

Adaptation to New Learning Modalities: A Case Study of Kindergarten Teachers' Practices

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ABSTRACT

In response to the "new normal," the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) developed the Elementary Education Learning Continuity Plan. This plan outlined a series of educational initiatives to address fundamental education issues arising from the pandemic. The purpose of this study was to explore kindergarten teachers' practices toward the adaptation of new learning modalities. The focus group discussion included nine (9) selected kindergarten teachers from the Digos City Division, 5 parents, and 4 school heads who were invited for virtual interviews. The data were recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Thematic analysis was used to examine the data, and the study's results concluded with core ideas, major themes, and overarching themes being formulated. As catalysts for lifelong learning in the 21st century, teachers served as implementers of learning modalities and collaborated strongly with stakeholders to fully understand the new learning environment. Teachers provided social-professional support to learners, developing the required domains of kindergarten to ensure readiness for Grade 1. Also, result highlighted the application of social intervention and innovative teaching as teachers embraced technological teaching, adaptation to homeschooling, introduction of best practices in teaching, and the cultivation of a positive attitude to successfully implement new learning modalities.

Keywords: Learning modalities; New normal; Kindergarten; Teaching practices

Introduction

Early childhood years are a crucial stage for a child's development. While most countries have adapted and supported distance learning during the COVID-19 crisis, only 60% provided support for pre-primary education (UNICEF, 2020). Teachers faced the challenge of finding effective teaching tactics and methodologies to enhance learning activities and improve students' academic performance. Wong and Tatnall (2009) explored how tracking students' performances using a learning management system platform could enable teachers to easily assess student output.

In response to the "new normal," the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) developed the Elementary Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) for the 2020-2021 school year. This plan outlined a series of educational initiatives to address fundamental education issues arising from the pandemic. However, the organization encountered various problems in delivering high-quality, equitably distributed, and culturally relevant education without jeopardizing the health and security of its employees, particularly educators and students, nationwide (Torres, 2021).

Moreover, the Department of Education innovated ways and mechanisms to meet the needs of learners, allowing them and their parents to choose appropriate learning modalities based on their equitable access. The available learning modalities included television-based instruction (TV BI) for visual learners, radio-based instruction (RBI) for auditory learners, online or digital learning for those with internet access, and self-learning modules (SLM) for learners who prefer printed materials.

The shift in learning styles and modalities brought about significant changes in the lives of teachers, especially at the kindergarten level. Given the fragility of young learners, teachers must be creative and serve as a source of inspiration to encourage education despite delivery gaps. Collaborative efforts among stakeholders are essential to ensure effective program implementation amid new modalities (Linde, 2020).

At present, kindergarten teachers are doing their best to provide quality education to their young learners, no matter what technique they cast off. Furthermore, Abdul Rashid et al. (2021) found that learners consistently performed better in the traditional way, the learners were more engaging and motivated to learn. It was a challenging task for teachers to adapt to the way of learning during the pandemic crisis to address the needs and provide quality education for kindergarten learners.

Several studies discuss learners' and teachers' experiences with distance learning during the COVID-19 crisis, with the Department of Education focusing on continuing early childhood education as a priority within the Philippine Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan. Despite complications and discussions about the learning gap, very few studies have specifically addressed kindergarten education during the current emergency (e.g., Kim, 2021; Spiteri, 2021; Yıldırım, 2021). Gayatri (2020) recommended further studies to observe how kindergarten learners adapt to new learning modalities and their effectiveness in acquiring learning domains at the kindergarten level.

Existing studies appear to focus less on the practical aspect of adapting new learning modalities in kindergarten education, especially during a crisis, placing teachers in a challenging position (Cahapay, 2021). Therefore, more studies should be conducted to gather data on the challenges and experiences of obtaining quality early childhood education despite the crisis. This descriptive study aims to explore the role of teachers in remote learning in kindergarten and the notion of support provided by kindergarten teachers for young learners' successful transition to Grade 1 with new learning modalities. The study is urgently needed to understand the adaptation of new learning modalities for kindergarten in the Digos City Division, uncovering the practices of kindergarten teachers in utilizing different learning modalities.

