

Article

Remote Learning in A Pandemic: Experiences of Public Elementary School Teachers

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Abstract: This study highlights the multifaceted nature of remote learning as observed through the experiences and viewpoints of those involved during the COVID-19 pandemic. It underscores the importance of clear communication and adaptability in delivering education in various remote formats. While remote learning offers advantages such as accessibility and crisis resilience, it also presents challenges like technical issues, pedagogical adjustments, and behavioral considerations. Technology's pivotal role is acknowledged but is accompanied by issues related to internet connectivity and device accessibility. Despite these challenges, educators and parents demonstrated resilience and innovation in ensuring quality education for special needs students. As the pandemic persists, the lessons drawn from these experiences will undoubtedly influence the future of remote learning in education.

Keywords: Remote Learning, covid-19 pandemic, technical issues, basic education

Introduction

Global education delivery has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 epidemic and these have resulted in the suspension of classes for millions of pupils globally (Osman, 2020). Distance learning has become a necessary tool for educational institutions to fulfill their mandates and maintain the academic activities of their students (Barbour et al., 2020). According to Toseeb et al. (2020) there were a number of difficulties with the switch to remote learning, particularly for pupils with mental or physical disabilities. While many nations have employed distance learning techniques as a temporary fix to meet every student's educational demand, these approaches' efficacy hasn't always been established (Soncini et al., 2021). As a result of the fact that many of these countries lack teachers, it is important to keep in mind



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that educational initiatives have evolved in tandem with the pandemic (Bozkurt et al., 2020).

Moreover, the widespread COVID-19 outbreak and related lockdown measures have severely limited the ability of both public and private schools to operate (Colbourn, 2020). Since the education industry has been impacted particularly hard, the effects are felt throughout the entire educational system (Ferri et al., 2020; Reimers, 2020). In addition, the pandemic has had a significant impact on the Philippines, forcing the closure of all public schools and the adoption of online learning as the only feasible option for students to continue their education (Teras et al., 2020). It is now challenging for schools to preserve the continuity of instruction as a result of this substantial change in the way that education is delivered (Maqsood et al., 2021). As a result, they had to develop and apply remote learning techniques. It has been questioned if remote learning can satisfy the demands of every student, notwithstanding these efforts and this is particularly true for students with disabilities or those from low-income backgrounds.

Academic institutions and teachers have to be creative and resourceful in order to give students a good and meaningful learning experience (Zheng et al., 2022). This is being done in order to meet the demands of contemporary classrooms and has made the creation of cutting-edge pedagogical approaches and the utilization of a range of technology tools necessary to improve accessibility to distant learning (Sohail et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the value of creativity, adaptation, and flexibility in the classroom and it has also given researchers the chance to look into cutting-edge methods of instruction and learning that might have advantages beyond the purview of the current problem (Doll et al., 2021; Gilead & Dishon, 2022).

Many children with special needs have been forced to accept online learning in lieu of the support they would often receive in regular classroom environments (Yazcayir & Gurgur, 2021). The sudden shift to remote learning surpasses traditional technology use since teachers cannot be physically present to interact with pupils through technology (Tulaskar & Turunen, 2022). Keeping students' attention is especially difficult for teachers of special needs students. Among the difficulties presented by remote learning are the requirement for parental support, schedule adjustments, differences in technology availability, a lack of accommodations, and social isolation (Shaw & Shaw, 2023). It can be more difficult for teachers to decide when and how to adjust the online learning experiences of students with special needs (Stenhoff et al., 2020).

There are many challenges associated with remote learning, from poor internet access and insufficient course resources to ambiguous course material, poor peer communication, competing household obligations, and unsuitable study locations (Khobragade et al., 2021). The shift from traditional classroom instruction to online

delivery techniques put teachers under pressure to make quick modifications with little time to prepare (Barbour et al., 2020). Teachers and parents, with special needs students in particular are all impacted by these barriers to education (Garbe et al., 2020).

