UNPACKING THE STORIES BEHIND THE CRAFTING OF MODULES AMONG ENGLISH COLLEGE INSTRUCTORS: A PHENOMENOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Quality education has been the constant aim and commitment of the tertiary institutions (TEIs) in the Philippines. This commitment has been put to test during the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic which started in January 2019. During this time, English instructors were suddenly compelled to devise self-learning modules to support their learners' transition to blended learning. Hence, the purpose of the study was to uncover the lived experiences of college instructors who were assigned to become module writers for English courses. The study is qualitative research adopting the phenomenological approach. Using purposive sampling, the participating 14 college instructors were identified and divided equally for in-depth interview and focus group discussion. Data were analyzed through the use of coding and thematic analysis. Results revealed the experiences of the participants: (1) lack of reference materials, (2) alignment of activities to objectives, (3) pressures on the limited time, (4) doubts on the quality of the module, (5) mixed emotions, and (6) lack of knowledge. In response to the challenges they have encountered, they deem the following coping strategies as essential: (7) collaborated with colleagues, (8) motivated by students' learning, (9) asked for God's providence, (10) conducted peer review, and (11) utilized different references. Upon reflecting on their entire experience, they arrived at the following insights: (12) provision of trainings and seminars, (13) reduction of unnecessary activities in the modules, (14) provision of resource materials, (15) importance of preparation, and (16) provision of adequate time in writing the module. The results, imply that certain improvements should be made within the institution to improve the writing experiences of the assigned English instructors as well as enhance the overall quality of the produced modules. This study is therefore deemed significant as this highly contributes to the body of knowledge related to materials development.

Keywords: crafting of modules, English college instructors, qualitative-phenomenological inquiry, thematic analysis, Province of Davao del Norte

INTRODUCTION

The current COVID-19 pandemic has drastically affected the educational sectors around the world. As a result, English teachers in the academes were forced to become module writers due to the emerging need to proceed with modular distance learning in the absence of face-to-face instruction. In doing so, English writers were exposed to various hardships and difficulties.

In India, English teachers found module writing as tedious, time-consuming, and mentally exhausting. Generally, they considered it as an unhappy experience (Boruah, 2018). Meanwhile, in the Philippines, module writers in the Department of Education (DepEd) were also rushed and blamed for the erroneous entries found

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in the learners' modules (Nicholls, 2020). In the Municipality of Kapalong, English module writers in college were pressured to simplify English activities as well as search for reliable reference materials.

There were studies which explored the experiences pertinent on online learning such as those of Mohmmed et al. (2020) and Khalil et al. (2020). No studies have yet explored on the English writers' experience in writing modules. Moreover, there is importance in conducting this study, knowing that learners rely heavily on modules while the pandemic is ongoing. To support, the results of the study may potentially bear significant implications which could empower the English teachers who write modules for their students. Therefore, all of these premises prompted me to pursue this study.

To introduce this academic work, the study's purpose was mainly to explore the lived experiences of English college instructors in writing modules for tertiary students. The study was also anchored to three theoretical supports: Gagné's (1985) nine-step instructional design, Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) materials model design, and Bruner's (1977) constructivism theory. The theories reinforce the contention that English instructors have to write learning modules in a manner wherein learners could learn the target language on their own.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to uncover the lived experiences of college instructors who were assigned to become module writers for English courses. It sought to 1). Document the experiences of college instructors in writing English modules for tertiary students, 2) Uncover how the college instructors cope with the challenges in writing English modules for tertiary students 3) Unveil the insights of college instructors in writing English modules for tertiary students

METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative in nature for it pertains to the endeavor of the researcher to understand the situation and its uniqueness, in relation to its context and the interactions inscribed herein. Moreover, this research design is described as an investigation of things in their natural settings (Lune & Berg, 2017).

The researcher used phenomenology which aimed to shed light on the specific and pinpoint the phenomena through the perspectives of the actors inscribed within the given situation. From the human point of view, this is usually interpreted as an act of collecting deep information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as discussions and participant observation, interviews, and representing this from the points of view of the research participants (Lune & Berg, 2017).

