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Sudden Transition to Online Instruction for ESL Instructors: A Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

In March of 2020, educational institutions worldwide experienced mass school closures mandated to prevent the spread of COVID-19 as part of public health efforts. Millions of educators and students around the world began to teach and study through distance education. In order to deliver high-quality instruction, educators were required to adapt to remote teaching tools and methodologies in a short amount of time. The majority of college instructors who teach remotely at community colleges had not received training prior to the online teaching transition. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of 15 English as a second language (ESL) instructors who taught at a community college in the northeast section of the United States during and immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic. During the data analysis, critical themes such as strong emotional reactions, technological difficulties, increased workload and exhaustion, teacher-formed learning communities, and learning by trial and error emerged. The contribution of this phenomenological study may benefit higher education administrators and instructors by helping them make informed decisions in case of a sudden transition. The data derived from this study might serve as a guide to schools in similar settings. This information could be shared in workshops and seminars to equip faculty as well as prepare future faculty and staff members. As a result of the study, educational institutions can evaluate their practices to increase the faculty's readiness to teach remotely under emergency conditions.

Keywords:

Accessibility, asynchronous, collaboration, coronaviruses, COVID-19, distance learning, outbreak, pandemic, synchronous, transition

1. Introduction

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which emerged in late 2019, caused significant changes in economic, social, and pedagogical terms. Education systems worldwide were one of the most impacted areas by the pandemic outbreak (Ronghuai et al., 2020; Trikoilis & Papanastasiou, 2020). Educational systems mandated mass school closures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 as part of public health efforts (Kaden, 2020; Ronghuai et al., 2020). Millions of educators and students worldwide began teaching and studying through distance education (Cavanaugh & DeWeese, 2020; Wieland & Kollias, 2020).

To deliver high-quality instruction and meet the needs of learners, educators were required to adapt to remote teaching tools and methodologies in a short amount of time (Babinčáková & Bernard, 2020). Instructors faced issues such as lack of technical support, limited opportunities for collaboration, gaps in the quality of using online tools to make lessons more student-centered, and a constant push for student retention (Baran & AlZoubi, 2020; Guo et al., 2020; Huang, 2020; König et al., 2020; Thaís, 2020). Most instructors who taught remotely at language schools and colleges had not received training before the online teaching transition (Martin et al., 2019). According to Allen and Seaman (2017), the percentage of technology-savvy instructors at

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the college level is low. The transition to remote teaching requires guidelines and procedures (Ramona et al., 2020).

The problem was that many community college instructors abruptly transitioned into remote instruction without professional development, sufficient bandwidth, and little to no preparation (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020). According to Allen and Seaman (2017), six percent of the 2,500 colleges and universities offering distance-learning courses have no training or mentoring programs for faculty who teach online. Implementing any online course requires ongoing professional development, collaboration, strong leadership, and constructive feedback (Martin et al., 2019). While instructors may transfer traditional face-to-face teaching strategies to online environments, acquiring other skills to teach remotely is needed (Martin et al., 2019). Instructors' readiness to teach in an online setting became even more critical during the challenging times of a global pandemic (Baran & AlZoubi, 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020).

1.1. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of 15 English as a second language (ESL) instructors who taught at a community college in the northeast section of the United States during and immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic. Educators across the United States were mandated to deliver online instruction and use various online tools to meet their learners' needs and expectations (Ramona et al., 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020). Instructors' self-efficacy to use online tools varies (Baran & AlZoubi, 2020; Major, 2020; Thaís, 2020). Without adequate training and preparation, instructors get overwhelmed when trying to fulfill duties to meet students' needs and increase academic outcomes (Frauenholtz et al., 2017).

