



EXPERIENCES OF FACULTY RESEARCHERS DURING THE PANDEMIC

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Abstract

The main objective of this study is to examine the lived experiences of Bohol Island State University faculty members who are conducting research on this pandemic. It further investigates the research practices of the university and the involvements of faculty members as to challenges and opportunities in conducting research. This study used qualitative phenomenological research design employing the conduct of one-on-one interview of the participants and Thematic data analysis by generating identified themes. Findings revealed these themes: following COVID health and safety standards, using online platforms in research, more engagement in conducting research, venting to qualitative research, internet connectivity issues, difficulty in data gathering, capacitating researchers through trainings and in-house presentations, full motivation and support in all research endeavors. The study concludes that faculty members are active in doing research despite the limitations and restrictions brought about by the pandemic. The study recommends that university administration improve their internet infrastructure for the benefit of the whole institution.

Keywords: faculty researchers, qualitative design, COVID-19 pandemic, lived experiences

INTRODUCTION

Research is one of the jump-off points to attain progress. That is why, faculty members be it in basic education or higher education both in public or private are mandated or at least encouraged to conduct or be engaged in research activities as much as possible. In the case of private higher education, it is clearly stated in MORPHE (Manual of Regulations for Private Higher Education) Article 2, Section 7, Item No. 4 as one of the objectives of private higher education to advance the frontiers of knowledge through research work and apply the technology gained for improving the quality of human life and responding effectively to changing societal needs and conditions. Moreover, public higher education institutions are also mandated to perform research as one of the core functions of the faculty members in the university. It is much very clear for state universities and colleges that every faculty member should perform the four-fold functions of the university namely: instruction, research, extension and production as stipulated in the university code.

In the case of Bohol Island State University, faculty members are mandated to perform research as one of the university's core functions. However, sudden change and transition occurred when the pandemic struck the whole world. And so the researcher is interested to look into the lived experiences of faculty members in that university in the conduct of research during the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has a tremendous impact, with its outbreak and histrionic effects on the education process around the world. Since its outbreak in late December 2019, COVID-19 has wreaked havoc across the world and like any critical sector, education has hit hard. Students, schools, colleges and universities have been deeply impacted. According to the United Nations Educational,

Scientific and Cultural Organization (*UNESCO*), over 800 million learners cannot attend school, 1 in 4 cannot attend higher education classes, and over 102 countries have ordered nationwide school closures while 11 have implemented localized school closure (Global Campaign for Education, 2018). Murphy (2020) stated that the COVID-19 crisis distributed the health professions' education and training. In an attempt to sustain the learning process and achieve learning goals, educational institutions switched from conventional to distance learning using online technology.

Despite the pandemic, faculty members are still mandated to pursue research and be able to produce quality researches as evidences for career improvement and for intellectual advancement as well. But during the pandemic, this task of conducting research seemed to be uncertain one most especially in the data gathering phase. Researchers are already given freedom and initiative to engage themselves in doing research for whatever reasons it may serve to them be it cognitive, emotional or physical gains. And so this study is anchored with the Work Engagement Theory by Khan (1990) which shows the degree in which a person exhibits own preference in the task at hand, building connections with the self and the job which somehow can increase role performance through cognitive, emotional and physical benefits. This theory relates with the study because as faculty researcher in this pandemic, it is the person's own initiative to be engaged in research for personal gains be it for career in advancement, publication and even for professional development.

Moreover, this study is anchored with the E-learning theory by David (2015) and Wang (2012) which shows the principles of effective multimedia learning with the use of educational technology platforms. This is relevant to the study because during the pandemic, faculty researchers learn from experts with the use of online platforms. Majority of the faculty members accepted the challenge of attending to multiple webinars and tutorials for them to learn about research.

According to Chenneville and Schwartz-Mette (2020 ; Thompson , 2020) as cited in an article written by Ramos, S. (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic has affected a variety of researchers, students and academics. Higher education institutions experience limited face to face activities including research and training which have been disrupted, thus results to new barriers and challenges.

One is on research methodology especially on the data gathering phase. As Lourenco & Tasimi (2020); Wolkewitz and Puljak (2020) said, research methodology plays an important role as to the impact of those individuals who are conducting research during the pandemic. They added that even among those who continue the research, the generalizability of data obtained in an unprecedented times may be an issue.

According to *UNICEF* (2020), the Philippines has kept its schools closed nationwide for more than a year, Filipinos continue missing education opportunities forcing students and faculty to shift in distance learning modalities. Apart from that, COVID-19 is not just altering everyday life; it's also upending psychological research. As universities and colleges across the country go virtual, researchers are scrambling to protect human participants and animal subjects, the scholarships and careers (Clay, 2020). As concerned faculty members, during the new normal in the conduct of research, it is important to follow the operating practices, health and safety protocols of the university.

Universities are stopping any and all face-to-face human research because of the risks involved, but despite of that, the Bohol Island State University, is still driven to conduct online and in house reviews and platforms colloquium open to all researchers. In this view, this study is optimistic to gather data as to the lived experiences of faculty researchers of Bohol Island State University in the time of pandemic. As this will add to the body of knowledge on research experiences of faculty researchers.