Methodology

Research Design

The qualitative approach employed in this study is a case study, aimed at discovering, describing, and exploring teachers' practices in adapting different learning modalities at the kindergarten level. Case studies are chosen to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic by utilizing various data sources (Carlin & Kim, 2019; Levitt, 2020; Stake, 2013). They are typically exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive, providing insights into a specific event or phenomenon (Carlin & Kim, 2019; Levitt, 2020; Stake, 2013). In the context of this research, the case study approach is utilized to offer an in-depth understanding of the innovation of kindergarten teachers' practices and the specific details uncovered in the process of adapting different learning modalities in the Digos City Division. This methodological choice allows for a nuanced exploration of the challenges, strategies, and outcomes associated with the implementation of various learning modalities in kindergarten education.

Research Locale

This study was conducted in various elementary schools within Digos City Division, specifically in Digos City. The research encompassed the four districts within the division, namely: Digos Oriental, Occidental, Digos South, and Mt. Apo District. Access to these schools in the mentioned districts was facilitated by land transportation. The Division of Digos City is situated on Roxas Street and is in the province of Davao del Sur.

Research Participants

The participants for this research were selected through purposive sampling, with the main objective being to create a sample that is representative of the population. Purposive sampling, also known as purposeful sampling, involves selecting a sample from a population based on specific criteria that align with the research goals. In this study, the goal was to choose participants who could share relevant ideas and experiences related to the adaptation of different learning modalities.

Using expert knowledge of the community, the researcher non-randomly selected individuals from four (4) districts in the Digos City Division. Nine (9) kindergarten teachers were chosen to participate in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD), with three (3) handling online learning, three (3) handling modular digital learning, and three (3) handling modular printed learning. The selected participants each had three (3) years of teaching experience in the chosen modality.

The researcher selected nine (9) kinder teachers to engage in the FGD, three (3) handled online learning, three (3) handled modular digital learning, and three (3) handled modular printed learning. Participants who had at least three (3) years of teaching experience in the study's chosen modality and were willing to participate in the focus group discussion and share their teaching practices were only included. Kindergarten teachers with less than three years of experience were excluded from the FGD. Triangulation was used in numerous data sources or methodologies for data analysis to boost a study's credibility. In addition, to validate the responses of the teachers, five (5) parents of

children enrolled in kindergarten classes taught by one of the participating teachers and (5) five school heads familiar with the practices of the participating teachers were invited for a virtual interview to confirm the practices of the teachers. Parents who are not the primary caregivers of their kindergarten children and school heads not directly involved in supervising the participating teachers were excluded from the interview. As in navigation and surveying, triangulation brings together numerous viewpoints and leads to a deeper understanding of the event (Kennedy, 2009).

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process for this study involved several key steps. First, the researcher crafted interview guide questions for both Individual In-Depth Interviews (IDI) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). Subsequently, the interview guide questionnaire underwent a validation process by three experts in language teaching, kindergarten supervision, and educational management, who provided valuable insights for refining the questions. With a validated questionnaire in hand, the researcher submitted a formal request for permission to conduct the study to the Division office of Digos City, along with a supporting letter from the College Dean/Program Head. Upon receiving approval, the researcher and participants convened virtually, where the purpose of the study and its potential benefits were communicated.

Important logistical details, such as interview times and FGD schedules, were also discussed, and participants in the FGD were provided with a consent letter. The actual interviews and discussions were conducted by the researcher at the agreed-upon times. The video recordings of the focus group discussion and individual interviews were subsequently reviewed and transcribed. Due to health considerations, the researcher opted for virtual interactions via Google Meet, aligning with safety protocols recommended by the Department of Health. This systematic and thorough approach ensured the collection of robust and meaningful data while prioritizing the well-being of all participants.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis in this study encompassed a comprehensive process and set of procedures aimed at transporting and collecting qualitative data for the explanation and interpretation of the people and situations under investigation. The analytical approach was primarily interpretative. Qualitative data collected followed the thematic analysis framework, influenced by the work of Oding et al. (2021). After the interviews, the gathered information was transcribed and handed over to the data analyst for thematic analysis.

The thematic analysis involved organizing the information into a structured framework comprising themes and core ideas. Horizontal analysis required careful examination of the responses, seeking recurring patterns that could be developed into overarching themes. This process considered the occurrence of responses and the patterns underlying core ideas.

