

Implementation of Face-to-Face Classes Amidst Pandemic: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

This study delved into the lived experiences of teachers, parents, and students during the COVID-19 pandemic, examining how it contributed to stress and burnout. Using a phenomenological approach, the research aimed to grasp the meaning of these experiences by exploring the lives of those affected. Employing qualitative research such as participant observations, in-depth interviews, and focus groups, thirteen distinct themes emerged. These themes encompassed financial, parental, and teacher support and environmental and affective variables for students. Instructors' themes included technological expertise, student engagement, family support, and environmental factors, while parents' themes covered financial, instructional, technological, and personal factors. Notably, self-determination, autonomous learning, interactive digital tools, and innovative teaching methods emerged as pivotal aspects influencing student learning in the online environment.

Keywords: COVID-19, Lived Experiences, Pandemic, Phenomenological Approach, Qualitative Research

1. Introduction

Globally, the pandemic has disrupted educational systems at every level. Since the pandemic began over two years ago, it has presented several chances, obstacles, and issues in every facet of day-to-day living, from health to economics, education, politics, culture, and other aspects of society. To support this demand, "Education must continue," various teaching approaches were introduced into the area, causing initial anxiety and worry among instructors, students, and parents. While these methods have been employed for a long time as different delivery methods are used in other nations, their acceptability in the Philippines has often grown difficult due to the constant criticism they encounter in the social and mainstream media.

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In light of this challenging educational environment, all educational institutions are committed to giving students a high-quality, inclusive, and result-based education. This is more than just a challenge for students and educators and authorities in schools (Johnson & Seaman, 2020). Given that technology has been a highly effective tool for learning during the pandemic, one of the difficulties is having reliable internet access and owning a piece of technology (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). According to reports, those students struggle academically since they cannot fully utilize online learning because of unforeseen events like inadequate internet access and those living in impoverished locations (Kapasias et al., 2020).

To address the educational problem in the Philippines brought on by the lack of face-to-face exchange for following health precautions, the Department of Education (DepEd) issued DepED Order (DO) No. 12, s. 2020. The department order release encouraged distant learning as an alternate mode of instruction (DepED, 2020). Delute and Ada (2021) emphasized the ways in which the shift to remote learning impacts student learning as a result of becoming accustomed to the new teaching medium. Additionally, conventional face-to-face instruction is still preferred due to the idea of learning by doing as well as direct human engagement. Finally, they highlighted how resources can impact their entire learning process, or the lack of them, familiarity with the remote learning environment.

The Department of Education implemented the three learning methods that would suit students' needs and the teachers' readiness and socio-economic status. The three available types of learning are Modular Distance Learning, Online learning, remote learning, and education via radio and television (Quinones, 2020). Modular distance learning is the most favored learning modality among parents, according to a DepEd survey of 8.9 million of them (Bernardo, 2020). Due to its popularity with parents, the DepEd decided to employ modular distance learning as its primary method of instruction for pupils in kindergarten through grade 12. DepEd reports that 13 million students, or 59% of the 22 million enrolled in public schools, would receive their education via modular distance learning (Magsambol, 2020).

Various global studies have examined a range of learning modalities. The majority shifted to online learning, while others welcomed remote and modular learning due to their perceived requirement and suitability. Amid this swift shift, a plethora of challenges, problems, best practices, and opportunities surfaced, catching the attention of numerous government agencies, especially educational institutions (Morgan, 2020). Using distance learning as a means of instruction, online Google Classroom was discovered to be the most popular learning platform among students (Oktaviani & Elmanora, 2020). Although online learning is the best alternative to traditional education, it does not produce the desired outcomes in developing nations due to slow internet access and poverty difficulties. As a result, some turned to distance learning, such as modular learning (Toquero, 2021).