METHODOLOGY

Design

This study made use of a qualitative research design specifically, the phenomenological research. It made use of an interview guide protocol for the one-on-one interview aided with open-ended questions to be answered by the participant of the study.

Participants and Environment

There were seven participants of the study who were purposely selected and they represent all the six campuses of Bohol Island State University (BISU) with two participants for the Main Campus. These participants were selected based on their being active researchers even during the pandemic. They were able to write, present or publish research studies during the pandemic.

The locale of the study is Bohol Island State University; it is the only state university in the Province of Bohol with six campuses. BISU is a highly recognized CHED-accredited higher education institution and offers various programs. Moreover, faculty members are expected to perform functions in instruction, production, extension and research.

Research Instrument

The study made use of self-made interview questions and guided by the Personal Interview Protocol. The questions were framed that would fit to what the study is all about. Originally, there were seven questions but the researcher sought for the help of her colleague and he suggested to omit 1 question. That is why, there were six questions included in the interview guide-protocol for the one-on-one interview. Question No. 1 deals with the personal experiences of the faculty members in the conduct of research during pandemic. The second question asked for the research practices in the university. The third question deals about the opportunities; the fourth talks with the challenges they encountered. The fifth asks about their coping strategies; and the sixth question is the support the faculty researchers received from the university.

Data Collection and Analysis

For the data collection, the researcher asked permission to the campus director in each campus and to the participants to conduct a face-to-face interview. To the faculty researchers when all the necessary channeling and protocol and interview questions were done, the researchers started to do face to face one-on-one interview with the participant in his/her respective campus. The interview questions were also checked by the researcher's colleagues who are experts in the field of research. The interview was good only for 15-20 minutes. But prior to the interview, the participants gave their consent from as an indicator that they are willing to be interviewed and that the interview was recorded for easy transcription. The audio recording was then transcribed through otter-ai and then re-checked by the researcher for accuracy and correctness of the transcription. Thematic analysis by Braun and Clark (2006) was used for the thematic analysis. After transcribing, the data then subjected for coding and generating the themes that came out from the interview through the help of Taguette. After identifying and generating the themes, the researcher made thematic map for interpretation and analysis with the aid of Braun, V. and Clark, V. (2006) Thematic Analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Question No. 1. What are the personal experiences in the conduct of research?

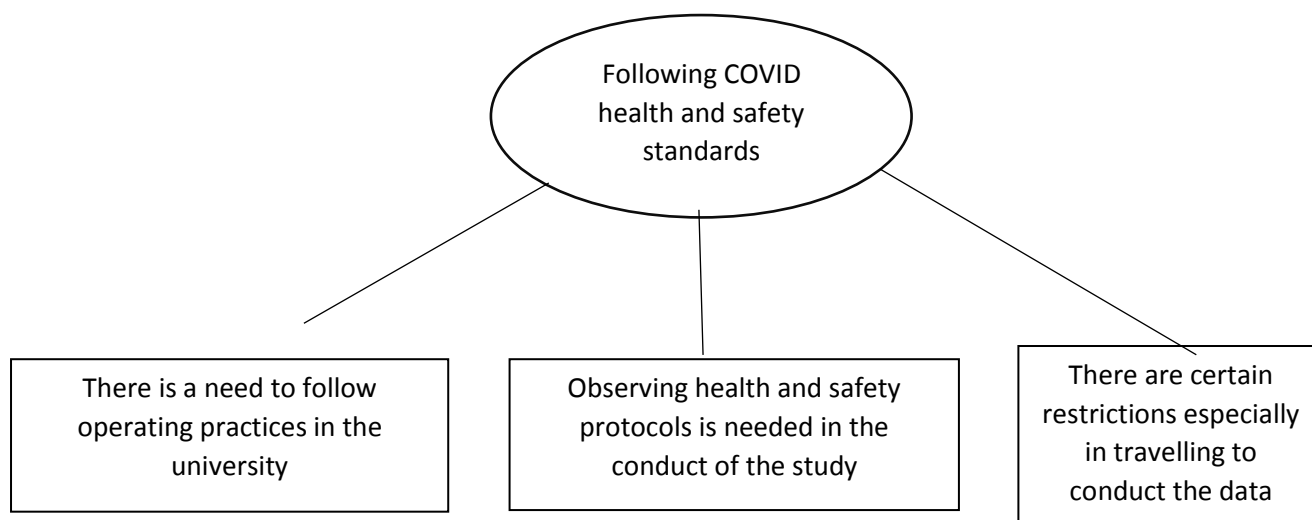


Figure 1. Theme 1. Follow COVID health and safety standards

Question No. 2. What are the research practices in the university during the pandemic?