For instance, poor internet connectivity, which can be caused by a lack of infrastructure in some places or technical issues with internet service providers, is one of the main obstacles to remote learning (Ferri et al., 2020). This could be challenging to use online learning platforms, turn in homework, and participate in online class discussions and students who struggle to grasp new concepts on their own may become confused and unhappy if there is a lack of learning materials or if the content of the learning materials is unclear (Simamora, 2020). Another problem that might cause children to feel detached and socially excluded is ineffective peer communication (Leech et al., 2022). Conflict between school and other responsibilities at home can also be a major obstacle for children who have to balance both (Garbe et al., 2020). Additionally, it could be difficult for students to create an environment that supports effective learning, particularly if they live with family members who work from home or study as well (Duraku & Hoxha, 2020).

The quick transition from traditional classroom instruction to online learning has left teachers with a big burden. Teachers who work with students who have special needs have found the transition challenging because they haven't had much time to adjust to the new online setting. In light of these difficulties, it is essential to acknowledge the difficulties that teachers and students have in order to encourage future distant learning experiences that are more fruitful.

The purpose of the current study was to provide insight into the perspectives of special education teachers working in elementary schools who were required to provide remote teaching during the COVID-19 epidemic. The study's specific goal was to investigate the strategies and tactics teachers used to provide online training to students with special needs, as well as the difficulties they encountered in doing so. This study sought to contribute to the future development of best practices for remote teaching by providing a comprehensive review of teachers' experiences with remote learning. This study aimed to identify the difficulties and constraints associated with distant learning in order to assist the future deployment of efficient interventions and support systems to address these problems.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative, phenomenological approach to research in order to record the perspectives of special education teachers who participated in online courses. The narratives and interpretations of teachers' experiences were evaluated and understood via the lens of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The INPUT-

PROCESS-OUTPUT paradigm was used to organise the research from its inception to its final analysis. The study was conducted in Quezon City District II and included 15 participants who were chosen using a purposive selection strategy from schools that offered special education programmes. Voluntary involvement and the avoidance of compulsion were given preference due to ethical concerns. All interviews and focus groups were recorded with participants' informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and coded into clusters for thematic analysis. The analysis of the data was grounded in the themes, resulting in a thorough comprehension of the nuanced dynamics of remote teaching in special education settings.

Results and Discussion

Theme 1. Definition of Remote Learning

The participants had varying definitions of remote learning. Some defined it as learning through technology and resources available at home, while others referred to it as a learning delivery format where education takes place between students and educators who are physically distant from each other to receive educational instruction. One teacher said:

“Remote learning is where the learner and teacher are not physically present in the traditional classroom. One example of remote learning is conducting online classes.” P2

“Remote learning or what we call Distance Learning refers to learning through the use of technology or resources available at home. Whether synchronous wherein you learn through online classes and with the use of online platforms such as Google meet, etc. Then, asynchronously you will learn through modules given by the teacher. Also, we can also use some devices such as TV, radio, and newspapers.” P5

Theme 2. Types of Remote Learning

Participants mentioned different types of remote learning, including Online Distance Learning (ODL), Modular Distance Learning (MDL), Blended Learning, and TV/Radio-Based Instruction. They also mentioned synchronous and asynchronous learning, and the use of different devices like TV, radio, and newspapers. One particular teacher said:

“Remote Learning according to the Department of Education (DepEd), Philippines (2020) refers to a learning delivery format where education takes place between students and educators who are physically distant from each other to receive educational instruction. The types of remote learning that the DepEd implements and we are bound to select and abide were the following Online Distance Learning (ODL), Modular Distance Learning (MDL), Blended Learning, a mix of modular and online instruction and lastly the TV/Radio-Based Instruction. During the time of the pandemic, the type of learning modality that was utilized in our school was Blended Learning, two

days of online synchronous instruction and 3 days of asynchronous modular instruction were practiced in our institution. Every Friday was our schedule for retrieval and giving a new set of modules for the week. Presently, blended learning to face-to-face learning delivery modality is the norm now.” P1

Theme 3. Pros and Cons of Remote Learning

Participants discussed the advantages and disadvantages of remote learning. Advantages include easily reaching learners in remote areas, promoting education during the pandemic, allowing continuous learning at home, and lessening travel time. Disadvantages include lack of face-to-face contact, lack of behavior management, unsupervised learners, and the involvement of parents during activities.