The researcher utilized phenomenology as it is greatly suitable in this academic endeavor. Given the fact that the study only aims to account for the lived experiences of the participants in this study who are the English college instructor and recognized the need to conduct a phenomenological study in my immediate setting.

The participants of the study were the English instructors. Using purposive sampling, the researcher identified and recruited 14 English college instructors in Kapalong, Davao del Norte. The participants were divided equally for the in-depth interview (IDI) and focus group discussion (FGD). The inclusion criteria of the study were the following: (a.) each participant must be a college instructor working in a college at Kapalong, Davao del Norte; (b.) the participant must also have graduated with at least a degree in Bachelor of Secondary Education Major (BSEd) in English; and above these, (c.) the participant must be assigned to write a module aligned specifically to English discipline.

Prior to the conduct of this inquiry, an endorsement letter was secured which was duly signed by the Dean of the Graduate School. The study was also subjected to a thorough ethical review headed by the institution's Research Ethics Committee (REC). After securing a compliance certificate from the said committee, the researcher began my data collection by identifying my research participants and asking for their informed consent via digital means such as: Facebook and e-mail transactions).

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Once the schedule was set, the researcher started with the in-depth interviews via Zoom. Afterwards, I began the focus group discussion using the same virtual platform. The researcher recorded our Zoom cloud meetings with their consent and permission. Moreover, concrete measures were followed in maintaining confidentiality of these digital records.

After the conduct of the study, the researcher rigorously transcribed the recorded data. Then, the researcher contacted again my participants to ask for their help in checking the correctness of the produced transcripts. Once the participants agreed that the transcripts were accurately encoded, they gave their signed member checking certificate which they sent via Facebook Messenger. To conclude the process, the researcher conferred tokens to each of my research participants as a sign of my gratitude for their participation.

In this study, the researcher utilized thematic analysis to search for commonalities among the ideas or codes previously derived from the codification process. Once the thematic analysis was done, the formulation of core ideas did follow. Out of the coded ideas, core ideas were gleaned and formulated which entail the important idea that each response contains. After core ideas were finalized, clustering of ideas was done to group together the core ideas which point to a single theme. In this process, themes with core ideas were generated which had become the results of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Experiences of College Instructors in Writing English Modules for Tertiary Students

The first research question inquired on the experiences of the college instructors in writing the English module for tertiary students. To answer this one, the following themes were identified: lack of reference materials, alignment of activities to objectives, pressures on the limited time, doubts on the quality of the module, mixed emotions, and lack of knowledge. Generally speaking, their experiences leaned toward the challenges that they encountered upon writing the mentioned learning materials.

Table 1

Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Experiences of College Instructors in Writing English Modules for Tertiary Students

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Lack of Reference Materials	• browsing of references as difficult due to unstable internet connection • writing for courses with insufficient resources and syllabus • lacking books and references in the library • experiencing difficulty to write due to the absence of a definite format • resorting to references with questionable accuracy and legitimacy • being assigned to a course with no available books and references • writing while having no references and only relying on the internet • buying books using one's money
Alignment of Activities to Objectives	• struggling to consider the nature, level of intellect, and learning styles of the learner in writing the activities • having difficulty in thinking of activities suited for college learners • facing struggles in incorporating listening and speaking activities • coming across difficulties in converting the activities into self-paced form • struggling to align activities to the objectives • finding difficulty in contextualizing the activities to the current situation • encountering difficulties in making engaging activities for the learners
Pressures on the Limited Time	• feeling pressured to write due to the given span of time • finishing the entire process in few months • procrastinating and lacking time management • having no more time to review the modules because of the impending deadline • experiencing time pressure due to other duties • crafting the modules in a very short amount of time • being stressed and frustrated in chasing the deadlines
Doubts on the Quality of Module	• feeling doubtful and pressured to commit mistakes • doubting the attainability of listening activities among students who lack the technology • being conscious of whether the students could learn anything from the modules • being doubtful on the contents of the modules due to lack of trainings and seminars • being doubtful that the difficult topics in face-to-face classes can be delivered through the modules • being hesitant on the quality due to limited resources
Mixed Emotions	• feeling excited yet pressured in writing the modules • feeling pressured at the same time delighted and privileged to contribute to a noble task • feeling pleased yet doubtful as a first-time writer • feeling happy and excited to write modules for handled subjects
Lack of Knowledge	• feeling nervous and pressured because of zero experience • lacking the knowledge to deliver courses in higher English • feeling clueless on what are the considerations in writing • feeling nervous and clueless on where to start and how the writing process goes

In support, Boruah (2018) reported that module writing entails plenty of challenges to the

assigned module writer. More so, Kapu et al. (2018) reinforced that writing English modules become challenging, especially when the writer is not a native speaker of the target language.

