

Educators' Knowledge, Skills and Abilities Growth during COVID-19 Pandemic: the Adversarial Growth Theory

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Abstract

COVID-19 Pandemic, the current global adversity event, results in the change in the teaching and learning process in the Vietnam's education system. To cope with the change, educators redesign their teaching and assessment methods to achieve course learning outcomes and to manage their classes effectively and efficiently. In doing so, educators may need to strengthen their knowledge, skills, and abilities. Using online survey to solicit responses and descriptive analysis to interpret the data, it was found that Vietnamese educators grew their human capital and believed that they have become better educators during the period of movement control order (MCO).

Keywords: COVID-19 Pandemic, teaching and learning, personal development, human capital

1. Introduction

The latest adversity event – the COVID-19 pandemic – creates a severe crisis for almost all nations worldwide. Like other countries, the Vietnamese government implements a ‘movement control order’ (MCO) to control the spread of the virus. This order means people must stay at home with certain exceptions during the epidemic. Positive or negative impacts of MCO can be seen across industries and sectors. The education industry in Vietnam; however, has been receiving a lot of negative comments. The unfavorable comments may be due to the several challenges that affect the effectiveness of the education system, including the digital gap, digital readiness, food security, and health (Wan Ya Shin, 2020). Students and teachers who live in city areas have problems with internet connections and speed but others who live in rural areas may not even have access to the Internet and relevant tools. Since the government implemented the MCO with immediate effect, students and teachers were not ready with the necessary knowledge and skills to conduct online classes and assessments. Consequently, the teaching and learning process was not effective. Besides digital issues, the health of students is another concern. Students from low-income family backgrounds may not be able to eat healthy foods. Staying at home also limits the physical movement. Furthermore, teachers and students have stress due to their inability to cope with changes, boredom, and movement constraints. These could affect their physical and mental health. However, throughout history, the adversarial growth of individuals was repeatedly found following adversity events (Borawski, 2011). Organismic valuing theory of growth adversity argued that a person would be motivated to adapt to the changes brought by the stressful event such as crisis and disaster to survive (Joseph & Linley, 2005). The intrinsic motivation, in turn, would lead to constructive behavior that makes a person successful (Jordan et al., 2019). In other words, a crisis can still generate positive consequences.

Following this reasoning, the MCO movement following the COVID-19 pandemic could yield positive implications in the education industry. Due to the MCO, all educational institutions in Thai Nguyen city of Vietnam were closed. To ensure continuation of the teaching and learning process, classes and assessments were conducted online or any other no-face-to-face contact channels. Thus, it is postulated that the restriction motivated educators in Thai Nguyen to strengthen or develop new knowledge, skills, and abilities to manage their classes and deliver effective teachings. At the same time, educators could become better lecturers, teachers, or tutors. But, because MCO is a relatively a new issue, studies about this matter are still lacking. Hence, the preliminary research was conducted to identify whether educators in Thai Nguyen grow their knowledge, skills and ability during the MCO period. The primary aim of this paper is to report the findings.

2. Literature Review

Adversarial growth is the constructive responses towards adversity, where individuals are propelled to a higher level of functioning than before the adversity event (Linley, 2004). To achieve a higher-level function, individuals need to grow and develop themselves so that they can cope with aversive situations (Dewe & Cooper, 2012; Lievrouw, 2009). Latest adversity event, COVID-19 pandemic, has slowed down or put stops to many organization processes for several months. The pandemic forces countries across the globe to close all learning institutions, making the institutions to change their mode of teaching from face-to-face to online channels. The changes in the teaching environment influenced educators – especially those who are intrinsically motivated and committed to their profession – to involve in professional development that could increase their human capital (İyidoğan, 2011). In coping with the change, lecturers must strengthen their knowledge and skills, and at the same time, foster their ability to be creative. This is because, during the universities' lockdown, teaching and learning activities were done remotely. Hence, during that time, lecturers had an opportunity to learn new knowledge, such as the latest knowledge of teaching tools and techniques.

At the same time, educators evaluate themselves so that they know about their strengths and weaknesses and thus provide bases to develop their human capital. Lecturers also learn new technical skills, such as using new solutions to conduct online classes and online assessments. Lecturers also sharpen their communication skills to deliver effective online classes (Jan, 2020). In terms of ability, creativity is essential as educators must find ways on how to teach, meet, and assess their students, and at the same time, fit with students' diverse backgrounds. This is critical because not all students have a supportive online learning environment such as a stable internet connection and a conducive home setting, and therefore they do not prefer online classes (Jan, 2020). As a result, successful educators are those who can transfer their knowledge to students through the teaching and learning process (Gunther, 2015). The cumulative knowledge, skills, and abilities of educators reflect the strengths of the educator's human capital. Thus, the higher the educator's human capital reaches, the higher their teaching capability gains.