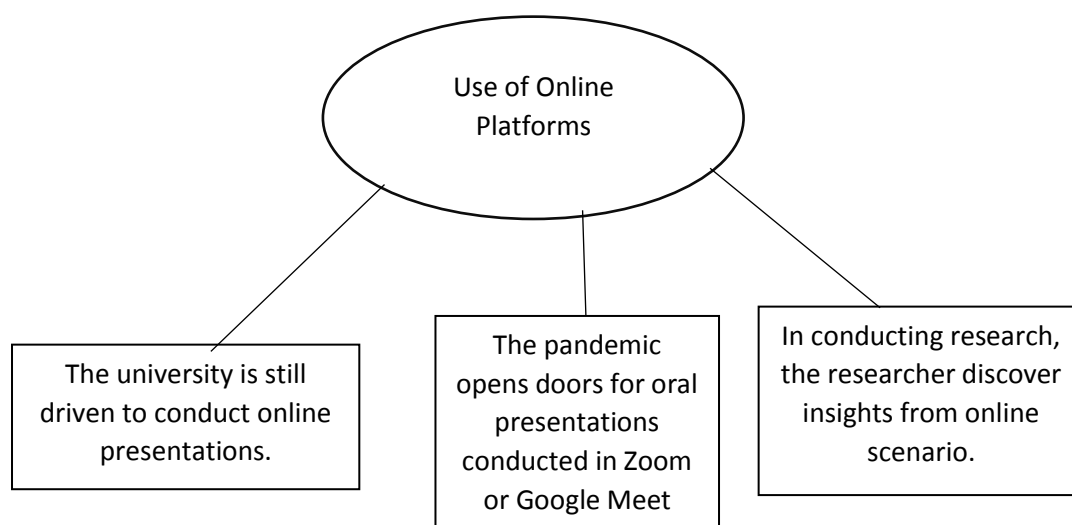


Figure 2. Theme

2. Use of Online Platforms in Research

Activities

Faculty researchers during the time of pandemic, sought to use online platforms in research activities. Moreover, the pandemic has led to the creativity and resourcefulness of faculty members who are doing research with the use of technology. But no pandemic can hinder faculty to conduct research in their respective fields. As one participant said "Despite the pandemic, our university is still driven to conduct online in-house reviews and colloquiums open to all faculty in the university" (Participant 6). The conduct of in-house reviews and colloquium continued despite during the pandemic with the use of Zoom or Google Meet virtual platforms.

Conduct of online trainings and seminars also played its significant role in the field of research during the pandemic. As participant 5 said, "Yes, we still have trainings and seminars but usually we transitioned from face to face to online. So all of our meetings, trainings and seminars are now online." It cannot be denied that faculty members are making use of the online platforms in order to continue transactions usually done prior to the pandemic. Online platforms have been an easy way for faculty members be it researchers or not to execute their tasks in the university.

The result supports the E-learning theory by David (2015) and Wang (2012) which states that the principles of effective multimedia learning with the use of educational technology platforms is used in the institution. During the pandemic, faculty researchers learn from experts with the use of online platforms. Majority of the faculty members accepted the challenge of attending to multiple webinars and tutorials for them to learn about research.

Question No. 3. What are the opportunities experienced by faculty members conducting research in the pandemic?