“My perception in remote learning is about the connection of the teacher and the learner in different places/areas because it allows to balance the commitments more easily. Based on my own practice as an educator there are pros and cons impact in learning states as follows: Pros: Easily reached the learners in remote area, promote education in times of pandemic, allows the continuous learning at home, and lessen the time to travel from home to school. The Cons included no face-to-face contact within the teacher and the learners, lack of Behavior Management due to the distance, Unsupervised learners during lessons and work activities and Involvement of parents during activities.” P6

Theme 4. Effectiveness of Remote Learning

Participants had differing opinions on the effectiveness of remote learning. One participant noted that it is less effective in remote areas due to inadequate communication networks and infrastructure, while another stated that it is not beneficial for children with disabilities.

“Remote learning is beneficial to other students but not for children with disabilities.” P10

“It is suited to urbanize areas but in rural areas it is not.” P9

Theme 5. Learning Environment

Participants discussed how the learning environment is different in remote learning. One participant mentioned that it takes place outside the usual classroom or school setup, while another noted that remote learning usually happens online through scheduled Zoom classes and activities.

“For me, remote learning is done through distance and with the use of online technology. Teacher could impart some knowledge and ideas with her students.” P11

“Remote learning happens online through scheduled Zoom classes and Brightspace activities, due to current social distancing measures, but your classes and program would normally take place in-person, in a classroom setting.” P12

“Remote learning or what we call Distance Learning refers to learning through the use of technology or resources available at home. Whether synchronous wherein you learn through online classes and with the use of online platforms such as Google meet, etc. Then, asynchronous wherein you will learn through modules given by the teacher. Also, we can also use some devices such as TV, radio, and newspapers.” P8

Experiences of Participants in the use of remote learning during the pandemic

Theme 1: Flexibility

The participants have provided detailed accounts of the variety of instructional strategies that they have implemented in order to successfully educate children with special needs through the medium of distant learning. These strategies involve providing concise and uncomplicated instructions, participating in a variety of activities, and utilizing various forms of technology, such as online classes and video tutorials. The educators changed the ways in which they teach in order to accommodate the requirements of the pupils who had unique needs. They gave the students more time to do the exercises, placed an emphasis on providing instruction that was clear and concise, and differentiated the tasks based on the talents and skills of the students. In addition to offering a variety of possibilities for involvement and assessment, they made use of parent-teaching-tutoring as one of the highlights of their instructional strategy.

The participants in the study have demonstrated a range of effective instructional strategies for educating children with special needs through remote learning. The strategies employed by the educators include providing concise instructions and differentiated activities, as well as using technology such as online classes and video tutorials to aid in the learning process:

“There are different teaching strategies that I used to my learners with special needs. These are; providing a range of learning materials to be used when internet connection is not available or they have uncontrollable behavior (tantrums); Being organized and follows regular routines/schedule to help the learners to familiarized working/learning schedules.” P7

“I had a regular schedule of the online class depending on the suggested allowed screen time for a learner. Asked the learner’s parent to have space at home, even just in the corner to have a sense of time when it is time to study. Video-recorded lessons are provided during unexpected circumstances like unstable internet connection, or if there is a conflict in schedule due to meeting or training.” P8

Theme 2: Adjustments in Pedagogy

The participants described their modified teaching strategies during the pandemic, which included extending activity time and utilizing a variety of online platforms to assist students outside of class

hours. In addition, they altered their educational strategies to accommodate students with special needs by extending task completion time, simplifying instructions, and customizing activities to their specific skills. In addition to facilitating different participation and assessment choices, they introduced extensive parent-teacher collaboration into their teaching technique.

The participants used a combination of modular and online learning, as well as adjustments such as giving paper copies of learning materials, generating video lessons, and combining graphics and sign language into instructional materials.

