

Adjusting to the New Normal Education: Perceptions and Experiences of Fellow Junior High School Teachers on the Conduct of Class Observation this COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: *This qualitative study primarily aims to understand the perceptions and experiences of fellow junior high school teachers regarding the conduct of class observation this School Year 2020-2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic by identifying the (1) the notable perceptions of junior high school teachers on the importance of the conduct of classroom observation this pandemic period?; (2) their notable experiences in the actual delivery of their lesson during the observation period; and (3) their ways of coping up with the expectations of class observation this pandemic period. A phenomenological research design is utilized through a friendly interview with 15 teachers as informants of the study. Transcripts of the interview were processed using the seven-stage Colaizzi's Method of processing qualitative data. Results of the study revealed three emergent themes, which are A Requirement for Compliance, Connection Driven Performance, and Unlimited Power. Accordingly, teachers' perceptions on the importance of class observation have to sides, which are (1) for the improvement of teachers' competence in the service and (2) for the compliance of the policy guidelines despite the several adjustments in the field. Regarding teachers' notable experiences during class observation, informants stated that stable connection, both internet signal and connection among fellow teachers, are very important, with mastery of the subject matter as the most essential factor for a successful delivery of the lesson. To cope up with the expectations of classroom observation this pandemic period, unlimited diligence serves as the informants' weapon in facing the unlimited teaching-related tasks. With the findings and conclusions presented, the study recommends instructional leaders and teachers to collaboratively harmonize and strategize initiatives relative to class observation to streamline the tasks to be accomplished for the benefits of both parties.*

Keywords — new normal; perceptions and experiences; junior high school teachers; class observation; COVID-19 pandemic

1. INTRODUCTION

Philippine schools must continue through a package of education interventions crafted collaboratively by the Department of Education (DepEd) and key education stakeholders in respond to the challenges brought about by COVID-19 pandemic. The implementation of the K to 12 must continue despite the pandemic with highest consideration to the safety of teachers and learners nationwide, thus applying the most appropriate and practical distance learning delivery modality. [1] After a number of postponements in the opening of classes due to health restrictions in the country, the School Year 2020-2021 officially started on October 5 [2] to continue the schooling of Filipino schoolchildren. Recognizing the value of flexibility in the teaching-learning process based on the differentiated contexts of teachers and learners across the nation, the department issued another policy guideline named as *Academic Ease* which primarily aims to reduce the stress and anxiety of both teachers and learners in adjusting to the new mode of schooling in the pandemic. [3]

On January 2021, DepEd issued the much-awaited guidelines of school heads and teachers on how to conduct class observation as part of the Results-based Performance Management System (RPMS) this new normal. The said issuance specified that, exclusively for this school year of

distance learning, class observation may be done on three modes based on the learning modalities being implemented in school, these are: (1) online observation, (2) video lesson observation, or (3) observation of a demonstration teaching via Learning Action Cell (LAC).[4] Classroom observation is said to be the most important procedure in ensuring that the curriculum is effectively implemented to its target beneficiaries, who are the learners, the center of the teaching-learning engagement. Cabigao (2021) stated that is a way of magnifying teachers' strengths worthy of emulation by their colleagues for more fruitful delivery of the lesson and possible replication for the continuous improvement of the teaching practice. He also noted that teachers' performance should be assessed and given appropriate instructional support to enable them to become effective facilitators of learning in the classroom. [5] Teachers' high performance are proven to produce high quality teaching performance, benefiting the learners as the center of the teaching-learning process.

Classroom observation, per DepEd policy guidelines, is an integral part of the assessment of teachers' performance at the end of each rating period. The Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers – Results-based Performance Management System (PPST-RPMS) mandated that the results of the class observation shall be used not solely for performance appraisal purposes only, but likewise for coaching and mentoring initiatives which will lead in

supporting the teachers' on-going professional development [4, 7].

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The study sought to understand the perceptions and experiences of fellow junior high school teachers regarding the conduct of class observation this School Year 2020-2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. It sought answers to the following specific questions: (1) What are the notable perceptions of junior high school teachers on the importance of the conduct of classroom observation this pandemic period?; (2) What are the notable experiences of junior high school teachers in the delivery of their lesson during the observation period?; and (3) How does junior high school teachers cope up with the expectations of class observation this pandemic period?