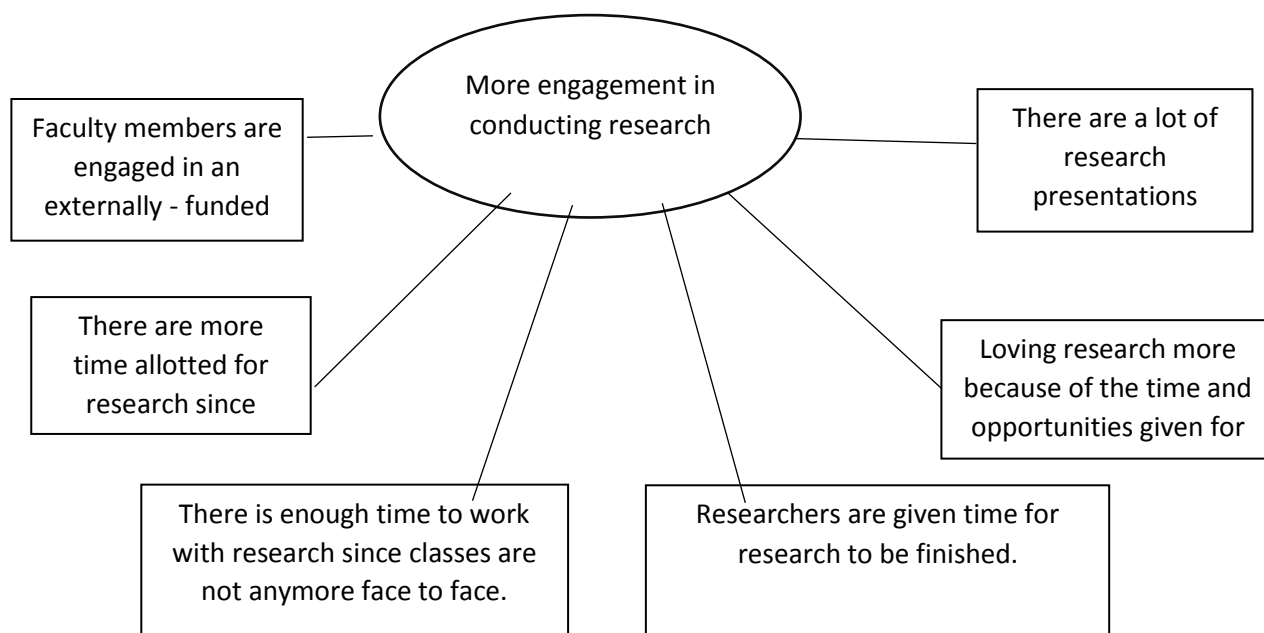


Figure 3. Theme 3: More engagement in conducting Research

Engagement refers to the involvement of the faculty researchers in conducting research in this new normal. Results shows the faculty researchers are highly engaged in research during the pandemic. Participant 4 said "We have enough time to work with the research since classes are not any more conducted face-to-face". Indeed, the pandemic does not only offer disadvantages but also advantages and one of that is the time they devote for research in this pandemic. Moreover, participant 7 also gave almost the same response that "We have enough time to work with research since classes are not anymore conducted face to face".

Moreover, he (Participant 7) added "Since a lot of researchers that have been gathered or done before the pandemic, it has given time for it to be finished". Participant 3 also responded "I am honored to be chosen among the faculty members to engage in externally-funded research during the pandemic". Moreso, "the pandemic has given more opportunities as to time in conducting research" as responded by Participant 4. With the responses of the participants, this means that faculty

researchers were given much time and opportunities for them to be engaged conducting research in the time of pandemic. In short, they have more engagements in research in this time of pandemic compared before the pandemic.

The Work Engagement Theory by Khan (1990) relates to the findings of the study wherein the theory shows the degree in which a person exhibits own preference in the task at hand, building connections with the self and the job which somehow can increase role performance through cognitive, emotional and physical benefits. This theory relates with the study because as faculty researcher in this pandemic, it is the person's own initiative to be engaged in research for personal gains be it for career in advancement, publication and even for professional development. The participants are highly engaged in their task being researchers because of some benefits they can get from it.

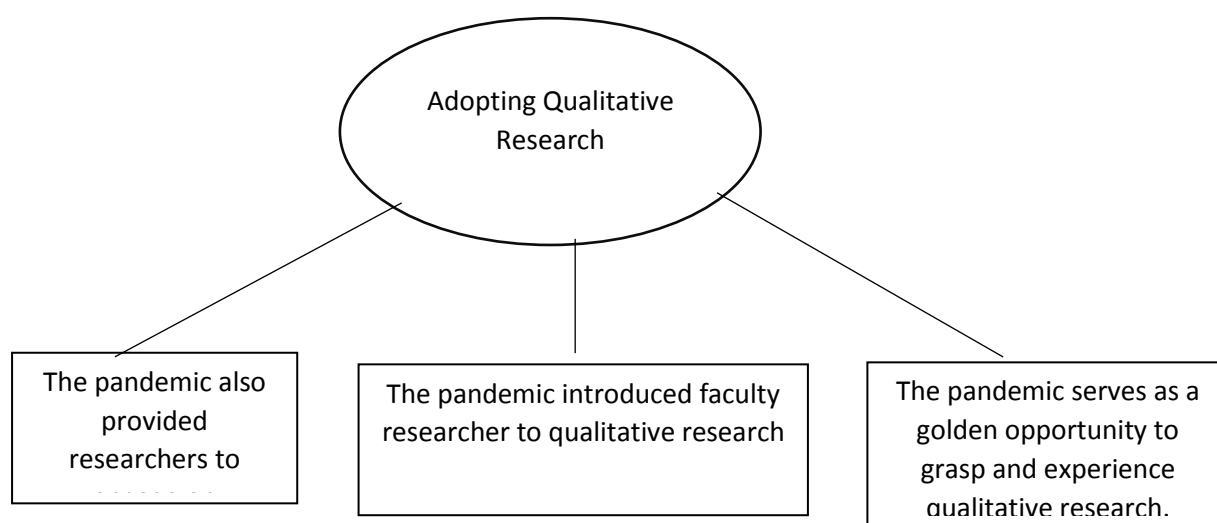


Figure 4. Theme 4. Adopting to a New Research Design

Adopting to a new research design in this pandemic is one thing that faculty researchers have experienced. The shifting of research design from quantitative research to qualitative research is one major experience which happened during the pandemic. As revealed by participant 7, "When the pandemic has started, we were introduced doing qualitative research which is very new for me". Indeed, the pandemic introduced another research design for the faculty researchers to venture with.

Quantitative research has been taking its popularity across it all disciplines and in different universities but this pandemic, also gives opportunity for faculty searchers to venture or even explore in qualitative research which is more on the interpretivist philosophy. Another participant also discloses that "[During the pandemic] so that was a qualitative research which makes it more exciting because most of my research engagements are quantitative". As observed, a number of faculty members across all levels in education are more exposed in quantitative research.

