Asian Journal of Distance Education

Instructional Development for Distance Education amid COVID-19 Crisis in the Philippines: Challenges and Innovations of Kindergarten Teachers

Michael B. Cahapay, **Janice B. Lorania**, **Mark Gil P. Labrador**, **Nathaniel F. Bangoc II**

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to explore the lived experience of kindergarten teachers on instructional development for distance education amid the COVID-19 crisis. Drawing data from a qualitative phenomenological study, 18 kindergarten teachers from Region XII, Philippines were purposively selected and interviewed online. The results revealed six superordinate themes of challenges and innovations that cut across the planning, implementation, and evaluation phases of instructional development. This research stresses the need for measures at the society, family, and school levels to contextually address the challenges encountered and strengthen the innovations employed by the kindergarten teachers so that a relevant, appropriate, and responsive kindergarten education can be attained amid and beyond the current novel crisis.

Keywords: kindergarten education, instructional development, distance education, COVID-19 crisis, Philippines.

Highlights

What is already known about this topic:
- The continued kindergarten education amid the COVID-19 crisis is a global educational concern that must be discussed.
- It is important to explore the lived experience of kindergarten teachers on instructional development for distance education amid the current situation.

What this paper contributes:
- This paper will open the doors for new knowledge in the field of kindergarten education set in the context of a crisis.
- It will present insights on instructional development practices that may be useful to kindergarten teachers currently working in the field.

Implications for theory, practice and/or policy:
- This study underscores the need for measures to contextually address the challenges encountered and strengthen the innovations employed by kindergarten teachers.
- It is suggested that concerted efforts of the community stakeholders, school administrators, and teacher educators at the society, family, and school levels should be placed.

Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis has ostensibly created one of the greatest disruptions of education systems in human history. The UNESCO (2020) initially reported that, due to the global emergency that forced schools to close down, there are nearly 1.5 billion children and 60 million teachers in almost 165 countries around the world who were affected. Feuer (2020) projected that at least 24 million children are estimated to leave school because of the current crisis. Relative to this grim expected outcome, unprecedented steps have been sought to continue education, this time, in a more secure approach. These same steps, however, have become the butt of an emotional and political issue. The crisis has indeed crystallized a tug-of-war between closing the schools or keeping them open, each has heavy consequences.

One of the most vulnerable groups affected in this novel crisis is the learners in their early childhood stage. Their lives have been overturned and every key measure of their development has gone backward (Gromada et al., 2020). The number of children who are starved, secluded, mistreated, and worried has increased. On an important note, access to education and other essential activities and services has decreased. The impact of this phenomenon will bear the shadows of the crisis in the lives of the children for years to come and bringing light to these shadows is an imperative action that education authorities and teachers need to mull over. According to UNICEF (2020), optimal brain development requires a conducive environment, sufficient nutrition, and desirable socialization. Under the current crisis, however, these opportunities have been severed. While access to quality kindergarten education is not the singular best answer to these concerns, it is the cornerstone (Philpott, 2021). With these issues, scholars have called for a need for care and empathy oriented, human-centered pandemic pedagogy (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2021).

The concern for the continued kindergarten education amid the COVID-19 crisis is a part of the Philippine Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan developed and implemented by the Department of Education as an educational strategy to pursue education for the school year 2020-2021. It identifies the most essential learning competencies and multiple distance learning delivery modalities that should be considered in developing instruction. However, its implementation is fraught with several problems (Punzalan, 2020) and many debates have been fired at how much learners have learned or missed given the difficult situation. Some authorities argue that, in the absence of traditional school, other elements like the restriction of educational aspirations, reduction of the number of social interactions, or detachment from the school system, will have a deleterious impact on the learning outcomes of the children (Tadalan, 2021).

Distance education has become the new normal in education amid the COVID-19 crisis. It has been specifically termed by scholars as emergency remote education to refer to the temporary change in the delivery of instruction caused by the sudden occurrence of a crisis and is not the same as the past distance education practices. Emergency remote education offers a temporary alternative to deliver instruction and provide students with needed support. It makes most of the available resources including a wide range of technologies that offer capabilities for remote learning. It is treated as an 'option' not 'obligation' in this time of crisis (Hodges et al., 2020; Bozkurt et al., 2020 cited by Rotas & Cahapay, 2020).

