EXPEDIENCY IN HONING LITERACY AND NUMERACY IN THE NEW NORMAL
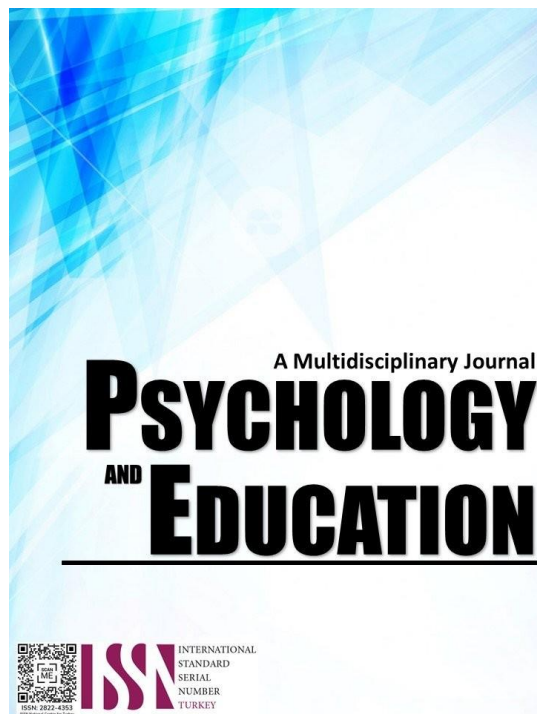

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Expediency in Honing Literacy and Numeracy in the New Normal

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Abstract

The current study examined the pedagogical techniques used by teachers to assist learners with special needs in raising their reading and numeracy levels. The purpose of the current study's qualitative research approach was to examine the teaching strategies that teachers employ to instruct students in language and mathematics through classroom observations. A focus group discussion was then held to identify the issues with literacy and numeracy that learners were experiencing. These exercises are often used to instruct slow learners. The findings showed that the majority of pupils struggle with literacy (spelling, reading difficult words, and writing long words) and numeracy (counting, subtraction, multiplication and divide). This study is a Phenomenology which deals with the real experiences of the participant, the participants were selected through purposive sampling by choosing a set of teachers who fit certain criteria from a school, a total of 7 participants were willing to participate in this study. Each and every answer that was provided by the participants were thoroughly read and analysed. The notable results from the participants consisted of bleak and negative experiences, most of the participants stated that their student's academic knowledge is not up to the quality that they should have been at their grade level and age. This study recommends reconsidering a new pedagogical technique for enhancing reading and numeracy for slow learners as the conventional teaching practice was found to have little impact on children's abilities in these areas.

Keywords: *pedagogical techniques, slow learners, literacy, numeracy, teachers, learners with special needs*

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic and general lock down of educational facilities has further increased the learning barriers and intensified the already existing literacy and numeracy problems of the country. According to the World Economic Forum (2020), the pandemic has caused a major disruption when it comes to education, affecting over 90% of the global student population of which 1.54 billion are children. Reports say that once the crises had ended, nearly 10 million students never went back to school. Although the government and several other organizations are constantly making an effort to address the ongoing crisis, some 500 million children who belong to families with low income still have no access to technology needed for distance learning, and even if they do have access to it the parents of most of these children are not literate enough to be a decent substitute for the teacher and teach their children.

Filipino students are not an exemption when it comes to having a poor level of Literacy and Numeracy. According to the survey called "2018 Programme for International Student Assessment" (PISA) found that out of 79 countries, Philippines was placed 2nd to the lowest. For this reason alone, an intervention needs to happen. One of the major decisions to come out as a result of the global crisis is the rise of online learning to lessen the rate of infections by lessening interactions (Ichimura, 2019). Every educational organization in the world has been making consistent effort to convert existing work to an online class format in order for the students to have continuity in their education. Even if educational facilities and schools are closed, a child should have the right to still have a quality education while also being safe. And as the world gradually returns to normal, everyone must be prepared to support the students and ensure their safety as well as their right to a quality education by bridging the learning gap and giving them a chance at a better future (Villar et al., 2022).

