

Blended Teaching Approach in the Eyes of Filipino Teachers: A Phenomenological Study

Author's contribution

This work was carried out in collaborations with between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

ABSTRACT

This research aims to describe the experiences of Filipino teachers in implementing blended teaching methods. Employing a qualitative phenomenological research design with purposive sampling, the study was conducted in private schools in Panabo City. Eight participants each were engaged in in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussion (FGDs), focusing specifically on teaching the Filipino subject. Through these interviews, the study aimed to uncover themes related to the teachers' experiences, challenges, and perspectives on blended learning. The findings revealed three main themes. Firstly, Filipino teachers encountered various challenges in blended teaching, including concerns about content knowledge and preparation, connectivity issues, technological difficulties, and challenges in monitoring and mentoring students. Secondly, the study identified coping mechanisms employed by Filipino teachers during the pandemic, such as peer sharing and consultation, resourcefulness and innovation in teaching, and enhanced monitoring of student performance. Lastly, the research highlighted the implications of blended teaching during the pandemic, including the development of independent learning among students, strengthened student monitoring and teaching practices, and the recognition of unguaranteed learning outcomes. Blended teaching, integrating traditional face-to-face methods with technology and distance learning, is increasingly becoming integral to the current education system.

Keywords: *Blended teaching, education, Filipino, Philippines*

1. INTRODUCTION

The weather changes quickly, and along with it comes the emergence of blended learning in the field of education. Blended teaching is the implementation of traditional face-to-face teaching alongside technology, the internet, and distance learning [13], [14]. Blended learning in the Philippines is still considered new and is just beginning. However, the increasing demand for blended learning is posing problems and challenges that need to be investigated, especially in emerging higher education institutions, which hinder the effective and efficient delivery of teaching and learning. In such situations, the challenge for every teacher who teaches blended learning is greater and heavier because they will be using new teaching methods such as utilizing technology. As a result, teachers encounter problems as they think about and prepare effective strategies to use in blended learning. During the pandemic, one

of the primary challenges faced by teachers is related to technology and its use [33]. Among these challenges encountered by teachers, particularly those instructing Filipino subjects, include insufficient training, technical difficulties, and the necessity to modify content for blended instruction.

Moreover, as highlighted in the research conducted by Ancho and Arrieta [4], the pandemic has brought about various challenges particularly in the education sector where the new normal experience revolves around online or digital class learning. [1],[17]. Additionally, as per research of (1), it was noted that educators in this contemporary setting are significantly challenged by maintaining educational quality and tackling the difficulties students face, such as navigating instructions, power interruptions, connectivity problems, and health hazards posed by the pandemic. On the other hand, blended learning is commonly used to describe the teaching and learning process involving various activities such as face-to-face teaching, live e-learning, and self-paced learning, as noted by [19]. In the study of [4], Filipino teachers are often busy addressing school needs aside from their teaching materials.

Blended learning is a crucial concept in the field of education and advocate for an "optimal" integration of technology and face-to-face teaching [34]. In the Philippines, the education system is increasingly embracing the need for virtual teaching, especially during the pandemic. This necessity has led to a shift from the traditional classroom teaching method, which is now less practical or feasible for the continued delivery of education. In existing studies on the new normal in education, the main focus of this study is on the experiences of teachers in blended learning [9]. Furthermore, when teachers leave the field due to exhaustion and changes, it affects the field of education [19]. They continue to strengthen the concept of blended learning as a strategy that connects personal experiences in the classroom and activities in online learning. The use of blended learning provides the best teaching in both classroom and online settings, allowing students to learn at their own pace. It has been found that one system can adapt to different groups of students.

The challenges associated with blended teaching have significant implications for the education system, urging us to be innovative in developing strategies that sustain the learning process under blended teaching. Equally vital is the creation of groups and recreational activities within school tasks, as these aid in strengthening teachers and fostering collaboration among them to be resilient, proactive, and advocates of progress, unity, and solidarity. In front of their students, they possess deep knowledge and teaching skills, transitioning from traditional teaching methods to modes of learning such as online, modular, and combinations thereof [16]. Moreover, teaching in college nowadays has proven markedly complex for teachers with less experience in this type of instruction. In this current research, the aim is to depict the experiences of teachers in the Filipino subject while utilizing blended teaching methods.

