

Problems, Coping Strategies, and Online Teaching Readiness of English Teachers Amid COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The unexpected shift of English language teaching from face-to-face classroom interaction to online learning activities using digital platforms has resulted in several challenges for English teachers and students. Hence, this qualitative study explored the challenges encountered, coping mechanisms, and online teaching readiness of English teachers in selected private schools in Iligan City for the school year 2020-2021. Interviews were conducted with the 30 English teachers from private higher education institutions in Iligan City to elicit free-formatted views. Based on the interview, the common problems encountered by the English teachers were time management and workload, students' behavior, stress and mental health issues, and internet connection. The coping strategies utilized by the English teachers included passive, active, and avoidant coping. Moreover, English teachers believed that they have adequate technical skills, although they have limited experience with online teaching and learning. The findings suggest that English teachers who are teaching online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic were facing several challenges in their teaching. On the other hand, it is a challenge for institutions to engage students in the teaching-learning process. Also, it is a challenge for teachers to move from offline mode to online mode, change their teaching methodologies, and manage their time. The findings underscore that teacher quality and quality teaching go hand in hand.

KEYWORDS: English teachers; new normal; online class

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1. Introduction

Though the world has dealt with other pandemics in the past, there is nothing like the COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis devastated the lives of billions of people. Lives were lost. People's jobs were affected. Social life had changed, and it seemed what is called "normal daily routine" had radically changed. Undeniably, this pandemic has brought a myriad of changes and affected people in profound ways. As part of the effort to contain the spread of the virus, various levels of containment, quarantine measures, and stay-at-home-orders were imposed all over the world. Arguably, the government is doing its very best to protect its people by formulating policies and programs so that the latter may continue their daily activities with little interruptions. The Department

of Education (DepEd) and Commission on Higher Education (CHED) have designed alternatives to continue the studies of millions of Filipinos albeit these trying times. In effect, schools and universities are closing and moving abruptly to online platforms and remote education.

The unanticipated transition in English language instruction from face-to-face classroom interaction to online learning activities using digital platforms has created problems for both teachers and students. Many of the specialized strategies used by English teachers with learners do not translate easily to an online setting. Hence, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the pressure on English teachers. Workloads that were once considered normal and simple have become more complicated as a result of the rapid shift to the internet. Indeed, life and work had altered dramatically. “For the worldwide education community, the ongoing COVID-19 situation has been and will continue to be both a major problem and a learning experience. No one could have predicted something like this.” The situation has been described as ‘emergency online homeschooling’. There is no denying that life with COVID-19 has suddenly and unavoidably become more complicated for everyone, including language teachers.

The unexpected shift of English language teaching from face-to-face classroom interaction to online learning activities using digital platforms has resulted in several challenges for English teachers and students. It is with these compelling reasons the researcher wanted to undertake this problem. Online classes may seem like a cure-all and convenient solution. However, teachers are wondering if they are doing the right thing. Hence, this paper examined the problems encountered, coping strategies, online teaching readiness of English teachers in selected private schools in Iligan City, in hopes of understanding their difficulties.

2. Theoretical Framework

To better comprehend the conceptual basis of the study, it is of paramount importance to present perspectives, theories, and practices relevant to the current study. This study was anchored on several theories.

The Community of Inquiry (COI) by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer explicates that online learning has the potential to bring teachers and students together and engage them collaboratively in purposeful and meaningful discourse through the creation of sustainable communities. This reflects a collaborative constructionist approach, consisting of interaction among learners with the guidance of the teachers. This model plays an important role in this study because it substantiated that teachers’ and learners’ collaboration are important factors in the success of online teaching.

Transactional theory of work-related stress suggests that stress is the direct product of a transaction between an individual and their environment which may tax their resources, and thus threaten their well-being. This theory is relevant because it encapsulated the concept of work stress. Moreover, it explained the association between work stress and a person’s appraisal of his/her difficulty in coping. This theory drew the association between the problems encountered by the English teachers and their level of coping.

The Theory of Coping by Lazarus and Folkman is a trait-based theory based on systemic stress. This trait-based coping determines the individual's preference for the use of specific coping strategies. Under this theory, coping is conceptualized as efforts to restructure the perceived threat and manage stress emotions. This theory is significant to the study because it possesses a more inclusive nature and propensity to evaluate the problems encountered by the English teachers.

Social Learning Theory by Vygotsky underscores the importance of social contexts in students' learning. He examined how social environments influence the learning process. According to him, learning takes place through the interactions of students with their peers, teachers, and the people around them. Consequently, teachers can create a learning environment that maximizes the learner's ability to interact with each other through discussion, collaboration, and feedback.

