

# Teaching experiences during COVID-19 pandemic: Narratives from ResearchGate

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**Abstract**— The COVID-19 pandemic has remarkably affected every sphere of our lives and education inclusive. It greatly disrupted the teaching and learning process, necessitating alternative approaches at different times to ameliorate the situation. In the new normal, various pedagogical tactics and teaching strategies are employed for content delivery. More so, different platforms are utilized to enable learning as well as assessment techniques. This study, therefore, sought to explore the teaching experiences during the pandemic. It also highlights the success factors of online teaching during the COVID-19 semester and the best assessment strategies used during the pandemic. The methodology adopted in the study is narrative and, precisely, the Naturalist narrative. The data utilized are the discussions and responses from questions posed on ResearchGate. The retrieved responses reveal both positive and negative experiences, but more of the challenges encountered dominated the reviews. Many factors account for the negative experiences such as internet issues including its cost, student's participation rate, insufficient media instructions, lack of students preparation, and preference for face to face class. The responses further show that various platforms enable teaching to continue remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the preference of tools used by individuals differs based on interest, audience, location, the content of the course, accessibility, among others. We gave a conclusion and offered a useful suggestion for future study.

**Keywords**—teaching experience; lecturers; COVID-19; online learning; pandemic

## I. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is having profound impacts on education globally. The pandemic has made E-learning become the mandatory component across all levels of the educational system. This situation has disabled the offline teaching process majorly while the alternative approaches come with new experiences. More than ever before, the global space became technically refined, with the teaching and learning process inclusive. In the "new normal," various pedagogical tactics and teaching strategies and remote learning support tools are employed for content delivery. According to [1], the world is dealing with unusual methods of working and studying. Though virtual shopping and social media, including online education, are not novel, COVID-19 is stimulating the requirements to investigate virtual education prospects profoundly. Recent studies such as [1] survey teachers' preference towards various features of e-learning during COVID-19. The results show that the majority of the teachers held a favorable opinion towards e-learning. Radha, Mahalakshmi, Kumar [2] also gather students' perspective on E-learning during the pandemic, and the finding reflects

the impact and interest in using E-learning resources and their performance. More studies are required to ascertain the teaching and learning process experiences to further improve virtual approaches in times of pandemics. It is essential to study teaching experience because it is all-encompassing, and it has a way of affecting both emotion and attitude [30].

This study utilized the narratives of scholars on academic, social network sites (ASNS), ResearchGate. According to [3], ASNS targets the academic audience and provides services directed to the community of students, research scholars, teachers, and other academic stakeholders. The network site can be divided into two categories, that is, platforms developed primarily to facilitate profile creation and connection (such as Academia.edu and ResearchGate) and reference sharing platform with a primary focus on posting and sharing related academic content that subsequently added social networking capabilities (such as Mendeley, Zotero, and CiteULike) [4],[5]. ResearchGate is a well-known example of ASNSs as a professional network for scientists and researchers. Statistics on its site (<https://www.researchgate.net/about>) show that ResearchGate has over 17 million members from all over the world that use the platform to share, discover, and discuss research. According to [6], it maintains its index (the "ResearchGate Score") based on the user's contribution to content, profile details, and participation in interaction on the site, such as asking questions and offering answers. It combines bibliometrics and altmetrics to create a more comprehensive performance measure for researchers and institutions. Ovidia, [3] further stated that the secondary goal is to create access to studies even before they are completed for peer review and exchange of ideas.

Researches have been carried on types of questions posed and discussion on social network sites [7] and academic communication [8]. Studies have also explored the types of questions academics and content pose to a specific ASNS, Academia.edu [9]. The findings show they are specifically academically focused factual knowledge-based questions prevalent in the academic context. While this study utilizes the discussion and responses from questions posed on ResearchGate, the focus is to extract relevant narratives related to the topic of interest. Therefore, this study set out to gather the teaching experience during the COVID-19 pandemic to identify the most used platforms for remote teaching, the assessment strategies employed, and the success factors of online teaching during the COVID-19 semester. The article is organized as follows: section I

introduces, and section II describes the theoretical framework and previous research on remote teaching in pandemics. Section III describes the research methodology. An analysis of the findings and interpretation of the results and discussion of the significance of the results is presented in section IV. Section V summarizes the findings of the study and draws a conclusion.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section discussed the theoretical framework of the study. We also reviewed relevant literature based on the theory and about the topic of inquiry.