The study was conducted with the following assumptions: (1) Junior high school teachers understand the importance of the conduct of classroom observation this pandemic period; (2) their mastery of the subject matter is the key factor in a successful delivery of lesson; and (3) they are adapting well to meet the expectations of class observation this pandemic period.

3. METHODOLOGY

A phenomenological qualitative research design is utilized in this study to talk about the significant perceptions and experiences of fellow junior high school teachers to the deeper understanding. Vagle [8] noted that this type of research is very accurate in the identification of what makes normal genuinely *normal*, by exploring the phenomena or the life-to-life bases that the informants of the study possess to deepen the perspective in relation to the theme of the research. A friendly interview was conducted to narrate the significant and firsthand experiences of the concerned individuals which will strengthen the perspective needed for the phenomenology of the study (Creswell) [9].

Purposive sampling is used to determine the number of informants of the study under the following criteria: (1) junior high school teachers this School Year 2020-2021; (2) DepEd permanent teachers for at least three years from the time of the study; (3) handling classes under the modular distance learning modality; and (4) teaching within the First Legislative District of Bulacan. The researcher utilized a semi-structured interview for a 30-minute session, the instrument was crafted in consideration of its the flexibility to create an accommodating and positive environment during the actual interview.

The researcher used the seven-stage Colaizzi's Method of processing qualitative data (Sanders) [10], which includes: (1) familiarization; (2) identifying significant statements; (3) formulating meanings; (4) clustering themes; (5) developing

an exhaustive description; (6) producing the fundamental structure; and (7) seeking verification of the fundamental structure.

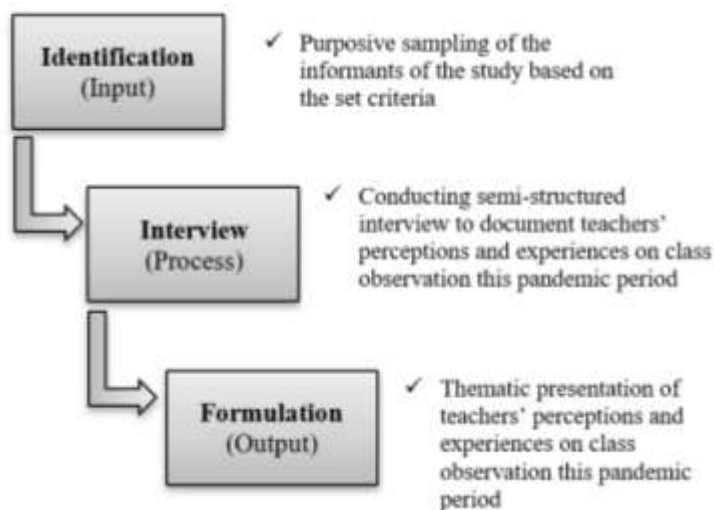


Fig. 1. Conceptual Model of the Study

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the interview sessions, the researcher encoded the responses. Three themes arose from the results of the processing of the encoded responses. These emergent themes are categorized from the fellow junior high school teachers' perceptions and experiences in the conduct of class observation this pandemic period. These themes are as follows: *A Requirement for Compliance*, *Connection Driven Performance*, and *Unlimited Power*.

Graded class observation started this January 2021 upon the released of DepEd's new guidelines which are exclusive this pandemic period. Teachers' perceptions on its importance were solicited and their collected responses posed an emergent theme *A Requirement for Compliance*, for according to most of them, the policy guidelines must be satisfied for the Improvement of Teaching Skills and as it is Badly Needed. Informants believed that is it for improvement purposes of teachers' competence, a way of helping them improve the craft as frontliners of education. A sub-theme emerged stating that and class observation must be done, as mandated by DepEd, no matter what happened, an order that must be followed, at all costs. Table 1 summarizes the perceptions of the informants on the importance of class observation this pandemic period.