This study examined the challenges encountered, coping mechanisms, and online teaching readiness of English teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic in selected private schools in Iligan City for the school year 2020-2021. The overall objective of the study was to obtain an in-depth data regarding the plight and difficulties encountered by the English teachers. Specifically, the study answered the following questions:

- What are the problems encountered by the English teachers in their online classes during COVID-19 pandemic?
- What are the coping strategies they utilized in dealing with the problems encountered?
- How do teachers perceive their online teaching readiness?

3. Literature Review

3.1 Teaching English in Higher Education during the New Normal Era

The ramifications of this pandemic have become powerfully evident to English teachers. Recently, a study looked at how EFL teachers used online learning and some of the issues they faced as a result of the pandemic. Based on an invitation, 16 Indonesian EFL teachers took part in the study. They were invited to provide reflections on their teaching methods and obstacles they encountered while teaching online. The study suggests that online learning beyond the classroom has both potentials and challenges that should be considered and therefore, immense studies are encouraged to address this issue.

Research has shown that English teachers in Iran faced many challenges such as lack of appropriate materials, learners' lack of attention and demotivation towards online classes, lack of funding and support for language institutions.

Online teaching preparedness issues are encountered by all educators who are utilizing the online environment. One author examined the assessment of online instructor eLearning readiness before, during, and after course delivery. The study reveals that the availability of online help desk services is an urgent need of online faculty.

Previous research examined teacher educators' readiness and preparation, and their perceptions on preparing preservice teachers in a fully online environment. The findings of the study reveal that teachers considered online teaching time-consuming. It was also shown that teachers who have newly acclimated to online teaching felt a lack of readiness, needed technical and pedagogical support, and time management strategies. Lastly, faculty members do not feel adequately prepared to teach online.

A study explored the challenges of English teachers teaching online and how it adversely affects their overall performance as an English teacher in the Philippines as well as in the English online teaching industry. According to the researchers, these challenges are contributory to a counterproductive online learning process and learning outcome. Hence, the researchers explored the dominating challenges to come up with possible remediation and solutions to those challenges. The study employed exploratory methods, a research method that relies on techniques such as secondary research - such as reviewing available literature and/or data formal qualitative research through in-depth interviews, focus groups, projective methods, case studies, or pilot studies. The qualitative data were gathered through a Google Survey Questionnaire. According to the data gathered, online English teachers experienced different categorical challenges at work. These include challenges with learners, class handling, and technical aspect. In line with teaching the students, this research found that most of the teachers have difficulty with students having unclear pronunciations whereas, on the technical side, teachers experienced heavy challenges due to the slow internet connection.

In a study, policy implications, strategies, and issues that will arise in the new normal education, particularly in the Philippines, were highlighted. He discussed the implications when the new normal comes, namely: wearing face masks and physical distancing, strengthening online platforms, research and development and program creation, and health integration to which, the researcher would mostly highlight the second struggle – the strengthening of online learning platforms.

3.2 Problems Encountered by Teachers

Any previously held notion that online learning was ipso facto more innovative than face-to-face instruction has been dispelled by the reality of emergency online education. Online education has proved to be highly didactic and passive and has resulted in an impoverished learning experience for many students. Burns added that the absence of instruction, or the substitution of online didactic approaches by teachers who often employ learner-centered approaches in face-to-face classrooms, has its roots in the fact that many teachers have had little technology training, particularly online technologies. Consequently, teachers had to quickly decide which technologies to use and learn how to use them.

An online class eliminated the human connection that a face-to-face, in-house teaching environment provides. An online instructor cannot gauge the mood, involvement, and engagement level of her students the way she can in a traditional lecture-based classroom. Also, students enrolled in online classes are not able to

interact with their classmates. Instead of being able to form study groups face-to-face, students in online classes rely primarily on email to interact with others.

Changing teachers' pedagogical orientations and approaches require a broadening of the teachers' awareness of the pedagogic opportunities afforded by learning technologies and the development of their knowledge and skills in online learning design through a professional development program that fosters critical reflection on technology use in teaching and learning [1]. Adapting to this 'New Normal' is a real struggle not just for students, but especially for those teachers who have been teaching for decades, as they are more equipped in the traditional way of teaching, using textbooks, blackboards, and other tangible instructional materials. Some of these teachers are illiterate when it comes to technology like computers.

The quality of education has also suffered from the failure to carefully design quality online learning experiences, develop digital content and assessments designed specifically for online practice, and create the requisite supports, policies, and procedures for online learning to work well. While technology is the buzzword for any student during the COVID era, teachers have the added burden of understanding how to use technology in the right manner. Teachers have to handle the challenge of children's poor attention spans, low or irregular attendance, patchy internet, and power connectivity, and highly demanding parents who both scrutinize and criticize the way teachers conduct their classes from home. Furthermore, Chandy adds that students have been known to taunt teachers who are still new to the tech format, while teachers are struggling to manage the needs of those students who do not have internet access, along with their household chores and expectations of family members.

