In a long-winded road: Understanding the lived experiences of faculty members on module writing in the new normal

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented difficulties and obstacles for educational sectors, with no one knowing when it will end. The number of illnesses continued to rise while countries worldwide established plans and processes to limit the virus. To maintain and deliver a high-quality education notwithstanding community quarantine, the new normal should be incorporated into the formulation and implementation of the "new normal educational policy." Thus, this qualitative study sought to develop a deeper understanding of teachers' experiences in module writing. Specifically, it explored the challenges they experienced and identified the coping mechanisms they employed. A total of 15 participants were purposely selected who took part in an individual in-depth and semi-structured interview. The themes emerged as the challenges of the faculty members, namely: Insufficient training on module writing, lack of books & other resources, subjects are not in line with the field of specialization, overloaded number of subject preparations, and inadequate office supplies/equipment for reproduction of modules. Further, the themes on the coping mechanisms include collaboration with colleagues, self-motivation, proper time management, and initiative and resourcefulness. Hence, the faculty member's best practices and coping mechanisms to improve their teaching through module writing were indicators that they want to grow and embrace professional development. On the other hand, to address the identified problems, a proposed enhancement program will be initiated. The platform focused on Strengthening the "Campus' Instructional Materials Development Program" and enhancing campus activities on developing instructional materials.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 epidemic, which began in China and has infected every country on earth, is the most recent worldwide public health calamity. Due to the increasing number of diseases caused by the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2, formerly known as 2019-nCoV), the subject of how to flatten the curve of these infections and eradicate the condition has gained international attention [1]. Additionally, most countries worldwide have delayed courses for nearly two epidemic months to halt the spread of the Corona Virus and decrease morbidity. About 1.2 billion students were impacted nationally, including over 28 million in the Philippines [2].

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic had a profound effect on the economic, tourism, and health sectors and the global educational system [3]. The influence of COVID-19 in the Philippines paved the way for universities to halt classes and proclaim a state of a public health emergency. The Philippine Commission on Higher Education (CHEd) issued COVID-19 recommendation no. 5 from March 9 to April 14, 2020, canceling classes and school activities, including on-the-job training and internships. As a result of these circumstances, educational leaders choose to embrace the new normal in education. Academic independence was granted to higher education institutions (HEIs), which made remote learning, e-learning, and other alternative modes of delivery open to students. They accomplish this in various ways, the most significant of which is through fostering flexible learning. This means that learning programs are built following students', schools', and communities' capabilities [4].

For decades, flexible learning has been a focus of interest and effort in the field of education. Flexibility in education, which stresses student choice, has been recognized as critical to raising educational standards and satisfying the needs of a diverse student body. It is frequently used interchangeably with the term "remote learning" [5]. Modular education is the most common form of distance education. Schools in the Philippines are currently being employed because distance learning via printed and digital modules is the most popular distance learning mode among parents of children enrolled this academic year. This also considers learners in rural areas who lack access to the internet for online learning [6].

Furthermore, modular instruction (as a learning program) is concerned with each student as an individual with their aptitudes and interests to allow each learner to think for himself. The focus must be on a single student with distinct abilities, goals, and experiences that can influence others. Again, the instructor must personalize and individualize the instructional program to give high-quality education [7]. Additionally, previous study [8] posited that modular teaching is more effective than traditional methods because the learners learn at their own pace. Further, since it is a free self-learning style, the learners receive immediate reinforcement and feedback from practicing exercise, motivating them, and creating interest [9]. It maximizes the chances of student participation in the classroom, allowing them to perform tasks quickly. Therefore, the students feel free to learn in their style [10].

In Quirino State University, the institution is steadfast in realizing a modular approach as a learning model for most students living in remote areas where internet connection is impossible. Hence, "module writing" is a tedious work that brought a dilemma among the faculty members in the university. Having this problem, the researchers conducted this study to explore faculty members' experiences in module writing. Specifically, it sought to understand the challenges experienced by faculty members in writing modules and identify the coping mechanisms they employed in the new normal. Further, the result of this study is a basis for coming up with possible programs and activities of the university in terms of developing instructional materials such as modules.