Most online instructors have not been trained to deliver courses online at language schools and community colleges (Martin, Wang, et al., 2019). It is likely more than half of any given faculty is not technology savvy (Allen & Seaman, 2017). Guidelines to support faculty before transitioning to distance teaching and learning are needed (Ramona et al., 2020). The data on the problems the instructors experience and steps to mitigate the difficulties are insufficient (Cheng & Cheng, 2020; Ramona et al., 2020). Although studies investigating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on education have been conducted, there exists a gap in the literature about teachers' experiences in emergency online instruction (Lassoued et al., 2020; Youmans, 2020; Zhao, 2020). This study can fill a gap in the literature about community college instructors' readiness to teach remotely during a pandemic, especially in the northeastern section of the United States. The faculty members' experiences may enlighten future educational decisions if and when another sudden transition to virtual platforms occurs. This study contributes to the knowledge base by providing data on the practices of instructors who have experienced teaching remotely during a pandemic and adds to the previous studies on distance teaching and learning. The data can be used to make better instructional and strategic decisions for future practices.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design and Rationale

In this phenomenological study, a qualitative research approach was utilized to reveal the experiences of ESL faculty teaching remotely during a pandemic at a community college. The goal was to understand the impact of a sudden transition to online teaching on ESL faculty. The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

Research Question 1: What were the experiences of ESL instructors who made a sudden transition into online teaching at a community college in the northeastern section of the United States?

Research Question 2: How does professional development shape the experiences of faculty members' teaching strategies while transitioning to online teaching at a community college in the northeastern section of the United States?

Qualitative research focuses on producing knowledge, which people develop to discover the depth of the social structures and systems built to understand experiences (Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Unluer, 2012). In the studies designed using the qualitative method, the purpose is to reach an extensive perception of

the event or phenomenon explored (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative methodology can provide a deep understanding of even complex issues related to human experiences (Creswell, 2013, 2015; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Englander, 2012; Miles et al., 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2003). Qualitative research generally uses data collection techniques such as observation, interviews, documentation, and discourse analysis (Park & Park, 2016). Exploring human perceptions and events in social reality and the natural environment is essential (Creswell, 2013).

Phenomenology is a qualitative research design exploring events people encounter in real life in greater detail (McMillan, 2000). The main focus of phenomenological studies is on the individual and their meanings; the lived experiences of individuals are valuable in defining the causes of occurrences as precisely as possible (Creswell, 2015). Participants are informed about how to construct the meaning of a phenomenon in an environment where opportunities to describe experiences freely and accurately are provided (Creswell, 2015; Englander, 2012; Unluer, 2012). A phenomenological approach is appropriate to explore and interpret the lived experiences of individuals to make sense of the world and develop a worldview (McMillan, 2000; Moustakas, 1994). Great strength is found in conducting in-depth interviews to explore educators' experiences with the phenomenon of a sudden transition to online instruction (Ghirotto, 2016). The nature of the research questions lends itself to a phenomenological approach.

2.2. Population and Sample Selection

The participants were determined by criterion sampling, one of the purposeful sampling methods (Creswell, 2009). The criterion sampling method was used to obtain in-depth and accurate data based on the research problem. In criterion sampling, participants with the most suitable qualities for the research problem were included in the study (Palys, 2008).

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research requires a purposeful selection of participants (Yildirim & Simsek, 2005). One of the most important steps is to determine the appropriateness of the participants for the study (Yildirim & Simsek, 2005). During the criterion sampling process, the participants were selected based on their duration of employment at the community college and their experiences with the sudden transition to teach remotely. The selection criteria included teaching ESL at the college for at least 12 months and completing a whole semester teaching ESL remotely. Participants who did not meet both criteria were not included in the study. The community college officially transitioned into remote teaching in March 2020; most participants had at least two semesters of remote teaching experience.

2.3. Data Collection Tools and Procedure

The data for the study was collected from 15 ESL teachers who experienced a sudden transition to online education in Spring 2020. The provost of the community college and the director of the ESL department provided a list of instructors who met the criteria to participate in this study. Upon receiving the names and contact information of the ESL instructors, recruitment letters were sent via email to ensure their willingness to participate in the study. From the initial 40 potential participants emailed, 15 interested individuals responded within two weeks. Each participant who agreed to take part in the study was asked to sign a consent form before responding to questionnaire items and participating in an interview.