Several arguments associated with e-learning – Accessibility, Affordability, Flexibility, Learning Pedagogy, Life-long Learning, and Policy are some of the arguments related to online pedagogy [2]. It is said that the online mode of learning is easily accessible and can even reach rural and remote areas. It is considered to be a relatively cheaper mode of education in terms of the lower cost of transportation, accommodation, and the overall cost of institution-based learning. Flexibility is another interesting aspect of online learning; a learner can schedule or plan their time for completion of courses available online. Combining face-to-face lectures with technology gives rise to blended learning and flipped classrooms; this type of learning environment can increase the learning potential of the students.

3.3 Coping Strategies

In teaching English Language Learners online, the usage of online tools will be able to help them assist not only their teaching but also the language needs of their students as well. Teachers can also record themselves explaining concepts. Not only does it save time for the teachers, but it would also help learners to retain the lesson even when they have no classes. Lastly, he pointed out that teachers should breathe and have fun whilst having an online class, that it's okay to have some fun despite everything that's happening around us.

During this tough time, the concern is not about whether online teaching-learning methods can provide quality education, it is rather how academic institutions will be

able to adopt online learning in such a massive manner. Resistance to change will not help any educational unit across the world. That is why teachers are coming up with ways on how they will be able to adapt to new changes in just a short amount of time.

There were other coping strategies for remote online learning. One of them is to maximize professional development. Good teaching involves the desire to keep improving. He states that teachers should bring that energy and personality into their online classroom the same way they bring it to their physical classroom. The skills that a teacher will learn, the resources they create, the flexibility they show, the effort at improvement, the calmness and level-headedness, and the acceptance of the situation can help them in a practical sense as a teacher and can be appreciated by senior management and possibly, hopefully by their students.

Stress was viewed, not as a stimulus or a response, but as a person-environment relationship that is perceived as taxing or exceeding a person's resources. When faced with a stressful situation, a person will evaluate its potential personal relevance and significance in terms of its impact on valued personal goals. This process is known as primary appraisal. Previously, several authors distinguished among different types of primary appraisal, namely harm/loss, threat, challenge, and benign. Harm/loss appraisals refer to an injury or damage that has already been done, such as being diagnosed with a terminal illness. Threat appraisals refer to the potential for harm or loss, fairly typical before health screening tests for example. Challenge appraisals refer to an opportunity for personal growth or mastery, for example being involved in a weight loss program exercise program.

In the reviewed literature, a great number of studies have attempted to explore the issues faced by English teachers, their coping mechanisms, online teaching preparation, and whether it can predict learners' engagement in an online class. Researchers, educators, and policymakers are eager to find out which factors are more prominent than others. The literature review confirmed that there is an intense interest within the field of language research to determine which factors affect learning outcomes in the online learning modality.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This qualitative study explored the challenges encountered, coping mechanisms, and online teaching readiness of English teachers in selected private schools in Iligan City for the school year 2020-2021. Descriptive studies are designed to describe something present through fact-finding and interpretation of data gathered.

4.2 Participants, Sampling, and Setting

The participants of this study came from the four private schools in Iligan City. Specifically, these schools have opted to shift to online classes as they acclimate to the new normal. The researcher purposively selected four private schools in the said city due to convenience and accessibility factors, namely Iligan Medical Center College,

Table 1. Distribution of participants.

Name of Schools	English Teachers
Iligan Medical Center College	10
St. Peter's College	10
Iligan Capitol College	5
Lyceum of Iligan Foundation	5
Total	30

Iligan Capitol College, St. Peter's College, and Lyceum of Iligan Foundation. All four private higher educational institutions are situated at Iligan City, Lanao Del Norte. These schools aim to produce graduates who are competent in their respective chosen fields.

The participants of this study were the 30 English teachers. Given the restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, only 30 teachers participated in the study. They were selected using convenience non-probability sampling, specifically the snowball technique, recognizing the dearth of English teachers who are teaching online and their availability.

Considering that teacher-participants were tasked to answer interview questions relative to English online teaching, a certain level of understanding and experience were deemed necessary. True enough, the participants were composed of teachers who were given English subjects and had experienced teaching amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Only English teachers who were teaching online were included in the study. Taking into account all these considerations, the participants possessed attributes suitable for the study.

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of sampled teachers from the four sampled schools.

4.3 Data Collection

The researcher asked permission from the participants to conduct the study. The purpose, objectives, and significance of the study were stipulated in the said letter. It specifically stated that the study would only involve college teachers who specialize in English.