The aforementioned obstacles and complexities associated with virtual education were conspicuous in underdeveloped nations. Nonetheless, industrialized nations reported greater levels of e-learning satisfaction (Abbasi et al., 2020). Regardless of the learning mode used, the rapid shift necessitates consistent and rigorous evaluation to ensure its success (Khalil et al., 2020), with student satisfaction being an essential factor (Chen et al., 2020). On a positive note, this epidemic presents a chance for teachers and students to improve their use of learning technologies to provide relevant teaching and learning experiences.

A thorough search of related literature and studies revealed that no study has yet been undertaken in the Philippines that investigates students' contextual experiences in modular, online, and hybrid learning contexts. As a result, this study will focus on the experiences of public high school students, instructors, and parents throughout the pandemic.

The study's objective is to identify the lived experiences of teachers, parents supporting their kids' online education, and students learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Methodology

A qualitative research design was employed to better understand and explore students' learning journeys during the pandemic. The researcher used purposive sampling for selecting the study's respondents, which is usual in qualitative and mixed methodologies research. It is especially effective when a researcher has to locate information-rich examples or make the best use of limited resources yet is vulnerable to research biases such as observer bias.

The participants were composed of 45 students (15 from online classes, 15 from blended, and 15 from modular), 15 parents (5 from online classes, 5 from blended, and 5 from modular), and all the 8th-grade teachers (5 from modular, 0 from online, and 6 from blended). All in all, the study involved a total of 71 participants. The interview took place at Bahay Pare National High School at a convenient time.

Both the parents and the students who participated in the focus groups employed a series of semi-structured guide questions to help collect the qualitative data required for the study. However, the researcher also used a semi-structured set of questions throughout the interviews with the teacher participants.

Ethical considerations were also ensured to be diligently followed before the interview. Given that the Grade 8 students primarily fall under the category of minors (below 18 years old), consent was obtained from the parents or guardians through an assent form before commencing the study. Furthermore, during the focus group discussion, participants were allowed to pose questions or seek clarification.

After gathering all the necessary qualitative data, a thematic analysis was conducted. Braun and Clarke (2023) note that thematic analysis is a widely employed technique for examining semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions.

3. Results And Discussion

3.1. The Learning Experiences in Modular, Online, and Blended Learning Environments (MOBLE)

Learning experiences consist of in-person or online/distance learning group experiences, individual experiences with self-study materials, and blended experiences that combine parts of both individual and group learning experiences. It can replicate situations from the real world that learners have faced or will encounter, delivering immediate, targeted, and detailed feedback on their decisions, resulting in an elevated degree of engagement, relevancy, and information retention.

Modular Distance Learning is a method of tailored education in which learners can use self-learning modules (SLMs) in either print or digital format, depending on their environment and

accessible learning resources. This technique allows students to learn at their own pace and in a way that meets their personal interests.

Online learning is a form of instructional delivery carried out electronically, utilizing diverse multimedia, Internet platforms, and applications. It gives teachers an effective means to impart lessons to students, particularly during a pandemic.

Blended learning is a distinctive instructional approach that combines traditional in-person classes with technological support, allowing learners to benefit from online and offline resources.

2.2. Learning Experiences of Students Amidst Pandemic

Students learn and grow when they make connections between new and prior information and when they engage in collaborative, multi-method learning in a classroom environment that encourages and supports their social and emotional needs. Teachers can aid students in developing memory and skill sets by teaching them to construct coherent, transportable conceptual frameworks.

Several factors could prevent sure students from having home access to digital learning tools, such as a lack of internet connectivity in their location, a lack of funds, or worries about online privacy, cybersecurity, or personal safety. These barriers to digital learning resources may limit students' ability to learn and participate in the classroom.

The level of parental support for their children's schooling predicts academic achievement. There is a correlation between parental involvement and academic success and improved social and emotional well-being in children. Student performance, confidence, and conduct all benefit from parental participation.

Students

Students experienced many challenges during their whole school year because of distance learning. The traditional face-to-face classes that they encountered before the pandemic is more potent for their improvement and development.

