Stories and Narratives of Teachers on Online Professional Development

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Abstract

This qualitative study dug out the lived experiences on online professional development of seven public school teachers in Ibajay West District, Division of Aklan through the use of phenomenological research design. The study revealed through the in-depth interviews with the participants that online professional development programs provided the participants with a meaningful, efficient, and evident learning that are of great help in their personal and professional growth. Poor internet connectivity, lack of interaction and collaboration among participants, less connection between the speaker and listeners, and health issues were the predominant challenges that the participants have experienced during online professional developments. However, they also confronted struggles on maintaining a balance between the demands of work and home chores, as well as failures on connectivity and efficient engagement on online activities due to the complex technical use of ICT, poor internet connections and the distractions that prevent them from focusing which also take a toll on their mental health. Teachers surmounted these challenges by employing a positive attitude towards it, keeping their faith in God, and managing their time properly. A proposed intervention program to address the results of the study was done to provide assistance and alternative solutions to the problems and experiences of teachers in online professional development programs. The project targets to establish partners and linkages in order to easily deliver the desired services effectively.

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Introduction

Professional development of teachers is one of the key elements in the advancement of school's performance. It is vital for both improving teaching and increasing the students' learning and achievements. Quality of instruction is ensured when teachers are engaged in keeping up with changes in performance standards, become familiar with new methods of teaching in the content areas, learn how to make the most effective instructional use of new technologies for teaching and learning, and adapt their teaching to shifting school environments and increasingly diverse learners.

Online professional development for teachers had been employed in the field for some time, but is not the popular choice of many. Among the many factors, struggle in the internet connectivity is the most challenging one. But teachers were left no choice when pandemic came. Given the limitations for group gatherings, web-based platforms in conducting seminars, symposiums, training-workshops, among others was utilized. It opened the door for online professional development to prosper and become prevalent to the life of teachers in the District of Ibajay West. Numerous trainings, seminars, workshops and courses are being conducted online. Teachers were even given a free SIM card with free load to maximize their participation. This online professional development provided them with the opportunity to keep abreast with the recent development in the educational system straight from the higher authorities in the central office and had given them the chance to clarify their thinking about complex educational issues.

Tong, et. al. (2015) noted that teachers were overwhelmingly positive toward virtual professional development, and is a gateway to increasing the scalability of strategies presented in the online setting. However, researchers have recommended that online professional development be examined for effectiveness in terms of teachers' knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, and classroom practices (Desimone, 2009).

Hence, this study was set out to get insights and explore the experiences, challenges and coping mechanisms on online professional development of teachers at the District of Ibajay West. Further, this gave an idea to the researcher, being a school head, the correct intervention programs to be made and implemented in the conduct of online professional development.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used phenomenology to describe the lived experiences of the seven teachers in online professional development. According to Creswell (2013) phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. The fundamental goal of the approach is to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon. It uses a combination of methods, such as conducting interviews, reading documents, or visiting places and events, to understand the challenges of teachers in online professional development by relying on their own perspectives to provide insights and how they cope to certain situations.

Participants of the Study

The seven (7) participants of this study are public school teachers in the Ibajay West District with age ranges from 25 to 45, with more than 3 years of teaching experience and have undergone online professional development.

Data Gathering Instrument

The research instrument used in gathering the data was a semi-structured interview guide consisting of two parts. Pre-determined open-ended interview questions focused on exploring the lived experiences, challenges and coping mechanisms in online professional development of teachers. However, additional questions were also asked by the researcher during the interview to explore teachers' experiences more in-depth when considered necessary. The interview guide was divided into two parts.

Part I gathered information on the demographic information about the participants' age, gender, address, teaching experience, teaching position, and subjects taught.

Part II generated answers on their lived experiences, challenges and coping mechanisms on online professional development.

Data Gathering Procedure

The letter of permission to conduct study for the Schools Division Superintendent, District Supervisor, School Heads and Participants were secured before conducting the interview. The researcher and the participants set the time for the interview. Each interview was recorded for the researcher to focus all her attention to the participants and the content of the interview.

All the gathered data were carefully recorded, transcribed, coded, interpreted and individually categorized according to themes.

Data Analysis Procedure

Colaizzi's method of data analysis was used in interpreting the qualitative research data gathered to identify meaningful information and organize it into themes or categories. The following steps represent the Collaizzi process for case study data analysis (cited in Sander, 2003, Speziale & Carpenter, 2007).

Each transcript will be read and re-read to obtain a general sense of the whole content of the study. For each transcript, significant statements that pertain to the case under study will be extracted. These statements will be recorded on a separate sheet noting their pages and line numbers.

Meaning will be formulated from the significant statements. The formulated meanings will be sort into categories and cluster of themes. The finding of the study will be integrated into a description under a phenomenological research design. The fundamental structure of the phenomenological design is described.

Finally, validation of the findings will be sought from the research participants to compare the researcher's descriptive results with their experiences.

Ethical Consideration

In the conduct of this study, the researcher ensured all the necessary letters of consent were secured and proper coordination with people who have direct involvement in this study was properly conducted.

In addition, letter of informed consent was given to the participants to orient them on the purpose of the study and for them to know their extent of participation in the study being undertaken.

The researcher ensured the anonymity of the teacher-participants by using pseudonyms to conceal their real identity. All the information disclosed by the participants were treated with utmost confidentiality by strictly adhering to the provisions of Republic Act 10173 or the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

Findings

Based on the results, the major findings of the study revealed that online professional development programs provided the participants with meaningful, efficient and evident learning that are of great help in their personal and professional growth. Attending in online professional development programs gave teachers new ideas and updates in their profession. It continually retool, reskill and upskill their knowledge on the current trends and programs of the Department.

Poor internet connectivity, lack of interaction and collaboration among participants, less connection between the speaker and listeners, and health issues are the predominant challenges that the participants have experienced during online professional developments. Other struggles include maintaining a balance between the demands of work and home chores, complex technical use of ICT, distractions, and mental issues.

Teachers surmounted the challenges in online professional development by employing a positive attitude towards it, keeping their faith in God, and managing their time properly. They learned to set their priorities, stretched their learning capabilities, and prioritized self-care.

Conclusion

The following conclusions are met based on the study's findings:

- Online professional development programs served as a refresher for teachers. In the advent of the pandemic, their progress was put on hold because of the many limitations being set by the IATF. The call of the Department that "learning must continue" does not apply to learners alone but to the teachers as well. This online professional development paved the way to the continuous improvement in the educational system. Teachers acquired new and meaningful learning despite of the numerous glitches in the delivery.
- A lot of challenges and struggles were met by the teachers during online professional developments. These are attributed to the lack of involvement of teachers on the design of the program, the choice of content that are being offered, as well as the consideration of their learning needs and technological circumstances. The hindrances affected the acquisition of maximum learning experience of teachers.
- Teachers exhibit different coping mechanisms, stretched their capabilities and even discover new skills amid the challenges in online professional developments. The need to keep abreast

with the recent development and modern trends in education drove them to be resilient, thus exerted efforts to fill the gap. This level of interest and motivation of these teachers need to be maintained to ensure the maximum attainment of the goals and objectives of online professional developments.

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