Everyone has stories to tell – irrespective of the context, setting, or timeline. Telling stories is essential to making sense of the world that we live in during a pandemic. They give meaning to our existence and help build an understanding of the communities in which we interact daily [10]. Regarding the COVID-19 crisis, many lives have been seriously affected – e.g., some people have lost their loved ones, some businesses bankrupt, transportation restricted, religious activities suspended, and several schools closed. Indeed, there are stories to be told. Mutual sharing of stories helps individuals connect with others [11]; [12], and it provides a means for turning an otherwise chaotic, shapeless experiences into a coherent whole filled with meaning [13] [14].

Narrative theory may be defined as the study of “how stories help people make sense of the world, while also studying how people make sense of stories” [15]. At the core of this definition is the idea that storytelling is a cognitive and emotional tool for shaping the understanding and meaning given to events and experiences [16]. A plethora of literature shows how narrative theory has been applied – particularly in the education domain. Martin et al. [17] used the narrative theory as an instructional strategy in a high school literature class. The author aimed to convey abstract concepts through concrete experience. The study was a success in helping the students to make connections between social and historical contexts. A visual tool was subsequently developed to help teachers replicate the strategy in their contexts. In a similar vein, [18] explored the feasibility of applying narrative theory in visual communication design education. The empirical research results show that by incorporating narrative theory into the design, students’ poster design capabilities were significantly improved across various aspects of the assessment and elicit their visual memory.

Studies have shown that teachers' impact on students may go beyond the classroom walls, even beyond the years of schooling adulthood [19] [20]. As adults, we sometimes remember the impact that a particular teacher had on us - sometimes for good and some other times for worse. Using narrative theory as a tool to reflect and make meaning out of life experiences, [21] examined the lives of four teachers who had been in the profession for a minimum of 18 (eighteen) years. The author intends to show how the teachers' life experiences, in and out of classrooms, impacted their interactions with the students. It was found that the teachers' interactions with their students were

impacted by the following: teacher's beliefs about the students, teacher's competence-level, and familiarity with the teaching environment (e.g., classroom), and teacher-student relationships. As evident in Reid's [21], there is an association between teachers' experiences (personal and professional) and the teaching environments in which they operate. This association will subsequently influence the impact they have on their students as COVID-19 has forced many schools to transition from traditional classroom teaching to remote teaching, evident conspicuous that both teachers' and students' experiences will be affected. Trust and Whalen [22] conducted research investigating how easy it was for teachers to shift their mode of operations from classroom to remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study report shows that teachers who used technology frequently in their practice had much easier transition to remote teaching than their peers who seemed to be learning about remote teaching for the first time in their career.

Furthermore, [23] shares how a public school in Florida, United States of America transitioned to remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. One key point is that their ability to plan and execute the transition successfully was predicated on years of leadership and professional learning focused on remote teaching, blended learning and related concepts. Similarly, in a study conducted in Australia, the researcher explored the experiences of students studying via remote teaching. They found that the students had negative experiences by virtue of the new mode of teaching due to the following issue: feeling of isolation, staff negative attitudes and insufficient technical skills; as well as students' limited knowledge in the use of learning technologies [24].

## III. METHODOLOGY

This study embarked on a qualitative methodology and dwelled on the aspect of narrative as an interpretive approach. The narrative approach is suitable for different research domains, and it can be called an interdisciplinary data analysis technique. The narrative approach is rich in storytelling with the ability to pass on tacit knowledge and make sense of real-life experience. This study explores the interdisciplinary potential of narrative better to understand teaching experience during the unusual pandemic of COVID-19. The story of an ongoing pandemic in the context of teaching is the object of the study, and the narrative methodology focuses on the experience of groups of scholars using Research Gate. This study captures the scholar's story through manual technique since the discussion is a growing trend, and now there are limited texts. McAlpine [25] stated that narrative is a unique qualitative methodology that researchers use to collect data, analyze data, and report results. Since the scholar's stories are subjective, the study adopts content analysis to quantify and analyze the meaning of related words, themes, and concepts. This adaptation is similar to the study of [26] that combined the Orthodox Model's narrative technique. The intervention of content analysis helps limit the subjectivity of the stories employed and detect trends of teaching experience. The narrative technique's data source is multifarious, and it could be text, picture media text, music, or film.