3. Research Methodology

A preliminary research was conducted in which a simple survey was distributed online to educators in Thai Nguyen, Vietnam, using convenience sampling through the snowball method. Educators are referred to lecturers, teachers, and tutors who are actively involved in teaching and learning, and serve higher education institutions, schools, and kindergartens. The survey was done from 20th February 2021 until 20th March 2021. Altogether, a total of 151 responses were collected. However, only 148 responses are usable for analysis. The survey consists of two parts: the demographic profile of respondents, and human capital growth. For Part A, there are five items on demographic profiles: gender, education institution, highest qualification, teaching area, and years of experience as a lecturer, teacher or tutor. As for Part B, there are six items on growth of knowledge, skills and abilities; and they are yes-no-items. The last item is a global one to indicate overall perception. As this is a preliminary survey, descriptive analysis was chosen to interpret the findings.

4. Research Findings

Respondents' Profiles

Findings show that most of the respondents are female, working in higher institutions, having at least a Master's degrees, and teaching non-technical subjects. As for years of experience, 93.1% of the respondents have been teaching for more than five years. **Table 1** reports the summary of the respondents' profiles in terms of gender, education institution, highest qualification, teaching area, and years of experience.

Table 1: Respondents' Profiles

Items	Number of Respondents (Percentage)
Gender	Male – 24 (16.2%)
	Female – 124 (83.8%)
Education institution	University – 64 (43.2%)
	College – 63 (42.6%)
	School – 14 (9.5%)
	Pre-school – 1 (0.7%)
	Others (combination) – 6 (4.1%)

Highest qualification	PhD / DBA – 19 (12.8%)
	Master – 86 (58.1%)
	Bachelor degree – 39 (26.4%)
	Advance diploma / diploma – 2 (1.4%)
	Certificate – 1 (0.7%)
Years of experience as educators	Others (professional) – 1 (0.7%)
	More than 30 years – 11 (7.4%)
	25 to 30 years – 11 (7.4%)
	20 to 24 years – 20 (13.5%)
	15 to 19 years – 27 (18.2%)
	10 to 14 years – 35 (23.6%)
	5 to 9 years – 34 (23.0%)
Teaching area Technical – 29 (19.2%)	Less than 5 years – 10 (6.8%)
	Technical – 29 (19.2%)
	Non-technical – 85 (57.4%)
	Both – 34 (23.0%)

Growth of Knowledge, Skills and Abilities

Table 2 shows the findings of the growth of knowledge, skills, and abilities of educators based on gender. Results reveal that majority (more than 66%) of the respondents regardless of whether male or female, believed that they did improve their knowledge, skills and abilities, and became better educators than before the MCO period.

Table 2: Growth of Knowledge, Skills and Abilities Based on Gender

Items	Male		Female	
	count	%	count	%
During the MCO period, I have more time to evaluate my teaching capability.	16	66,7	92	74,2
During the MCO period, I have gained new knowledge to strengthen my capability as a lecturer/teacher/tutor	17	70,8	119	96
During the MCO period, I learnt new skills (e.g., technical, communication) to strengthen my capability as a lecturer/teacher/tutor.	19	79,2	117	94,4
During the MCO period, Working-from-home provides me with the opportunity to develop new ideas in managing my classes in the future.	20	83.3	110	88.7
I am more creative in delivering my classes than before the MCO period.	19	79,2	101	81,5
Overall, I believe that I am a better lecturer/teacher/tutor than before the MCO period.	16	66,7	79	63,7

*Count is based on total 'yes' responses; % is based on total responses for male (24)/female (124)

Table 3 exhibits the results for the growth of knowledge, skills and abilities based on teaching area. It seems that majority of educators (more than 55%) developed their human capital through acquiring new knowledge and skills, and at the same time enhanced their abilities during the MCO period.

