Exploring Non-Teaching Personnels' Challenges on Training Through Webinars: Administrative Officers in Focus

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Abstract

This study explored the challenges faced by non-teaching personnel in training through webinars. Ten (10) teachers who came from Banaybanay, Davao Oriental, participated in this study. This study used a phenomenological approach to extract the ideas of the non-teaching personnel. An in-depth interview was employed to gather information regarding the participants' experiences. The following themes emerged about the experiences of the participants: the experiences of non-teaching personnel in their webinar training revealed three themes, namely: adapting to new technology, connecting with professional peers, and facilitating effective communication. The challenges experienced by the participants during their webinars were digital fatigue, limited participant interaction, and overwhelming webinar content. The insights gained from the participants showed two significant ideas, namely, embracing the new role of non-teaching personnel and enhancing adaptability with the new policies. The non-teaching personnel may be more attentive in their dealings with constituents and other stakeholders. They may communicate information directly or indirectly to other school personnel through the websites developed for their school. Their openness to suggestions to improve their office performance is a welcome move to enhance their office skills through webinars and other special training intended for them.

Keywords: Non-Teaching Personnel Challenges, Training Through Webinars, Administrative Officers

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has compelled educational institutions worldwide to explore alternative methods for delivering high-quality education, prompting a rapid shift towards e-learning and blended learning modalities. This transition has posed significant challenges, particularly for non-teaching personnel needed to prepare for the demands of emergency remote work. Many have needed help effectively using diverse online platforms and faced numerous unforeseen obstacles. To address these challenges, non-teaching staff have prioritized their professional development by engaging in online training and webinars, enhancing their ability to support schools and education (Mohalik et al., 2020).

The importance of professional development has become more pronounced in the digital era, with webinars and online seminars becoming crucial for maintaining work functionality and excellence. Since March 2020, educational institutions globally, including those in India and the Philippines, have adopted technology as a vital tool for knowledge dissemination. Despite the novelty of organizing and attending webinars, educators and non-teaching personnel have faced difficulties such as technological skill gaps,

poor internet access, and limited infrastructure. Research highlights that the success of online programs relies heavily on the availability of digital devices, internet connectivity, and support facilities (DepEd, 2020).

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) has implemented various capacity-building workshops to equip teaching and non-teaching staff with the necessary skills for online education. Despite these efforts, significant challenges still need to be addressed, especially in rural areas with inadequate internet access. The pandemic underscored the need for continuous professional development through online means. As schools navigate these hurdles, understanding the experiences of non-teaching personnel in webinars can provide valuable insights into improving support systems and fostering professional growth amidst ongoing crises (DepEd, 2020).

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Kurt Lewin's 1947 theory of organizational change, which involves three steps: unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. This model emphasizes the need to recognize change, transition to new behaviors, and solidify these behaviors as norms. Educational institutions, facing significant internal and external pressures, must adapt to improve processes and teaching practices (Beycioglu & Aslan, 2010; Harris, 2006). Professional development, particularly for non-teaching staff, is crucial in this context. The continuous improvement theory, or the Kaizen approach, underscores that improvement is a gradual process requiring commitment.

Additionally, the study draws on the Learning through Technology theory, highlighting the importance of technology and webinars for modern professional development (Gilbert, 2007). Engaging in online learning and professional development programs helps non-teaching personnel enhance their skills and adapt to the new normal. The study thus integrates concepts of organizational change, continuous improvement, and technological learning for comprehensive professional development (OECD, 2009).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design with open-ended questions to explore participants' experiences. This method captures the essence of participants' descriptions by setting aside the researcher's experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The researcher described teachers' shared meanings regarding their efficacy in blended learning, highlighting the similarity of their experiences (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenological research effectively surfaces individual perspectives, challenging structural assumptions and informing policy (Lester et al., 2009). This approach was ideal for understanding teachers' professional development experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, addressing research gaps, and suggesting improvements (Bogart, 2017).

The study also involved in-depth interviews (IDIs) and participant observations, using varied interviews, observations, and texts to explore social or human problems (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lee, 2007). This method builds a holistic understanding, analyzes detailed views, and is conducted in natural settings. Phenomenology was particularly suitable for exploring teachers' lived experiences in public elementary schools, with common themes being analyzed and coded from the interviews.