Thirty teacher-participants were interviewed and asked questions relative to the research aims. For the convenience of the participants, interviews were done via Google Meet. The said platform was effective in conducting the interviews, allowing teachers with hectic schedules to take part in the research. In addition, given the limitations imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this was one of the most appropriate methods of collecting data.

There were 12 participants who opted to write down their answers through Messenger due to their busy schedules. The remaining 18 participants were interviewed through digital recording, Google Meet, where videos could be recorded, with the permission of the participants.

Participants were reminded of the study's aims, research protocols, expected benefits, their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and confidentiality protection as a first step in the interview process. The researcher represented herself as an English language instructor from Iligan Medical Center College to establish rapport with the participants and display familiarity with the topic.

The interviews were recorded, through Google Meet, with the participants' permission to ensure a thorough transcript. During all interviews, typed notes were taken, allowing the researcher to keep track of crucial points and for data analysis. A semi-structured interview strategy was adopted to elicit rich material that can be beneficial in the qualitative analysis.

The interview protocol and consent form were distributed to the participants about a week before their scheduled interview so that they could think about and prepare their responses to the initial questions. Throughout the rest of the interview, open-ended questions were utilized to encourage participants to speak freely and respond openly to inquiries. Participants' experiences were investigated in depth during the 30-minute interview to strengthen the credibility of the study's findings. For accurate analysis and interpretation of interview data, the audio recordings were meticulously transcribed in a Microsoft Word document.

4.4 Data Analysis

Interviews were conducted to accurately chronicle the English teachers' lived experiences while using online platforms in delivering their instructions in their English classes. Their responses were interpreted using thematic analysis. The thematic analysis was used to group similar responses and form codes to determine major themes.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Entry protocol such as dissemination of letters and informed consent form were given. Informed consent was formally obtained from the participants. The researcher endeavored to inform each participant of their right to withdraw should they feel uncomfortable. Teacher-participants were assured that their answers would be treated with the utmost confidentiality and would have no bearing on their job performances or ratings. Lastly, in pursuit of ethical considerations, the researcher made earnest efforts to prevent any physical or psychological harm to the participants.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Problems Encountered by the English Teachers

In this study, the English teachers utilized mostly free platforms such as Google Classroom, Edmodo, Zoom, Facebook messenger, Google Meet, and Moodle. The challenges encountered by English teachers refer to the problems and challenges met in these platforms. At the time of quarantines and viral outbreaks, it would seem that online learning is the only viable way to continue learning at a distance. Despite the

promises and advantages of online classes, some problems come with it. The data below would give a glimpse of the plight and challenges that are experienced by the English teachers as they fared in their classes.

5.1.1 Time Management and Workload

One of the major issues faced by instructors was the demand for their time. It takes time to prepare, plan, and teach in an online class. It takes faculty two times as long to prepare and teach online than face-to-face. In a time-comparison study, a faculty teaching an economics class that has taught both online and face-to-face spent 155 hours preparing and teaching the course online compared with 62 hours face-to-face. Hence, time and workload are magnified in online classes compared to face-to-face discussion.

"In the first few months of online class, I got overwhelmed. I had no idea what I was doing. I was unsure if I would use Zoom, Discord, or Google Meet. The school gave me 30 units and some overload subjects. I would start my class tired, and I would end my class exhausted. It was surreal. I did not know how I survived."
(Participant 30)

5.1.2 Students' Behavior

The participants believed that their learners get easily distracted by unwanted noise during online classes. They also revealed that whenever their learners turn off their cameras, they feel like their students purposely do this because they do not like to pay attention to the class. In an online class, there are a lot of temptations and diversions. In the interview, among the major complaints of teachers were students' behavior, which includes students getting distracted, late submission of classwork, and playing online games while their teachers are having lectures.

"Some students are easily distracted." (Participant 22)

"Students tend to be distracted. Sometimes, I am not sure if they are still focused with the lessons." (Participant 23)

"They submit their classwork very late. I always have to remind them." (Participants 9 and 10)

"It has always been a problem for me to manage students' attention during class as they easily get distracted especially if they are in a loud environment." (Participant 17)

"While I was discussing, there was this student who kept on cursing in the background. I realized he kept his mic unmute. It was then I

discovered that he was playing ML [Mobile Legends].” (Participant 4)

Although adequate teaching and technical skills are necessary, they are not a guarantee of success. To be effective online learners, students must make changes to their study habits. A major obstacle to online learning is a lack of student discipline. Students must be able to embrace the duties and responsibilities of a good student. Several research in psychology, cognitive science, and neuroscience have found strong evidence that online classes can contribute to distracted learning. Due to the presence of multiple streams of information and entertainment, a student learning in the virtual environment may get distracted [3]. It may lead to a significant detrimental effect on student learning and performance. This is a predicament that many students are unprepared for. As a result, not only does online learning question the traditional understanding of what it means to be a teacher, but it also challenges the traditional view of what it means to be a student.