2.3.1. Questionnaires

The data collection process involves sending the questionnaires to ESL instructors. The participants who signed the informed consent forms received a link to complete the questionnaire. A web-based questionnaire tool called Google Forms was used to establish meaningful variation among the participants' responses (Jansen, 2010). The questionnaire included eight open-ended questions, which took the participants approximately 15 minutes to complete. After the participants completed the questionnaires, they submitted the forms electronically.

To ensure questionnaire items were well structured and valid, five subject matter experts (SMEs) working in education and research were consulted. The main criteria in determining the experts were that they must have had experience conducting qualitative research and they must have earned a doctoral degree (Unluer, 2012). Other criteria for the SMEs were previous experience teaching ESL at the college level as well as the

ability to use online tools in language teaching. The experts validated the interview questions and survey items.

2.3.2. Semi-structured interviews

The participants were presented with a calendar via email to schedule an interview date and time. Based on the availability and choices of the participants, interviews were scheduled to be held via phone or online (Zoom). While 13 participants requested to be interviewed via Zoom, two participants preferred phone interviews. The interviews were recorded via a voice recorder or the record function of Zoom for validity purposes. The participants consented to recorded interviews. The participants were given as much time as they needed to answer the questions so the researcher could expand on the participants' experiences with the phenomenon being investigated. During the interview, ten open-ended questions were asked, and detailed notes were taken to categorize, catalog, and sort the information accurately (Unluer, 2012).

2.3.3. Document analysis

Following the interviews, the document analysis part of the data collection started. The coordinator of the ESL department and the provost of the community college shared a document that included instructions on how to use Blackboard, a virtual learning environment used by the community college. This five-page guide, prepared by the information technology department, provided insights on exploring the second research question, which asked how professional development shaped the experiences of faculty members' teaching strategies while transitioning to online teaching at a community college in the northeastern section of the United States.

To collect documents to be analyzed, O'Leary's (2014) eight-step planning process was followed. In the first step, relevant documents were gathered. The next step entailed developing an organizational scheme. Copies of the original documents were made for annotation, and the authenticity of the documents was confirmed by reaching out to the Information Technology Department staff that led the production of the materials. Next, background information such as purpose, style, and target audience were evaluated, and no potential biases were acknowledged. Finally, relevant questions such as why, who, or when the document was produced were asked, and finally the content was explored (O'Leary, 2014).

After completing the interview, the participants were thanked for their contributions to the interview, and information about the next steps in data collection was provided. To ensure member checking, a copy of the interview transcript was emailed to each participant. The participants were informed that they would be able to request a follow-up interview to review the recording of the interview or expand on the transcripts. While all of the participants confirmed the accuracy of the interview transcripts, no one requested a follow-up meeting. The participants' names were coded to ensure confidentiality, and the data were kept on a password-secured laptop in a safe locker. No additional contact, follow-up interviews, or amendments to transcripts were required for this study. Following the interviews, document analysis was conducted to explore the documents provided by the ESL department. The data collection process took two weeks. There was no deviation from the original data collection plan, and no additional time or procedures were required. No events or circumstances impacted the data collection process.

2.4. Data Analysis

The phenomenological analysis focuses on obtaining the psychological essence of the phenomenon experienced by the participant. The reasoning process used in qualitative research requires creating a whole by perceptually bringing the pieces together (Akturan & Esen, 2008). An inductive approach was used to group and analyze the data (Simon, 2011). The data analysis was carried out based on the four-step data analysis suggested by Giorgi (2012). The steps are bracketing, phenomenological reduction, imaginary diversification, and a synthesis of the general structure of experiences. In the bracketing step, each participant's experience was acknowledged non-judgmentally, and previous knowledge was used to create new understanding (Vagle, 2016). The researcher set aside all assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation. During phenomenological reduction, interview texts were divided into different semantic units to manage them more efficiently and accurately. The views of each participant were transcribed. At the imaginary diversification stage, the semantic units reached in the phenomenological reduction process were