This study categorizes the ASNS text into structure, concepts, terms, and points of view of the teaching experience phenomenon. According to [27], the narrative methodology could be a socio-cultural, naturalist, or literary. The socio-cultural perspective affects individual experience while naturalist focuses on the people's content on an incredibly hot issue. The literary depicts the discourse that individuals use to describe their experiences, and literary can be used along socio-cultural or naturalist. Among the three types of narrative techniques, the study opts for naturalist as the focus of the research is on the personal teaching experience of the Scholars on Research Gate regarding COVID-19, the implication of their experiences to them, the complication of their actions, and the evaluative aspects they underscored. This research conducts the data analysis in five ways: first, the data extraction. This extraction is done manually with copy and paste from the ASNS into a text editor, precisely Microsoft Word. Second, data cleaning. The study manually separates the relevant text to teaching experience from irrelevant (inclusion and exclusion criteria) text and removes all the unnecessary punctuation, abbreviation, and disjointed phrases or sentences. Third, the study defines the unit of meaning (coding) and the categories (demography) of the text that meet the criteria specified. Fourth, the study develops a set of rules for the coding, and in the fifth part, the study codes the text according to the set rules. Due to the limited texts, the study employs manual coding. Coding software, NVivo, was used to draw out prominent words in the extracted reviews, as revealed in Fig. 1. The final part analyzes the results and draw conclusions on teaching experience during the COVID-19. The research critically examined the correlated texts and patterns at the final stage of data analysis. The data was retrieved on July 23, 2020.

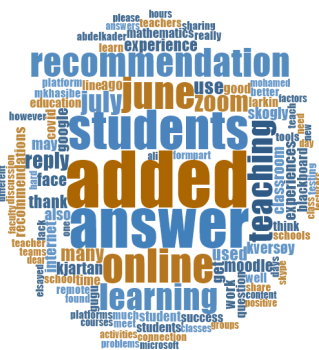


Fig. 1. Word cloud for teaching experience

#### IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Altogether the responses of 64 individuals were gathered, including 48 males and 16 females. Our results, based on narrative detection from the reviews, that is, response to questions posed on the academic social network site (ResearchGate) are classified under four headings.

These are Teaching experiences during COVID-19, Platforms utilized, Assessment Strategies, and Success factors of online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. These classifications identified the scholars' experiences taking cognizance of responses, whether it is positive, negative, or neutral. All these constructs are interlinking in

the expressed opinions of scholars on their teaching experiences during COVID-19. The names of respondents to the question posed online were quoted with initials, F means female, while M means male.

#### *Experiences of lecturers in online teaching during COVID-19*

The analysis starts by investigating the lecturers' experiences teaching online. The scholars shared their views on their experience teaching remotely during the pandemic. We extracted the reviews of a question explicitly posed by GM (F), on July 7, 2020, that "what are the experiences of lecturers in online teaching during COVID-19?" from the ResearchGate platform. Twenty-one responses (M=15, F=2) were provided as at the time the data was retrieved and used for the analysis. The demography remains 17 because other responses were made by the poser to acknowledge or make a clarification. The excerpts below depict the mind of the reviewers:

*Positive: The faculty and lecturers are having a good experience with online teaching. They have all gone through training to improve their courses and have spent time learning new technology to accomplish the task (SA, Male, July 8, 2020).*

*I found that some of the students thrived in the online environment and had a bigger voice (KH, Male, July 8, 2020).*

*Diversification in giving lectures, such as audio, video, reports, workshops and activities (SM, Male, July 14, 2020).*

*Negative: ...my experiences are very challenging. Most of the students were taken off guards, they were never prepared to learn online same applies with some of the lectures (GM, female, July 7, 2020).*

*My teaching was forced online, but I found students were unable to focus or concentrate. I too lost interest as the human encounter is important in education. I think online learning is overrated and not as useful as many have argued (DT, Male, July 8, 2020).*

*Internet connection is the problem, I teach online and use my mobile phone and zoom sessions consume 0.5 gig per 40 minutes easily (HG, Male, July 9, 2020).*

*...I teach graduate students only (late 20s through 60s and 70s), not young teenagers, and I found that for my cohort the human encounter was central to the learning experience....It's no panacea (DT, Male, July 10, 2020).*