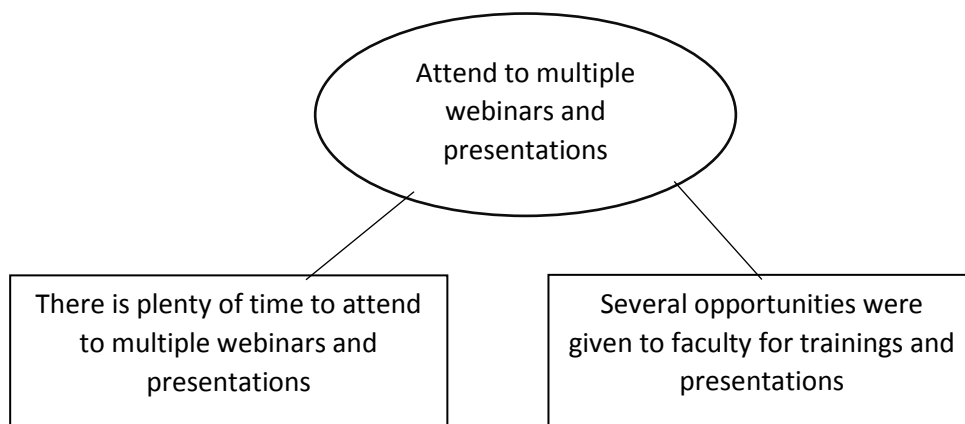


Figure 5. Theme 5: Attend to Multiple Webinars and Presentations

In the onset of pandemic, it gives opportunities to faculty researchers to attend multiple webinars and presentations pertaining to research. As revealed by the responses of the participants, majority of them find the pandemic to have given them the opportunity to do multitask and attend to a number of webinars and research presentations done online. Participant 7 disclosed "We have undergone also during the pandemic is having a lot of research presentations together with my colleagues in our campus." This means that during the pandemic, research presentations were still done by the faculty members. Moreover, Participant 5 said, "So there are so many opportunities for research like presentations, trainings and other services [research] because it's online." Doors are open for faculty members to learn something new through webinars even though just stay at home.

Question No. 4. What are the challenges encountered by faculty members conducting research in the pandemic?

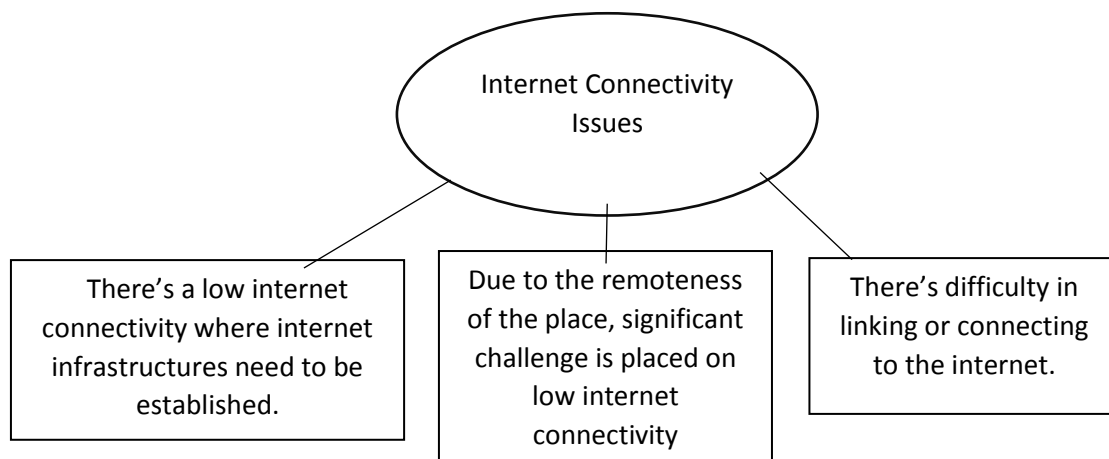


Figure 6. Theme 6: Internet Connectivity Issues

One of the difficulties encountered by the participants in the conduct of research in the pandemic is the issue on internet connectivity. It cannot be denied that majority of the participants in this research expressed their sentiments on the and unstable internet connection during the pandemic most especially that faculty members or instructed to stay at home and also do classes online. When asked of the difficulties encountered, Participant 1 said "First and foremost is the low internet connectivity because that's the time wherein our internet infrastructures need to be established." It is observed that when the pandemic strikes, everyone was caught off guard. And the least that faculty researchers resort is to be online in order to communicate to respondents or participants and to the

students in general. The location of the campus or the remoteness of the area also matters in terms of internet connectivity issues as mentioned by participant 4 "I've encountered more challenges but the most significant challenge that I've encountered is this in our place in Candijay campus is the internet connectivity." Indeed, it is a great challenge experienced by faculty members with regards to the issue on the internet connection. "The challenges that I can point out you given by this time of pandemic if the difficulty to link or connect to the internet," Participant 2 added.