2. Coping Mechanisms of College Instructors on the Challenges Encountered in Writing the English Modules

Table 2
Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Coping Mechanisms of College Instructors on the Challenges Encountered in Writing the English Modules

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Collaborated with Colleague	• collaborating with faculty members • letting one's colleague check the output for grammatical errors on top of personal checking • working with the experts and the academic council • being guided by the administration together with the resource speaker • listening and asking for expert advice • working with the program head, the persons in charge, and other colleagues • discussing with co-teachers who have the same subject • asking help from the instructors who taught the course as well as the technical working group
Motivated by Students' Learning	• being inspired to write for students to learn amidst the pandemic • being motivated by the possible benefits of the modules to the students • being motivated by the students because they are the recipients of the modules • writing modules out of concern for the students' welfare • finishing the modules due to knowing the current hardships of students • writing modules for the learners to have materials when classes begin
Asked for God's Providence	• offering a prayer to the One who provides the resources • asking for spiritual guidance and wisdom • acknowledging that we owe everything from God • asking for divine intervention in crafting the module • running to God in times of difficulties
Conducted Peer Review	• undergoing the output through thorough checking by the co-teachers, the academic council, and experts • letting others notice and check the forgotten module entries • presenting and consulting the module to the panel of experts • undergoing the output to a review conducted by the technical working group
Utilized Different References	• referring to multiple printed and non-printed materials and using English as a Second Language (ESL) websites as sources • referring to Google • reading again the used references • relying not only on people but also on the internet

The second research question explored the coping mechanisms of the college instructors on the challenges of writing the English modules for tertiary students. In response to the question, the following themes were determined: collaborated with colleagues, motivated by students' learning, asked for God's providence, conducted peer review, and utilized different references. Broadly speaking, the instructors utilized various ways and innovations to solve their experienced plights and inadequacies in the entire writing process. As supported by Honigsfeld and Nordmeyer (2020), collaboration among teachers is the key to survive the challenges in this time of pandemic. Moreover, Savery (2015) claimed that using various references aid teachers on their preparation of instruction in classes.

3. Insights of College Instructors in Writing English Modules for Tertiary Students

Table 3
Major Themes and Core Ideas on Insights of College Instructors in Writing English Modules for Tertiary Students

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Provision of Trainings and Seminars	• invite resource speakers who are well-versed in teaching English • provide not just a few but several trainings for writers • conduct a capacity building among module writers for skill enhancement • provide in-service training prior to the start of the semester • update the writers' knowledge about the new trends via constant trainings • provide stress management seminars for writers as part of the preparation
Reduction of Unnecessary Activities in the Module	• reduce the activities to the simple and important ones • focus only on the important and attainable activities • omit the unimportant activities • improve the redundant activities by finding new and interesting ones • reduce the number of activities to lessen the stress of the students and the instructors
Provision of Resource Materials	• supply references for easier and time-efficient writing • furnish resources and a fast internet connection to writers • provide available books to writers • give updated references to writers
Importance of Preparation	• be prepared in all aspects of being a writer • prepare the available source materials as fundamental to the task • be exposed to the workshop as an important preparation • be open to learning the English course as essential to writing preparation
Provision of Adequate Time in Writing the Module	• give sufficient time because having lesser time in writing compromises the quality of the modules • provide enough time for and prepared syllabus to writers for a faster writing process • provide ample time to enable writers to plan for the best lessons and activities

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The third research question revealed the insights of the college instructors in writing the English modules for tertiary students. These insights include: provision of trainings and seminars, reduction of unnecessary activities in the modules, provision of resource materials, importance of preparation, and provision of adequate time in writing the module. In connection, Sikki et al. (2013) remarked that teachers should be continuously provided with plenty of opportunities to grow as a professional. More so, provision of resource materials is also a vital component to prepare the teachers to undertake professional development endeavors as well as teach with competence in the classroom (Smart & Jagannathan, 2018; GEM Report, 2016). More so, it is said that activities should be short and limited in a certain number for the learners to maximize the learning opportunities given to them (Larawan, 2013).