discussed, and the structural themes of the phenomenon studied through the semantic units were discovered. Finally, the participants' experiences of a sudden transition to online teaching were synthesized (Giorgi, 2012). The common points of the meaning units were formed over the texts containing the opinions of each participant, and the structural themes reached through the units were synthesized. The unchanging essence of the phenomenon under investigation was revealed (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). Table 1 provides the reader with an understanding of the themes that emerged during the four-step data analysis suggested by Giorgi (2012).

Table 1. Themes Identified During Data Analysis

Theme	Number of participants who mentioned the theme (n=15)
Question 1 topic: Experiences of ESL instructors making a sudden transition into online teaching	
Strong emotional reactions	14
Technological challenges	10
Increased workload/exhaustion	8
Question 2 topic: The role of professional development in shaping faculty members' teaching strategies	
Blackboard training	15
Teacher-formed ongoing PD meetings	15
Learning by trial and error	5

The emerging themes from the data collection were: strong emotional reactions; technological challenges; increased workload and exhaustion; Blackboard training; teacher-led ongoing professional development meetings; and learning by trial and error. The reasoning process used in this qualitative study required creating a whole by perceptually bringing the pieces together (Akturan & Esen, 2008). The findings obtained within emerging themes and patterns were explained (Yildirim & Simsek, 2005).

2.5. Ethical Procedures

Protecting human subjects is an essential component of conducting research (Creswell, 2014). Before conducting the study, to ensure the privacy and safety of the participants, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the American College of Education was obtained, and the data collection method and recruiting of the participants started after the approval. Upon entering the study, the participants received and signed consent forms via email, which provided information such as the purpose of the study, data collection methods, expectations of the participants, and the freedom to withdraw from the study at any stage without facing penalties or obligations. Confidentiality was addressed by creating a clean data set that did not contain any information related to the identity of the participants (Kaiser, 2009). The participants' names were coded by letters to ensure privacy. The information was kept on a laptop with a password known only to the researcher. The laptop was kept in a locked cabinet. After the study was completed, the data were kept in a locked safe and destroyed three years later. The names of the participants were not shared with the community college's administrators.

3. Findings

Studying the detailed accounts of the participants' experiences made exploring the phenomenon of teachers' sudden transition to online education possible. Research Question One determined the experiences of ESL instructors make a sudden transition into online teaching at a community college in the northeastern section of the United States. The semi-structured interviews and questionnaires pointed out the following themes: strong emotional reactions, technological challenges, increased workload, and exhaustion. In addition to the technical difficulties and burnouts, the participants experienced strong emotions such as relief, worry, anxiety, and feelings of isolation.

3.1. Strong Emotional Reactions

Amid the wave of pandemic lockdowns, teachers had to turn their homes into classrooms while dealing with health and safety concerns. Data from the research confirmed the theory of Darling-Hammond et al. (2019), which suggested that before and during real-time teaching sessions, several strong emotions might take the form of various reactions, such as shyness or low self-esteem relief, and exhaustion. These emotions may lead

to more intense burnout when the lack of technological readiness is added. Notably, the participants experienced relief, anxiety, worry, and feelings of isolation.

3.1.1. Relief

The opportunity to teach from home brought a sense of psychological relief to the instructors. The spread of the virus, which claimed thousands of lives, was taken seriously by the instructors, and eliminating the risk of going out and being infected was a huge relief. In addition, the participants were relieved because they were able to maintain their jobs. Wilson (2020) suggested teachers' mental well-being during the pandemic significantly impacts the quality of instruction and helps students catch up on lost learning. The participants stated that this sense of relief helped them during the transition to online instruction. Participant O stated, *"I was really relieved because I took the 2019 virus very seriously. I'm older, I think. And I knew that this could have been a big risk for me and my family."* Participant D stated:

I was relieved because I was feeling really anxious at the time, in March. And then you are hearing all the news and everything—just general anxiety about the world. So in a way, I was relieved not to have to go and possibly be infected.