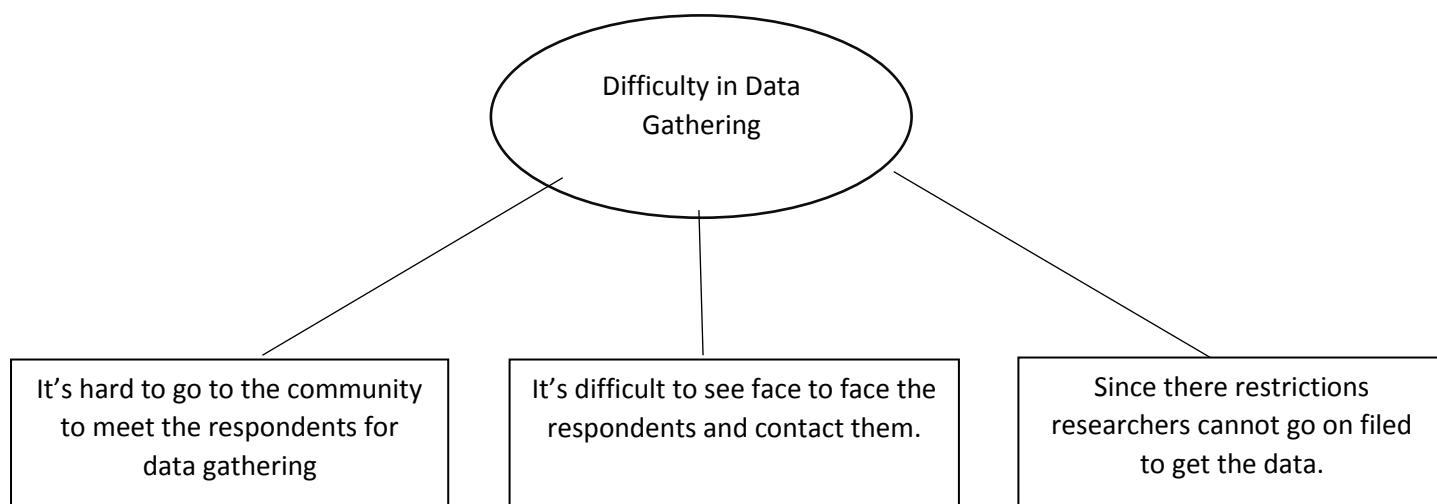


Figure 7. Theme 7: Difficulty in Data Gathering

Aside from the internet connectivity issues as the challenge in the conduct of research, the faculty researchers also pointed out that there is a difficulty in the gathering during the pandemic. majority of the faculty researchers revealed that gathering data in the community and reaching out the respondents in the field is one great challenge they faced during the pandemic because of the restrictions mandated by the national government through the IATF. Participant 5 responded "But since there is a restriction, officially in the travelling, we cannot go on field. One is how we get data [challenge], say I am in the field of environmental science, so I usually do field work. We cannot do field work anymore." This means that due to restrictions it is hard on the part of the researchers or gather or get the data in their research. Moreover, it is not only in that field but also other fields as mentioned by Participant 6, "I think this challenge is common to all of us for our entire community, the accessibility and restrictions, we can't easily access information in libraries due to COVID restrictions and we can't easily go to the community to extend to our respondents and to gather data.

This pandemic has really placed faculty researchers to rely on technology for the gathering of data, which took them a challenge. As Participant 7 said, " One thing that hinders us is on basically one of the most difficult parts is on data gathering where it is difficult to see or to have face to face contact with our respondents." Indeed, majority of the faculty researchers find it hard to reach out with the respondents because of the restrictions and of course with the unstable internet connectivity in most of the areas in the province.

The finding relates with the study conducted by Lourenco & Tasimi (2020); Wolkewitz and Puljak (2020) that one challenge experience by researchers is on research methodology especially on the data gathering phase. As said, research methodology plays an important role as to the impact of those individuals who are conducting research during the pandemic. They added that even among

those who continue the research, the generalizability of data obtained in an unprecedented times may be an issue.

Question No. 5. What are the coping strategies made by the faculty researchers as to the challenges are concerned?