5.1.3 Stress and Mental Health Issues

One of the most significant impacts of an online class is the impact on teachers' mental, social, and emotional health. The World Health Organization (2009) defines mental health as "a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and can contribute to his or her community."

The COVID-19 pandemic has led teachers to an unpredictable educational landscape. But between the unpredictability, the isolation, and the newfound challenges, teachers' mental health issues are on the rise. The participants revealed that they have been feeling anxious, stressed, and overwhelmed with online teaching. Teaching from home is a different experience, one that is both more invasive and lonelier at the same time. Students in Google Meet and Zoom classes often have their cameras turned off and their microphones silenced, making it difficult to communicate and speak with them. Teachers can usually rely on their colleagues for continuous emotional support in short lunchroom chats. But that kind of spontaneous help is not possible right now.

Likewise, the challenges are greater for mothers. This insight was obtained because most of the participants are working mothers. One of their common complaints whilst teaching online is their difficulty to balance work and family life. Research has shown that in many families, mothers are more often the ones supervising a child's virtual education. Teachers experience that dynamic two times over – instructing their students virtually while also working as the primary parent to ensure that their children do not fall behind in their distance learning. Indeed, online classes have affected all people from different walks of life.

"Ever since the pandemic, I have felt like the entire weight of the world is on my shoulder. I have an online class and my children have online classes, too. My husband goes to work every day, and I

am afraid to hire the services of a "yaya" because of COVID. Sometimes, when I have classes, my children interrupt me and ask for help because they cannot understand their teacher. I get mad at them and myself. It has been very stressful." (Teacher - Respondent 29)

5.1.4 Internet Connection

One of the most common challenges that participants sometimes face is poor internet connectivity. The participants sometimes get disconnected while they teach online due to poor internet connection, and finding a good connection is sometimes a struggle for them. In addition to that, the participants sometimes experienced audio drawbacks during their discussion due to poor connection as well.

"I always experience having unstable internet connectivity."
(Teacher - Participant 20)

"Poor internet connection does not only affect the quality of teaching, but it also causes delays for the submission of the students' classwork." (Teacher - Participant 7)

"The common problems that I encountered while teaching online are the internet connection, noise from the outside, and power interruption." (Teacher - Participant 28)

This is a very sad scenario in third world countries, the Philippines most especially. Despite teachers' best intentions and expectations in their online class, there are things much greater than their desire to teach students – internet connection. Poor internet connection poses challenges in the adoption of online education in the Philippine context. It is also contended that online education widens the educational and socioeconomic gap among the haves and have-nots.

Other than the internet connection, technological skills and confidence to use them also posed a serious problem. Hardware and equipment malfunctions are detrimental in an online class. This failure can be very frustrating for teachers and students. No matter how prepared the instructor is, but if the internet speed is low and the camera and microphone fail, everything goes downhill. Everything comes to a standstill and the learning environment is interrupted, no matter how prepared the instructor and how eager the students are. If there are too many instances of technical glitches, the entire course is affected. Unanticipated technical problems with the system shortened the class time and discussion that negatively affected the overall quality of the class presentation, and thus negatively impact learner engagement.

5.2 English Teachers' Coping Strategies in Online Class

Teaching is considered one of the most stressful professions and being a language teacher triggers its own inherent and unique challenges. Likewise, responses to the Covid-19 pandemic have also created new stressors for teachers to cope with. This includes the transition to online language teaching. This section examines the level of coping strategies that English teachers exerted in their online classes. The study measured the coping responses of the teachers and was grouped into three types: Active, Passive, and Avoidant Coping.

Around the world, a typical day for a language teacher is stressful enough due to their heavy workloads, time pressures, and difficulties juggling roles. These challenges encapsulate the specificity and the emotional character of foreign-language teaching; self-doubts about one's language ability; coping with the emotional anxieties of learners; heterogeneous proficiency in learner groups; threats to the sense of self and identity; energy-intensive teaching methodologies; intercultural components to teaching; and precarious working conditions.

Unfortunately, the advent of COVID-19 has multiplied teachers' stress. Workloads that were once perceived as routine and simple have been complicated due to the abrupt conversion online. It cannot be denied that lifestyle and work had radically changed. "The ongoing COVID-19 crisis has been and will continue to be, both a massive challenge and a learning experience for the global education community. Practically no one saw something like this coming." The situation has been described as 'emergency online homeschooling'. There is no denying that life with COVID-19 has suddenly and unavoidably become more complicated for everyone, including language teachers. Hence, it begs the question: How were English teachers coping amid this crisis?