Three participants mentioned the relief of keeping jobs. Participant A stated, *"In March, I had so many questions. It was scary. So knowing that there was work made it much better. You know, in that respect, psychologically, it helps."* Participant F stated, *"I was relieved that things were continuing, you know, I would still get a paycheck and all that. I was looking forward to teaching from home."*

3.1.2. Anxiety/Worry

The participants spoke most in depth about their overall feelings and opinions about the transition to online teaching. Even with mixed feelings about the transition, half of the participants expressed their anxiety and worries about their changing teaching environment and methods. While anxiety and worry were common feelings, the participants expressed different reasons for their feelings, such as not having enough time to prepare, not being trained, being camera shy, possibly losing students and the job, and not knowing what to expect. Participant G stated:

I was worried because I knew it would be a challenge. First of all, I wasn't trained, and it basically happened overnight. And I knew I had very little time, so I was kind of scared and felt uneasy.

The participants had worries about doing a good job in their new virtual classrooms. Participant C stated, *"It was like a huge learning curve, so it was a little bit of anxiety about having to do this job online and do a good job. I wanted to do a good job, but I didn't really know-how."* Participant E stated:

I felt nervous. I didn't really know what to expect. I was never too fond of being on camera, so I could say, even though I'm a very dynamic and outgoing person, I have always been a little bit camera shy. I was worried about how I was going to deal with these people looking at me constantly on camera. Will I be able to act the same way as I do in the classroom? Will I be able to see the students? Will I be able to reach out to them the same way I do in a normal classroom setting? So those were the biggest worries there.

Participant J stated:

I was worried that I would never be prepared enough. I thought I was going to lose my students. If I don't learn how to use these new platforms, how am I going to teach my students? I have to be a pro to be able to keep my job.

The teacher participants repeatedly expressed their concerns about not knowing what to expect. They all had a minimum of 12 months of teaching experience at the community college, but they were not sure to what extent they would be able to teach the same way they did in the classroom. The participants were worried about the quality of education that they could offer to their students.

3.1.3. Feelings of Isolation

Concerning the feeling of isolation, almost half of the participants felt isolated due to the loss of the human element in teaching. The main reasons for the loss of the human element were the lack of interaction between teachers and students, students not turning their cameras on during real-time teaching sessions, and feeling isolated in the home environment from the outside world. Six participants expressed a feeling of isolation due

to the loss of the human element in teaching. While two participants shared that they felt isolated in their home environment, four participants expressed isolation in their new virtual classroom because they did not turn their cameras on. Participant B said, “I felt isolated at home. I missed in-person teaching. I missed that social contact. I didn’t feel good psychologically.” Participant H expressed the feeling of isolation and how critical it was for second language instruction stated:

I felt like the whole element was lost. The human element, the learning element, and the teaching element... We were isolated. Something was off. Teachers miss the interaction and face-to-face communication. I feel like I am losing my students. They connect but don’t show their faces, which is a big deal to me. Interaction is critical to learning.

Participant E stated:

A lot of students, at least in the beginning, didn’t want to have their cameras on. I was looking at a bunch of blank spaces and trying to imagine who these people were. It was very hard—I mean, feeling alone and talking to a blank space. The participants mentioned that the lack of student-teacher interaction led to an increased feeling of isolation.

The teacher participants repeatedly expressed their concerns about the loss of human connection in their virtual ESL classrooms. When the majority of the students did not turn their cameras on, the feeling of isolation increased. The amount of active interaction mentioned by the participants is critical to successful second language teaching and learning.