Intervention will be invaluable in the honing the numeracy and literacy skills (Segarino et al., 2022; Ugbamen et al., 2022) when students finally go back to school and experience the "new normal". Not only will it be crucial in the development of the students but it will also let them know that their teachers are willing to help them and are genuinely concerned for their future a new and different world situation, this helps in building good relations. One thing that has become popular out of the Covid crisis was the concept of Flexible learning (Abucejo et al., 2022; Ando et al., 2022), this style gives the students the choice to learn at their own pace and can also still be promoted through the use of the appropriate pedagogical practices (Gordon, 2014). The students are provided with multiple options as to how they can proceed with their education and suit them their own liking and needs, this method can be very effective since all learners are diverse and have different needs

depending on their situations (Cabello et al., 2021). These options include the choice of what time and place they can learn, and to some degree even a choice of what curriculum and uses of several technology to support a wide range of learning (Alexander, 2010; Olleras et al., 2022).

Numeracy and Literacy are the scaffoldings used in all other subjects not just in math and literature. These skills are crucial in the development of a student's education. Their uses do not end in school, numeracy and literacy is used constantly in all aspects of life no matter what career path they may choose in the future. This study uncovers the meaning and importance of why the foundation skills should be taken into account.

Literature Review

Numeracy is the application of the ability to apply mathematical concepts and skills, literacy meanwhile is the application of reading, writing and speaking skills. These 2 sets of skills are the backbone of more advance lessons the students can learn in higher levels of education. Because of the learning gap cause by COVID, students will have a hard time in learning the more advance subjects, that is why it is necessary to be able to bridge that gap.

The learning loss is clearly seen in students with learning income even in first world countries such as the USA (Dorn et al., 2020), and the loss is experienced throughout all school levels, if the issue is left alone the damage may be felt for as very long time. The damage is of course even more severe in third world countries such as our own. When distance learning was implemented in the Philippines, a few households were not able to join in due to their inaccessibility to the devices needed for online classes, these households had abstained their children from enrolling in schools.(Cho et al., 2021)

With the lock down in place teachers needed a method of learning where both teachers and students will still be both safe from the virus while maintaining the best quality of education they can achieve (Bahinting et al., 2022). This is where distance learning is introduced, online classes were implemented and it came with its own set of difficulties such as accessibility, easy distractions and more (Cabello, 2022). Distance learning encourages students to self-motivate when it comes to their education (Emia et al., 2022). But it also offers new opportunities specially to tertiary students such as innovations when it comes to their

research, flexibility in learning, and the new assessment methods (Gurajena et., Al 2021).

Another problem that occurs in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic is the visible achievement gap between students of high and low income families (Bailey et al., 2021), with the pandemic keeping students from school, schools all over the world have resorted to alternate means of education, one of these is online learning but this requires a stable internet connection and a working device. Families of lower income are unable to provide for online learning and the student's academical achievements are affected.

Technology used in online learning is also a very method specially here in the Philippines, technology has many uses both outside and inside the school, whether it's for education or for something else, it is known for its convenience and people expect technology to solve every problem for them or provide them with an answer, but technology is only is only a medium for education, a means to an end, teachers should not rely on it for their student's education (Xiao, 2021).

While online education may not be as effective as face to face classes when it comes to the quality of learning, it is still a very decent learning method. Unfortunately, due to faulty infrastructures such as poor network connection, unavailability of both internet connection and electronic devices, there is much difficulty in making online classes effective specially in a country like Philippines that has a lot of financial issues (Longcob et al., 2022; Mangubat et al., 2022; Yamon et al., 2022)

Another disadvantage that students can have due to online classes is that it affects their subject grades, the online classes may affect subjects such as mathematics and reading as these subjects require guidance in order to learn, this setback further increases the decline of the student's numeracy and literacy skills (Hoofman & Secord, 2021).

When Schools finally opened up, and classes started again, there was still a risk of catching the virus, due to this, blended learning was introduced as a way to have classes while minimizing risks for the students and teachers (Anzaldo, 2021). Blended learning consists of having both online and face to face classes on scheduled times, but it still carries with it some of the problems of online classes such as lack of accessibility or internet connection (Cariaga et al., 2022; Ogang et al., 2022).