To support this study, the researcher identified the best support from well-known theories. This study is anchored in the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) written by Kolb and Kolb [20]. Experiential learning aims to make learning effective by changing experiences. Kolb's theory of experiential learning emphasizes how experiences, including our thoughts, emotions, and environment, affect the learning process. Based on Kolb and Kolb's explanation [20], of their theory of learning through experience, they will describe an unusual aspect. They state that individuals at the right age learn through their experiences. When your experiences are acquired and integrated, teachers have a responsibility to share their knowledge with their students.

As a support to the earlier theories upon which this research is based, the Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK) theory was also utilized as a framework for

integrating technology, describing how teachers can use ICT as a pedagogical tool in teaching and learning. The aim of TPACK is to understand how to use technology to teach concepts in a way that reflects students' learning experiences. This theory is founded on creating effective teaching using technology [3]. This includes a deep understanding of the concept of technology use, pedagogical methods—utilizing technology in constructive ways to create teaching content that either facilitates or complicates learning—and how technology can address the challenges faced by students.

Based on Javier's study [17], he emphasized that teachers teaching the Filipino language face various challenges, particularly in dealing with technological capabilities. Blended learning is a new method where traditional teaching methods are combined with distance and online learning. The use of blended learning has been the focus of recent research examining the academic and social benefits of this teaching method. By combining traditional and online teaching methods, the promise of embedded learning is realized in the strengths of both teaching approaches [3] refers to blended learning as the most commonly used term to describe any combination of face-to-face teaching with computer technology (online and offline activities/materials). Additionally, the use of computer technology as part of blended learning is commonly understood to occur in various settings during face-to-face instruction and potentially during students' independent study time. Schools have undergone significant changes due to digital technology adoption, sparking debates on their effectiveness in the learning environment and potential consequences [24]. This analysis underscores the need for further research to address the challenges faced by students, teachers, and educational institutions in blended learning environments.

There is a need to address the lack of knowledge in utilizing technology to strengthen effective implementation of blended learning strategies. According to Pulham & Graham [28], have demonstrated that the skills required to teach in online and blended environments differ from traditional teaching, yet teacher education programs often fail to prepare teachers in preservice for these new teaching methods. Furthermore, research on blended teaching competencies is lacking. A study was conducted in the City of Panabo to illustrate the challenges experienced by teachers in blended learning.

Blended learning requires that teachers not only understand technology and its tools but also think about how technology can serve learning. Mixed-method research is a method of combining the benefits of both online and face-to-face learning. However, over the years, this approach of combining online components with face-to-face teaching has raised concerns. While much research has focused on the overall issues of blended teaching strategies, there is a lack of clear understanding of the issues existing in the online components of blended learning [24].

The general objective of this qualitative study is to describe the experiences of Filipino teachers in the process of using blended teaching methods. This research aims to address the following questions: First, can the experiences of Filipino teachers in teaching blended learning during the pandemic be described? Second, to narrate the mechanisms utilized by Filipino teachers in blended teaching during the pandemic? Third, to enumerate the details on the implications of teaching blended learning during the pandemic? As a contribution, the significance of this research serves as a model for other teachers, whether they are experts in the field of Filipino or not. It will provide valuable information to teachers, aiming to give them a clearer understanding of how to face challenges and what are the best strategies to use in engaging in blended teaching. Quality education: Ensure the provision of inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

This research is important for leaders and teachers to consider what should be done, especially in terms of strategies, methods, techniques, and the use of new technologies in blended teaching. The results of this study will also assist Filipino teachers in understanding what roles they should play for effective blended teaching. This research will also aid researchers in the need for a Master of Arts in Education major in Filipino. The findings of the study provide knowledge about the challenges faced by teachers in implementing blended teaching methods. Finally, this research will serve as a foundation for future studies, helping teachers improve their understanding of blended teaching.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research uses qualitative methods, aiming to understand human perspectives, particularly in the context of changing education due to the pandemic. The study employs phenomenological research, delving into individual experiences to gain deeper insights. Phenomenology, as Qutoshi [29], explains, not only analysis experiences but also enhances self-awareness and perception of the surrounding world. It merges philosophy with analytical methods to explore the essence of our experiences.

Participants

The participants for this research study are the teachers of one of the private schools in secondary in the City of Panabo, Davao del Norte. The selection of the participants in qualitative was deliberate. During this stage, non-probability sampling, particularly purposive sampling methods, were employed to choose secondary teachers from private institution in the Philippines.