3.2. Technological Challenges

Teachers' technological readiness is vital to understanding learners' needs and expectations and delivering instruction appropriately (Guo et al., 2020; Ramona et al., 2020; Thaís, 2020). The data obtained from semi-structured interviews showed only a few teachers had online teaching experience before COVID-19.

Three participants previously worked for a China-based company to teach kids English online, and one participant tutored adult students virtually. The teacher participants who had taught online before the pandemic experienced a smoother transition. They stated they just had to adjust their teaching materials for online instruction.

The ten participants who mentioned technological challenges did so concerning the technological challenges the instructors faced and the students' technological challenges, which directly impacted instruction. Participant K stated:

I am not a computer person at all, and I am not familiar with so many of the tools I am using now. I was not so well equipped technically, either. It was just like jumping in the water without learning how to swim. If we had been using some of the online technologies before, the transition would have been easier. A lot of the technologies were already there. The question was how I could adapt them to my online teaching.

The data obtained from the interviews showed the participants and the students had technological difficulties. While the participants received training, the students were not trained to use the tools they needed to attend online classes. Teaching the students how to use the technological tools added to the participants' workload, resulting in exhaustion. Facing a sudden transition to remote teaching with students who were not technologically savvy added extra burdens to teachers who had never taught or considered teaching online before (König et al., 2020). Consequently, the participants experienced a significant increase in work time, resulting in exhaustion.

3.3. Increased Workload/Exhaustion

Another theme that emerged from the data collection was increased workload and exhaustion. The teacher participants mentioned that they had to take on new roles and work for long hours due to the changes in their teaching environment. The teachers' new responsibilities included managing the virtual classrooms, fixing technical problems, and finding solutions to the students' problems. Participant K stated:

It is nice not having to get dressed and get into the subway, but dealing with the students is much more difficult. Getting their attention is so much more difficult, and they will just do whatever they want. You have to work much harder to teach in a virtual classroom. You can hear all the noises in the background. It is so frustrating.

Participant M stated:

I felt like there was no time off because, when I was done with teaching, I had to figure out how to fix that problem or fix this problem. So I just felt like I was working 24/7, whereas teaching in the classroom has its own challenges. But I felt like when I would leave the classroom and then prepare for my next class, I could move on. The biggest thing with online teaching was that there was no segmenting. It was like in any spare moment of my life, I was either grading, answering emails, or figuring out how to teach. It felt like it was never ending.

Further insights were gained from another participant regarding the increased workload and new responsibilities the teachers had. Participant B stated, “On top of my added workload, I was dealing with the students’ problems. I was a teacher, a guardian, and a psychologist. I was working non-stop to find solutions to my problems and the students’ problems.” The teacher participants stated they were concerned about the students’ well-being and did their best to help them get through this process.

Increased workload and exhaustion were an emerging theme mentioned by eight participants. Although the participants saved time commuting, their workload increased due to factors such as answering emails, finding solutions to problems, and planning their lessons in a way they never did before. The participants also had to take on new roles to help their students transition to online learning as smoothly as possible.

3.4. The Role of Professional Development

Research Question Two asked, “How does professional development shape the experiences of faculty members’ teaching strategies while transitioning to online teaching at a community college in the northeastern section of the United States? Moreover, can you provide insights into the role of professional development during the transition to online education?” The following themes emerged during the semi-structured interviews and questionnaires: Blackboard training, teacher-formed ongoing professional development meetings named co-generative teacher dialogues (CTDs), and learning by trial and error.

3.4.1. Blackboard Training

The first theme identified from the data to answer the second research question was Blackboard training. All participants mentioned that the school offered only Blackboard training during the transition to online education. This training covered the basics of the Blackboard learning management system.

The majority of the participants stated they did not learn much in that professional development activity. Participant K stated, “It was like a crash course, as I would call it. I don’t think it was adequate. I learned along the way.” Participant N noted, “We had a few short sessions organized by the remote learning department. They were very quick sessions, so I didn’t learn much.” Similarly, Participant E stated, “It was more like an orientation than professional development. It was not reimbursed. I didn’t learn anything. I wish they had professional development on how to use different platforms because there is so much out there.”