The underlying concept in this study is patterned after the social constructivism theory as a framework as a lens to better understands faculty's experiences in module writing. According to this notion, language and culture shape how humans see, communicate and comprehend reality [11]. Furthermore, social constructivism holds that people are active participants in the formation of their knowledge. Vygotsky thought that learning occurs primarily in social and cultural contexts rather than inside the individual [12]. According to social constructivism, individuals want an understanding of the world in which they live and work. They also create subjective interpretations for their experiences, with implications directed at specific objects or things [13]. Indeed, social constructivism assumes that social reality is built, not an ontologically objective given fact. It is an ontologically subjective reality that can be studied objectively. Qualitative approaches help investigate ontologically personal data. Qualitative interviewing, participant observation, and fieldwork are ideal methods for collecting such data, while descriptive phenomenology is suitable for describing them [14]. Therefore, the social constructivism theory provides an ideal framework to understand comprehensively the challenges experienced by teachers in writing their modules.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The qualitative phenomenological research design was employed in this study. The phenomenological method describes the interpretations of the participants based on their experiences. It uses a phenomenological approach to describe and interpret the struggles of faculty members in module writing. This technique enables the researcher to maintain the participants' "voice" without abstracting their perspective through analysis [15]. This laid the framework for delving into the experiences of a group of people (teachers) who experienced a shared experience and examining any emotions, reactions, feelings, changes, or issues that may have arisen as a result of the shared experience. A method and procedures involve studying a few subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning [13].

Further, the study includes 15 faculty members across all programs state universities in the Philippines and used the purposive sampling method in identifying the participants. To collect data, the researchers obtained permission from the Campus Administrator and the chosen participants, notifying them of the nature of the study, the topic to be discussed, and the scope of their participation. Once the participants obtained their consent, the researchers scheduled a one-on-one interview based on their convenience and availability. The participants were also informed about ethical considerations such as maintaining privacy throughout the study [16]. Their real names were changed to pseudonyms to protect the participants' identity and confidentiality (participant 1 or P1). Likewise, they were informed that the interview process would be audio recorded to ensure accuracy.

Further, this paper used in-depth and semi-structured interviews in English, but they were allowed to answer in Iloko or Filipino (whichever language is comfortable). The interview sessions lasted for 1-2 hours and were conducted in their respective classrooms. The said interview primarily focused on the experiences of faculty members in module writing. Their sharing revolved around the following key questions in the interview guide: i) What are the challenges of faculty members in module writing?; ii) The coping mechanisms of faculty members in writing modules? The participant determined the flow of conversation, although, for some occasions, the researcher needed to ask questions for clarification and to probe deeper into specific responses.

To retain the original meaning of the articulations, the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the utterances were translated, interpreted, and checked. In addition, data was analyzed topically to complete the research goals. Themes were developed based on the participants' repeated statements, and they served as the foundation for an inquiry-based assessment of the research problem. Research analyses were carried out correctly by familiarizing, organizing, coding, documenting, summarizing, and interpreting [17].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To provide empirical flavor to this paper, the researchers quoted a few excerpts from the interviewees' direct statements. The query intended to explore the challenges encountered and the coping mechanisms in module writing. The results revealed that the participants in this study faced challenges in writing modules include: i) Insufficient training on module writing; ii) Lack of books and references and other resources; iii) Subjects are not in line with the field of specialization; iv) Overloaded number of subject preparations; v) No standard format/style of module; and vi) Inadequate office supplies/equipment for reproduction of modules. On the other hand, the coping mechanisms and best practices in module writing of teachers include: i) Collaboration with colleagues; ii) Self-motivation; iii) Proper time management; iv) Initiative and resourcefulness.

3.1. Challenges of the faculty members in module writing
3.1.1. Insufficient training on module writing

In education, the instructor plays a crucial role. As a result, they should have suitable professional and educational training to gain sufficient knowledge and teaching abilities and devote themselves to teaching. Most importantly, if exercise and professional development programs are provided to teachers, they must be introduced, coached, and regularly evaluated by specialists in the field [18]. However, in this study, most of the participants enunciated that they lack sufficient training/seminars in module preparation, as illustrated by the following direct statements from the participants:

"To be honest, I'm having difficulty determining where to begin constructing my modules. This is the first time I've written modules." (P2)
"I've never had formal training, particularly in the field of module writing. I believe it will be tough for me to produce my modules due to my lack of experience." (P7)
"I was apprehensive from the time I began writing my module because I had no idea where, how, or what the next step would be." (P8)
"I lack sufficient training in module writing." (P1)

The statements highlight how faculty members struggled to write their modules due to a lack of regular module preparation training. This implies that thorough training is required for professionals in the field to overcome such obstacles. This is congruent to previous study [19] investigating the needs of student-teachers professional development. It was found that training on a module is one of the challenges that they experienced. It is also argued that training and development are critical components of human resource management for all educational institutions. A strong correlation exists between training and development and teacher productivity and performance [20].

