



Sodais T. Tarusan

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6371-3150>

Department of Education of the Republic of the Philippines

e-mail: sodaistarusan21@gmail.com

Genesis B. Naparan

<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2335-2757>

Saint Columban College, Pagadian City, Philippines

e-mail: genesisbnaparan@gmail.com

Gilbert A. Celesio

<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8794-9646>

Saint Columban College, Pagadian City, Philippines

e-mail: bertcelesio@sccpag.edu.ph

Learning Experiences of Teachers Attending Online Webinars

Abstract

The shift from actual seminars to the internet-mediated webinar format has changed how teachers access opportunities for continuous learning. Attending webinars has also become necessary as teachers look for alternative ways to further develop their knowledge. The purpose of this study was to explore the learning experiences of the teachers who attend webinars. This study used Meriam's case study research method; intensive, holistic description; and analysis of a bounded phenomenon, such as a program, institution, person, process, or social unit. The study was conducted in the elementary schools of Sultan Naga Dimaporo West District, Division of Lanao del Norte, Philippines for the 2020–2021 school year. It was found that most teachers participated in webinars about teaching strategies, content knowledge, the teaching profession, and general knowledge related to the pandemic. It was also revealed that these teachers are expected to gain relevant knowledge and skills applicable to "the new normal." The teachers

shared their experiences in acquiring knowledge, skills, and emotional content in their actual participation in the webinars during the pandemic. The teacher's purpose of attending webinars is to gain understanding of the topic to improve the quality of teaching. Thus, the webinar presents an opportunity to expand teacher training programs amid the pandemic.

Keywords: learning experience; teacher participation; webinar

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is a sign of the changing times and requires the educational system to undergo a significant revolution. The spread of COVID-19 implies that education may never be the same again. It has caused online learning to be rushed into full-production learning environments for K-12 education everywhere, especially in the Philippines. Teachers are making drastic changes to how they approach instruction within hybrid-learning, with innovation playing an enormous part (Iradel et al., 2021; Toquero & Talidong, 2020).

Webinars have replaced face-to-face seminars and other workshops. The term *webinar* refers to disseminating recorded or live content over the Internet (Bhargava et al., 2021). It permits individuals around the world to associate in a virtual classroom and to share information via the Internet. Notably, webinars can benefit teachers in education because they make events, including workshops, lectures, and training courses, accessible to clients in remote areas and to numerous learners in entirely different places (Idhalama et al., 2021). This way, webinars can be dynamic tools that support learning, teaching, and professional development.

Today, teachers from various educational institutions are also getting an opportunity to participate (Al-Shahrani, 2019). This role is satisfied by their exceptional cooperation in numerous seminars, workshops, and faculty improvement programs, which are conducted solely to upgrade their learning experiences (Boiarska-Khomenko et al., 2020). Webinars are a cost-effective way for schools to carry out teacher training, since they do not entail the costs of speakers' fees, equipment rental, food

and refreshments for participants, and certificate printing. What spurs Filipino teachers to go to webinars? Many webinars are free. Through webinars, teachers can upgrade their earning while staying at home and can even receive a Certificate of Participation afterward.

The shift from face-to-face seminars to the online or internet-mediated format of webinars has also changed how teachers access opportunities for continuous learning. Considering that the new set-up of teaching and learning has also changed to a new modality for teachers, attending webinars has also become necessary as teachers look for alternative ways to acquire knowledge in the current situation of “the new normal.” With the current situation that our teachers face, they are stagnant in aspects such as attending seminars and training. This study investigated teachers’ learning experiences of attending webinars based on Kolb’s experiential learning theory (Healey & Jenkins, 2000). It explored the different expectations of attending webinars and how the webinars enhanced their professional development as teachers.

Method

This study utilized the case study research method, focusing more on the case study model of Sharan Merriam (1998), which is particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. It is particularistic because it focuses on a particular situation or phenomenon. The choice of the case study method with qualitative methods was based on two reasons. Firstly, the nature of the problem under investigation required an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon. Secondly, value is contextual and determined by the individual’s experience, emotions, relationships, and learning, which affect value realization.