Although the participants claimed that they did not receive adequate support from the community college during the transition to online education to improve their instruction, the data from the study revealed that 100% of the participants highly benefited from the CTDs.

3.4.2. Teacher-formed Ongoing Professional Development Meetings

While some teachers experienced traumatic events during the transition, many others quickly learned new technologies and adapted to the new platforms with the help of ongoing collaboration, professional development, and leadership (Carolan, 2020).

A group of ESL teachers, including some very responsible colleagues, as described by a participant, formed this group to share best practices and ideas. All participants from various teaching backgrounds attended these meetings to learn new skills and share their teaching strategies.

The ESL teachers met voluntarily every Thursday from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. to discuss topics related to ESL instruction. To promote the continuation of this group, the community college decided to compensate teachers who participated in these sessions. Table 2 presents the titles of the topics covered in these meetings.

Table 2. Topics covered in the weekly co-generative discussion group

Topics
Balanced Literacy as an ESL Approach in the Classroom
Reading Wars: Which Side Are You On?
Music in the Classroom: Techniques and Practices
Virtual Dictionaries: Suggestions and Feedback
Use of WhatsApp for Mitigating Communicative and Technical Difficulties in Virtual Classroom Spaces
TMS for Mitigating Issues of Record-Keeping on Zoom
Global Conference on Hip Hop Education
Using AnkiApp for Flashcards
Teaching Pronunciation Part 1 (Approaches to Teaching Elocution Classes)
Teaching Pronunciation Part 2
How to Conduct Virtual Field Trips
Experiences with Turnitin
Does Turnitin Really Detect Plagiarism? Turnitin vs. Plagiarism Checker
Blackboard Template Walk-through
Blackboard Collaborate Ultra
Controlling Pace of Quizizz Exercise
Racial/Cultural Literacy
Embedding an Oral Component Blackboard Test
How to Create Blackboard Tests the Way
How to Use Wikis on Blackboard
Flipgrid
Conducting Oral Communication Classes in Zoom
Concept Checking Questions
Blackboard Tip of the Week (How to Make Discussion Forum Gradable)
Padlet
MyEnglishLab and E-books
A Walk-through on How to Create a Kahoot!
How Kahoot! Can Be a Tool for Distance Learning
Using Regular Expressions with Fill-in the Blank Questions on Blackboard
Microsoft Teams: How to Create a Team
ESL Video

Co-generative teacher dialogue meetings enabled the teachers to collaborate on various tasks, such as creating quizzes, midterms, or final exams. The participants found these meetings highly beneficial for various reasons. The friendly atmosphere of the meetings, the wide range of topics covered, and the alignment to a natural teaching setting were among the reasons why the participants highly benefited from these meetings. Participant C stated:

The Thursday meetings were very beneficial. It was a friendly and easy environment. I felt comfortable. We were able to share the best practices of online teaching quickly and directly. Those meetings were not like meetings where you sit and learn nothing applicable to your practice. We were able to learn new skills and build a community of learners.

Further insights gained from Participant F:

They were very helpful because it wasn't like going to a professional development seminar; it was just someone telling you something. It was like they were sharing their experiences because they had actually tried it, which seemed more helpful than simply hearing, "Here's another tool, here's another tool, and here's another tool." This was more like here's a tool that I have tried in our teaching setting and that I like so far. They were definitely helpful.

Participant C stated that the school only required teachers to use Blackboard, but other than that, they were free to conduct their classes the way they felt comfortable. They were also free to supplement their lessons with any tools they wished to use. Participant N shared:

In these meetings, our colleagues would share what they were doing. In the beginning, I didn't even know there were so many things available. I could just hear from them and then decide if it was something I wanted to use or not. Another participant mentioned that everyone was using something different and that it was so easy to get lost

among the possibilities. The majority of the participants mentioned the freedom of experimenting and stated that they eventually chose the tools that they felt comfortable using.