Trustworthiness of the Study

The researcher maintained trustworthiness throughout the data analysis process by adhering to the standards of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Triangulation was employed as a strategy, and each participant was involved in checking the accuracy of the transcribed responses. The transcripts from the interviews were meticulously examined, and their correctness was validated during this process. The digitally recorded interviews were also reviewed multiple times to ensure the credibility of the data. To enhance transferability, the study provided a detailed and rich description of its procedures, participants, and setting. This thorough documentation enables other researchers to utilize and learn from the study, contributing to its broader applicability and relevance. Additionally, the study itself was well-documented and can be validated by fellow researchers, further bolstering its trustworthiness.

Ethical Considerations

To safeguard the identities of participants, the researcher implemented several measures. Each participant was assigned code names to ensure anonymity. By assuring participants of confidentiality, the researcher created an environment where individuals felt more comfortable engaging in interviews or focus group discussions. This assurance of confidentiality encouraged participants to share their viewpoints and ideas, enriching the study with valuable and in-depth knowledge. During the initial interactions, the researcher warmly greeted and informed participants about the purpose and duration of the study. Participants were also made aware of any potential future risks or discomfort associated with the study's conduct. Importantly, they were assured that the information they provided would be kept private and that they had the option to withdraw from the study at any time, emphasizing the researcher's commitment to ethical considerations and participant well-being.

Results and Discussion

Kindergarten Teachers as Catalyst of Lifelong Learning in the 21st Century

Five themes emerged regarding the role of kindergarten teachers in the adaptation of new learning modalities.

Theme 1: Importance of effective communication and collaboration

In the context of the opening of classes for the academic year 2021-2022 and the adoption of the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP), the Department of Education executed the National Oplan Balik Eskwela. The DepEd Digos City Division proactively implemented distance learning with the new learning modalities offered. Teachers disseminated crucial information to the public through press releases, website postings, and updates on the School's Facebook page. Oplan Balik Eskwela Recorrída activities were conducted around the community to effectively disseminate information about the various learning modalities available. As a result, kindergarten teachers initiated activities to empower parents, as indicated by the participant, Teacher 4 who was handling online modality explained the mechanism of the different learning modalities, excerpts provided below.

"Teachers informed the parents about the new learning modalities in this new normal, and it was well disseminated to the community" (T4, L 20-23, p. 1).

Communication played a crucial role in the implementation of new learning modalities. Parents were recognized as vital partners in the education of kindergarten learners, especially during the pandemic when the teaching-learning process shifted to a new way of learning. One parent shared in a virtual interview: Parent 3 who chose the modular learning modality of her child attested that the teacher of her child was always open to entertaining her queries:

"The teacher always contacts us because we have a group chat on Messenger. If I have queries about the lesson, I always contact the teacher regarding my problem in the lesson" (P3, L36-40, p.1).

Collaboration between parents and the school aligns to work together (Ducrey and Jendoubi, 2016; Monceau and Larivée, 2019). To understand the context of learning modalities, open communication between parents and teachers is essential. Teachers explained and informed parents about the various learning modalities, considering resource capacity, areas, and time availability for each parent and its process. Teachers who trusted parents to make decisions with them, spoke to them openly and honestly, fostering successful collaboration (Graham, 2018). Participants attributed the major part of their accomplishment to assisting parents to easily adapt to a new learning environment while ensuring that parents understood the learning modalities. Teachers organized students for learning by applying these strategies, and materials, and communicating with parents about what was required for each day's learning activities.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, kindergarten teachers recognized the importance and challenges of helping their students acquire skills crucial for readiness in formal schooling. Joaquin (2020) emphasized the evolving role of teachers from knowledge imparter to learning facilitator. Teacher 7 handling modular modality shared her experience in adapting the distance learning she shared:

"Well, it is difficult and challenging for us as kindergarten teachers to adapt to sudden changes in the learning system, especially because our students need to be guided, particularly at the foundation of learning" (T7, L 66-68, p. 2).

Kindergarten teachers understood the need to collaborate and the parents of their students to navigate the sudden changes during the pandemic (Sood, 2020). They acknowledged the importance of being versatile, adapting, and rebounding despite difficulties. Kindergarten teachers utilized adaptive or planned curricula to address the diverse needs of each child in the new learning environment.