CONCLUSIONS

In a summary, the participants have generally expressed their hardships and stress toward the deadlines, inadequate resources, insufficient trainings, as well as the struggles in writing the contents of the English modules. These imply that certain improvements should be made within the institution to improve the writing experiences of the assigned English instructors as well as to enhance the overall quality of the produced modules. This study is therefore deemed significant as this highly contributes to the body of knowledge related to materials development.

Being a module writer, the researcher realized that the key experiences revealed by the participants were actually similar to mine. Somehow, the study has been empowering on my part in the sense that it has given me the voice to retell my story from other people's perspectives. the researcher felt the fulfillment knowing that she is never alone and lonely in this long-winded journey.

More importantly, the whole scholarly venture has been a worthwhile experience. Upon talking with the English module writers, the researcher learned a lot with regards to teaching English during the new normal. This whole undertaking has also been a meaningful professional development on my account. It expanded further my horizons in research. It taught me patience, endurance, perseverance, and grit. She learned lessons that she would never know from books and classes. Most essentially, she was delighted by the fact that she reached the concluding part of the study.

To reciprocate the important lessons that this research has taught the researcher, she hopes that this humble work would be used as an instrument to improve the module writing experience of all the college instructors who are assigned to write English modules. She also hopes that through this inquiry, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) would take more action to aid the college instructors on their plights, especially today that people are still in the new normal. Hopefully, more trainings and seminars will be provided to address the needs of the college module writers. Lastly, she hopes that this research study has brought the same understanding and learnings to whoever reads this manuscript until its last page.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has been deemed rich in terms of the solutions it proposed to address the various problems of writers in crafting the English modules for their tertiary students. Primarily, for the module writers, the study enumerated that they may do the following: (a) seek collaboration with other teachers, (b) utilize multiple reference materials in the writing process, (c) find recreational activities in certain occasions to ease their stress, (d) reduce the number of activities in the module, as well as (e) attend more trainings and seminars to enrich their module writing experience.

Further, for the college administrators, they may provide more trainings and reference materials for the teachers to utilize in their writing projects. Moreover, they may plot convenient schedules wherein writers may no longer be pressured and frustrated with the deadlines. Also, they may offer enticing rewards for those who accomplished the module writing projects to motivate further the writers.

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In addition, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) may also realize the importance of capacitating the writers assigned to craft English modules. They may offer more trainings and seminars on module writing in general, teaching literature, teaching linguistics, and applying stress management to assist the writers on the demanding task of designing the English modules for their tertiary students.

Finally, to get more extensive answers to the questions of this study, it is recommended to conduct further research using a large number of participants and should cover a wider range of schools. Furthermore, it is recommended to research further about the evaluation of the produced modular materials for English courses. Experts from various fields are enjoined to scrutinize the grammar, content, presentation, and language of the said materials. More importantly, it is also wise to include the feedback of the students on the evaluative research. Using the insights formed from these future researches may lead to the improvement of the existing English modules.

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Janice A. Fernandez, Ph.D., finished her Bachelor of Secondary Education Major in English in University of Mindanao - Tagum College in March 2006. In 2013, she completed her Master of Arts in Education Major in Teaching English, bagging a Meritorious Award. She also acquired her doctorate degree in University of Immaculate Concepcion in April 2018. Currently, she is a Master Teacher II in Sagayen National High School. She is also working as a part-time professor in the graduate school of St. Mary's College of Tagum, Inc (SMCTI). As a dedicated, passionate, and expert educationist and researcher, she continued to contribute her time and knowledge on various associations and institutions such as the Department of Education (DepEd), Asian Qualitative Research Association (AQRA), and SMCTI.

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