3.2 Research Participants

The study was conducted in DepEd Region XI, focusing on schools in Banay-banay, Mati, and Davao Oriental. Eight non-teaching personnel from different elementary schools were selected using purposive

sampling based on their roles as office staff or administrative assistants with at least one year of experience in the Department of Education. This non-random technique, as Bernard (2006) described, involves selecting informants with relevant knowledge and experience. To ensure varied perspectives, participants included males and females with diverse educational backgrounds and ranks, all of whom had faced challenges in webinars and experienced both old and new everyday work environments.

3.3 Data Analysis

In this study, all collected data were meticulously examined and analyzed with academic rigor. The researcher commenced by detailing personal experiences with the phenomenon to bracket them, thus ensuring the focus remained on the participants' experiences. Significant statements reflecting participants' experiences were identified, listed, and refined to eliminate redundancies. These statements were then categorized into broader themes called meaning units. Subsequently, the researcher crafted a detailed description of the participants' experiences and an account of how these experiences transpired, reflecting on the context and setting. Finally, a comprehensive composite description was developed, integrating textural and structural descriptions, encapsulating the phenomenon's essence under investigation. This final synthesis represents the culmination of the phenomenological analysis.

4.   Results and Discussions

4.1 The Challenges Experienced by the Non-Teaching Personnel in Public Elementary Schools in Participating Webinars as a Professional Development Strategy in the New Normal

4.1.1 Adapting to New Technologies

New technologies frequently need to be noticed by users, often requiring new skills. This can lead to confusion, especially among the non-teaching personnel of DepEd. With numerous work-related reports to handle, these employees need help to learn new applications, particularly during webinars when they need to locate necessary files. Some participant comments included:

DepEd webinars equipped me with advanced digital skills, enabling seamless adaptation to online administrative tasks during challenging times (P1).

Time Management and Productivity workshops are needed, as these skills are essential for non-teaching staff juggling multiple responsibilities yet are often sidelined in professional development(P2).

They facilitate a continuous improvement mindset, encouraging me to adapt to evolving technology trends and methodologies in education administration(P6).

Adaptive Leadership Skills training is needed for non-teaching roles, ensuring staff can navigate change effectively, a crucial aspect sometimes overlooked in professional development (P7).

Participant 1 noted that gaining digital skills eased her administrative tasks, while Participant 2 found that attending webinars improved her productivity. Participant 6 reported that webinars significantly enhanced her mindset through new technologies, a sentiment echoed by Participant 7, who emphasized the importance of webinars in her role. According to Lau (2022), the rise of remote and hybrid working has accelerated the adoption of collaborative technologies like cloud computing, AI, and AR, which

improve operations and employee efficiency. Androitis (2017) highlighted the necessity of adopting new technologies to stay competitive, noting the varying ease with which employees adapt to these changes.

4.1.2 Connecting with Professional Peers

Indeed, modern technologies facilitate connectivity anytime and anywhere, exemplified by the user-friendly nature of contemporary cellular phones and other gadgets. Webinars, in particular, offer a convenient avenue to establish connections with professionals globally, fostering networking opportunities across geographical boundaries. Here are some of the few comments of the participants during the interview:

> *As non-teaching personnel, webinars empower me with information that aids in better decision-making and problem-solving within the DepEd environment (P4).*

> *Webinars foster networking opportunities, allowing me to connect with peers, professionals, and experts in related fields (P5).*

> *Webinars contribute to community and collaboration, promoting the exchange of ideas and experiences among non-teaching staff in DepEd (P7).*

Participants, notably P4, benefited significantly from attending webinars, while P5 reported enhanced networking opportunities with peers and professionals. P7 highlighted improved collaborations and a sense of community resulting from webinar attendance. According to Moseley (2023), creating a connected workplace involves driving collaboration, fostering healthy relationships, and promoting knowledge-sharing among teams, leading to enhanced efficiency. Blaschka (2021) suggested that effective connection-building is crucial for business leaders across industries and age groups, particularly in light of the pandemic-induced isolation and remote work environments. Mastering the art of connection enhances communication, fosters deeper relationships, builds trust, and boosts persuasive abilities, facilitating effective team leadership and positive influence within professional circles.