"The role of the kindergarten teacher is very important because it's the very critical stage, it's the first step of their formal education" (SH4, L162-164, p. 4).

Teachers found ways to deliver quality learning to kindergarten learners. The More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) played a crucial role in providing support, facilitating the learning process, preventing student struggles, and assisting them in moving closer to independence (Parkin & Harper, 2020).

Kindergarten teachers emphasized the importance of building trust by getting to know parents and maintaining regular communication to address any concerns. They highlighted the significance of a collaborative effort between teachers and families to support children in acquiring skills necessary for school readiness. During the

focus group discussion, participants shared insights on their relationships with parents in implementing new normal learning modalities. According to Teacher 7 handling modular modality, strong collaboration with parents is essential for the effective implementation of the learning modes:

"We have what we call strong collaboration, and cooperation between teachers and stakeholders is essential for the effective implementation of the learning mode" (T7, L199-200, p.4).

Developing shared leadership among school stakeholders was identified as an effective way to establish and sustain a successful early childhood program or school (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Graham, 2018). Teachers should provide parents with open communication and involve them in decision-making processes for the successful implementation of learning modalities (Graham, 2018). Parental participation was also recognized as a significant consideration (Monceau & Larivée, 2019).

Through various communication platforms such as calls, texts, and messengers, teachers ensured constant communication to provide technical assistance. The strong collaboration between teachers and parents in the teaching-learning process was evident. Daniels (2019) discovered that collaboration, shared purpose, and shared ownership in decision-making promoted a sense of community, responsibility, and trust among all those involved in the role of teacher. Parents' collaboration was crucial for kindergarten teachers; they played a vital role in achieving the learners' learning goals. Without the cooperation of parents, distance education would not be possible, and parents serve as a conduit for teachers to deliver learning at home.

Teachers implemented feedback mechanisms to address the challenges in communication between teachers and parents, which hindered the effective delivery of distance learning. Teacher 3 as a modular teacher explained these mechanisms as follows:

'Having constant communication with parents and providing updates through group chats and calls' (T3, L314-316, p.8).

'I always keep parents informed about the scheduled distribution and retrieval of the modules' (T3, L316-317, p.8).

Kindergarten teachers consistently collaborated with parents, utilizing various platforms to connect with them regarding module distribution and retrieval. They uploaded and reviewed digitized SLM in Google Classroom and continued to share Google Meet links for online classes.

In assisting kindergarten parents to transition into the role of kindergarten learners and prepare for formal schooling, participants attributed their success to daily planning and long-term charting. Citing Welsh (2016), it was found essential for kindergarten teachers to be attentive to diverse behaviors displayed by children lacking positive early education experiences, often struggling to adjust in the initial stages of kindergarten.

Parents played a crucial role by guiding their children at home, addressing basic cognitive and language skills, as well as social and emotional competence. Open communication between parents and teachers proved vital for addressing concerns and questions about instruction or providing guidance on teaching at home. Teachers emphasized their constant availability to guide parents, highlighting the importance of a strong relationship between both parties to achieve the common goal of enhancing kindergarten students' learning.

To adequately prepare kindergarten students for formal schooling, collaboration between teachers and parents is essential. Both parties must work together to develop the necessary domains before entering grade one.

Theme 2: Innovator of Learning Pedagogies

Despite the challenges posed by the mandatory educational changes due to the sudden pandemic, kindergarten teachers demonstrated creativity in designing distance education for their learners. They innovated various modalities for delivering instructional content through distance learning and prepared instructional materials while considering the adaptability of preferred learning modalities. One kindergarten teacher shared her approach:

"I even record myself for a PowerPoint presentation with my presence so they can see me even when we are not physically together... writing materials and even oral assessment via video call" (T2, L 95-97, p. 3).

Teacher 2 handling digital modular modality made an effort to create a video presentation instead of downloading one from YouTube, believing that her students would find it more engaging if she acted it out. Also, Teacher 1, as an online class teacher, added that one of her innovations was conducting online "kumustahan" (checking in) to interact with her students:

"I conduct online 'kumustahan' for my children through online interactions where we face each other. I can monitor and track their learning" (T1, L 121-122, p. 3).