5.2.1 Passive Coping

Most of the participants apply passive coping to make things bearable for them in their online classes. They shared that they pray to God to take the stress away, trying to view things from a different perspective, and believing that everything is God's plan.

These imply that the participants find comfort in their spiritual beliefs through praying and meditation. Intervention programs that focus on religious or spiritual struggles and positive religious strategies may help improve resilience and well-being among the affected participants. This also indicates that teachers are resilient by reframing events through a hopeful lens. Positive religious reframing can help people transcend stressful times by enabling them to see a tragedy as an opportunity to grow closer to a higher power or to improve their lives.

The COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly represented a significant stressor for many individuals around the globe. Data from several different nations suggest that, after lockdown and restrictions have been placed by governments, the levels of depression and anxiety were much higher than those typically observed in pre-pandemic community surveys. Because of the emergence of mental health problems, comes the rise of religious coping. Previous study used Google search data from 95 countries to

look at the frequency of religion-related searches. The term “prayer,” spiked in March 2020. Around this time, many countries have already enacted control measures.

In the interview, the participants shared that when they are faced with challenges brought about by online class, they disconnect from the virtual environment, and engage in leisure activities that would make them forget, at least temporarily.

“Whenever I am stressed, I early logged out from my work, and I do things that would make me calm and relaxed.” (Participant 28)

“I usually engage in outdoor activities, such as biking and trekking. Online class can be tiring and monotonous. But outdoor activities make me more vigorous and feel alive.” (Participant 24)

5.2.2 Active Coping

Whenever the participants were faced with constraints or difficulties online, they exerted online coping strategies to counter those problems. The term active coping refers to a coping style that is characterized by solving problems, seeking information, seeking social support, seeking professional help, changing environments, planning activities, and reframing the meanings of problems.

In the interview, the participants shared that they created group chats on Facebook and Messenger. Such platforms allowed members to engage in real-time conversation, either through chat or video calls. Often, group chats were used by teachers and students to share, exchange ideas, and communicate their feelings. One participant also shared that he would endure or go through with the problem but would look at it using a positive and hopeful lens to avoid negativity.

“Having a lot of patience helps. I created group chats on Facebook so that my students can reach out should they have questions. I also told them that I may not be able to answer immediately. I think they understood.” (Participant 25)

“I just endured all the stress that I had encountered. And also, I always think on the brighter side and avoid all negativity in life.” (Participant 22)

In particular, the nature of the global pandemic brings a particular set of COVID-19 difficulties to the mix: health concerns for oneself and loved ones, social and physical distancing, travel restrictions, closed borders, shortages of daily necessities, restricted services, and uncertainty as to when life will return to ‘normal.’

Language teachers, alongside their workloads, are forced to cope with almost everything that this pandemic has brought. Hence, to function well in these trying times and demanding professions, there is a need to strike an equilibrium between personal and professional roles.

Active coping is a vital factor that leads individuals to successfully cope with stressful situations. Due to the disruption and changes in the environment and lifestyle, among the recommended coping responses is the activation of one's social support.

5.2.3 Avoidant Coping

Some participants resorted to avoidant coping to placate their stress levels. Avoidant coping is unhealthy and maladaptive because it exacerbates stress. Procrastination, for example, is an avoidance coping mechanism. This is an encouraging result given that the participants do not resort to counter-effective coping practices.

One activity that has been among Filipinos from the onset of the lockdown until the present time is the increased engagement in gardening. Home gardening suddenly became a widespread activity in rural and urban areas. The stress of lockdown and financial pressure caused by the pandemic has prompted many Filipinos to seek solace in their gardens, earning themselves the nicknames "plantitos and plantitas," or plant uncles and aunties. Such a gardening craze paved the way to the neologism "plantdemic."

In the interview, one participant shared that ever since the pandemic, Netflix has been ingrained in his system; as the adage goes: "Netflix and Chill." It has been reported that since January 19, the streaming television leader reached 203 million paid subscribers. Arguably, Netflix became a source of escape and connection amid the pandemic.

"Netflix has been my way in and way out." (Participant 5)

Another interesting finding that emerged is the notion that some participants turn to their academic work as a coping strategy. Participants revealed that they view the pandemic as an opportunity to improve their education. Some participants have enrolled themselves in graduate programs. Some have also engaged in online classes, not as teachers, but as students. While others have enrolled in vocational courses.

"I extend my time in teaching and studying." (Participant 30)

The data yielded in this paper presents an opportunity to further investigate the relationship between religious coping vis-à-vis common mental health problems and academic resilience. Further, the data implies that teachers are no different from anybody. Teachers are also humans. They get consumed, too. Hence, they need appropriate coping responses if they are to function well in these unprecedented times.