It was found that the student's perspective in MOBLE most likely experienced the weak internet connection, no gadgets to use, parents working, teachers not always available, noise distraction at home, and the absence of friends and classmates, but it developed a strong family bond during the pandemic. Students faced with these experiences become stronger and more independent and continue learning to ensure they are not left behind. It may encourage the participants to become more engaged in independent learning.

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2.3. Teaching Experiences of Teachers Amidst the Pandemic

Within the classroom, teachers are tasked with using their professional judgment to make choices that will lead to desired results for their students and themselves. A teacher's responsibility is to assess their classroom setting and identify the most effective methods for fostering student learning there.

Technological skills are communicating, getting things done with computers, and using other electronic gadgets. One must have the requisite knowledge and/or skills to accomplish certain technological goals. It does not imply any background, social skills, attitude, etc. While one may have the necessary technical knowledge for a position, one can lack strength in other areas that make for a well-rounded employee. Working effectively with others in an office setting requires more than just technical knowledge.

Teachers

Teachers are responsible for exercising their professional judgment in the classroom to achieve desired outcomes for both them and their students. Teachers are tasked with identifying and implementing the most impactful approaches to cultivate student learning by assessing their classroom environment.

The teacher perspective on modular, online, and blended learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers played a crucial role in adapting to new challenges and continuing to provide education to their students. Their responsibilities and functions evolved significantly in response to the pandemic.

Teachers quickly transitioned from traditional in-person classroom instruction to online or remote learning platforms. They had to learn to use various digital devices and platforms to teach, conduct virtual classes, and share resources.

2.4. Experiences of Parents Amidst Pandemic

Typically, children learn from their parents. However, there are numerous important lessons that children should learn in school. While the children's inability to attend school became an additional factor in their learning outcomes, children are more likely to perform well in school and have better social and emotional development when their parents are involved in their education. Open communication between home and school is advantageous for both parties.

Financial issues may be terrible for families. During critical economic times, numerous families lose jobs, homes, vehicles, retirement funds, personal possessions, savings, insurance for healthcare, and other things. Families struggle to meet their fundamental needs. Stay-at-home moms may have to work or sell what they have. Unemployed parents feel shame as well as guilt over losing their ability to provide for their families.

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A family's finances can collapse under financial hardship. Many families experience asset losses during challenging economic times, including employment, homes, cars, retirement funds, personal items, savings, health insurance, and other valuables. Families are battling to meet their fundamental needs. Mothers who stay home with their children may have to sell their possessions or find employment. Parents without jobs feel bad and embarrassed about being unable to support their families.

2.5. Influential aspects of online learning setting in student learning

Self-Determination

The ability to be self-determined is the conviction that one has command over one's life. Self-determination is the disposition and set of skills that motivate an individual to take charge of his or her life and pursue his or her goals. Independence entails deciding matters for oneself, figuring out how to deal with challenges, and taking charge of and responsibility for one's life. Self-determination involves taking responsibility for one's actions and dealing with the results.

Autonomous Learning

The ability to direct one's own education is known as learner autonomy. It was originally promoted for use in the study of other languages but has since found use in many areas of education and is a good fit for online instruction. Students develop their own sense of accountability at the center of autonomous learning. Having options makes it so that kids and teens can feel like they oversee their education. This, in turn, encourages accountability and initiative in them.

Interactive Learning with Digital Tools

Technology is used in interactive learning, promoting student involvement in the learning process. In contrast to passive methods, such as the lecture, students actively participate in the learning process. When students can interact with one another in meaningful ways, it promotes a more cooperative learning environment and encourages more excellent social development. In the long run, this prepares them to deal with life's inevitable difficulties.

Innovative Teaching Methods

Innovative teaching brings fresh ideas and approaches to the classroom. The goal of adopting these innovative approaches to education is to raise learning standards and foster social justice by solving actual problems. Introducing new approaches to teaching has the potential to improve classroom conditions for students. In today's progressive classrooms, students are actively working to improve their interpersonal communication and their ability to engage with their classmates actively.