Data Collection

The researcher used an interview guide containing questions that helped the researcher to generate themes that supported the results in the quantitative phase. The questions from the interview guide underwent validation. The questions covered the experiences and perspectives of secondary Filipino teachers regarding blended learning. For each main question, sub-questions were formulated to answer the main question. Additionally, embedded in the main question under the sub-questions were probing questions. These questions were asked to provide deeper detail of the participants' stories, in case the participants' statements were somewhat unclear and needed further explanation.

Data Analysis

The researcher conducted an analysis of responses obtained from IDIs and FGDs using the thematic analysis approach developed [6]. Through this methodology, transcripts of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were carefully examined to identify recurring patterns, themes, and essential concepts. These identified patterns serve as codes that shed light on the experiences of tertiary instructors in research activities. To further enrich the data, a thorough theme analysis was conducted. The systematic collection of data on respondents' experiences was effectively carried out. Following this, the data was thoroughly scrutinized by the analyst. Once themes were identified by the data analyst, the researchers compiled their findings. This analytical approach is commonly employed in qualitative research.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Experiences of Filipino Teachers in Teaching Blended Learning During the Pandemic.

Content Knowledge and Preparation Concerns. According to the participants, teaching blended learning is indeed very challenging, especially online. Moreover, internet connectivity requires additional preparation before teaching. Some of them are not yet familiar with how to teach online. Teachers expressed difficulty in choosing appropriate strategies for the lessons they need to teach. According to Javier's study [17], if a teacher lacks the appropriate skills in what they are teaching, failure is likely, especially if there is also a lack of technological skills. The teachers' lack of knowledge is disheartening. They find it very difficult to teach online, especially since this kind of teaching has just begun.

Furthermore, they struggle to provide appropriate depth and expansion on the subject matter. Additionally, it is difficult to understand the students because some are not visual learners, and others prefer being physically present in class with teacher interaction. Nonetheless, teachers are looking for effective strategies to provide students with proper knowledge. They continue to inspire students to learn more, and they do not let the challenges of online classes hinder them. Despite struggling to understand each lesson, they continue to face challenges, especially in technology.

Connectivity Issues. Teachers experience problems with internet connection, especially in areas with weak signals. Sometimes, while teaching online, the connection suddenly drops or gets interrupted. Poor internet connectivity was experienced during online teaching, as documented by Sumalinog [31]. Therefore, access to the internet is a major issue that needs to be addressed and internet connectivity is a significant problem in blended learning [23]. The problem caused by internet connection disrupts teachers' teaching in their classes. Furthermore, Lassoued [22], stated that internet speed is slow in remote or rural areas. This results in students' dissatisfaction with online classes. According to Javier [17], poor internet connection also affects communication in teaching. In fact, the lack of fast, affordable, and reliable internet connection hinders the process of online learning and teaching, especially for those residing in rural areas far from urban areas.

Difficulty in the use of Technology. Teachers have expressed difficulty in using various online apps because not all teachers are proficient in using technology. Their lack of technological skills may pose a significant obstacle to online learning. Additionally, the influence of technology is felt in various fields, such as education, community service, tourism, banking, and other industries, as noted by [25]. The use of technology in teaching and learning can have positive effects on students' successes. Students are accustomed to traditional face-to-face learning [12]. Due to technological advancements and the pandemic, the use of technology is rapidly increasing. They struggle to use features found online, and there are instances when students are better at using them than the teachers.

Furthermore, the participants admitted to struggling with the use of other online apps, especially with emerging technologies. Their experiences include a lack of knowledge in using various online apps and their features because not all teachers are proficient in navigating technology. Both life and livelihood are deeply affected by technology; hence, it's difficult to imagine life without it. This only indicates that technology is something not to be overlooked as it has successfully rooted in most, if not all, human activities. One of the positive outcomes of technology is its impact on communication. The use of technology in education is only to facilitate teachers in transferring knowledge, not in shaping the students' personalities [10]. Teachers who fail to recognize the benefits of online learning are more likely to create ineffective blended courses. A negative or indifferent response from students to poorly designed online components in a blended course may reinforce teachers' beliefs that such additions to traditional classrooms have little value.