3.1.2. Lack of books and references and other resources

Books are used as dependable sources of knowledge and as a teaching and learning tool for informal studies of a subject. It is an excellent teaching resource that should be utilized in conjunction with other materials when planning a practical session and providing a framework for getting students started and orientated. As a result, various books, references, and online resources are critical in developing modules.

"I conducted research on many issues on the internet and copied and pasted because the library does not have any books or references available." (P4)

"It's difficult for me because such areas are covered by the new curriculum, which has a limited number of references." (P5)

"I am apprehensive about beginning work on my modules. Yes, our library is in desperate need of current versions of books and other module-writing resources." (P3)

"We encountered issues with our internet connection. It's quite difficult for me." (P9)

"I use my Wi-Fi because the school does not give internet access, which makes it more expensive for me. I purchase my load in order to connect to the internet via Wi-Fi." (P13)

The participants' statements emphasize that needed books and references are not available at the campus library, making it difficult to write their modules. Additionally, they had connectivity issues, which limited their capacity to prepare their modules. This is consistent with previous research [21] in which discovered that educational resources and information technology are critical for increasing the effectiveness of teaching, obtaining scientific-methodological education, and adhering to worldwide academic standards. Similarly, a study conducted among private teachers discovered that insufficient instructional materials and the absence of proper facilities such as libraries affect the quality of graduates produced [22]. Further, the importance of making adequate teaching and learning materials available to ensure the successful implementation of inclusive education [23]. Additionally, teachers have challenges using their expertise in their specific areas due to a lack of equipment, resources, and instructional materials [24].

3.1.3. Subjects are not in line with the field of specialization

The participants honestly admitted that they handled subjects that are not in line with their field of expertise. They reiterated that having subjects not based on their area of specialization caused them uncertainties in the quality of their outputs. This is evident with the following statements of the participants:

"Some of the subjects were outside my area of specialization, which caused me to doubt my output; I am concerned that I will be unable to give an adequate module for my students." (P8)

"I have five preparations, and three of them were challenging for me since they were unfamiliar to me; this was my first encounter with those subjects" (P3)

"Three of my subjects are outside my area of specialization, which makes writing tough, and I'm not sure if my work will pass the review committee." (P6)

The findings corroborate the theory that teaching requires specialization in a certain topic, teaching abilities, didactics, and unique personal characteristics needed for the profession [25]. Additionally, teachers play a critical role and obligation in assisting pupils in developing their knowledge and abilities. As a result, teacher education should be a place where relevant information and teaching-learning processes may be applied directly, frequently posed questions, and where analyses and experiments can be undertaken.

3.1.4. Overloaded number of subject preparations

The participants in this study were allocated with so many subjects with various preparations. Most participants highlighted their difficulty managing their time while preparing for their modules. This was evident through the following excerpts from the participants' statements:

"I was assigned six preparations, and it's difficult for me to manage my time well for each subject. Perhaps if I were limited to three or four preparations, I might be able to concentrate and produce a higher-quality output." (P6)

"For me, it's quite difficult because I have five subjects to prepare for whereas others only have one. I prioritize the courses I've previously taught because I've had several years of experience, but I'm uncertain about my ability to accomplish the new subjects assigned to me." (P12)

"I have eight preparations, although I was only assigned to prepare for five modules. Given my lack of knowledge and skill in these areas, I'm concerned about my capacity to finish a full module for the courses allocated to me." (P10)

According to the participants' statements, having an excessive quantity of subject preparations made them anxious about the quality of their work. The findings corroborate previous study [26] indicating that teachers in schools are overworked. Additionally, it was shown that job overload affects the quality of work performed. Additionally, teacher overload is a real problem in schools, particularly since the implementation of free education, which led to over-enrollment. It continues to be a barrier to accomplishing educational goals and objectives [27]. On the other hand, the prior finding contradicts with the findings that discovered overworked teachers are more likely to have good classroom management practices early in their careers [28]. Additionally, previous study [29] confirmed that teachers perform admirably despite severe workloads.