4.1.3 Facilitating Effective Communication

One of the best things that ever happened to most of the participants of this study was their experiences in speedy communication in their respective workplaces.
Here are some of the comments shared by the participants during the interview:

> *Effective Communication in Administrative Roles is timely, as it addresses the need for clear communication strategies often assumed to be innate rather than a skill requiring development (P7).*

> *Webinars offer a cost-effective and time-efficient means of professional development, eliminating the need for extensive travel or time away from work (P9).*

> *Networking Skills for Non-Teaching Personnel are essential but might need more attention, as building professional connections is often associated more with teaching roles(P10).*

Participant 7 emphasized the necessity of effective communication in fulfilling office roles. At the same time, P9 underscored the importance of webinar attendance for professional development, citing its cost-effectiveness due to the absence of travel requirements. P10 credited webinars with enhancing her networking skills and bolstering her professional capabilities. Cook-Campbell (2022) highlighted the challenges of developing communication skills, particularly in remote and hybrid work setups, emphasizing the transformative impact of effective workplace communication on individuals, teams, and organizations. Vogel (2023) stressed the criticality of workplace communication skills, noting their role in preventing miscommunications that impede productivity. Implementing a communications strategy fosters open communication, effective teamwork, and proactive leadership, especially in remote teams and virtual collaboration.

4.2 Non-Teaching Personnel Coping With the Challenges They Experienced

4.2.1 Digital Fatigue

It is widely acknowledged that prolonged engagement with digital activities can induce fatigue, affecting ocular health and overall physiological well-being. Given the continual evolution and rapid proliferation of digital systems globally, individuals utilizing such technologies must continually refine and adapt their skill sets to navigate these digital landscapes effectively.

Here are some of the responses given by the participants during their interviews.

Digital fatigue became apparent, affecting focus and concentration during prolonged webinar sessions(P3).

Adapting to new virtual platforms for webinars presented a learning curve, occasionally impacting the overall experience. Isolation and lack of networking opportunities in the virtual environment can hinder collaborative learning and shared professional experiences. (P6).

Technical literacy gaps among participants in specific webinars affected the overall pace and flow of the sessions(P9).

The responses from participants in this study underscore the challenges associated with digital fatigue and adaptation to new virtual platforms during webinars. Participant 3 highlighted digital fatigue as a significant challenge, while Participant 6 articulated difficulties in acclimating to novel virtual systems. Participant 9 expressed encountering a technical gap relative to other webinar participants. Jacobson (2023) delineates digital fatigue as mental exhaustion precipitated by extensive digital device usage, exacerbated by factors such as remote work and increased reliance on digital tools amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Laker (2023) further elucidates the detrimental impact of digital fatigue on employee well-being and organizational functioning, emphasizing its potential to diminish productivity and elevate turnover rates.

4.2.2 Limited Participant Interaction

It is common knowledge that while webinars are good ways to introduce new information to all the viewers, they also have limitations. One of which is the limited interactions among its participants. Not all of the attendees can interact with each other. Some problems here are brought about by limited time to discuss important topics or even the intermittent internet connections, to name a few.

Some of the participant's comments are as follows:

Limited interaction in specific webinars hampered the collaborative and participatory aspect of the learning experience (P4).

Scheduling conflicts occasionally led to missed opportunities to attend specific webinars of interest and

interact with other participants (P7).

Collaborative activities or group discussions during webinars faced difficulties, impacting the ability to share experiences and insights effectively (10).

Based on the participants' narratives, particularly Participant 4, she expressed that the limited interactions with participants during seminars hamper the opportunity to improve learning activities. Likewise, Participant 7 mentioned schedule conflicts and limited interactions during webinars. Participant 10 focused on the difficulties of interacting with each other due to limited time or loss of Internet connectivity.

Arbough et al. (2007) suggest in their research that participant interaction is one of the strongest predictors of success in online environments. However, studies about the effects of participant interaction in a large sample of multiple online environments could be more extensive. Using hierarchical modeling techniques, we examine a sample of 40 online MBA courses to determine whether learner–instructor, learner-learner, or learner–system interaction is most significantly related to online course outcomes.

Yang Chao et al. (2011) reported that proper interaction is a crucial factor for learning effectiveness in the education business. However, it is not easy to successfully guide the participants to achieve the appropriate interaction in an online learning environment. The interaction and internal dialogue should be systemically performed under valid control. This paper applies knowledge sharing to achieve the appropriate interaction among participants in an online learning environment. By evaluating and integrating the differences between interaction considerations and knowledge sharing, the proposed methodology transforms the interactions into knowledge flows to apply the concept of knowledge sharing easily. Then, the corresponding activities can be acquired following the conformable analysis. According to experimental results, the learners assigned with interaction supported by knowledge-sharing flows have better learning effectiveness. That is, the concept of knowledge sharing significantly influences the interaction throughout the use of a learning platform and is a way to enhance learning effectiveness.