This online interaction allowed the teacher to track the progress of her learners, assess the effectiveness of technical assistance provided by parents, and observe improvements in the performance of kindergarten learners. McNally and Slutsky (2020) explored the relationship between teaching practices and teacher-student interactions, highlighting the implementation of various alternate methods, such as live group or one-on-one interactions and sending physical materials for home use.

Theme 3: Vessel of Continuous Learning

As part of the new normal, the DepEd Digos City Division organized a series of webinars and training sessions aimed at development and upskilling, reflecting the prevailing trend in the teaching profession. These training initiatives were designed to assist teachers in implementing various learning modalities, particularly for kindergarten learners. The following were some of the key training sources attended by kindergarten teachers: DMS2020_274, a webinar on teaching and learning through virtual and other modalities, and DMS2020_497, an online showcasing of different lesson series through various modalities for kindergarten learners. These trainings equipped teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to support parents and children in learning and engaging with these modalities, including the use of digital learning in instruction. Teacher 5 handling the online modality of learning shared her experiences:

"We undergo trainings and seminars or webinars for new online platforms which we will use for the new setup. Modular and blended learning is applied to us, so we need to be flexible enough to accomplish our goals" (T5, L 150-153, p. 3).

During a virtual interview, one school head emphasized the support provided to teachers:

"Providing them the necessary support they need, such as appropriate training, technical assistance, supplies, and materials appropriate to the different support modalities in teaching-learning instruction" (SH3, L10-13, p. 1).

The school head 3 of San Miguel Elementary School demonstrated strong support for teachers, allowing them to attend training and providing technical assistance to facilitate the delivery of instruction through various learning modalities. Regular workshops, webinars, and conferences were conducted for teachers and other stakeholders to foster professional growth, knowledge-sharing, and technology awareness. These training sessions played a crucial role in facilitating the adaptation and implementation of the new learning environment, especially the integration of technological teaching methods. Kindergarten teachers applied the knowledge gained from the webinars and training in planning innovative strategies beneficial to their learners.

Kindergarten Teachers' Notion of Social-Professional Support to Kindergarten

Kindergarten teachers played an important role in preparing students for school. The overarching theme emphasized the teachers' support in getting kindergarten students ready to enter grade one.

Theme 1: Conduct Learning Assessment and Monitoring

Despite the ongoing pandemic crisis and its educational consequences, the significance of learning assessment remained crucial in guiding kindergarten instruction and monitoring the progress of children. Kindergarten teachers faced challenges in gaining a comprehensive understanding of their students' performances due to these issues. However, teachers from DepEd Digos City employed innovative approaches to monitor kindergarten learners' performances through virtual assessments, including the submission of pictures and videos by parents.

"I sent them educational videos for kindergarten and writing learning materials to help them master the fundamentals. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are children's most critical skills and developmental milestones to achieve" (T5, L359-362, p.9).

The results of the assessments conducted on kindergarten learners were utilized by teachers to plan activities and track individual performances, identifying potential areas for improvement. This approach aimed to assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of preferred learning modalities, aligning with Ringwalt's (2008) perspective on the use of assessment data. The primary purpose of kindergarten assessment, according to NAEYC (2003), was to guide instructional decisions by incorporating continuous assessment information into the productive quality of learning in kindergarten.

While monitoring and assessing kindergarten learning posed challenges, teachers found ways to track progress and identify areas for improvement. Virtual assessments, including sharing slides through messenger, proved effective, with active involvement from guardians motivating learners to study in their respective homes.

Theme 2: Contextualize Learning Materials

Despite the challenges posed by the educational transformation imposed by the pandemic, kindergarten teachers demonstrated innovation in designing distance education for early childhood learners. They creatively planned the curriculum and instructional resources, tailoring them to the specific needs of kindergarten students as an alternative approach to delivering instruction in distance learning. Recognizing that not all resources could address the diverse needs of learners in modular printed learning activities, facilitators designed lessons incorporating innovative instructional practices. Teacher 5 handling modular modality shared her innovative practices:

'We created digitized videos for letter sounds or stories' (T5, L400-400, p.10).