The study area was the West District of Sultan Naga Dimaporo (SND). The district has 14 complete elementary schools and five integrated schools. SND is a Class 5 municipality in the province of Lanao del Norte. The teachers in this district have joined a series of webinars given by the Department of Education.

The study's participants were selected elementary teachers from the West District who have attended at least two webinars and teachers who earned at least two certificates from attending webinars. The participants were categorized according to their length of service in the Department of Education in order to collect accurate, in-depth data and to weight their learning experiences from webinars: three of the participants had 0 to 5 years of teaching service (Group 1), three had 6 to 10 years' service (Group 2), and three had more than 10 years (Group 3).

The researchers were the prime instruments in the research. They conducted in-depth interviews to gather the necessary data, aided by their interview protocol. The interview guide questions consisted of engaging, exploratory, and exit questions. The researchers observed ethical practices while doing the research and they secured the consent of the participants. They also preserved the confidentiality of the data and ensured the participants that they would not be harmed in the study.

The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed into field texts, from which themes were extracted. A simultaneous re-reading of each participant's meaningful reports facilitated the participants' essential ideas and experiences. The data analysis is based on Meriam's model, which consolidates, reduces, and interprets what the people have said and what the researcher has seen, read – and then makes meaning (Merriam, 1998). An inductive analysis was used from the data segment to categorize idea units into primary/secondary concepts or the sub-themes into macro-concepts or themes. The researchers adapted the audit trial technique to ensure the reliability of the data, as mentioned in Merriam's method. Following the six strategies for enhancing the validity of the data, the researchers adapted the strategy of peer examination to provide factual information and a strong validation of the data.

Results and Discussion

Teachers' Expectations of Attending Webinars

In terms of teachers' expectations about attending webinars, five themes emerged. These are the *acquisition of conceptual knowledge*, *acquisition of skills*, *accessibility of technological resources*, *trainer competence*, and *social interaction*. Each theme is described below, followed by the experience of each case relative to the theme.

Acquisition of Conceptual Knowledge. This theme implies gaining additional learning from attending webinars and supplementary skills from what has been learned already. Significant excerpts that demonstrate this phenomenon are as follows: "I expected to learn from the webinar because of the learners' need to deliver instruction and how to facilitate to make it quality" (T2); "I expected to gain knowledge and wisdom from the webinar. The webinar helps me to enhance my knowledge in a specific discipline" (T3).

For teachers who have been teaching for one to five years, one of their expectations from attending webinars was to learn from the speakers or trainers. In their expectations of webinars, these teachers hoped to learn general conceptual knowledge or knowledge that encompasses a broad range of concepts, especially those that generally interest them: "I expected to learn general knowledge and ideas which anchor to the objective of the seminars" (T4); "I learn Photoshop ... and new educational trends which are significant in the new normal" (T5)

Teachers who have taught for six to ten years are expected to learn general and specific knowledge from their webinars. They hoped to understand a wide range of topics and gain expertise about specialized issues related to their work or hobbies: "I expected to be acquainted with or learn about particular topics" (T7); "I expect to know about learning in the new normal and different learning modalities" (T8); "I expect to learn or acquire something new and relevant to my field of specialization" (T9).

Teachers who have taught for more than ten years are expected to gain conceptual knowledge in specific and more specialized areas of

learning. Teachers are also expected to learn new technical knowledge according to their areas of specialization. With the change in teaching and learning conditions, these teachers attended webinars expecting to learn specific concepts related to how students learn in this new context. One of the themes that emerged from the teacher's expectations of attending seminars is the acquisition of conceptual knowledge, as disclosed by the participants in all three study groups. From the experiences of teachers who have attended webinars, this theme represents the expectations they expressed regarding acquiring conceptual knowledge from the webinar. The participants were aware that the purpose of participating in webinars was to learn something and they expected to gain some ideas or understanding of general topics or more specific and specialized issues.