Monitoring and Mentoring Issues. Teachers find it challenging to ascertain whether a student comprehends their subject because they cannot tell if they are the ones answering the lesson or not, communicating to children on how to properly deliver the lesson to them. The reliance on online learning with technological tools and the provision of equipment are major challenges for institutions, teachers, and students. Teachers face technological challenges. These are the technological problems that have emerged during the implementation process of blended learning [2]. A teacher needs to find a good strategy to better teach the topics being discussed. In addition, another challenge for teachers is that students may not fully understand their lessons because it's difficult to determine whether they are the ones answering the activities or not. Finding appropriate methods for each student can be challenging; however, [36] taught that blended learning makes teaching and learning "easier to understand, flexible, active, interactive, reinforcing, and inspiring. The lack and absence of preparation can threaten education. Furthermore, the success of online learning, especially in private schools, largely depends on being ready to use technology. Guiding students is being a role model for them, showing them where you want to go and where a student can be shaped. The work of teachers and curriculum designers is crucial, and they should collaborate to develop an excellent system. This is the best way to monitor students and intelligently execute tasks.

Skills and Mechanisms of Filipino Teachers in Blended Teaching during the Pandemic.

Peer Sharing and Consultation. Teachers demonstrate their knowledge by assisting fellow teachers in achieving the goal of delivering proper lessons to students. Additionally, they share their expertise by simply asking colleagues questions, seeking suggestions, and seeking help in creating videos or PowerPoint presentations. This is commonly done by teachers to overcome the challenges of blended teaching. Here are some of their insights. The participants showed that collaboration is an effective way to impart proper knowledge to students. As Nerantzi [26], stated, it is the teacher's role to help students become autonomous in their learning so they can continue studying and progressing beyond their school education and contribute positively to local communities and society as a whole. Therefore, designing and implementing effective teaching strategies that facilitate learning in a supportive environment is indeed crucial—a setting gradually gaining independence and not dependence. The non-involvement of teachers in decisions directly affecting their daily work environment leads to both diminished self-esteem and intense feelings of external control by others.

Being Resourceful and Innovative in Teaching. Teachers are exploring methods to use online apps for teaching and learning, aiming to improve their blended teaching approach. They're also searching for effective strategies in case of internet connection issues, there is still a solution to avoid interrupting their class. If education requires creativity and innovation, it should start with teachers through professional development, which is the primary means of successfully implementing education reforms [32]. Furthermore, they are researching various teaching tools that they can use in blended teaching.

Teachers have shown resourcefulness; they have sought alternative methods. They shared their knowledge by participating in various seminars on using effective teaching strategies for blended learning. Additionally, teachers utilized strategies to capture students' attention, making academic activities more varied. It is expected that teachers will use various teaching strategies such as applying different teaching methods, media, and games to pique students' interest [35]. In this study, teachers enriched their teaching with various resources, depending on their confidence to experiment with blended approaches.

Teachers demonstrate ingenuity in delivering lessons that children need to learn. Providing appropriate and comprehensive learning resources is an effective strategy to create an easy-to-use learning process to develop the skills students need. A modern learning resource succeeds in fostering active student engagement, making learning more enjoyable, and ultimately increasing their knowledge and skills to meet the competencies needed in the field of education. Improving student performance by providing high-quality learning resources is crucial as a strategy to full fill life skills needed in full force after their studies [30].

Strengthen Monitoring among Students. Based on their experience, it appears that teachers are finding ways to strengthen students' knowledge. Teachers are reaching out to parents through contact and home visitation to understand the true situation of students and provide feedback on their performance in school. Findings show that communication between teachers and students is not progressing smoothly due to slow connections, making it difficult for students to listen to teachers when occasionally using Zoom. Communication is one-way, and their lack of interaction hinders learning. Previous research also noted that teacher-student communication is difficult due to a lack of interaction, and when poor communication is experienced. It was also stated in previous research that teacher-student communication is difficult due to a lack of interaction [8], especially when poor communication is experienced [5]

They need to assist the students because they are concerned about their situation, and they might fail due to their academic progress, so they provide additional tasks to ensure that the students pass. Ultimately, if students still lack motivation even after utilizing various methods, they will now involve the parents. According to Choi, Lee, and Kim [7], studying by seeking solutions through inquiry; shaping learning experiences; providing instructions for specific tasks to be completed by students; gathering facts, assigning various roles and tasks to each other; and organizing thoughts and ideas are just some of the strengthening of monitoring children's performance. These are some of the experiences that teachers have done in teaching blended learning during the pandemic.

Implications for Teaching Blended Learning During the Pandemic.