At the heart of any educational modality, including emergency remote education, is the instructional development. Conceptually, instructional development is the application of the notion of a systems approach. Davies (1973) explains the capacity of this conceptual level of instructional development to create a bridge between educational theory and classroom practice. The framework of the bridge is modern organizational theory that realizes an art and science of teaching. There have been several instructional development models (e.g., see Knirk & Gustafun, 1986; Hannafin & Peck, 1988; Dick & Carey, 1990), applied also in distance education, and following common stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation. It is suggested that it should be undertaken considering the needs of the target learners, demands in the content, and constraints both on the sides of the teacher and students (Willis, 1993).

An emerging body of scholarly works suggesting good instructional development practices in redesigning distance education in basic education and higher education amid the COVID-19 crisis have been reported (e.g., Ahmed et al., 2020; Carvalho et al., 2020; Ferri et al., 2020). However, very few studies on kindergarten education amid the current emergency have been reported (e.g., Kim, 2020; 2020; Spiteri, 2021; Yıldırım, 2021) and they seem to focus less on the practical aspect of developing instruction in kindergarten education especially during a crisis, causing predicament on the teachers (Cahapay, 2021a). Thus, more research works should be conducted on the ground to account for the difficulties and opportunities in attaining functional kindergarten education amid the COVID-19 crisis.

This study will primarily investigate the phenomenon of instructional development for distance teaching and learning amid the COVID-19 crisis as lived out by the kindergarten teachers. Drawing from the professional narratives of the teachers in the field, this research will focus on uncovering the problems encountered and solutions employed in the process of continuously improving kindergarten education program. The researchers believe that, on a theoretical level, this paper will open the doors for new knowledge in the field of kindergarten education set in the context of a crisis. On the other hand, on a practical level, this paper will present insights on instructional development practices that may be useful to kindergarten teachers currently working in the field.

Thus, the overall objective of this paper is to explore the lived experience of kindergarten teachers on instructional development for distance education amid the COVID-19 crisis.

Methodology

This section presents the research design, sampling technique, contextual background, study tools, data collection, and data analysis. They are explained as follows.

Research Design

A phenomenological approach to qualitative research was used to attain the purpose of this study. Creswell (2007) stated that a phenomenological approach allows for an extensive process of investigating how the participants live out a phenomenon through the lens of their lived experience. Penner and McClement (2008) further maintained that the major purpose of the phenomenological approach is not to explain but describe the very essence of the lived experience of participants with a certain phenomenon. Thus, it is an appropriate research design to address the interest of this research that revolves around exploring the lived experience of kindergarten teachers on instructional development for distance education amid the COVID-19 crisis.

Research Group

As recommended in phenomenological research, the participants of this study were sampled through a combination of criterion sampling technique (Palinkas et al., 2015) and variation sampling technique (Moser, 2018) with the main consideration that each participant will be able to furnish information relevant to the interest of this study. The participants of this study were 18 kindergarten teachers who were purposefully selected based on their experience in instructional development for distance education as the main criterion. They were further selected regardless of their age, gender, location, teaching position, educational attainment, and teaching experience to attain maximum variability. The sample of this study does not represent the population of all the kindergarten teachers but can be considered adequate for the qualitative purpose of this research.

Contextual Background

This study was set in schools in a region in Mindanao, Philippines amid the worldwide COVID-19 crisis. As suggested by Fink (2002), any crisis happens at three phases: 1.) prodromal phase in which an issue is emerging; 2.) crisis phase in which the issue has completely surfaced, and 3.) resolution stage in which the issue is no longer a problem. This research appears to be situated in the middle of the crisis stage. It was conducted in April 2021 when teachers in the kindergarten and other levels continue to struggle with the impacts of the crisis on education.

Research Tool

The researchers tailored an interview guide that consists of four sections: an introduction, short survey of participant information, list of questions, and conclusion. Specifically, the section for the list of questions contained questions to reveal the lived experience of kindergarten teachers on instructional development for distance education in the context of the present crisis. The central question is: As a kindergarten teacher, how do you live out the experience on instructional development for distance education amid the COVID-19 crisis? It served as the basis for the formulation of probing questions. The questions were content validated by an education professor, a school administrator, and a kindergarten teacher to ensure their suitability.

