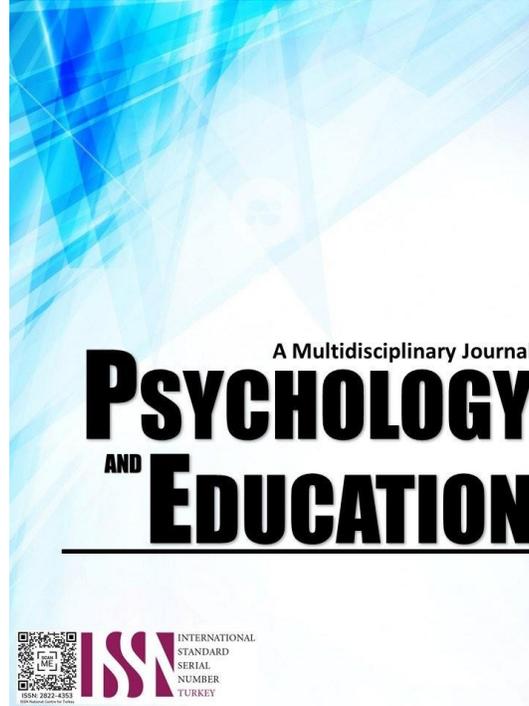


# LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ENGLISH TEACHERS IN TEACHING LITERATURE UNDER NEW NORMAL



## PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

Volume: 17

Issue 7

Pages: 672-678

Document ID: 2024PEMJ1598

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10784620

Manuscript Accepted: 02-07-2024

## Lived Experiences of English Teachers in Teaching Literature Under New Normal

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### Abstract

This study deeply examines the lived experiences of English teachers in teaching literature under new normal. It aims to unveil and identify common responses from the participants' experiences, coping mechanisms and gained insights on aforementioned phenomenon. The participants of the study are Senior High School English teachers both came from public and private institutions in the province of Davao de Oro who were able to teach literature subjects during the phenomenon irrespective of major of specialization. This qualitative study used phenomenological design with seven (7) participants from in-depth interview and another seven (7) participants from focus group discussion. There are fifteen (15) themes interpreted according to the notion of transactional distance theory. During pandemic, English teachers confronts challenges in teaching the subject such difficulty in instructing literary interpretation, unresponsive students in accomplishing literary tasks, inability of the students to contextualize literary interpretation, however, the participants also considered the pandemic period helpful towards discovery of teaching strategies such as utilization of media in facilitating literary assessment whether it is authentic, collaborative, or written-based activities. The result of the study reveals that physical separation has brought gap to interaction yet helps broaden opportunity of English teachers to discover the advantage of technology in reaching out students amidst pandemic.

**Keywords:** *teaching literature, modular distance learning, transactional distance theory, Philippines*

### Introduction

Globally, COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected the education sector due to implementation of social isolation and lockdown measures. Schools in most countries are temporarily closed. In the Philippines, distance learning temporarily replaced the traditional face to face interactions to continue academic activity during the pandemic. Under distance learning, teaching literature has been compromised. The active interaction in teaching the subject was hindered due to physical separation between teacher and students. Teaching using printed materials is difficult since most learners depend on the system where the teacher's physical presence is within reach. According to the theory of Moore, which called transactional distance, physical distance creates a room for potential misunderstandings of the information that the teacher is trying to convey to his students, which can lead to a communication gap between the two (Moore, 1997).

English literature teachers were having dilemmas in teaching literature under the new normal. It was difficult for a novice teacher to improve teaching atmosphere where teacher and learners' interaction is limited, subjects are designed in highly structured manner and only minority are autonomous learners. On the other hand, researchers have not come across a qualitative study unveiling the lived experiences of English teachers who were able to teach literature subjects in Senior High School under modular distance education; thus, given the aforementioned circumstances, the researcher is driven to perform a thorough investigation into it.

This study employed a phenomenological method that examined a chosen group of people's perspectives, experiences, and insights (Bonyadi, 2019). The sources of the data were gathered through in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD). Additionally, the collected data was subjected to coding and thematic analysis to identify specific themes. This study aimed to provide answers to the following research questions:

- What are the lived experiences of English teachers in teaching literature under new normal?
- How do English teachers cope with the lived experiences in teaching literature under new normal?
- What are the insights of English teachers in teaching literature under new normal?

The findings of this study will help school administrators make informed decisions on how to respond to the difficulties face by English literary teachers in similar situations. Also, this will support English literary teachers in determining the best teaching strategies to employ while instructing literary subjects without compromising student learning because of geographical distance. Learners will also benefit as this will improve awareness on how to respond situation positively when physical classes are not available. Lastly, this will provide future researchers to give broader scope of ideas in teaching literature field.