The Department of Education (DepEd) was perplexed by the current condition of the educational system, where face-to-face meetings are prohibited; they considered distance learning an effective way of delivering quality education (Department of Education, 2020). They organized seminars to help teachers develop strategies anchored to the learners' learning styles. Teachers are encouraged to attend the webinars initiated by DepEd in order to deliver quality education to learners.

The three study groups revealed apparent differences in their expectations of acquiring new conceptual knowledge from webinars. Jahangir et al. (2012) cited gaining knowledge and a deeper understanding of the topics they are interested in as one reason for the training participants to attend webinars. The webinars can give them additional information, which can aid them much more in their professional development to provide quality education to learners.

Acquisition of skills. The acquisition of skills implies obtaining competencies related to the purpose of the seminars and the skills required to train the teachers. Evidence of this interpretation from teachers in Group 1 includes the following statements: "I expect to learn new skills in lesson planning. Lesson planning is necessary for teaching the learners, and I have to learn further since I'm still a neophyte in this matter" (T1); "I wanted to learn teaching strategies that suit not only the learners' learning styles,

but also the current situation" (T2); "I expected to learn more skills which I needed to improve my way of teaching" (T3).

The teachers in Group 1 expected to learn new, additional skills in terms of designing their teaching approach. They also expected to learn skills in delivering lessons to their students or to acquire new, alternative skills so as to be able to adjust accordingly, depending on what ways would best fit into the current teaching situation.

Similar experiences were also found in Group 2, in these sample statements from the interview transcripts: "I wanted to learn new strategies I could use in distance learning. These new strategies helped me to teach my learners" (T4); "I want to learn appropriate interventions for students in the new normal and to [provide] them with skills according to their levels" (T6).

The teachers expected to acquire new skills in teaching that they could use as an alternative to the skills they already had in terms of approaches to teaching. The expectation of acquiring new skills in education became apparent when schools suspended the face-to-face mode of teaching and learning. With this change, students experienced new difficulties in learning that teachers needed to address, which is why these teachers expected to learn from webinars new strategies to address their students' learning difficulties. The teachers in Group 3 did not report anything about expectations of acquiring strategic knowledge.

The second theme that emerged from the participants' responses was their expectation of acquiring from webinars new skills and strategies that they could use in their teaching during the pandemic. Groups 1 and 2 disclosed that they expected to learn new skills and techniques to deliver instructions that could be used in distance learning.

For the teachers who attended webinars, skill acquisition included developing teaching capacities or enhancing their abilities through calibration and retooling (Karalis, 2020; Rao, 2018). Skills are learned and improved by attending webinars. Teachers can improve their acquired skills through webinars and can develop new skills for their learners (Karalis, 2020; Tanucan & Uytico, 2021). Moreover, the teachers' skills are honed through webinars.

Accessibility of technological resources. Accessibility to technological resources implies ease and comfort in utilizing electronic learning resources. Similar experiences of expectations for accessibility of technology resources were found in Groups 1 and 2, as described in the following significant statements from the teachers: "I expected to have a stable internet connection which I could use in the webinars for me to learn" (T3); "I expected to have a stable Internet connection because this would help me learn the webinars from the speakers" (T4); "I expect to have Internet access in attending the webinar. I expected gadgets to be available" (T5).

The expectation of the teachers in Groups 1 and 2 was to have accessible technological resources for them to have a stable Internet connection while attending webinars. For these teachers, a stable Internet connection was essential to their attendance in webinars so that their participation and engagement were smooth and continuous. Group 3 did not mention the accessibility of technological resources in webinars.

Training participants expect much in terms of the competence of the trainers. Some paid a considerable amount of money to learn new skills and held the competence of the trainers in high regard (Buxton & De Muth, 2012). Speakers for webinars possess expertise regarding the subject matter. Thus, participants can learn well in attending the webinar.