The participants mentioned that ongoing teacher collaboration became possible thanks to these “co-generative teacher dialogue” meetings. The teachers were able to reach out to colleagues and collaborate on various tasks, such as creating quizzes, midterms, or final exams. A WhatsApp chat group was created to make communication faster and easier. Participant L stated:

I wrote to one of my colleagues about my worry about an exam for which I had to prepare. We were teaching the same course. He offered to meet in a Zoom meeting like the one we're having, and he shared his screen with me and showed me where to find everything and create an exam. We worked on a test together. That was really great. That was a very useful meeting.

The participants found the Co-Generative Teacher Dialogues (CTDs) beneficial for various reasons. The strong sense of community built in these meetings helped the participants communicate more frequently and easily. All of these ongoing efforts aided the participants' transition to online instruction.

3.5. Learning by Trial and Error

The final theme that emerged from the data collection was learning by trial and error, as mentioned by four participants. The teachers had the flexibility and freedom to use any instructional materials or tools they wished. By trying different methods, tools, and strategies, they learned what worked well with their students and what did not. Participant O stated:

I tried a number of things. Some things worked, while others did not, including Quizlet and Kahoot! It was basically trial and error. See what works, what doesn't work, and do whatever I can in my class.

Participant A added the feedback received from students during the process of learning by trial and error:

I have done a lot of trying and learned by trial and error. What really helped me a lot was actually talking to my students. I had a group of students who were very friendly and mature. So I always asked their opinion. And they were sincere, which I really appreciated. I asked them what worked and what didn't work. They would tell me that we could do it separately or in a different way. Student feedback really helped me.

Participants D and M mentioned learning how to navigate on Blackboard by trial and error and creating a mock course to try things. By doing so, the pressure to make mistakes was removed. The teachers were able to try all the functions of Blackboard on their mock courses. Learning by trial and error was an effective problem-solving method for the participants during the transition to online teaching.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which emerged in late 2019, caused significant changes in economic, social, and pedagogical terms. With or without remote education experience, every educator and learner suddenly had to continue teaching and learning with distance education methods and tools. Since teachers had limited knowledge and skills in online education and designing lesson materials for online classes, ensuring everything ran flawlessly was challenging. Educators faced pedagogical, technological, or psychological and emotional challenges. Teaching a course face-to-face and teaching it online require different types of pedagogical training, and instructors should be trained before teaching remotely.

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of 15 English ESL instructors who experienced a sudden transition to teaching remotely at a community college during a pandemic. Critical themes such as strong emotional reactions, technological difficulties, increased workload and exhaustion, teacher-formed learning communities, and learning by trial and error during the data analysis. The abrupt transition to online teaching during the pandemic fundamentally changed how faculty members approach education. However, with the help of teacher-formed learning communities and the freedom to try different tools and methods, the ESL instructors could successfully transition to online instruction despite the challenges.

5. Recommendations

This study explored the lived experiences of 15 ESL teachers at a community college during the transition to online education in the northeastern section of the United States. Valuable data emerged from the collection of data, but more research is needed. Future studies should include mixed participants from all sections of the country or around the world. Based on the limitations of this study, future research can be expanded to include a larger sample size.

Participants reported the benefits of teacher-led ongoing professional development meetings and the positive effects of teacher collaboration on teaching practices. Participants were also experiencing strong emotional reactions such as worry, isolation, exhaustion, technological difficulties, and increased workload. Participants agreed that training students to use technology is just as important as training teachers to reduce workload and exhaustion. Future research should focus on the training of students and the impact of this training on teachers' instructional practices. Therefore, there is a greater need to focus on the professional development needs of teachers as well as training students, emphasizing the importance of leadership practices for unexpected incidents or circumstances in education.

6. References

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