Table 3: Growth of Knowledge, Skills and Abilities Based on Teaching Area(s)

Items	Non-Technical		Non-Technical		Both	
	count	%	count	%	count	%
During the MCO period, I have more time to evaluate my teaching capability.	62	72.9	25	86.2	21	61,8
During the MCO period, I have gained new knowledge to strengthen my capability as a lecturer/teacher/tutor	77	90.6	29	100	30	88.2
During the MCO period, I learnt new skills (e.g., technical, communication) to strengthen my capability as a lecturer/teacher/tutor.	78	91.8	29	100	29	85.3
During the MCO period, Working-from-home provides me	75	88.2	28	96.6	27	79.4

with the opportunity to develop new ideas in managing my classes in the future.						
I am more creative in delivering my classes than before the MCO period.	65	76.5	26	20.7	29	85.3
Overall, I believe that I am a better lecturer/teacher/tutor than before the MCO period.	54	63.5	22	75.9	19	55.9

*Count is based on total 'yes' responses; % is based on total non-technical (85)/technical (29/both area (34) responses.

Table 4 displays the findings of the growth of knowledge, skills and abilities of educators based on years of experience. Again, the analysis shows that regardless of years in teaching experience, majority (more than 54%) of juniors and senior educators for each category perceived that they enhanced their human capital during the MCO period. However, only 48.6% of educators with experience between 10 and 14 years felt that they became better educators compared to before MCO period.

Table 4: Growth of Knowledge, Skills and Abilities Based on Years of Experience

Items	< 5yrs		5-9yrs		10-15yrs		15-19yrs		20-24yrs		25-30yrs		>30yrs	
	C	%	C	%	C	%	C	%	C	%	C	%	C	%
During the MCO period, I have more time to evaluate my teaching capability.	6	60.0	26	76.5	24	68.6	21	77.8	14	70.0	8	72.7	9	81.8
During the MCO period, I have gained new knowledge to strengthen my capability as a lecturer/teacher/tutor	7	70.0	33	97.0	31	88.6	24	88.9	20	100	10	90.9	11	100
During the MCO period, I learnt new skills (e.g., technical, communication) to strengthen my capability as a lecturer/teacher/tutor.	10	100	33	97.0	32	91.4	24	88.9	17	85.0	9	81.8	11	100
During the MCO period, Working-from-home provides me with the opportunity to develop new ideas in managing my classes in the future.	10	100	30	88.2	28	80.0	24	88.9	17	85.0	10	90.9	11	100
I am more creative in delivering my classes than before the MCO period.	8	80.0	31	91.2	27	77.1	25	92.6	12	60.0	7	63.6	10	90.9
Overall, I believe that I am a better lecturer/teacher/tutor than before the MCO period.	8	80.0	23	67.6	17	48.6	19	70.4	12	60.0	6	54.5	10	90.9

*Count(C) is based on total 'yes' responses; % is based on total responses for each category of experience

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Even though the research started with the adversarial growth theory as guidance, the results indirectly concur with other theories, including personal agency and adaptive change. As shown in Table 2, 3, and 4, the majority of the respondents believed that they have strengthened and developed their human capital. It seems that working from home during MCO may allow educators to widen their 'hidden and open area', where they have

more knowledge about their teaching capabilities. Knowing their teaching strengths and weaknesses are vital because they provide bases for educators to improve themselves.

In addition, educators are also able to improve or gain new knowledge. Educators use the time available to acquire new knowledge through online short courses or by learning online such as YouTube and social media. Then, they could apply the knowledge in the classes, or aid their online teaching and learning processes. Changing from face-to-face to online teaching requires educators to be able to use various tools, solutions, and softwares. Furthermore, interactions between educators and students are not the same. Face-to-face communication enables educators to use body language and feel their students, but the online discussion cannot do the same. Hence, educators are forced to learn new technical skills and improve their communication skills. Besides knowledge and skills, educators also must be creative in managing their classes. This is because students are so diverse that they come from different family backgrounds; their access to the internet connection and online resources is also affected. To be creative, educators may generate new ideas for future use and incorporate them into the course syllabus revision. Nevertheless, majority of the educators with experience in teaching between 10 and 14 years felt that they did not become better educators despite of strengthening their human capital during the MCO period. Maybe, the increase in their knowledge, skills and abilities was not high enough, or there were other else factors contributing to their careers. This research concurred with adversarial growth theory.

Findings revealed that educators responded positively towards the adversity by developing their human capital during the MCO period. In the past, the theory was mostly used in psychological research to understand how people cope with natural disasters, traumatize experiences, and medical problems (Joseph, 2009). However, this article reveals the analyses and discussions based only on the 'yes' responses. No discussion was made on why some respondents did not develop their knowledge, skills and abilities during the MCO period. In addition, this research is just preliminary and provides basic information. Future studies may use the findings as a springboard to a more complex research.

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