The study was delimited on exploring the challenges of the selected public and private English teachers in Davao de Oro in teaching literature under new normal. Furthermore, the actual challenges were enclosed on teaching literature of (14) English teachers during pandemic.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative design utilizing a phenomenological approach that aids in comprehension of people's lived experiences and looks into what people experienced and focuses on how they felt about a phenomenon. The researcher took the role of being an interviewer, transcriber, and verifier. As interviewer, exclusion of own thoughts and opinions is essential to maintain the credibility of the study. In addition, being the transcriber, it is vital to guarantee that transcript will be accurate and to ensure to protect participants' identities by assigning codes. Lastly, as verifier, the collected data was given back to participants to strengthen the reliability of the responses.

The researcher secured permission to different authorities to conduct the study. The researcher wrote a letter of permission from the Dean of Graduate School as indication to commence the study. After which, the letter of approval was sent to the School Division Superintendent in Davao de Oro since the phenomenon is a school-based. Right then, the researcher wrote another letter of consent to School Principal and School Heads to selected public and private schools to utilize their English teachers who handle literary subject under new normal. After the participants being identified, an orientation was conducted to those who would be participated in an In-Depth Interview (IDI) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). When the data were already gathered, transcription and data analysis were done. The recorded answers of the participants were transcribed verbatimly for its reliability and integrity. The participants verified the printed transcript if the responses matched to their intent to maintain the credibility of the study (Stahl & King, 2020).

The researcher used coding and thematic analysis in analyzing the gathered data. In order to generate themes from the transcribed data, thematic analysis was used as appropriate method (Braun & Clark, 2006). Furthermore, it is very important to familiarize the collected data for the purpose of coding. The collected data is summarized or condensed through coding to arrive at particular themes, ideas, and categories (William & Moser, 2019).

Furthermore, the reliability of the study is secured by ensuring its credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. To maintain credibility, in-depth interaction with participants and member verification were employed to ensure the result was in line with reality. The consistency of the study was observed on its dependability since it is from the ideas of the participants where researcher can describe and understand the phenomenon. For confirmability, findings were product of deep inquiry and not the from the viewpoints of the researcher. For transferability, the researcher ensured to provide ample of related information in the field in order for the reader to make such transfer.

### Participants

The participants of this study are Senior High School English teachers who are able to teach literature subjects in selected private and public schools of Davao de Oro under distance education, the researcher selected seven (7) participants for In-Depth Interviews (IDI) to explore the participant's experiences, insights, and perspectives without being shaped by the opinions of others and another seven (7) for Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to provide participants an opportunity to discuss challenges, circumstances, and experiences and is more likely to be influenced by others' opinion. It has a total of fourteen (14) participants, which closely corresponds to Polkinghorne's statement that a qualitative study with five (5) to twenty-five (25) individuals verifies its authenticity and validity of the study.

This study represents the people who experienced the phenomenon; thus, a purposive sampling technique is utilized in which participants are chosen on purpose. The participants are fourteen (14) Senior High School English Teachers from selected public and private schools in Davao de Oro and identified as teachers who taught literary subjects either major in English or not as long as they have experienced to teach the subject under new normal education. The researcher viewed the participants as self-sufficient, giving them freedom to choose whether to participate or not. Additionally, participants are given the chance to withdraw from the study, if she or he believes that it is for his or her best interest or for any reason.

### Instruments

The primary instrument used in the study was a validated interview guide questionnaire completed with the script. It is used to draw information about the experiences, challenges, and insights of the participants in teaching literature during pandemic. The researcher pursued to look for the general theme, ergo, the interview guide undergone internal and external validation from panel of experts for further modification such time it was finalized and established as valid.

## Results and Discussion

Based on the data obtained, there are 15 themes emerged from the different responses of English teachers who were able to teach literary subject in Senior High School during pandemic:

## What are the lived experiences of English teachers in teaching literature during pandemic?

Table 1. *Lived Experiences of English Teachers in Teaching Literature Under New Normal*