“The modifications that I used during the time of pandemic were: used different modified strategies that will help guardians or parents in teaching lessons at home. And these are the following: A. Hard copy of learning materials (modules) in two copies. The first copy is for the parent/child so that they can study at home. The second copy is for teachers’ records. B. Video lesson that I made that they can download with the guide of their parents/guardians. C. Instructional materials with pictures and sign language for parents copy. D. Video lessons that they can search online from various sign language tutorials.” P6

“The modifications that I used during the time of pandemic were: Modified lesson presentation using characters, celebrity, color or anything the learner is interested; Activity worksheets given to learner were presented online during guided activity time; Modules were modified based on how a learner can accomplish it; Lessons were simplified; Scheduled routine were provided and a regular conference or weekly feedback if needed.” P8

Theme 3: Utilization of technology

The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated a shift to remote learning, prompting educators to adopt various technologies to facilitate instruction. The participants in this study highlighted the diverse technologies they utilized for remote education, such as computers, internet connections, headsets, phones, and online programs like messenger, Google Meet, Microsoft Office, and YouTube. In addition, they placed an emphasis on the use of interactive exercises, video courses, and multimedia resources in order to maintain the involvement and motivation of the students. They took advantage of technology by conducting online classes, sending instructional materials, and assisting students via online platforms.

“The kind of technology that I used for remote learning instructions included laptop, cellphone, and other online applications that my students can use to help them in understanding our lesson.” P2

“The kind of technology that I used for remote learning instructions included The use of Zoom as our online conference tool since he can navigate it on his own. Game-based platforms such as Quizizz, word-wall and abcyas and Google forms were also used during assessments and for gathering information needed for IEP.” P8

Theme 4: Best Practices

Throughout the pandemic, participants utilized a variety of effective strategies when it came to their instruction for remote learning. One of them was supervising learning modules and activities conducted online for parents or guardians who could have trouble understanding even the most basic instructions since they do not sign. Another strategy was to maintain an orderly daily routine in order to assist learners in becoming accustomed to working and studying at specific times. Throughout synchronous and asynchronous activities, they found that using game-based platforms for engagement and assessment was effective.

“One of the best practices I have applied to remote learning instructions during the pandemic is how I monitor modular and online learning. Especially to those who can’t follow simple instructions. Parents or guardians who cannot do sign language that hinder learning.” P11

In addition, encouraging parents to collaborate in maintaining and enhancing learning at home is a specific example of an effective best practice that one member might share with the group. This relationship provides opportunities for bonding between the child and the parent and helps parents have a deeper understanding of their child's strengths as well as areas in which the youngster can grow. Before delivering them back to their respective parents-learners, the participant made sure that the modules that were recovered were examined and remarked on.

“What I consider as a best practice that I have applied to remote learning instructions during the pandemic is empowering the parents to work with you to sustain and strengthen learning at home. This is challenging but it’s worth it. so many positives we can learn from this partnership. The bonding that the child and parent can create while doing study time. The parents discover more about their child what they can do and what to improve etc. I make sure that the retrieved modules were checked and commented on before returning it them to the parents-learners.” P1

Another best practice is providing multiple options for participation and assessment by utilizing rubrics, as well as multiple touch points for synchronous communication, and creating a positive and inclusive environment were also among the best practices that were identified. Creating slides and video lessons to enhance technology-based lessons was another one of the best practices that was identified. This entailed providing required accommodations and modifications in addition to encouraging participation from all students, making the learning environment safe and welcoming for all students, and encouraging participation from all students through encouraging participation from all students.

“Creating a positive and inclusive environment: Encourage participation from all students and create a safe and inclusive environment.

Make sure to provide accommodations and modifications as needed to ensure that all students can participate and succeed.” P5

Challenges encountered by the participants in the use of remote learning during the pandemic

Theme 1: Technology

One of the most typical issues that develop during remote learning is technical challenge. This includes an inconsistent internet connection, a slow internet connection, a malfunctioning laptop, and a lack of resources at home. Internet connections that are unstable or slow might disrupt synchronous sessions, which can be annoying for both professors and students. As the key device for accessing online materials and engaging in virtual classrooms, malfunctioning laptops can potentially impede remote learning. The absence of a peaceful location to study, a lack of basic supplies, and insufficient technology or software at home might negatively impact the quality of the learning experience. Educators must be aware of these technical obstacles and give support and resources to assist students in overcoming them in order to make remote learning accessible and effective for all students.