'I created a PowerPoint presentation and recorded my voice. I observed that children are more interested in watching if their teacher is the one in the video, and it was effective' (T5, L420-422, p.10).

Throughout the pandemic, teachers underscored the importance of reflective practice. Many felt more intentional in selecting strategies to motivate and engage kindergarten learners despite the challenges of the learning environment. The concept of distance learning through technological advancements emerged as a guiding light (Wilder-Smith, 2020). Kindergarten teachers digitized instructional materials, created videos for phonetic awareness and numbers, and shared them with parents. Digital technology plays a pivotal role in helping kindergarten learners understand the challenges of their social environments and adapt to new learning environments, facilitating the acquisition of skills (Danby, 2018). Digitized learning materials improved the opportunity for accessing informative learning for kindergartners, enhancing basic skills and promoting lifelong learning (Nascimbeni & Burgos, 2019).

Kindergarten teachers localized DepEd self-learning modules, making them more understandable for parents and students. They improvised materials based on individual children's needs, creating supplementary writing and reading materials to assist kindergarten students at home. Interactive activities were also provided for students with internet access and a gadget.

Theme 3: Develop Wholistic Learning

Kindergarten teachers emphasize that preparing children for formal education goes beyond addressing academic skills alone. They underscore the importance of educating the kindergarten learner, encompassing cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and, more recently, technical skills. This perspective is reflected in the following teacher responses:

'Reading, writing, and arithmetic are children's most critical skills and developmental milestones to achieve' (T5, L356-357, p.9).

Teachers actively assist parents in nurturing all domains of a kindergarten learner, even in the context of distant learning. Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) advocate for early childhood educators to adopt a whole-child approach, recognizing each learner's unique qualities, interests, and needs. Teachers understand the significance of addressing all their students' needs across various domains. School readiness factors, as proposed by Ghandour (2019), encompass social-emotional, physical, and cognitive readiness, along with instructional strategies and basic knowledge. Adopting a holistic approach to cognitive and noncognitive development is crucial for kindergarten learners' school readiness and future academic achievement (Kokkalia, 2019).

Teachers adapt, modify, or adopt new techniques, strategies, and practices to address whole-child learning, collaborating with families, other teachers, and experts. Kindergarten learners must master all required domains to be successful in grade one, necessitating physical, emotional, social, and cognitive preparedness. Achieving this goal is possible through collaborative efforts between teachers and parents, fostering independence and readiness for grade one.

Theme 4: Synergy

Developing shared leadership among school stakeholders has been identified as a crucial step toward successfully implementing learning modalities in kindergarten (Daniëls et al., 2019; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Graham, 2018). One significant challenge that teachers have encountered since the transition to distance learning, often conducted at home, is the perceived lack of parental skills in guiding and teaching their children. Teacher 4 as an online class teacher has shared her perspectives:

'Asking for help from my co-teachers who are more knowledgeable, and the feedback from our parents and colleagues is very important. We need to love and embrace the changes we have' (T4, L452-453, p.11).

A positive school environment enhances teacher productivity as they feel secure, especially from the threat of the COVID-19 virus. Parents are also more likely to visit the school and collect updated modules in such an environment. According to Graham (2018), school leaders empower stakeholders by involving them in decision-making through open and honest communication, thereby enhancing their skills. In the successful implementation of learning, all stakeholders need to participate in decision-making (Graham, 2018). A partnership among stakeholders is crucial to achieving common goals in implementing new learning modalities for kindergarten learners. Fernandez and Shaw (2020) support the idea that team effectiveness in early childhood education enables participants to respond more effectively to sudden changes, as demonstrated during the global COVID-19 epidemic.

Parents' active participation, including obtaining and submitting learning activity sheets, guiding learners in online classes, and uploading and downloading digitized learning activity sheets, contributed to the successful implementation of learning modalities, and meeting the needs of kindergarten learners. As distance education was a novel experience for everyone, all stakeholders had to collaborate to implement new learning modalities. Teachers played a role in supporting parents by guiding them in teaching at home, while school heads supported teachers by providing necessary resources. Collaboration between parents and students on school activities fostered unity among stakeholders.