Trainer's competence. The trainer's competence involves the teachers' expectations regarding the speaker's knowledge of the topic of the webinars. It also denotes expertise in the subject matter, which enables the teachers to learn new skills. This theme emerged exclusively among Group 1, as described in their comments: "I expected to have an excellent speaker. The speaker should be able to use euphemisms and know the manner when she speaks with respect" (T2); "I expected a well-versed speaker of the webinars, who could serve the real purpose of the webinars" (T3).

The expectation for webinar trainers to be competent was apparent in the statements of the teachers in Group 1. Webinars speakers were expected to be proficient in communicating the target learning areas. Even if they talk excessively, at least they were expected to speak meaningfully. Trainers were also expected to be respectful and encouraging when

making comments, critiques, or responses to the participants' ideas. For the teachers in Groups 2 and 3, there were no comments about expectations related to webinar trainer's competence.

One of the themes that emerged from teachers' expectations in attending webinars is trainer competence. One of the essential elements of a webinar is facilitation, which is the primary responsibility of the speaker, lecturer, or trainer (Poce et al., 2021). Training participants expect a great deal of competence from the facilitators. Some paid a considerable sum of money to learn new skills and they held the competence of the trainers in high regard (Cornelius & Higgison, 2010).

Social Interaction. Social interaction refers to interacting with the other participants during webinars. This theme of social interaction was generated from different dimensions of the experience of teachers in Groups 1 and 3. "I should look good in front of the camera. I need to be beautiful and competitive in answering the tasks required." (T3).

In Group 1, the expectation for social interaction when attending webinars was more centered on the dimension of self-presentation. A teacher who is about to participate in the webinar will prepare to look presentable online. As an expectation of one's self-presentation, looking presentable online is about physical or facial appearance and a demeanor that may indicate competitiveness in terms of responding the tasks in the webinar.

In Group 2, no related statements were obtained from the teachers. However, teachers in Group 3 did make some comments on this topic: "I expect to be able to share my thoughts and ideas with the other participants" (T7); "I also expect to have the chance to meet significant individuals whom I can have meaningful virtual experiences with" (T9).

The last theme that emerged for this category was social interaction. Teachers in Groups 1 and 3 said that when they attend webinars, they also expect to be able to interact with other people. Some teachers looked forward to attending webinars in order to present themselves to other participants or communicate with them. Webinars are not only for professional development, but also for social engagement. Teachers joined because they could communicate with other teachers close to

them. The presence of fellow teachers attending webinars encourages other teachers to participate in some webinars (Jahangir et al., 2012; Poce et al., 2021).

The teachers' expectation of acquiring conceptual knowledge is relevant to Kolb's e-learning theory on reflective observation. Teachers' expectation of the webinars they attend allows them to reflect on their previous experiences. Teachers expect to learn new and particular topics connected with the webinar's objectives. Teachers reflect, which provides them with their expectations in attending webinars.

Teachers' Significant Learning When Attending Webinars

Teachers have learned a great deal from the webinars on the many topics discussed in those they have attended. Three themes emerged from the interviews conducted with these teachers to represent the significant knowledge that teachers have obtained: *relevant instructional practices*, *current developments in the teaching profession*, and *the professional roles of teachers*. Each of these themes is described below, including the specific experiences of teachers in the three study groups.

Relevant instructional practices. This theme refers to the learnings of the teachers from the webinars regarding instructional practices. Below are brief excerpts from the participants' interviews.

One teacher in Group 1 said that "I learned that we do not need to make many performance tasks per learning area as long as we make one integrative performance task. We must see that we integrate the skills or competencies from the different learning areas in one integrative performance task" (T1).

In Group 1, one teacher learned about relevant instructional practices from webinars on instruction-related topics. For example, webinars that discussed different learning modalities helped the teacher learn various modalities of learning. The teacher should make instructional adjustments depending on what learning modalities were focused on. The teacher also knew that to make education relevant to the current situation, instructional adjustments should include careful lesson planning, integrative learning tasks, and effective lesson delivery.