<i>Themes</i>		<i>Core Ideas</i>
Difficulty in Interpreting	Instructing Literary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The students focused only on describing one or two literary elements but not interpreting the text as a whole.</li> <li>The students were tasked to interpret each line of the poem using own words and understanding but some literally translated it.</li> <li>The students were just defined the characters based on the descriptions the story has given.</li> <li>Others just sum up the text when in fact they tasked to relate it to the required context.</li> </ul>
Unresponsive Students in Accomplishing the Literary Tasks		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Others did not have answers and some were very short and hanging.</li> <li>Some students skipped to answer some literary activities and questions that correspond to those stories that require time to read.</li> <li>Some questions and activities had no answers especially those long stories.</li> <li>Post literary questions were not answered by some of the students.</li> </ul>
Inability of the Students to Contextualize its Literary Interpretation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The same pattern of answers was detected to some students when they tasked to list themes of the story.</li> <li>Some students were copied their answers from the internet.</li> <li>Some answers of the students were similar in words.</li> </ul>
Group Collaboration of Teaching and Facilitating Literature		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The students can express and share when they are working in group.</li> <li>Collaborative learning activities may enhance students' understanding and critical thinking skills but due to physical gap, it was limited.</li> <li>Teaching literature is more fun and engaging when done in groups or in collaborative efforts and this was limited during pandemic.</li> </ul>
Utilization of Media in Facilitating the Literary Authentic-Based Activity		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Majority of the students were able to perform if they were tasked to record-video as part of the lesson.</li> <li>The students showed active response when they tasked to perform using media.</li> <li>Had tasked them performance activity such promotional video, the students were more responsive.</li> </ul>

With the theme, difficulty in instructing literary interpretation, Moore claims that educational programs which interaction between instructor and learners is primarily through one-way channel such printed modules have little teacher-learner conversation because these materials cannot transmit messages back from learner to teacher. Learners understand and interpret internally to what is communicated through the channel, but they are unable to respond individually to the teacher such as asking questions and seeking clarifications and vice versa, as a result, it may be difficult for teachers to teach literary interpretation when the subject designs in highly structured manner and interactions are limited (Moore, 1997).

With the theme, unresponsive students in accomplishing the literary tasks, it was supported by Moore's claim in his theory that when the teaching-learning process has lesser teacher-learners dialogue and the learning-content is tightly structured, it may force students to increase self-autonomy which resulted to deterrence in participating academic activities. Majority of learners are trained to be dependent in school system where teachers physically exist and are typically not prepared for independent learning while only minority of learners might be practicing as complete autonomous (Moore, 1997). Subsequently, queries and concerns towards literary activities were kept for themselves, as a result, some activities are overlooked and ignored particularly those literary pieces that really require time to read.

With the theme, inability of the students to contextualize literary interpretations, transactional distance theory stated that when learning-content merely focused on printed materials or one-way channel, it is likely not appealing to some learners who were uncertain with managing their own learning and are deemed highly organized information with minimal conversation (Moore 39). Consequently, activities provided by the teacher were taken for granted and considered only as mere compliance.

With the theme, group collaboration in teaching and facilitating literature, Collaboration is one of the effective and notable strategies in teaching literature subject. Working with groups provides an avenue to communicate with personal information, ideas and learning



experiences that might result to increase understanding of the concept and furthers learning performance of the group. However, due to physical distance, the possibility of collaborative group discussion depletes extensively. Students tend to focus on individualized tasks rather than group activities.

With the theme, utilization of media in facilitating the literary authentic-based activity, in transactional distance theory, learner-interface interaction implies that when teacher uses media as tool to interact with the students and make learning-content more flexible through modifying and giving activities online, it decreases the transactional distance felt by the students (Moore, 1997).

**How do English teachers cope with the lived experiences in teaching literature under new normal?**

Table 2. *English Teachers on Coping the Lived Experiences in Teaching Literature During Pandemic*

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Core Ideas</i>
Meeting Students Online in One-on-One Basis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Had allotted time to reach out and communicate those who have difficulties in literary interpretation and instructing them online.</li> <li>• Students who struggled to respond literary text interpretation was scheduled to meet online in one-on-one session.</li> <li>• Instructed the students online and asked some literary questions one-on-one to deepen understanding of the lesson.</li> </ul>
Soliciting Students' Literary Ideas and Opinions Online in Asynchronous Manner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Had created flexible schedule online to students who showed poor response in literary text interpretation.</li> <li>• Activities related to literature are posted in FB page and give some enough time to answer them.</li> </ul>
Finding Appropriate Electronic Reference Sites to Support Printed Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant pre and post literary questions are posted in social media platforms in order to get the ideas of the students.</li> <li>• Providing literary questions in the chat room and not so strict with the time.</li> </ul>
Contextualizing Literary Performance-Based Activities to New Normal Situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spent time online to find good references for literature pieces and share it to students to keep them engaged.</li> <li>• Had searched online for suitable and easily be accessed reference materials.</li> <li>• Discovered credible literary sites that would help support the materials on hand.</li> </ul>
Utilizing Different Media in Facilitating the Literary Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Had given various literary authentic activities that they could do at home with the use of mobile phones.</li> <li>• Had allotted students to perform activity such as drama together with their family members.</li> <li>• Provided performances that could be done at home.</li> <li>• Had provided different activities online such posting open-ended questions to obtain ideas from the students.</li> <li>• Let the students be asked some reflective questions with regard on themes of literature pieces.</li> <li>• The students performed authentic activities and posted it in FB group page</li> </ul>