3.1.5. No standard format/style of module

Modules are designed to assist students in achieving specific goals. Individualized education is achievable through the usage of these modules. Students can study the material at their own pace and convenience. Additionally, they can be utilized to enhance classroom education. As a result, when writing modules, format and style are critical. Teachers are expected to process and evaluate new knowledge linked to their core professional activity and maintain a current knowledge base to enhance their skills and meet unique teaching needs as professionals in their fields. This point of view was not shared by the campus participants, as one of them stated:

> "I had trouble doing my modules because I was not informed of the proper format to be used. I have my format, and my colleagues have their own. We have a different format. As long as we can produce or make our modules, it is okay to have varied formats." (P15)
> "In the department, we don't have a set format. We differ in terms of the module's components. We ran into the problem that the criteria they used to evaluate our work were unfamiliar to us, such as the inclusion of an introduction and summary for each topic." (P11)
> "I don't know what to follow because there is no standard format." (P15)

The participants' responses emphasize the importance of following a consistent format and style when writing modules. Thus, this is consistent with the claim in a study demonstrating the efficacy of applying concept maps and modular learning strategies in improving students' academic performance [8]. They discovered that educators should encourage the activity of planning and developing modular materials. Additionally, they feel that as module authors, they should lay a common groundwork for the design. Further, they noted that faculty members must be mindful of both deep and surface approaches to learning when developing modules.

3.1.6. Inadequate office supplies/equipment for reproduction of modules

Faculty members encounter several challenges, one of which is the reproduction of their modules. The university does not have enough printer ink or bond paper to reproduce modules. Participants shared their predicaments:

> "Well, we're out of bond paper and printer for the time being. We used my printer to expedite the printing of our module, which I had with me." (P9)
> "We purchased one ream of long bond paper since we were out of stock. Yes, they also supplied us, but it is still insufficient. I have more than 50 students in one class, and I need to print 50 sheets for the preliminary period." (P4)

Participants expressed frustration about a lack of ink, bond paper, and printers necessary to recreate their modules. This means that faculty members require office materials to accomplish high-quality work. Previous research [30] found that material shortages and delays in material supply are among the leading causes of building project delays worldwide. Additionally, Dangle [6] conducted a study to ascertain the difficulties teachers have when implementing Modular Distance. The primary constraint found was a lack of financing from schools for module creation and delivery.

3.2. Coping mechanisms and best practices in module writing
3.2.1. Collaboration with colleagues

According to Vangrieken et al. [31], the educational sector is under increasing pressure to collaborate. Instructors must be skilled collaborators to do their jobs well, so teamwork is a factor. Additionally, collaborative work environments appear to be becoming the standard for all organizations. As a result, the participants in this paper engaged in collaborative work with their colleagues, as indicated:

"By sharing ideas, we assist one another in completing our modules." (P6)
"One of the positive aspects of the module was that we were able to discuss ideas with our peers. So far, the best approach we've used while working on our modules was checking them all together." (P4)
"We solicit input from others on topics such as developing rubrics for enrichment activities and comprehension exercises." (P3)

Collaboration results in an excellent strategy for teachers to complete their modules in this study. This is consistent with Anfara's assertion [32] that teachers who create collaboration are more excited about their profession, have a more incredible passion for their professions, have higher expectations for their students, and are more confident and devoted to improvement.

3.2.2. Self-motivation

Teachers' values guide their behavior and objectives in the classroom. Additionally, matters might impact an individual's self-efficacy and subjective well-being. Additionally, teachers' self-efficacy, which refers to their belief in their ability to effectively manage tasks, obligations, and challenges associated with their professional activity, is critical for influencing critical academic outcomes (i.e., students' motivation and achievement) and their workplace well-being [33]. Self-motivation is indicated in the following ways among faculty members in this study.