Insights in the Application of Social Intervention and Innovative Teaching

Teachers encountered challenges in fostering their students' readiness skills during the crisis. A predominant theme emerged as teachers emphasized the importance of social intervention and innovative teaching approaches. This encompassed embracing technological teaching methods for delivering instructions in distant learning, adapting to homeschooling models where learners could continue their studies at home, introducing effective teaching practices to aid parents in guiding their children at home, and adopting a positive attitude. Despite the novelty of this learning approach, teachers demonstrated resilience by adapting to and embracing the situation.

Theme 1: Embrace Technological Teaching

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, a consensus emerged among participants regarding the vital role of technology in assisting kindergarten learners in developing readiness skills and facilitating a successful transition to formal schooling through the adaptation of various learning modalities. They highlighted the use of a variety of digital and interactive activities for teaching and assessing. Kindergarten teachers acknowledged the significance of information technology in addressing both digital and traditional learning modes, even for those who were not initially well-versed or equipped to manipulate computers. This sentiment is evident in the perceptions of kindergarten teacher 2 as digital modular teacher:

'The adaptation of technology, even though I am not very knowledgeable about computers, I try my best to learn about the advancements' (T2, L572-574, p.11).

Kindergarten teachers embraced technological methods, particularly for teaching letter sounds. They innovatively converted video presentations of letter materials, incorporating proper pronunciation. Dias (2020) noted that the COVID-19 pandemic presented a challenge for educators to identify strategies for providing support and education for kindergarten learners, emphasizing the exacerbated inequities in kindergarten education during the transition to distance learning. Despite the challenges of adapting to the new normal of learning, teachers continued to embrace and strive to learn for the benefit of their students. Mercer (2020) highlighted that due to limited access to technology, materials, and trained kindergarten teachers, some children's needs were not adequately addressed with the shift to digital learning. This issue was particularly prominent in Digos City, where some parents lacked access to devices for digital activities. The Department of Education addressed this concern by allowing learners to borrow tablets to access digitized materials, thereby aiding kindergarten students in strengthening their skills. Lapada (2020) explored the correlation between teachers' years of online teaching experience and their success in assisting learners with student achievement through online educational learning during the global epidemic, noting that few were adequately prepared.

Theme 2: Adapt Home Schooling

Due to the ongoing pandemic crisis, parents worldwide found themselves with no other option but to take charge of their children's education. Consequently, parents faced the challenge of supporting their children's learning at home when educational institutions shifted to remote learning. Kindergarten teachers actively encouraged parents and learners to continue their studies even in a home setting. Teacher 5 as modular teacher shared the reality of the situation:

'Since learners have been schooling at home for two years, adjustments are significant' (T5, L110-111, p.3).

With the closure of schools, educational institutions began providing parents with distance learning assistance plans that encompassed both digital and non-digital options. Stauffer (2020) defines homeschooling as a method of delivering instructional content where learners and parents do not physically meet. Instead, they utilize various media, phone calls, text messages, messenger video calls, and even virtual classes for remote learning. Kindergarten teachers ensured ongoing communication with parents regarding the concerns and performances of learners. UNICEF introduced the Learning at Home program, offering daily tasks that parents with internet service could develop and share with others (Miks and McIlwaine, 2020). Kindergarten teachers developed interactive activities and digitized learning materials tailored to the needs and interests of kindergarten learners. Distance education provides students the opportunity to pursue a high-level education and continue learning, albeit with difficulties. The Department of Education encouraged parents to enroll their children in school even when they were at home, and kindergarten teachers actively assisted parents in guiding their children's learning in the home environment.

Theme 3: Introduce Best Practices of Teaching

Kindergarten teachers generously shared their teaching practices and daily preparation strategies for providing effective learning experiences to kindergarten learners. They focused on developing practices that would assist parents in teaching their children at home, emphasizing the importance of becoming familiar with innovative approaches and guiding both learners and parents in their implementation. Various practices were highlighted:

'Innovating and creating digitized videos for letters and stories' (T1, L404-405, p.10).

Teacher 1 as an online class observed learning gaps and recognized the challenges parents faced in teaching kindergarten learners solely through modules. In response, kindergarten teachers innovated practices to support parents. One teacher, for instance, shared how she created digitized videos for letters and stories to keep her students engaged and prevent boredom, considering the short attention span typical of kindergarten children.