Data Collection

Given the current situation, online modalities are becoming the trend for collecting research data. An online modality that is used in gathering qualitative research data is the online interview. An online interview is a set of data collection technique in which data can be generated synchronously or asynchronously in a variety of forms (Salmons, 2015). The online interview procedures for this study, based mainly on text form, occurred in some stages.

Initially, the researchers introduced the purpose of the research to the target participants. The ethical considerations were also discussed, underscoring that involvement in the study is completely voluntary and confidential. The participants were also assured that no potential disadvantages are involved in this study and that if at any time the process becomes agitating, they may decide to disengage. After securing their consent, the participants received the interview guide through Messenger or Gmail. The initial data were gathered and reviewed. Where responses need illumination, the researchers arranged a time that is convenient with selected participants for a synchronous interview. The participants were asked to explain based on their initial responses. The data gathered were added and analysis began at this point.

Data Analysis

The procedure for data analysis in this phenomenological study was based on the framework developed by Thomas and Pollio (2002). This framework analyzes the phenomenological research data in a part-to-whole process, in which the researchers recount "a part of some text to the whole of the text, and any and all passages are always understood in terms of their relationship to the larger whole" (p. 35). This data analysis framework was adopted in this study as it offers a deductive, rational, and focused approach in handling thick information gathered for this research.

Following the above data analysis framework, the researchers reviewed each of the interview transcripts and they discussed the words, phrases, or sentences that they find relevant to the interest of the study. The relevant meaning units that repetitively appeared across interview transcripts served as the basis for the development of the themes. The initial themes that appear across interview transcripts were generated to form the subordinate themes. Examining further the patterns in these subordinate themes, a set of broader themes were developed called superordinate themes. Finally, the researchers discussed these themes, repetitively returning to the responses of the participants in the interview transcripts.

Findings

Based on the data analysis framework discussed above, the findings of this study are organized into superordinate themes. Table 1 shows the findings.

Table 1. Result of thematic analysis.

Sample of meaningful unit	Subordinate theme	Superordinate theme
The letter-sound identification in particular is a difficult skill to teach remotely. It must involve an active and face-to-face interaction which are not allowed as of this time. This is difficult to plan considering the limited allocation of resources as well as the degree of parent facilitation is concerned.	Problem translating activities into print modular learning modality	Challenges in distance instructional planning
Reading and writing are more difficult to plan because I need to visualize my pupils that they could be able to read and write with the guidance of their parents through the learning materials and learning activity sheet.		
Planning distance learning lessons is very challenging, especially those involving writing, letter and sound identification, and socialization.		
We know that kindergarten pupils have short attention span in learning and they don't like being bombarded with activities. So as teacher, I must consider their age and the complexity of the activities in preparing instructional materials.	Difficulty in preparing distance learning materials suited to learners	
It is more difficult to make learning materials for we are dealing with early stage developing child. Each instructional materials must be easy to follow for the young learners while still educationally sound.		
Many activities in kindergarten, like sounding letters, are supposed to be conducted face-to-face. I find it difficult to design instructional materials in distance modular learning modality given these activities and the resources of the children.		
A problem I encountered during the distribution of instructional materials is the distance of school to the houses of the children. Some of the parents are not able get the instructional materials on time.	Distance of houses that delay delivery of instructional materials	Challenges in distance instructional implementation
The instructional implementation includes the distribution of modules. Some pupils live far away from school, so they receive the module late and we retrieve them late too.		
Another difficult thing in the remote instruction is the delivery of modules especially to children in the remote areas. Some parents don't have enough time to get the modules in the school because of the distance.		
The problem that I encountered in delivering instructions is the communication since not all of my learners or their parents have gadgets for them to be updated in delivering the instruction.	Scarce structural resources to efficiently implement instruction	
Communication between the parents and teachers is difficult since most of the parents don't have any means like cellular phone in case they have questions about the contents of the printed self-learning modules.		
The school cannot implement online learning because a lot of our learners don't have smartphones. Internet connectivity is a problem, too.		
Some parents can't even read a simple word and its near impossible for them to make their children understand what the lesson is all about.	Lack of skills of parents in teaching and guiding their children	
These skills should be taught by an expert like teachers who are really trained in this area. But parents as facilitators of home-based learning are not so capable to teach due to lack of education and training.		
There are parents who tend to withdraw or refuse involving themselves in receiving the printed modules because they are not capable of assessing their children due to their educational background.		
The issue that "Is this the child's work and ideas? Or is this the parents' work and ideas?" is something that I would personally ask myself and also to the parents because I don't even have an eye in their place.	Issue on the validity of assessment performance of children	Challenges in distance instructional evaluation
We cannot always ensure that the pupils are the ones who are answering the printed modules, thus the problem I encounter in remote assessing is how to validate if the child learned the lessons well or could the child write and read.		
There seems a validity problem between what the children learned and their assessment performance. Some parents just answer the assessment tasks, especially the written ones. When I have the chance to assess the child personally or synchronously, I find inconsistencies.		
Some pupils cannot cope up and I observed that there are some pages in the learning materials not fully answered or left blank.		