With the theme, meeting students online in one-on-one basis, a tutorial between teacher and a single student conducted in audio-video application is highly interactive. However, the interaction may vary depending on the ability of certain learners to manage his engagement during the conduct of one-on-one online class. Meeting students online in one-on-one basis was directed toward the discovery and new understanding, which stands to improve the knowledge and insights of the two relevant stakeholders who separated by space through spontaneous interaction. Moore added that the increase of dialogue can bridge the gap of communal misunderstanding of the input between teacher and learners through communications technology (Moore & Diehl, 1997).

With the theme, soliciting students' literary ideas and opinions online in asynchronous manner, it has been stated by Moore that when lesson content is less structured, it decreases the transactional distance which allows greater possibility of interaction between teacher and students and its content. As one of the coping mechanisms to bridge the gap of transactional distance, some English teachers had expressed that they offered less structured support learning activities aside from being reliant on printed materials through using different platforms to be responsive to learner's individual needs and preferences. A less structured activities allow the students to interact with literary questions and provide greater opportunity to share opinions related to the lesson (Moore & Diehl, 1197).

With the theme, finding appropriate electronic reference sites to support printed materials, online electronic references became helpful in providing information on a topic especially literary concepts and a well written overview of different literary pieces during pandemic crisis. It helps make the topic easy to understand. It was considered as supplemental support materials for teachers in increasing knowledge of the students while learning at home. This coping mechanism of English teacher considered by Moore as less structured since learners were allowed to choose from a list of recommended materials, with this, transactional distance felt by the students



decreases (Moore, 1997).

With the theme, contextualizing literary performance-based activities to new normal, the use of various media in contextualizing authentic activities became widespread teaching strategy that provides flexibility to the part of the students to still perform activities authentically despite distance. According to Moore, this coping mechanism decreases the distance felt by the students because activities are flexible and within reached by giving freedom of the students to do and create things on their own (Moore, 1997).

With the theme, utilizing different media in facilitating the literary assessment, according to advance domain of transactional distance theory, learning-interface interaction opens opportunity for learners to interact and complete tasks through the use of advance technology such mobile or smart phones. Moore described a less structured programme allows students to seek their own exploration through the use of various media that aims to meet their needs. Consequently, this decreases the transactional distance. In this case, learners are not forced to be completely autonomous which helps reduce the learners’ feeling of isolation and demotivation.

**What are the insights of English teachers in teaching literature during pandemic?**

Table 3. *Insights of English Teachers in Teaching Literature During Pandemic*

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Core Ideas</i>
Connecting Literary Text to Increase Understanding of Literary Piece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problems or issues found in the story must link to relevant experiences of the students</li> <li>• Students were tasked to find themes of the story that influences them as person or students.</li> </ul>
Involving Family Members to Develop Literary Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing reflective questions based from literary themes to increase understanding of the story.</li> <li>• Students were allowed to share with their parents in order to obtain opinions and insights from them.</li> <li>• Skills in collaboration can be somehow acquired by involving immediate family members.</li> </ul>
Enriching Teaching Literary Experiences Through Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow students to tap family members if there will drama or role-playing activity.</li> <li>• Communication with colleagues is of great help upon sharing appropriate things to do in teaching the subject.</li> <li>• Advices from colleagues is vital to stay updated to new approach and strategies in teaching the literary subject.</li> <li>• Communicating salient points to colleagues specifically enhancing the teaching-learning process on teaching literature is important.</li> </ul>
Sustaining Literature Performance-Based Activities Amidst Distance Gap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The gap on distance must not compromise the authenticity of assessing the students.</li> </ul>
Increasing Resourcefulness Amidst the Challenge of Times	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher may use different media to still able the students perform authentic tasks.</li> <li>• Taking advantage of the opportunity that students are active online by allowing them perform activities to deepen the understanding of the topic.</li> <li>• Manage what is available online, finding suitable references for the learners is really important.</li> <li>• Researching and generating new ideas about the topic online and share these to the students.</li> <li>• Optimize available resources to increase understanding of the students.</li> <li>• Finding necessary materials to support the lesson is vital in teaching literature subject.</li> </ul>