Table 1. JHS Teachers' Perceptions on the Importance of Class Observation

Theme	Theme Clusters	Formulated Meaning
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A Requirement for Compliance	Improvement of Teaching Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class observation helps teachers improve their teaching performance. • Class observation identifies teachers' point for improvement. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fellow teachers' help is very evident in the conduct of class observation thru virtual LAC sessions.
	Badly Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct of class observation is part of Department Heads/ School Heads' KRA. • Class observation must be conducted against all odds. 			

The show must go on, as a popular adage says, so does with the class observation amidst this pandemic period. Teachers having modular distance learning modality underwent class observation through Learning Action Cell (LAC) session, either through face-to-face or virtual session. Informants stated that stable connection played a crucial role on the success of their teaching presentation, and this stable connection refers not only to an *internet connection* but as well as to a *friend connection*. According to them, glitches on the internet connection is highly expected any time during the presentation, but its risk can be mitigated with the support of colleagues who are willing to offer technical assistance to address such ICT-related flaws while the teaching presentation is on progress. Moreover, fellow teachers' participation is indeed helpful to set the directions of the teaching episode in the right direction throughout the delivery of the lesson. Should there be glitches to both internet and friend connection, the last resort of the teacher is the high level of mastery of the subject matter as reflected on the confidence level being manifested during the lesson presentation. Table 2 capsulizes the responses of the informants on their notable experiences during class observation.

Table 2. JHS Teachers' Notable Experiences During Class Observation

Theme	Theme Clusters	Formulated Meaning
Connection Driven Performance	Stable Internet Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stable internet connection is very important to deliver the lesson effectively. • Internet connection causes some problem due to poor signal in the area where the teacher resides.
	Stable Friend Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistance for colleagues helps teacher delivers her lesson despite poor internet connection.

This school year at this pandemic period poses a big challenge to educators especially to teachers on how to effectively perform their duties and responsibilities of teaching schoolchildren through various distance learning delivery modalities. One of those challenges is on how to prepare for a class observation this pandemic period where everyone is in the middle of adjustment from the sudden shift of teaching-learning episodes due to strict compliance with the health quarantine protocols. This study solicited teachers' experiences on how they are coping up with the expectations of class observation this pandemic period. Informants said that through their Unlimited Power, brought by unlimited commitment in the service despite the unlimited works, they are surviving successfully. According to them, the best weapon at this time to tackle the never-ending tasks in the service is their never-ending commitment as teachers, as an informant said: "*Napapagod 'pagkat kami'y tao, subalit di susuko 'pagkat kami ay guro.*" [We get tired as humans, but we'll never give up because we are teachers.] Table 3 presents the teachers' responses on how they cope up with class observation expectations this pandemic period.

Table 3. JHS Teachers' Coping Up with the Class Observation Expectations this Pandemic Period

Theme	Theme Clusters	Formulated Meaning
Unlimited Power	Unlimited Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers' commitment in the service are always high despite the numerous reports to be submitted. • Teachers are faithfully doing their duties and responsibilities during this New Normal era.
	Unlimited Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doing teaching-related works are accomplished even beyond the official time. • To finish the unlimited works, working on weekends and all night long is just the New Normal.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Using Colaizzi's Method of qualitative data processing and interpretation, the study was able to deduce that: (1) teachers' perceptions on class observation is generally for compliance in the service, though it serve important purposes, the thought that its conduct this pandemic period is somehow just for strict compliance of the established requirement; (2) internet connection plays an important role in the successful conduct of teachers' class observation this pandemic period, its stability contributes for a smooth preparation and delivery of the lesson, with the compliment assistance of colleagues either through internet connection or instructional support, however, the mastery of the subject matter is still the most essential preparation that teachers should have to deliver the lesson well; and (3) junior high school teachers are coping up with the class observation expectations this pandemic period through their unlimited commitment in the performance of their duties and doing/finishing teaching-related works even beyond the official time of their duty.

With the aforementioned findings and conclusions, the study recommended to: (1) harmonize the instructional leaders and teachers' orientation on class observation to further enhance each other's commitment in conducting it through dialogues, focus group discussion, and the like; (2) strengthen the stable connection of instructional leaders and teachers to lessen the gaps brought by the present not so good internet connection capacity through congenial communications, consultations, and the like; and lastly, (3) strategize initiatives in the local level on how to minimize the paperwork assignment of teachers that might hinder the effective preparation for their daily teaching-learning engagement.

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