National Vocational School, is questionably reliable. For this reason, learning is a challenge since teachers who are learning facilitators cannot directly interact with learners in the new normal education.

With limited learning experiences students have undergone, their level of learning degrades. The modules they read and the video lessons they have watched cannot suffice the level of learning they will get with face-to-face interaction with other learners and teachers. Students learn less as they cannot directly ask for clarifications, which may lead to misconceptions in this new normal education.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that despite the preparations and adaptations made in the new normal education by Junior High School Science teachers of Hilongos National Vocational School, downsides of the new normal prevailed. These preparations, through engaging in professional development, preparing learning resources, and aligning lessons to MELCs, immensely helped teachers in the new normal in teaching. Teachers' modification of content and ICT utilization are the adaptations made by teachers so learners' needs in this new normal can still be catered to. However, it was inevitable that preparations and adjustments made in the delivery of Science subjects were insufficient to lessen teachers' workload, smoothen communication, address problems in assessment, and improve students' learning. These unpleasant experiences can be overcome by taking the initiative and



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addressing them to get maximum learning among students in the new normal, as this was seen to be the most severe challenge in the new normal education.

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