5.3 English Teachers' Online Readiness

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, online education became a pedagogical shift from traditional methods to the modern approach of teaching-learning; from face-to-face interaction to Zoom, from personal to virtual, and from seminars to webinars.

The health crisis has forced teachers worldwide to adapt to online teaching. However, little is known regarding teachers' online readiness. Online teacher readiness, e.g., understanding, confidence, positive attitude, and motivation towards the implementation of distance learning is an important factor that would influence successful learning engagement.

5.3.1 Adequate Technical Skills

In the interview, the participants shared that they have a computer available at home or in the office. They are competent in the use of PowerPoint and are familiar with the use of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter.

The result suggests that most of the teacher-participants have access to computers, considering that most of the courses are moved to a completely online environment. Hence, most of the participants are using smartphones, laptops, and tablets. Interestingly, most of the gadgets are personally owned by the participants themselves and were not subsidized by their employers. Some teachers before the pandemic did not own a laptop. Some are not tech-savvy. Some did not even know that google suite exists. But after the implementation of distance learning, teachers found ways to secure a laptop and train themselves to be efficient in gadgets and web-based software. This indicates that teachers have initiatives and are indeed versatile.

In the interview, participants were asked whether they are equipped with technological skills. Most of them answered in the affirmative.

"As an educator, for now, I consider myself prepared and competent." (Participant 7)

"I am an educator who is technologically inclined. Even before the pandemic, I am already using technology as means of improving class discussions and computing grades." (Participant 9)

"In terms of technical and conceptual skills, I believe that I am competent and equipped with the necessary skills needed in the workplace. I always try my best to innovate to share new things with my students." (Participant 12)

Computer skills and literacy are recognized as influential predictors for learning outcomes and learning satisfaction. Participants also signified that they are quite familiar with social media, e.g., Facebook and Twitter. Online learning needs communication and participation through active interaction on digital devices. As such, social media can be used as a platform for synchronous and asynchronous communication and discussion. Research has identified that social and communication competencies are critical competencies and influential predictors for learning outcomes and learners' satisfaction in online learning environments.

5.3.2 Attitudes toward Online Learning

The interview revealed that participants view online platforms as a means to interact and exchange ideas with their students. It also implies that teachers are adopting digital technology to gain maximum advantage to improve the overall educational process. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, for educators, it cannot be denied that there is an increased reliance on technology and online platforms in delivering their lessons and discussions. Hence, having a positive attitude toward online learning may significantly affect learning engagement.

When teachers perceive online learning as easy to use and accessible, they deliberately adopt digital technology. The perceived ease of use and accessibility help them to keep pace with digital learning leading to better outcomes as with the rise of online technologies.

5.3.2.1 Positive Attitude

Most of the participants have a positive attitude toward online teaching. They stated that teachers' preparation is essential in building quality education.

"You must be prepared and competent in teaching online so that you can teach your learners effectively." (Participant 28)

"Although there are certain challenges that go with online teaching, we need to be prepared for these to deliver quality education to our students." (Participant 17)

5.3.2.2 Negative Attitude

However, some participants expressed their concerns and issues regarding online classes. They contended that they still prefer face-to-face interaction.

"It would be better for me to teach in actual because in the online class, your scope is so limited and there are many activities you cannot do in this platform, whereas in actual class you would be able to monitor students learning accurately and precisely." (Participant 11)

"I still prefer face-to-face teaching." (Participant 5)

5.3.3 Limited Experience with Online Teaching and Learning

Most of the participants have not had formal training or previous background in distance learning. Training, attitude, technical competence, time constraints,

pedagogy, and methodology were among the major elements of adaptation to distance learning.

“Let us be honest. Nobody was prepared for this. One day we were sitting comfortably in an air-conditioned office, the next day we found ourselves teaching in the confines of our houses, without even sufficient background in online teaching.” (Participant 30)

“No. I still need more training to become a competent online teacher.” (Participant 29)

Albeit the limited experience of the teachers with distance learning, they appraised themselves as online ready and technologically savvy. This resonates with the encouraging and resilient attitude of the participants. Despite the lack of experience and training, they were able to acclimate to the virtual environment. Despite limited experience in distance education and a lack of the requisite technical and time management skills, teachers were still able to cope with the trends in distance learning.

Also, many faculty, without formal training and basically on their own, have simply adapted their face-to-face teaching methods to accommodate online education demands. Likewise, institutions have pushed faculty into the role of online educators rather than transitioned them via preparatory training. These studies imply that online class is a “baptism of fire.” No one has prepared these educators for the worst possible scenarios, and yet they were able to endure and bear the difficulties and challenges that distance education has brought.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The COVID-19 outbreak is the chance to make out the best from the current situation. Surely, the abrupt shift of face-to-face instructions to distance learning has brought emergent and unprecedented challenges. But it cannot be denied that online class has its perks and downside; and even though it has its inherent flaws, it has kept education afloat in these trying times.