With the theme, connecting literary text to increase understanding of the literary piece, learners learn something new when they are able to make connections between what they are currently experiencing and something they already know. When make few or no connections, learning within these experiences is difficult and easily forgotten. By teaching students how to connect to text they are able to better understand what they are reading. This can be associated to Moore’s domain of transactional distance which is learner-content interaction. When teacher aimed to offer flexible learning content such giving an even more contextualized and less structured activities to the students, a tendency of decreasing the transactional distance is greater (Moore 35.)

With the theme, involving family members to develop literary skills, collaborative learning with significant others may help develop the collaboration skills of the learners (Laal and Laal in Chijioke et al. 72), hence, it involves working together to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product. In teaching literature subject, performance activities that involve collaboration is inseparable. This gained insight is significance for lowering transactional distance through modifying authentic activities. These should be accorded with the learners’ need and preference. Educators according to Moore have its control to modify the activity to make the learners able to develop collaboration skills even amidst pandemic (Moore and Diehl 39).

With the theme, enriching teaching literary experiences through collaboration, collaborative teaching environments provide opportunities for teachers to learn from and with each other on an ongoing basis. Active collaboration is particularly important for

creating a growth-based learning environment and for increasing student learning progress. Research shows that teachers who work together and learn from each other are more successful in improving student outcomes than those who work alone. In Moore's transactional distance, this teaching approach is recognized as less structured as it seeks to understand and respond to what is happening for their learners.

With the theme, sustaining authentic-based activities amidst distance gap, learner-interface interaction as additional domain in Moore's transactional distance theory, supported the aforementioned theme. The greater learner-interface interaction, the lesser the distance felt by the learners and the more it increases learners' participation, even when they are learning from home. Given that students are more technologically inclined, the type of interaction gives teachers additional opportunities to take advantage of the situation and develop instructional strategies that use technology, particularly in delivering authentic assessments (Chen, 2001).

With the theme, increasing resourcefulness amidst the challenge of times, teacher resourcefulness is the ability to use available teaching materials to get the best results from students. Instructional resources, such as electronic, are considered significant in maximizing learners' comprehension during the teaching and learning process. The greater learner-interface interaction, the more likely it is that they will be able to access educational resources online. However, supply of electronic resources or references depends on the rigidity or flexibility of the teaching methodologies of the teacher, and the extent to which a program can accommodate or be responsive to each learner's specific needs and preferences.

**Implication for Teaching Practices.** Interaction has always been inseparable in the teaching-learning process. It provides opportunity for teachers and learners to increase understanding of the lesson. However, pandemic partially if not completely compromised interaction in teaching literature subject in terms of teacher-learners, learner-content, and learner-learner interaction. Thus, this study will serve as a guide for English teachers how to handle the same struggle as to employing different strategies in teaching the subject amidst the challenge of distance.

For public and private school administrators, this study may help them be responsive of the English teacher's experiences and provide solutions to the challenges such as provision of facilities like technology support to help sustain interaction without compromising the learning of the students where physical nearness is strictly restricted. Moreover, they may provide seminar and workshops to enhance teachers' proficiency in using digital devices to help increase interaction to both teacher and learners and the learning content.

The situation, which learning from home, is always been a threat to education sector, hence, may the Department of Education and private school organization be aware of the situation in teaching literary subject during pandemic. This may give them a basis for creating a special curricular where involvement of technology in teaching-learning process is a topmost priority.

**Implication for Future Research.** The findings presented were limited to English teachers' lived experiences in teaching literature under the new normal, ways in which they cope with their lived experiences, and their insights in teaching literature during the pandemic, the implication of this study suggests that further study should be made to confirm the responses of the teachers using larger number of respondents which might lead to discovery of additional teaching strategies to be used when approach with similar situation. The findings of this study may not be a whole representation of all English public and private English literature teachers in the division of Davao de Oro.

## Conclusion

Physical presence of teacher and learners is vital in teaching literature subject to sustain natural flow of ideas and interaction but due to physical restraint, it apparently made teaching difficult. However, English teachers are continuing to find and discover ways and effective strategies in teaching literature in order not to completely compromise students' learning amidst the challenge of distance using various digital platforms. In the future, where the same situation is always a threat to education sector, this study will lead to a wider viewpoint to English teachers in teaching literary subject.

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