4.2.3 Overwhelming Webinar Content

Webinars are effective platforms for disseminating new information, yet they are flexible. Chief among these limitations is the restricted interactivity among participants, impeding comprehensive engagement. Challenges arise from time constraints for crucial discussions and intermittent internet connectivity issues.

Some of the responses of the participants were as follows:

> *Balancing webinar attendance with increased workloads posed a significant challenge, impacting my ability to engage in some sessions (P2) fully.*

> *Challenges in accessing supplementary materials or resources discussed in webinars affected the application of learned concepts in my teaching (P5).*
> *Some webinars provided overwhelming content, making it challenging to absorb and apply the information effectively (P8).*

Some participants in this study, notably P2, encountered challenges in balancing office work with webinar participation, while Participant 5 experienced difficulty accessing webinar materials, disrupting her learning process. Participant 8 noted the overwhelming content presented in some webinars. Hunter (2023) underscores the significance of webinars in marketing, citing their effectiveness in lead

generation and audience education, supported by survey data from global marketers. Hughes (2022) emphasizes the importance of implementing effective strategies to ensure successful webinars, highlighting the potential for increased engagement and favorable impressions among attendees.

4.3 Insights of the non-teaching personnel regarding their experiences on webinars as a professional development strategy in the new normal

4.3.1 Enhancing The New Role Of Non-Teaching DepEd Personnel

Non-teaching personnel within the DepEd are integral to school policy implementation, serving as conduits of vital information to teaching staff. Recognized by school leaders for their pivotal role, their webinar attendance is essential for staying updated on emerging trends within the virtual education landscape.

Some of the responses of the non-teaching personnel were as follows:

Embracing the role of a DepEd non-teaching personnel in the new normal has heightened my awareness of the critical importance of administrative support in facilitating effective education delivery (P1).

The exposure to various webinars has reinforced my understanding of the interconnectedness between non-teaching roles and the overall success of educational initiatives (P5).

The new normal has prompted a reassessment of my skill set, encouraging me to enhance my digital competencies to effectively contribute to modernizing educational processes (P6).

Participant 1 highlighted the crucial role of non-teaching personnel within the DepEd system, emphasizing their significance in implementing administrative regulations and policies. Participant 5 noted that exposure to various webinars has reinforced her knowledge and skills. At the same time, Participant 6 recognized the importance of skill enhancement in fostering the development of teaching and learning within the school. Chi (2019) reported creating 5,000 new non-teaching positions under the Department of Education to alleviate the administrative burden on public school teachers, as Vice President and Education Secretary Sara Duterte stated. The AYOS Project (2015) serves as a strategic initiative to enable, engage, and empower non-teaching employees to align with DepEd's strategic directions, contributing to effective implementation driven by the Rationalization Program. Managing organizational change resulting from infrastructure shifts is crucial, as emphasized by Stan Davis, given its potential impact on management, leadership, and governance within the SDO.

4.3.2 Enhancing Adaptability with New Policies

All non-teaching personnel must demonstrate adaptability to the evolving policies within the Department of Education (DepEd). Given their pivotal role in disseminating information, they are primary sources for initial updates. With the emergence of new DepEd policies, non-teaching personnel are responsible for promptly acquiring and efficiently disseminating pertinent information to all relevant stakeholders. The responses of the participants are provided here:

The shift to the new normal has deepened my commitment to continuous learning, as I recognize the pivotal role of staying updated and adaptable in supporting the education community (P4).

Being DepEd non-teaching personnel in the new normal has emphasized the importance of proactive problem-solving and strategic thinking in addressing unforeseen challenges (P7).

Becoming DepEd non-teaching personnel in the new normal has highlighted the significance of being adaptable, resilient, and forward-thinking to successfully fulfill the evolving needs of the education sector (P10).

The participants in this study shared their perspectives on attending webinars. Participant 4 highlighted how the post-pandemic shift to the new normal has heightened her commitment to learning novel concepts relevant to her role. Participant 7 emphasized the importance of proactive rather than reactive approaches, while Participant 10 noted an enhanced resilience and openness to new knowledge gained from webinars. Raeburn (2022) posited that workplace adaptability enables effective responses to diverse situations, detailing strategies to develop adaptability skills such as problem-solving, embracing change, maintaining an open mindset, practicing mindfulness, and stepping out of one's comfort zone. Kuttappa (2020) underscored the necessity of adaptability in navigating inevitable changes, delineating cognitive, affective, and behavioral facets as intrinsic components of adaptability during organizational transitions.

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