6.1 Problems Encountered by the English Teachers in their Online Classes during COVID-19 Pandemic

The common problems encountered by the English teachers were time management and workload, students’ behavior, stress and mental health issues, and internet connection. One of the major issues faced by instructors is the demand for their time. It takes a faculty two times as long to prepare and teach online than face-to-face. Time and workload are magnified in online classes compared to face-to-face discussion.

Among the major complaints of teachers are students' behavior, which includes students getting distracted, late submission of classwork, and playing online games while their teachers are having lectures. The participants believed that their learners get easily distracted by unwanted noise during online classes. They also revealed that whenever their learners turn off their cameras, they feel like their students purposely

do this because they do not like to pay attention to the class. Although adequate teaching and technical skills are necessary, they are not a guarantee of success. To be effective online learners, students must make changes to their study habits.

One of the most significant impacts of an online class is the impact on teachers' mental, social, and emotional health. The COVID-19 pandemic has led teachers to an unpredictable educational landscape. But between the unpredictability, the isolation, and the newfound challenges, teachers' mental health issues are on the rise. The participants revealed that they have been feeling anxious, stressed, and overwhelmed with online teaching. Teaching from home is a different experience, one that is both more invasive and lonelier at the same time.

One of the most common challenges that participants sometimes faced is poor internet connectivity. The participants sometimes get disconnected while they teach online due to poor internet connection, and finding a good connection is sometimes a struggle for them. In addition to that, the participants sometimes experienced audio drawbacks during their discussion due to poor connection as well. This is a very sad scenario in third world countries, the Philippines most especially, that despite teachers' best intentions and expectations in their online class, there are things much greater than their desire to teach students – internet connection.

6.2 Coping Strategies Utilized

The coping strategies utilized by the English teachers included passive, active, and avoidant coping. Most of the participants applied passive coping to make things bearable for them in their online classes. They shared that they pray to God to take the stress away, trying to view things from a different perspective, and believing that everything is God's plan. The COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly represented a significant stressor for many individuals around the globe. Because of the emergence of mental health problems, comes the rise of religious coping.

Whenever the participants are faced with constraints or difficulties online, they exert active coping strategies to counter those problems. The participants shared that they created group chats on Facebook and Messenger. Such a platform allows members to engage in real-time conversation, either through chat or video calls. Due to the disruption and changes in the environment and lifestyle, among the recommended coping responses is the activation of one's social support.

Some participants resorted to avoidant coping to counter their stress levels. One activity that has been among Filipinos from the onset of the lockdown until the present time is the increased engagement in gardening. The stress of lockdown and financial pressure caused by the pandemic has prompted many Filipinos to seek solace in their gardens, earning themselves the nicknames "plantitos and plantitas," or plant uncles and aunties. Also, a participant shared that ever since the pandemic, Netflix has been ingrained in his system. Another interesting finding that emerged is the notion that some participants turn to their academic work as a coping strategy. Participants revealed that they view the pandemic as an opportunity to improve their education.

6.3 English Teachers' Perceptions of their Online Teaching Readiness

English teachers believed that they have adequate technical skills. Their attitude toward online learning was not unanimous; some were optimistic, and some were

pessimistic. Lastly, they believed that they have limited experience with online teaching and learning.

Teacher-participants shared that they have a computer available at home or in the office. They were competent in the use of PowerPoint and are familiar with the use of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter. They shared that they have adequate technical skills.

The participants' attitudes on online teaching were divided. Most of the participants have a positive attitude toward online teaching. They stated that teachers' preparation is essential in building quality education. However, some participants expressed their concerns and issues regarding online classes. They contended that they still prefer face-to-face interaction.

Majority of the participants have not had formal training or previous background in distance learning. Albeit the limited experience of the teachers with distance learning, they appraised themselves as online ready and technologically savvy. This resonates with the encouraging and resilient attitude of the participants.

In the light of the findings of the study, the following recommendations are suggested:

- School heads may establish a wellness program that would champion the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of their teachers. The rationale for this program is to allow teachers to cope with the constraints they encounter at work.
- School heads may conduct training and seminars to mentor and coach teachers in the use of online platforms and tools. School heads may tap on experts in the field of educational technology.
- School administrators may invest in technological infrastructures in hopes of providing teachers the tools necessary in making online teaching rewarding.
- School administrators may consider distance learning as part of accreditation. The main objective of this accreditation is to capacitate universities and colleges to enhance and improve the distance learning modality.
- Future researchers may investigate the problem using a phenomenological-descriptive approach to obtain a richer and more in-depth analysis of the lived experiences of the participants.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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