The above quotes from the scholars depict their experience, revealing they have positive and negative comments on their experiences regarding teaching students online. The retrieved responses have shown the tutors' positive experiences, but more of the challenges encountered dominated the reviews. The positive responses must have been possible due to the teacher's training and mastery of technology or careful selection of appropriate technology for content delivery in a particular setting. It

could also be that much attention were given to at both ends (teacher and the students) in the seamless transition as one of the responses indicates that more than face-to-face instruction, online teaching requires attention to students as an audience who must choose to be involved despite alternative demands on their time and the inconvenience of accessing content through devices. Many factors were highlighted, which accounts for the negative experiences such as internet issues including its cost, student participation rate, insufficient media instructions, lack of students preparation, and preference for face to face class. The respondents' challenges were mostly reported, such that slow and weak internet connections affect the teaching and learning process. Relatedly, the Internet cost is another issue that made some conclude it is too expensive to teach online. Furthermore, the lack of learning tools/gadgets such as computers and the learning space needed contributes to online teaching problems. Difficulty in getting the student's participation also emerges as a challenge to online teaching. The students must be willing to participate and be fully prepared for online education. It can be deduced from the review that for many faculty and part of the failure encountered in online learning were due to institutions and schools only having technologies and various tools available (Moodle, Zoom, Microsoft teams, etc.) without providing guidance on which tools, techniques, and activities produce most extraordinary student retention. Conclusively, preference for the human encounter was seen as very important in the review, and it was stated that online learning/teaching could be used more but alongside traditional face to face interaction.

#### *Platforms utilized during the COVID-19 pandemic for remote learning*

The COVID-19 outbreak as necessitated the use of various virtual platforms to mitigate its effect on the teaching and learning process since physical distancing is the new practice. It is necessary to find out the platforms utilized during the pandemic to ease learning and access education at various places and climes despite the situation. The data about the platforms used across places were extracted from responses for the question posed by MS (M), June 22, 2020, that is, "What type of platform did you use during the COVID-19 pandemic for remote learning with the students?". 30 responses (M=18, F= 11) were provided as at the time the data was retrieved and used for the analysis. A close reading show that three categories of responses emerge; remote learning with students, communication with students, and personal projects and discussions.

#### *Remote learning with students*

Scholars identified various learning platforms as to the tool they use to drive the online learning class. The excerpts below are some of their expressions.

*We use Google Classroom and Google Meet for Remote Learning (AU, Female, June 25, 2020).*

*I used Moodle and BigBlueButton to conduct my virtual classrooms with my students (YL, Male, June 22, 2020).*

*....in my research in Indonesia. 50% of teachers use WhatsApp, because this application is lightweight and all students have it (HK, Male, June 23, 2020).*

*we use zoom, gmeet, edpuzzle, online tutorial...latest to explore microsoft teams (MZ, Female, June 23, 2020).*

#### *Communicating with students*

Communicating with students specifically was included in the scholars' responses, which may mean that in teaching the students, they also use the listed platform in addition to platforms chosen to engage them remotely. The communication might be in the form of follow-up with the online class activities or getting feedback. Below are some of their expressions.

*We used GOTOMeetings. It worked great with both our client's staff and students with few glitches that had to do with peoples internet stability (VK, Female, June 23, 2020)*

*.....and to communicate with students, viber (KE, Male, June 24, 2020).*

#### *Personal projects and discussions*

The tools used in discussion and personal project emanate from the responses of scholars. It can be inferred that specific tools are easy for them to discuss educational activities such as research or a project. It could also be that the tools are used for discussion among lecturers on developing contents to be delivered to the students. Some of the scholars' responses are highlighted below.

*....Sometimes, I used Zoom for personnel projects or short discussions (YL, Male, June 22, 2020).*

*Moodle, Zoom and Xournal its really easy make graphics and maps (JG, Male, June 23, 2020).*

Summarily, the responses above show that various platforms are used to enable teaching to continue remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the preference of tools used by individuals differs, which may be based on interest, audience, location, the content of the course, and accessibility, among others. For instance, [28] shows that the WhatsApp group is the most effective in the early COVID-19 pandemic because WhatsApp is easy, simple, and does not require a large data quota package. It was further stated that through WhatsApp accounts, learning took place optimally because students and lecturers could communicate and share PowerPoint files, Microsoft Word files, JPGs, Voice Notes, Videos, and other learning resources links. This study is in tandem with a previous study [28], which shows some applications in online learning such as WhatsApp Group, e-Learning, Zoom, Google Classroom, and the combination of two online applications. The platforms used by the authors as listed in their responses are Skype, Zoom, Adobe Connect, Webex, Blackboard, and Blackboard collaborate, Notability and Teams; Moodle, Google meet, Microsoft teams, BigBlueButton, Viber, FB Messenger, Google meeting and Hangout.