"To keep me motivated, I need to provide something for my students to study in this pandemic. Despite the misinformation and perplexity, I should mention that writing modules provided me with many memorable experiences, such as being inspired to complete it, which makes me feel pleased and fulfilled and satisfied." (P9)
"It's quite stressful, but I'm trying to be positive. Everything is going to be alright. This is, after all, for our students." (P14).
"It's complicated. Nonetheless, I valued it since it helped me develop my knowledge and abilities as a young instructor. Even, at the same time, the writing module is quite stressful. It is also gratifying." (P9)
"Look on the positive aspects of what is happening right now and disregard the obstacles, I tell myself to ease the strain of completing my modules." (P10)
"To meet the Dean of Instruction's deadline, I'll have to push myself to complete the work." (P11)

It is worth mentioning that the participants remained motivated to accomplish their projects despite their obstacles. They stated that module writing is stressful but also enjoyable and rewarding because its benefits pupils. As a result of this research, it is in line that when teachers are motivated, their performance inevitably improves [34].

3.2.3. Proper time management

According to previous researchers [35], time management refers to the effective use of time for achievement and production. It is concerned with managing work schedules to meet the business's objectives through progressive planning, organization, and execution. As expressed by the participants:

"For me, it's simply a matter of good time management. I put my modules ahead of anything else since I need to meet the deadline." (P2)
"Those subjects that have ready references are my priorities. I normally try to complete each subject in a week. Well, if I establish a deadline or time frame for myself, I make sure that I can meet it." (P9)
"I think I'll be able to finish it if I stick to my schedule." (P10)

Notably, participants recognize the importance of time management when it comes to finishing their modules. They assert that the module takes precedence all other considerations. Additionally, the following participant verbalizations are similar to the previous descriptive study [36], which discovered that teachers utilized scheduling, goal setting, prioritizing tasks, managing paperwork, and controlling interruptions and excessive paperwork and reports.

Additionally, a study [37] discovered that teachers' lesson preparation skills benefited students' performance significantly due to their superior time management. Teacher time management has a direct correlation with student achievement. Teachers of public elementary schools who plan actively and intelligently may build more intellectual brains for the future development of the nation [35].

3.2.4. Initiative and resourcefulness

"Initiative is the capacity to operate independently of constant direction, as well as the capacity to be resourceful." Perseverance and determination are required. Individuals who have initiative demonstrate that they are capable of thinking for themselves and acting independently. This involves the application of your mind and a will to succeed. Additionally, self-management is one of five real-world and job abilities required of professionals, along with initiative. What the participants said was:

> *"I had trouble with the collection of data, since making modules must not be based only on one book, so what I usually do is to search on the internet."* (P8)
> *"I learned a lot of things. I learn how to discuss through writing and explore different websites."* (P4)
> *"I was having problems gathering material because constructing modules can't be based solely on one book; therefore, I normally search the internet"* (P8)
> *"I gained a lot of knowledge. Writing has taught me how to discuss the lesson well."* (P1)
> *Being resourceful is a virtue. If the library does not contain the books/references I need, I must find another way/source, such as buying books online or browsing the internet."* (P3)
> *"I was merely talking about the online module tutorial. Working under pressure and stress is a positive experience for me since it teaches me to be resourceful."* (P5)

Indeed, the ingenuity of a teacher affects student achievement. Extremely resourceful teachers are competent in identifying the best practical ways and materials to teach their students, given the differences in their talents, prior knowledge, and home backgrounds [38]. Additionally, Rubio [39] asserted that teachers must be able to withstand the demands, pressures, and obstacles inherent in a variety of teaching situations. He contended that an effective teacher must be tenacious, adaptive, and innovative when implementing novel teaching techniques.

4. CONCLUSION

The current study revealed that faculty members experienced challenges in module writing. Moreover, the faculty member's innovative strategies and coping mechanisms to improve their teaching through module writing are indicators that they want to grow and embrace professional development. On the other hand, to address the identified problems, a proposed enhancement program will be initiated. The platform focuses on strengthening the Campus' Instructional Materials Development Program and enhancing Campus Activities on Developing Instructional Materials.

Furthermore, the current study shows that the administration should assist faculty members in meeting their objectives for developing high-quality instructional materials. Additionally, the administration should provide faculty members with instructional materials, specifically module writing, to produce high-quality IMs. Furthermore, it is proposed that the institution make the required teaching and learning materials and equipment available to both teachers and students. In addition, the administration should consider the field of specialization when distributing subject loads among faculty members to ensure quality outputs. Moreover, this study and its findings demonstrate the critical need for additional research on teachers' experiences in other aspects such as teaching in the modular approach.

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