Develops Independent Learning Among Students. According to the interview results, through asking open-ended questions, fostering classroom discourse, seeking higher-level thinking, responding to students' questions in ways that encourage them to think, solve problems independently, and develop a deeper understanding of the material. Additionally, students are given the opportunity to learn according to their abilities, learn how to research, and have the chance to work while studying. Furthermore, teachers do not give up on blended teaching; instead, they continue to face the challenges of the times, with online learning not being a hindrance. In fact, some students have completed their studies despite the difficulties in learning. Teachers emphasize that the implications of blended teaching help sharpen and enhance teachers' creativity in thinking and implementing strategies to facilitate interactive learning. Additionally, students are given the opportunity to learn according to their abilities, learn how to conduct research, and even work while studying. According to Nortvig et al [27] stated that, in fact, no particular aspect of blended learning or traditional teaching improves one over the other, but success in any learning environment is related to the context of learning.

Strengthen Student Monitoring and Teaching Practices. This study discovered that teachers need to be skilled in teaching because they are the ones facing the students. It is essential to maintain the quality of education even in blended teaching methods. Technology is one of the tools that can help in delivering effective blended teaching. Teachers who utilize technology in teaching improve the success of their students, making them analytical and motivated thinkers [13]. Additionally, not all teachers are proficient in using the internet. It is

crucial for teachers to have proper knowledge of technology because often students are more adept than them.

Other participants also agreed that the quality of education, use of technology, and strategies are crucial in blended teaching. Teachers need profound teaching because they are the ones facing the students, providing learning materials ahead of time, and focusing more on students' writing skills as writing proficiency is essential. Teachers emphasized the importance of continuous monitoring and proper teaching to students, understanding the significance of time as a challenge and companion in their teaching journey. According to [8] mentioned that students who are not monitored and intervened in the new normal are more likely to drop out of school and may lose the opportunity to return to school if not given proper attention. Teachers expressed that writing skills and monitoring are crucial to maintain proper spelling usage, not just relying on the internet for their knowledge; it is better for them to learn to write well.

Unguaranteed Learning Outcomes. In this aspect, it appears that teachers have a negative outlook on blended teaching due to the challenges they face. It's difficult to accurately assess knowledge, especially in online learning, and there's uncertainty about who is completing the assignments given by the teacher. The lack of proficiency in using technology is also a challenge because not all teachers or students are skilled in using online applications or features in virtual classes. According to [15], the lack of technological skills can be a hindrance in the online learning process.

Furthermore, sometimes there are students who do not participate in class, especially in online classes, because they are shy or preoccupied with other activities that are not visible to the teacher. Often, students remain quiet in online classes and do not participate actively. This is a common observation made by teachers while implementing blended learning. The teachers expressed that their perspective on blended teaching is negative because it's challenging to accurately assess learning. Despite the difficulties in using technology, they continue to employ effective strategies, even though not all teachers are proficient in using online applications in virtual classes. Sometimes, students do not participate, especially in online classes, either due to shyness or engaging in other activities unnoticed by the teacher. Often, students remain quiet and do not actively participate in online classes. This is a common observation made by teachers while implementing blended teaching.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have profound implications for teachers' experience with online blended distance instruction. In addition, the results of the study added to the researcher's understanding of the struggles of his colleagues at work in the midst of the pandemic. Overall, the findings provided better input into way in which teachers strive and work hard in delivering education. Apparently even lacking in resources. It is clear that despite lacking resources or having limited access to them, regardless of the type of school, teachers face the same struggles. Their time, effort, and dedication to teaching have been demonstrated, and each of them has contributed to the accessibility and successful implementation of this blended approach in the country. Because if it is not properly implemented, the education system will not succeed amidst the pandemic. This research is an important reminder that the challenges in teaching blended are similar to those in life, where teachers are constantly looking for a solution for the sake of the students, academic journey. In addition, blended learning provides alternative methods and facilitates broader access to education. Overall, blended learning is an effective teaching method that is spacious and easily accessible. Moreover, it can increase students' motivation and their success in the course. However, based on responses regarding the implementation of blended learning, facilities such as an adequate number of computers

with internet connection, school supplies, and training for distance education during times of uncertainty are insufficient.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

CONSENT AND ETHICAL APPROVAL

The researcher complied and adhered to all standards in conducting the study following the protocol of assessment and standardized criteria. Ensuring the privacy protection of research participants is essential. A sufficient level of confidentiality of research data must be ensured. Any form of deceptive information should be avoided, as well as biased representation of key findings in the data. Voluntary participation, privacy and confidentiality, informed consent process, recruitment, plagiarism, falsification, conflict of interest (COI), deceit, permission from organization/location, and technology issues were strictly followed as stipulated by the University of Mindanao Ethics Review Committee (UMERC 2023-050).

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