## V. CONCLUSION

### *The best assessment strategies used during COVID-19*

As pandemic forced e-learning on institutions worldwide as an alternative to the traditional face-to-face class, it is expected that there will be different teaching strategies. Relatedly, different assessment strategies will ensue as a result of the new approaches. The best assessment strategies different scholars used in the COVID-19 period were stated, and some of their expressions can be found below. Seven responses (M=6, F= 0) were provided as at the time the data was retrieved and used for the analysis.

*I used E. Tests by BigBlueButton (AME, Male, May 7, 2020).*

*I used Research assignment and presentation on the e-learning platform: Blackboard. Also, I have used Quiz and tests. (RJ, Male, May 8, 2020).*

Different assessment strategies were reported as been used by scholars based on their preference and knowledge of the tools used in teaching. Other strategies used include Blackboard as it is described to detect plagiarism and prevent cheating, such as using a random block of questions, timed tests, test exceptions, and safe assignment. Additionally, Moodle has been used for testing purposes. However, the scholars are still in a search for some better ideas to ensure smooth testing for their students.

### *The success factors of online teaching during this COVID-19 semester*

Online teaching's success factor during the pandemic is necessary to ascertain effective and seamless teaching and learning process using online platforms. Seventeen responses (M=9, F= 3) were provided as at the time the data was retrieved and used for the analysis. The number of the respondents remains 12 because other responses were made by the poser to either acknowledge or make a clarification. Some of their expression can be found below.

*The success of any teaching method depends mainly on the teacher's method of communicating and simplifying the scientific subject and choosing the appropriate platform (AF, Male, June 28, 2020).*

*..I think the success factor in my case was to keep motivating students to learn, especially in the hard situation of COVID-19. What I have learned from my online teaching during this crisis is that students need to be motivated much more than when classes are face-to-face (HS, Female, July 22, 2020).*

In the scholars' responses, the emphasis was made on methods adopted in delivering content to the students as a success factor. More so, teachers have to progress and update their knowledge every day. Consequently, interaction with students is important to get them involved in the learning process.

This study investigates the teaching experiences and success factors of online teaching during COVID-19 derived from an academic social-networking site, ResearchGate. We invoked the narrative theory [29] as a point of departure and adjusted this genetic theory, developed in the context of storytelling and communication, to the specific context of academic network and its singularities. The study was conducted using the narratives from scholars on ResearchGate as it pertains to this research's focus. The scholars belong to various academic institutions based on their profile, and their responses posed to a question section on the research gate were extracted to answer the research question posed in this study. The responses gathered are of 64 ResearchGate scholars. Teaching experiences during COVID-19, platforms utilized, assessment strategies, and success factors of online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic were the four main headings in which analysis was made. Findings revealed that scholars have positive and negative experiences as regards teaching students online. However, the challenges encountered dominated the reviews. The factors which account for the negative experiences are internet issues, including its cost, student participation rate, insufficient media instructions, lack of students preparation, and preference for face to face class. Many platforms were used for content delivery and several assessment strategies, while the success factors were highlighted.

### *Study Limitation and Future Study*

Data retrieved for the study is on an on-going discussion, and more responses would have yielded more insight into the study. At the time of extracting the narratives of the scholars, few responses were added. Furthermore, it is possible that scholars would have asked more specific and related questions to the studies after the extraction was done. Future studies should be done after the pandemic to ascertain the trends of events related to experiences of lecturers and their students during the pandemics and the way forward to mitigate future occurrence. Besides, we could not ask the participants follow-up questions based on their comments, such as "how technically-comfortable are the participants (teachers) with their remote teaching environments and tools?". The students' opinions would have been beneficial in this kind of study, but as it appeared, the majority of the participants in the discussion forum were teachers. Because teaching and learning go hand-in-hand, and students may influence teachers' experiences, a future study may consider replicating our work using a qualitative study approach but focusing on both teachers and students. Another study may be conducted to investigate the correlation between teachers' experiences and their knowledge of technology. A similar study may be conducted for students.

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