What was destroyed can be built again, the Covid 19

pandemic has damaged a lot of things in the educational system and ever since the beginning of the new normal, a lot effort has been directed towards the recovery of what has been lost, but at the same time the damages left by Covid may become an opportunity to build the educational system (Olleras et al., 2022) better than it was before (Quilter-Pinner et al., 2020).Though the damage left by Covid 19 is immense specially in education, the world will eventually fix itself but things will never be the same as it was, this has both negative effects but it also has positive ones. One of the positive effects of the change is the opportunity to transform education and make it evolve to a curriculum (Pableo et al., 2022) that is student centered and personalized to their need and encourages them to self-learn (Zhao & Watterston, 2021).

The impact of technology on online learning during the pandemic has had an effect on the new normal due to technology's flexible and convenient nature, what started as a solution to a problem might in the future become a common part of the new normal education (Perez et al., 2022). Despite the common problems of technology such as unavailability and in accessibility, it is shown that learners who have access to technology and are good in disciplining themselves and mastering time management are known to succeed in online classes, it is believed that online learning will be a part of the new normal (Xie et al., 2020).

The impact of the Covid 19 pandemic has on students was leaving them 5 months behind in their numeracy and 4 months behind in their literacy by the end of the school year. This creates a wide gap in the student's education and their achievements which will in turn affect their opportunities (Dorn et al., 2021). The actions to mitigate these damages will cost the country a significant amount of resources and the results may not even solve it, but the damage that the learning loss causes may be felt for a few decades if not an entire lifetime.

Methodology

Research design

This study used the Phenomenology as the research design. This type of research design deals with the lived experiences of the participants regarding the event or problem being undertaken, in this case we are investigating the experiences of teachers in the new normal setting and how they deal with their students learning gap in order to have their academic knowledge up to standards.

Sampling technique

This sampling technique is a purposive non-probability sampling in which participants of the study are selected based of the researcher's perception. Furthermore, the participants are being selected because they are suitable in a particular profile. Hence, the researchers provided the inclusion criteria for more information about the participants of the study.

Inclusion Criteria

1. Participants must be either male or female and 18 years of age
2. Participants must be public school teachers.

Participants must be at least 1 year teaching experience in public school either elementary or secondary.

1. The blended learning mode is being used by the participants.
2. Participants must have at least 1 year teaching experience in public school either in elementary or secondary.
2. The blended learning mode is being used by the participants.

Data Collection

Letter of intent was written and submitted for approval to the school principal's office. Upon the grant of request, schedules of interview were arranged. During the interview, the researcher conducted a face- to- face interview using the semi structured instrument created by the researcher. All the data gathered will be examined and evaluated. The researchers will be recording the participants answers, this is done with their consent as well. After gathering all the pertinent data, it is then subjected to analysis.

Research Rigor

In determining the rigor of this study researcher's use Whittemore et al., (2001) to determine the credibility and authenticity of the data. Furthermore, Cabello and Bonotan (2020) cited that the rigor of the study was increased when the researcher utilized bracketing, Alase (2017) added that in order to reduce bias, bracketing is required for research.

Ethical Consideration

The legal guardian or next of kin of the children has given their consent regarding their engagement in this study. The studies which involve live human participants were carried out in accordance with the

rules and guidelines of the aforementioned research. Regarding their personal involvement, parents offered their informed permission (Husband, 2020).

Data Analysis

This study made use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which is based on the Moustakas-popularized Modified Van Kaam Approach. The horizontalizing process—also known as sorting participant experiences—was the starting point for the seven principles of data analysis. The second was to break down the experiences into several components, from which the researchers would then examine the highlights. The creation of topics that were grouped to produce their own primary themes was the next phase. Comparing data sources that can verify the invariant elements was the fourth crucial stage. Constructing a unique analysis of its textural descriptions was the fifth crucial stage. The process of creating the description of the data's composite structure began. The final step was compiling and analyzing all of the participants' personal experiences.

Results and Discussion

Three themes generated by the researchers after analysing the data are "Academic Ineptitude, Poor attention span and After school follow up. These three themes represent the difficulties and challenges as well as the solutions of teachers after the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Academic Ineptitude

The Covid-19 Pandemic affected schools for almost three years, which created a learning gap for students of all ages. The teachers tried to bridge this gap with the use of modules but it was not as effective as face-to-face classes, so when normal classes resumed, there was an inevitable wound that needed to be healed.