In Group 2, the teachers' participation in webinars also gave them significant insight into relevant instructional practices. Some statements extracted from the participants' interviews are as follows: "The mode of delivery is beneficial, specifically for us as teachers, because these stages are useful during this pandemic" (T4); "Webinars are beneficial. One of the topics I attended a webinar on was a comprehensive guide to Photoshop basics for teachers" (T5).

The teachers in Group 2 learned content that is useful in teaching specific subjects during the current situation. They also learned the pedagogical knowledge needed to address students' current learning needs. Knowing what teaching approaches are effective in delivering the lesson, given the current teaching and learning situation, is one of the most significant benefits they obtained from webinars.

In Group 3, one teacher shared an experience of learning relevant instructional practices from webinars: "Learning about learning modalities during this pandemic is important – learning about the CLP through varied modalities and how to stop the spread of the coronavirus" (T7).

One of the themes of the knowledge teachers learned from webinars was instructional practices relevant to students' and teachers' needs in the situation brought about by the pandemic. Teachers learned the practical and timely application of different learning modalities, instructional strategies and approaches, and lesson preparation (Leonardo & Cha, 2021). While it can be fun to learn about anything, for these teachers, knowledge is relevant when it is valuable and effective in responding to the current challenges in education. Training courses and seminars enable teachers to learn new teaching practices. Amidst this pandemic, teachers must use appropriate methods according to the learners' learning styles and must develop instructions that are suitable for independent learning (Koshy, 2009).

Current developments in the teaching profession. Current developments in the teaching profession denote the progress and advances that aid teachers in delivering quality education. Specific experiences that the teachers in each study group disclosed are presented below.

A teacher in Group 1 stated that “as a teacher, you need to grow and develop in some aspects... and the learning acquired from webinars should be implemented. I have learned that you must also be up-to-date nowadays, especially since education is dynamic” (T2).

For this teacher in Group 1, specific new trends and current developments in teaching and learning have been among the most significant lessons learned from webinars. Keeping themselves abreast of new developments in the teaching profession has encouraged teachers to continue learning as professionals and to put that learning into action.

The teachers in Group 2 learned new developments in the teaching profession from their webinars, as evidenced by the following excerpts from the interviews: “I gained knowledge without spending much money. I learned knowledge that I feel thankful for right now. I gained knowledge that I need in my profession” (T5); “I gained knowledge in using technology that I can apply to my profession as a teacher” (T6).

The teachers in Group 2 were aware that the recent results in their work were products of the constant change in education. The new knowledge they obtained from webinars was needed and applicable to their teaching practice. New knowledge was required to replace old and outdated knowledge, such as certain practices in classroom-based teaching that are no longer helpful during this pandemic, when schools have shifted to either online or modular distance learning.

Another subtheme of what teachers learned from attending webinars was about advancements in the teaching profession, as disclosed in Groups 1 and 2. Teachers acknowledged current developments and new trends in their work, and the webinars allowed them to learn about some of these developments. Teachers must keep themselves up-to-date with the current teaching and learning developments so that their professional practice never gets outdated.

Webinars can assist teachers in learning new things. They enable them to develop new instructional strategies and practices that suit the learning needs of the learners (Songül et al., 2018; Toquero & Talidong, 2020) and make teachers’ work easier because learners’ learning needs are addressed. Their prior instructional practices can be updated as they

become familiar with the new trends (Abaci et al., 2021; Poddar, 2020; Rodesiler, 2017).

Professional Roles of Teachers. This brief statement from one teacher captures the general sense of this learning experience: “Webinars made me realize that I could do more. It enables me to develop new skills” (T3).