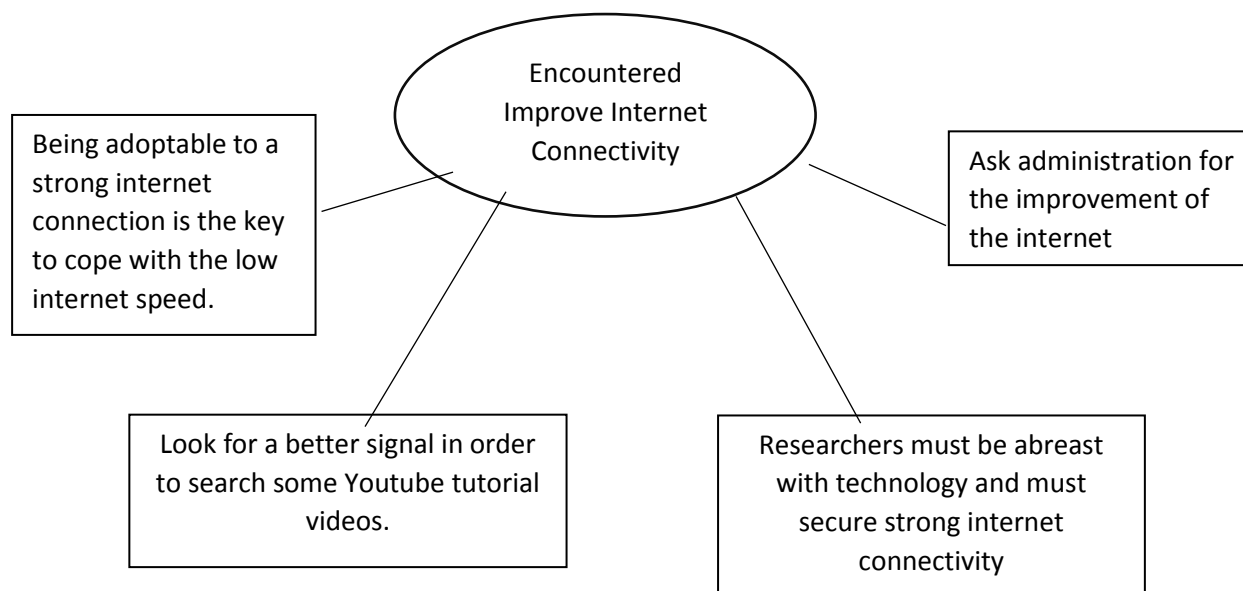
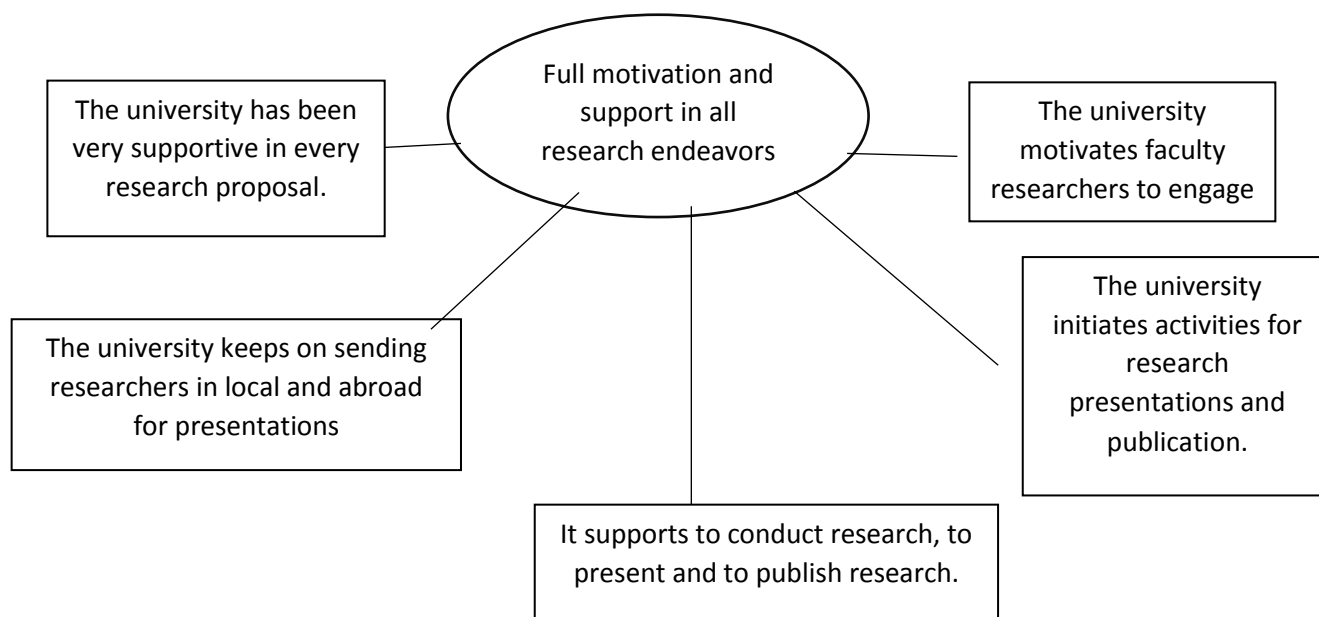


Figure 8. Theme 8: . Improve Internet Connectivity

As challenges occur in the conduct of research by faculty members especially on the issue of Internet connectivity, majority of the faculty members said that improving the internet connection and to stay online is one effective strategy in order not to hamper transactions during the pandemic. Most of the responses of the participants deal with ways and what the university is doing in order to continue transactions and usual work. Participant 1 said, "I think we are the first one to complete our infra facility [internet fiber]. We can have the opportunity to be with there and less also funds and expenses because we can reach them and through online." This means that the university is trying its best to complete the infra facility for strong internet connectivity. Participant 2 added, "To cope with this challenges is that we always find ways like we do, the university adopt to a type of internet like the fiber which gives us fast internet connection."