“The main challenges that I encountered during the time of remote learning were an unstable internet connection in synchronous instruction. The availability of the parents to guide their kids both in synchronous and asynchronous instruction. Lastly, the authenticity of the work of the learners in their modules/worksheets.” P1

“Slow internet connection, a laptop that is not working properly, unnecessary distractions, and short attention span of the students. I think that remote learning for learners with special needs is not effective. There is a big difference in terms of teaching assistance and learning environment at home and school. Learners with special needs can learn more at school because the teachers can give them more attention and hands-on assistance. There is also less distraction at school than at home.” P2

Theme 2: Quality education

One of the most important obligations of a parent or guardian is to ensure that their child receives a quality education. Despite the fact that schools are the primary learning institutions, parents and guardians play an essential part in their child's education. But, assuming the role of a teacher can provide its own set of difficulties. There are a variety of hurdles that parents and guardians may face when it comes to educating their children, ranging from a lack of teaching knowledge to trouble managing discipline. In this context, it is crucial to comprehend the obstacles that parents and guardians encounter when attempting to provide their children with an education and how they can overcome these obstacles to guarantee that their child receives the finest education possible.

Lack of knowledge on teaching is one of the challenges that parents and guardians face when it comes to educating their children is a lack of knowledge about teaching methodologies and techniques. While parents may have the best intentions and want to help their children succeed academically, they may not have the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively teach them. This can result in frustration for both the parent and child, as the child may struggle to understand the material and the parent may feel powerless to help.

"The parent or guardian itself. They do not know how to teach inside their home. They do not know when to start and how to manage discipline during teaching hours. Too much help from parents or guardians in assisting the child. The older answer the lesson. The child depends on their parents or guardians. The child loses his focus and independence in doing their task at home." P5

"Family problems or personal matters that sometimes affects the class time. It varies from learner to learner. Parents, guardians, and their families primarily play a remote learning role. Parents have to endeavor to balance time for working and the needs of the learner. Teachers in this setting, not only spend time teaching the learners but also the parents. It is indeed challenging to everyone but with the time and effort the community put into the needs of the learner, learning and being independent in little ways happens." P7

Theme 3: Behavior of the Learners

Learner behavior is a crucial aspect of the educational process since it can have a substantial impact on a child's capacity to learn and academic progress. Sadly, many children face a number of behavioral hurdles that may impede their progress and impair their academic success as a whole. These issues may include short attention spans and difficulty concentrating, as well as an excessive reliance on parents or guardians and an inability to develop autonomous strengths. In this context, it is crucial to understand the barriers faced by pupils and how parents and teachers can work together to overcome them. By recognizing and eliminating these impediments, we can help ensure that all children have the chance to reach their academic.

A short attention span is among the most challenging student behaviors. Children may have trouble concentrating for long periods of time, especially when undertaking tasks that are not immediately interesting or enjoyable. This can make it difficult for them to retain information and limit their ability to efficiently learn. Teachers and parents can overcome this challenge by incorporating interactive and engaging activities into the learning process and use a variety of techniques to sustain the child's attention. potential.

"Big problem is the behavior of the child and WiFi connection. Generally, remote learning is not really effective for children with special needs. They cannot attend the class because some learners have different

waking and sleeping time. Parents and guardians are also busy, there is no guide for the learners to answer and even attend the class.” P8

Theme 4: Evaluating student’s learning

Evaluation of student learning is vital to the educational process since it provides instructors and parents with valuable feedback on a student's academic progress and performance. Yet, evaluating student learning can bring a number of issues, such as establishing appropriate assessment methods, measuring student comprehension and knowledge, and assuring fair and objective grading standards. These obstacles can make it difficult to effectively evaluate a student's learning and provide improvement-oriented feedback. In this context, it is essential to comprehend the obstacles connected with evaluating student learning and to investigate potential solutions. Teachers and parents can guarantee that students receive fair and accurate assessments of their learning and have the opportunity to progress and thrive academically by addressing these obstacles.