It was found that this teacher in Group 1 learned to focus on their belief in their ability to do more and to learn more. It was important for this teacher to know to believe in themselves more than they used to. In the same way, it was also crucial for this teacher to believe in themselves to learn more. This teacher thought that this belief in their own capacity to do and learn more is among the professional roles of teachers: to take initiative and never stop improving.

In Group 2, knowledge about the professional roles of teachers was reported by one teacher, who explained that webinars had taught teachers to be more aware of their professional part in collaborating with other stakeholders, particularly the parents of their students. Their brief statement captures the general sense of this learning experience: “One of the topics that captures my heart is the role of teachers and parents in shaping young minds with the love of learning” (T6).

This teacher acknowledged that the current teaching and learning situation requires the collaborative effort of teachers and parents to give the students all possible opportunities to learn in their different subjects despite the absence of face-to-face classroom teaching.

In Group 3, it was found that the learning about the professional roles of teachers was focused on three aspects. These excerpts from the participants’ interviews encapsulate this: “Especially during this time, where learning is so passive, as a teacher we should be armed with knowledge and uplift the learning of the learners during the pandemic” (T7); “I learned about the role of the teacher and the school in teaching learners and, along with the theme of Philippines’ Department of Education that education must continue despite the threat of COVID-19” (T8).

The first aspect was the role of teachers in guiding the students, which included teaching them important lessons and motivating them

to continue learning despite the difficulties brought about by the current pandemic situation. Another aspect was the role of teachers to carry out the school's mission to provide good education despite the circumstances. The third aspect was the role of teachers as a source of strength in times of desperation, which includes patience and flexibility from them.

The third subtheme of what the teachers learned from attending webinars was the role of a teacher in their profession. While teachers' professional roles have already been clearly defined in the standards of their work, the interviews revealed that the webinars the teachers have attended reminded them of the essential professional functions of teachers. The more teachers attend webinars, the more they realize their significant role in education. This enables them to appreciate their full potential in transforming their learners into professionals (Koshy, 2010). Thus, they encourage their students to pursue more by attending webinars in order to learn their students' skills.

Current development in the teaching profession is one of the themes that emerged in line with Kolb's experiential learning theory, active experimentation. The participants shared that they learned the importance of being up-to-date nowadays, especially since education is dynamic; they believed that webinars help them acquire the knowledge they need in their profession. The participants expect to return to the field of teaching with new strategies to ensure quality education.

The theme that emerged on the professional roles of teachers was that of abstract conceptualization, where teachers learn new techniques and ideas which can be applied in their teaching profession (Kouteh, 2021). The teachers realized that a teacher should be armed with knowledge, uplift their learners' learning in these times of the pandemic, and develop new skills. The new techniques can enhance the teachers' knowledge and help them address their learners' needs during the pandemic.

Learning continuity under the new circumstances is a challenge. The usual operations in the school have been interrupted and hindered by the pandemic. Teachers' typical strategies, which are considered effective and efficient in delivering instructions, are hampered. Teachers need to develop a new set of learning methods and principles. Providing quality

education requires many seminars and training sessions or webinars to acquire new skills. The topics of webinars focus on developing skills in teaching strategies and in school management. The goal of webinars is to develop in teachers the necessary skills for “the new normal.” In the webinars, teachers should strive to acquire new knowledge, enhance existing knowledge, and develop instructional practices for their learners and their professional growth (Hidayati et al., 2021).

Conclusion

The pandemic changed the ways teachers acquire relevant knowledge and skills; and improving professional practice was greatly affected. In light of the global crisis, webinar training can supplement teachers’ competencies and skills and can enhance their strategies without face-to-face seminars and workshops, when social distancing and home quarantine are enforced. Thus, webinar technology presents opportunities to expand teacher training programs amid the pandemic. Professionals, especially teachers, are using virtual seminars thanks to webinar technology to develop teachers’ theoretical knowledge and pedagogical skills and to expand their virtual strategies. The use of webinars can expand the online-based training for teachers and other professionals in potential future outbreaks.

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