To be updated with technology is one strategy that helps faculty researchers in this time of pandemic. Being updated and abreast with technology is one thing that the faculty researchers are doing. As said by Participant 5, "We have to really abreast with technology. So we really cope with using technology more especially in doing activities and to connect with others online. In addition, Participant 7 said "And there's also a time that I will lead to some sites, go to YouTube and have some tutorials." With this being said, it boils down to secure a strong internet connectivity so that faculty researchers can still be productive even at the time of pandemic.

Question No. 6. How does the university support faculty researchers in the time of pandemic?**Figure 9. Theme 9: Full Motivation and Support in all Research Endeavors**

With the shift from face to face to online way of communication and even in the conduct of research, the faculty researchers are motivated to conduct research in this pandemic because of the full motivation and support of the university in all the research endeavors.

One form of support is on proposal and other research presentations and even leading towards publication. Participant 2 said "The university is particularly supportive of the faculty members who will present their research. And most of all, if you want to publish your paper." Participant 4 added, "One of the opportunities given by the university support to conduct research and the support also to present our research to publish our research." It can be noticed that the university is indeed supportive in terms of research presentations and even publications.

Participant 5 also said, "The university is very supportive in all our research endeavors. So every research paper and every proposal, they are really supportive." Participant 6 also responded, "Our university is very supportive of us in research. They keep on sending researchers in local and about for presentations. They encourage publications and presentations. So from these responses, the university support faculty researchers in research presentations across all campuses. And in order for the faculty researchers to be capacitated with research, it initiates activities for it to happen. Participant 7 responded, "So far for me, it is really a big thing for us researchers in the university that we are asked about our needs, we are asked about proceeding to our higher level other than successfully doing research and that is for publication and to other intellectual property activities.

Therefore, it cannot be denied that the faculty researchers are motivated to conduct research in this challenging time- the pandemic because of the full support and motivation coming from the university.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main objective of the study is to determine the lived experiences of faculty members who are doing research during the pandemic. Further, the study sought answers to their lived experiences as faculty researchers in the time of pandemic, examined the research practices in the university, challenges and opportunities encountered by the faculty researchers including their coping strategies and how the university supported them as faculty researchers at the height of the pandemic.

Findings revealed that faculty researchers need to follow and observe COVID health and safety protocol in the conduct of research during the pandemic and the use of online platforms in research activities served as the avenue for them to conduct research. Moreover, faculty researchers had opportunities to be engaged more in research because of the time element that they have more time to work on research since they are in a work from home mode. Part also of the opportunities experienced by the faculty researchers is they vented on another research design and that is qualitative research design. Majority of them have been exposed to quantitative research design and this pandemic pushed them to venture on qualitative research since they have more time to do it. Attending to multiple webinars and presentations was also an opportunity for the faculty researchers since most of the trainings and presentations were done online. However, certain challenges also caused some constraints in the conduct of research in time of the pandemic like the low internet connectivity due to the remoteness of the area of some campuses of the university and the difficulty in the gathering of the data since the researcher could not easily see their respondents face to face. Certain strategies were done by faculty researchers in order to cope with the aforementioned challenges and one thing that they did was to improve the internet connectivity at home or even requested it in school so that they could access easily to the internet. Moreover, being abreast to what technology can offer is one of their coping strategies. In the study, it is evident that the faculty researchers received full support from the university in the conduct of research in the time of pandemic and that they were supported in all aspects of their research from the conduct, proposal, presentations and even in publication stage. Hence, the study concluded that faculty members are active in doing research despite the limitations and restrictions brought about by the pandemic. The faculty researchers find the transition from face to face to online platforms difficult yet they were able to manage such transition. Moreover, they find more opportunities in doing research and one significant opportunity is faculty members welcome and be engaged in qualitative research. And that faculty members are highly engaged in doing research during the pandemic because of the full support of the university administration. The Work Engagement Theory by Khan (1990) relates to the findings of the study wherein the theory shows the degree in which a person exhibits own preference in the task at hand, building connections with the self and the job which somehow can increase role performance through cognitive, emotional and physical benefits. This theory relates with the study because as faculty researcher in this pandemic, it is the person's own initiative to be engaged in research for personal gains be it for career in advancement, publication and even for professional development. The participants are highly engaged in their task being researchers because of some benefits they can get from it.

With the responses of the participants and based on the findings, majority of the participants really find a problem on a strong internet connectivity and this serves as the major challenge of faculty members in the conduct of research during the pandemic. And with this finding, the university administration really needs to purchase and improve the internet infrastructure so that this challenge will be addressed. Moreover, the administration may revisit the Research Manual of the University for incentives to those who can publish faculty researchers' research papers in high-impact journals so that faculty members will be even more motivated to conduct and publish their research. Moreover,

the Research Unit of the University may invite research persons who are into qualitative research in order to capacitate faculty researchers doing qualitative research.

Lastly, since the study only focuses on the faculty members experiences during the pandemic for future researchers, they may study on faculty members' experiences and do mixed-method research design exploring the research productivity of the faculty members.

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