2.6. Emergent Themes

The interviews for this study yielded numerous lines of information to code and evaluate. Semi-structured interview transcripts were coded to uncover commonalities in the experiences of pupils, teachers, and parents in modular, online, and mixed-learning settings. To find trends for this study, the researcher sought recurring codes to answer the question, "What does this expression represent?" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 194). These codes provided the basis for thirteen (13) themes. These themes include for students: financial, parental support, teacher support, environmental factors, and affective factors. For the teachers, themes include technological expertise, student engagement, family support, and environmental factors. Meanwhile, for the parents, themes include financial, instructional, technological, and personal factors.

Students

Financial. Student respondents were not given enough resources to support their online academic endeavors. Many students do not have access to a strong internet connection because of their family's inability to pay for such necessities.

Parental support. Many students felt inadequate support provided by the parents, as they were not always available during the time of answering their modules and such.

Teacher support. The majority of the student respondents do not necessarily feel that the teachers are always present to answer them in case certain academic-related issues arise.

Environment factor. Many students were not given a comfortable and conducive learning space at home where they could study for class. This keeps them distracted from online learning.

Affective factor. It has also become an issue for the students to have the fear of missing out with their peers. The lack of socialization during the pandemic has made them more anxious, which affects their academic learning.

Teachers

Technological expertise. The teachers were not knowledgeable when it came to the use of technology, specifically during the transition part of the pandemic, which caused some online classes not to be conducted smoothly.

Student engagement. Most of the teachers noticed low levels of student engagement during the conduct of classes during the pandemic period.

Family support. The teachers' families have supported them to conduct online classes and assist them during that period.

Environment factor. Most teacher participants have a space for them not to get distracted during online class discussions.

Parents

Financial factor. Parents are not ready for the consequences of the pandemic because many parents lost their jobs to fund the students' needs.

Instructional factor. Many parent respondents do not have the expertise to help their children with online classes. They do not know how to teach some lessons that their children ask them.

Technological factor. Parents are not well-equipped with the skills needed for online learning, and they are not aware of how they can help their children with gadgets.

Personal factor. Some parents are not available at all times to help their children with academic work, and some find it an additional chore to do, whereas when the children are at school, the teachers would be the ones to teach them.

4. Conclusion

The study's findings led to the following inferences: While not wholly unpleasant, students' experiences during the epidemic differed. Online learning seemed to pose more challenges for students and parents than teachers, making it less convenient overall. Though the teachers experienced challenges and difficulties, these were somewhat manageable compared to financial, instructional, and personal issues faced by the students.

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Regarding problems and difficulties, students were drawn to external noise-particularly environmental issues that affect their focus on learning. Similarly, teachers also saw this problem and the unavailability of students when attending online classes, resulting in a low attendance rate. The parents were also conscious of the problem where their children struggle to concentrate on schoolwork while learning at home.

Moreover, considering the impact of online learning environments on student education, favorable outcomes indicated the potential for interactive learning opportunities using digital tools to enhance students' proficiency in essential learning skills.

The results and inferences drawn from the research propose the following actions derived from the identified themes: Learners must be open to seeking help from various sources, recognizing the multitude of needs—mental, psychological, moral, and spiritual—during this pandemic. Establishing productive learning routines is essential for genuine learning beyond completing modules and materials. Parents ought to re-embrace their role as the main instructors within the household. Teachers should strive for dynamic and engaging content presentation by meticulously crafting modules and supplementary materials. Additionally, their vital role as supporters of parents is crucial, as many seek collaboration but might lack guidance on where to start or how to participate effectively. Moreover, these results may be utilized to improve the strategic planning of initiatives and activities aimed at maximizing the effectiveness of online education for the broader student community. The school respondents may consider the program of activities for implementation.

The study is limited to 45 students, 15 parents, and 11 teachers of Bahay Pare National High School only.

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