Participant #2 mentioned that, "After the pandemic, as a teacher, here are three challenges I encountered in teaching numeracy and literacy among the learners. "One of which was "Learners have difficulty in remembering concepts." It seems that due to the lack of proper education and lack of guidance the pupils do not have the necessary conceptual knowledge that they should already have at their grade level.

Participant #1 said that "The challenges and struggles that I encountered was students were having a poor comprehension, lack of reading skills and content

knowledge" .

When a student's literacy is poor it will also inevitably affect numeracy as well, as with Participant #3's case who stated that "With regards to numeracy, for me, if a learner doesn't know how to read and write numbers from 1 – 100, it will pose a great obstacle in learning numeracy"

Poor Attention Span

The attention span of students of all ages is limited but it is specially low in younger students in elementary, it is a constant battle for teachers to grab the attention of students, grabbing the attention of the students is the backbone to all learning sessions because without their attention, learning cannot take place. It is specially harder in the world after the pandemic since students are used to having online classes in their homes where a lot of thing distract them.

Participant #7 said that one of their challenges in teaching students literacy and numeracy is "Lacking focus/comprehension". Participant # 2 states as one of their suggestions that "Needs play-based activity to get their attention due to low attention span"

When students are at home, they are basically free to do whatever they want and are also surrounded by many distractions, from their surroundings to the social media they consume they are able to distract themselves from their studies and due to the long period of time where online classes took place, the students may have incorporated this behavior as part of their study habits which make going back to classes harder.

Participant #6 stated that "Due to pandemic, learners are low in comprehension, low retention span, poor in communicating and writing" The Covid-19 Pandemic gave student's minds a chance to become dull and slow, and like an engine that is cold from not being used for a while, the teacher must start the engine and warm it up first.

Basically, the pandemic created a behavioral change on how the students go about in their studies, unfortunately with improper guidance, they may have developed an attention problem which can cause issues in face-to-face classes.

After Classes follow up During class is where students tend to learn the most since they are in a proper learning environment, the teachers are doing various teaching techniques to make the most of this precious time but because of the learning gap left by the

Covid-19 pandemic, the students need every learning opportunity they can get in order to bridge the gap. After school activities are being implemented by the teachers (Riconalla et al., 2022).

When asked about ways their learners cope with learning lessons involving reading, writing and numbers, Participant #2 said "Needs parental involvement, follow-up at home". Participant #1 stated something similar "Needs follow up at home".

The gap that the pandemic created cannot be bridged quickly with just the normally scheduled classes set by the school, they also need to be doing activities outside of class hours and at home as well. Since the teacher cannot be with the student all the time, the parents/guardians must also pitch in on the students learning.

Participant# 4 said that "My challenges and struggles in teaching numeracy and literacy are lack of interest, Parental guidance and support, Poor foundation of the four basic operations, Poor reading habits leading to poor reading skills and comprehension."

Many parents tend to just leave all the work to the teacher when it comes to the child's education, but it is a partnership between the parents and the teachers that shape the education of the student, this is true before and it is even more highlighted during the post pandemic climate.

Conclusion

This study covers the Covid-19 pandemic and its effects on the numeracy and literacy of the students as well as the different methods and coping techniques teachers have implemented in order to bridge the gaps left by the lock down, upon analyzing the data from the participants answer, three themes were found among them. The first theme is academic ineptitude where students are struggling in concepts that they should have already learned at their level, the second is poor attention span where students have a hard time paying attention in classes likely due to the habits they developed during the pandemic. The third one is after class follow ups where teachers, use various teaching methods that takes place after class hours such as tutoring sessions or coordinating with the parents and guardians.

The Covid-19 pandemic caused a lot of damage to the educational system, some of these damages are repairable and some are unfortunately not but the learning gap that our students are suffering is very much repairable, it is a damage that may still last years to come if not decades but it is not impossible to overcome. Teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skill to implement different techniques in order to better teach the students about Literacy and Numeracy. The real challenge lies in keeping the attention and motivation that the students need in order to help bridge the gap. We suggest to build a solid agreement with parents and guardians to aide in keeping their students motivated and as well as making sure they keep up with after class activities and let them attend remedial classes and programs.

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