“Limited ways in monitoring the overall achievement of the learners. Remote learning has not been successful in some areas but it has been a good tool in promoting awareness regarding the needs of the children.” P9

Theme 5: Challenges Related to COVID 19

The epidemic of COVID-19 has had a dramatic effect on many parts of society, including schooling. The pandemic has compelled schools and educational institutions across the globe to adjust to a new reality of remote and hybrid learning, social separation, and other health and safety measures. This abrupt change in the educational landscape has offered various obstacles, such as guaranteeing fair access to education, maintaining student engagement, and ensuring that children obtain a quality education despite the difficulties posed by the pandemic. It has brought about significant changes to our daily routines, including our work and school schedules. Many individuals are now working or attending school remotely, which has disrupted their usual routines and caused a great deal of stress and anxiety. In addition, the pandemic has also led to sudden meetings or changes in schedules, which can further exacerbate these challenges.

Anxiety and worry are one of the key issues connected to COVID-19. Individuals' worry and stress levels have escalated as a result of the pandemic's widespread uncertainty and apprehension. This is especially true for students who now attend school remotely and may feel detached from their classmates and teachers. In addition, the abrupt transition to remote learning and the difficulties associated with adapting to new technology and learning settings can generate stress and anxiety among students.

“Challenges we encountered were communications, assessment, online education experience, technology use tools, time management, anxiety, and coronavirus disease stress. However, students reported positively the effectiveness of online learning during the pandemic.” P4

Discussion and Conclusion

The various definitions of remote learning supplied by participants show the concept's richness and diversity. As P2 points out, remote learning is more than just online classes; it also includes studying through technology and resources available at home. Similarly, P5 emphasizes the various types of remote learning, such as synchronous and asynchronous learning, as well as the utilization of various technologies such as television, radio, and newspapers. Secondly, the many definitions of remote learning highlight the importance of clear communication and uniform language in remote learning settings. With the various insights about remote learning, this may have caused confusion among all stakeholders that may have affected the implementation of remote learning. However, be that as it may, remote learning has indeed contributed to the continuous teaching-learning process during the pandemic.

Moreover, the different types of remote learning and modes of delivery highlighted by the participants indicate the need for flexibility and innovation in providing quality education amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the advantages and disadvantages of remote learning identified by the participants highlight the complex nature of this learning delivery format. On the one hand, remote learning can promote education during the pandemic and allow learners to continue their education from home, even in remote areas where access to traditional classroom-based instruction may be limited.

The participants had varying perceptions of the learning environment in remote learning. While one participant emphasized the use of online technology, another mentioned the traditional classroom setup. A different participant explained that remote learning takes place outside the typical classroom or school setup. Remote learning is defined as a learning delivery format where education takes place between students and educators who are physically distant from each other to receive educational instruction. It can be conducted through online synchronous instruction, asynchronous modular instruction, or TV/Radio-Based Instruction. (P1, P5, P8). Remote learning usually happens online through scheduled Zoom classes and activities, but it can also be conducted through different devices such as TV, radio, and newspapers (P11, P12). Overall, remote learning presents both opportunities and challenges for educators and learners. As such, careful planning and implementation of effective strategies are necessary to ensure that remote learning is an effective educational delivery method. The advantages of remote learning mentioned by participants include easily reaching learners in remote areas, promoting education during the pandemic, allowing continuous learning at home, and lessening travel time. However, there are also disadvantages, including lack of face-to-face contact, lack of behavior

management, unsupervised learners, and the involvement of parents during activities. While remote learning has its advantages, addressing the challenges and limitations of this approach is crucial in ensuring its effectiveness for all learners. In particular, ensuring equitable access to resources and infrastructure, as well as addressing issues of behavior management and learner supervision, will be crucial in ensuring the success of remote learning in the future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the experiences and perspectives of participants in the use of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic reveal the complexity and adaptability of this learning format. Participants highlighted the diverse definitions and types of remote learning, emphasizing the need for clear communication and flexibility in education delivery. While remote learning has its advantages, such as reaching learners in remote areas and promoting education during crises, it also comes with challenges, including technical issues, the need for effective pedagogical adjustments, and behavioral considerations. The use of technology played a central role in remote learning, but it also posed challenges related to internet connectivity and device accessibility. Nonetheless, educators and parents alike demonstrated remarkable resilience and innovative strategies to ensure quality education for students with special needs. As the world continues to grapple with the ongoing pandemic, the lessons learned from these experiences will shape the future of remote learning and its role in education.

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