NAEYC (2020) emphasizes that teachers should employ materials, practices, and techniques that actively engage young children for proper growth and development. Kook and Greenfield (2020) proposed that activities such as storybook reading and hands-on science activities improve teacher-student interaction and successfully develop the skills of kindergarten learners. Moreover, DepEd Digos City Kindergarten teachers innovated practices by creating stories and converting them into video presentations, making the learning experience more interesting for kindergarten learners. To prepare children for kindergarten, Cavadel and Frye (2017) suggested that social-emotional development should be a part of explicit customized instruction. According to NAEYC's recommendations based on Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), play is the most natural approach for young children to learn and excel academically.

Theme 4: Seize Positive Attitude

As the transformation to distance learning predominantly took place at home, kindergarten teachers shared their experiences in addressing the concerns and queries of parents while remaining open-minded about learning new methods in this new normal. The teachers emphasized the importance of patience and an open mindset in adapting to the changes, as expressed by Teacher 6 as a digital teacher:

'We have to be patient and open-minded in the new trend in teaching' (T6, L654-656, p.15).

Teacher 6 elaborated on dealing with the challenges of teaching and learning in the new normal, highlighting the necessity for teachers to be patient in addressing the concerns and anxieties of parents. Teachers acknowledged the difficulties parents faced in teaching kindergarten students and emphasized the need for adaptability to embrace and learn new approaches. Teachers recognized their crucial role as the hope for kindergarten students to continue learning despite the pandemic, serving as partners with parents in shaping their child's learning at home.

Corbin (2020) found that teachers who created a positive and nurturing learning environment were more successful in enhancing students' learning and readiness skills. Teachers, in response to the pandemic, affirmed their commitment to collaboration, technology adoption, and mutual support to overcome challenges, sharing best practices. They believed that during the COVID-19 pandemic, all stakeholders played critical roles as More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs) in helping learners develop across domains and skills. Teachers actively engaged in sharing leadership efforts, adapting to the crisis with a positive attitude toward dealing with stakeholders. This situation compelled teachers to integrate technology into their teaching, and they expressed gratitude to DepEd for providing various training opportunities to help them adapt to the new learning environment.

Conclusion

Kindergarten teachers played a crucial role in the successful implementation of new learning modalities in early childhood education, guiding learners to acquire fundamental skills and domains essential for progressing to grade

one. The collaborative effort between teachers and parents, particularly in the new normal, became paramount. Constant communication proved essential in achieving common goals, prompting teachers to innovate practices and assist parents in teaching their children at home, especially in areas like correct letter sounds.

Utilizing the latest technology, teachers digitized materials to captivate students' interest, creating an engaging learning environment through teacher-generated videos and interactive activities. Despite the challenges, kindergarten teachers remained committed to continuous learning, ensuring quality education for their students. Patience and addressing parents' concerns were key aspects of distance education, with teachers consistently reassuring parents of their unwavering support in delivering learning in the simplest form.

DepEd Digos City Kindergarten teachers actively engaged in conferences to develop innovative practices aimed at strengthening various domains of kindergarten education. To further support parents and alleviate their struggles in teaching at home, recommendations include prioritizing kindergarten students to borrow tablets provided by the National Office, planning additional training sessions for teachers to develop new innovative practices, and providing instructions to parents on the correct approach to teach basic skills to their children.

Further studies are suggested to explore the innovation practices of kindergarten teachers on a larger scale, aiming to gather more information and derive effective procedures that can enhance kindergarten innovation practices in this new normal learning environment. The pandemic enhanced technology adoption in education, even at the kindergarten level. This means that even though the pandemic is "over," teachers and learners will likely continue to use digital tools and resources in some capacity. The skills and strategies teachers developed to adapt to new modalities during the pandemic can still be valuable. These might include using online platforms for communication and collaboration, creating engaging digital content, or differentiating instruction for students with varying needs. The post-pandemic set-up may involve blended learning models that combine in-person and online instruction. The experiences and insights gained from navigating different modalities during the pandemic can be vital for designing and implementing these effectively. Young children's social and emotional needs remain important, regardless of the learning modality. Studies on teachers' adaptation might offer valuable insights into maintaining a nurturing and supportive classroom environment, even when integrating technology.

Contributions of Authors

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Conflict of Interests

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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