An issue that I am facing is that some of my learners still did not know how to write their names and identify letters.	Poor level of assessment performance of the children	
Whenever I can visit children at their homes, some of them hesitant and do not talk when I ask them.		
We have School Learning Resource Center revived recently with kindergarten instructional materials. We informed the parents to come over to borrow instructional materials.	Adaption of alternative distance instructional delivery modes	Innovations in distance instructional planning
There are learners who were given free radios that can be used for listening radio-based instruction. It has been useful especially in sounding out letters.		
I made activity sheets for the last two quarters. These activity sheets are an additional practice to pupils. The activities were localized and not hard enough also to teach especially for parents who who will guide them at home.		
I design instructional materials that are easy, direct, and translated to the mother tongue. In this way, the parents will be able to teach their child properly.	Preparation of instructional materials with consideration of the intended users	
I designed instructional materials that are easy-to-understand to the learners and based on the perspective of the parents or guardians who are our teaching partners.		
I search for instructional materials online and suit them to the print modular learning modality. I see to it that still follows the principle of developmental appropriateness.		
We distributed the modules and instructional materials house to house. We also requested the PTA and homeroom officers to help us facilitate the distribution of the modules and instructional materials.	Distribution and retrieval system of the instructional materials	Innovations in distance instructional implementation
We assigned dropping points and leaders to facilitate the distribution and retrieval of self-learning modules and activity sheets so that children who are located far from school can get their materials on time.		
We strategically assign teachers and parent leaders for every far-flung area to deliver to materials at once to all the learners, regardless of grade levels.		
I made an online group chat, and I added all the parents or guardians of my learners for me to be able to reach them easily. So, there, for example, we make a schedule on the distribution of materials.	Feedback mechanisms between the parents and teachers	
We created a Facebook group chat with parents for them to easily communicate when they have difficulties. For those without gadget or internet connection, they can easily send teachers a message or call through their own or borrowed cellular phone.		
We made a group chat with the parents and through that means of communication, they would always get updated.		
We conduct orientation to parents in which we include sessions such as letter and sound identification and how to write letters properly following the blue-red-blue lines.	Improvement of the quality of involvement of parents	
We have identified parents who are not capable to teach and find a legal guardian or older sibling to do so and be invited to attend to parent mentoring sessions.		
Another innovation that I and my colleagues in kindergarten did is the brochure for the parents to equip them and help us assess the learning of their children.		
If possible and following the mandated safety protocols, I personally visit children at their homes and conduct an assessment to validate their performance.	Validation of child performance through different means	Innovations in distance instructional evaluation
For the children afraid of the teacher, the parents administer summative assessment activities and take video and send to our group chat.		
I also require the parents to have their children taken a picture or video of them answering their learning materials and performing activities.		
I scheduled every child twice to thrice a month to check the child progress. This is through online video conversation. I prepared some previous lessons to check how much understanding has the child got over the time and compare the child assessment scores with that in online assessment.	Monitoring of learning performance through different approaches	
I did house to house assessment for those parents who seem not active in the learning of their children. I conducted evaluation and discussed those topics which are difficult to understand.		
I personally ask the parents to where the child is having difficulties and to that, I draw and give suggestions. For example, the child is in the stage of learning the phonetic alphabet, I give parents different options to consider.		

Superordinate Theme 1: Challenges in Distance Instructional Planning

Instructional planning is a crucial task in instructional development. The teachers articulated challenges in planning kindergarten instruction as the teaching and learning modality has changed to distance modality because of the COVID-19 crisis. These challenges in distance instructional planning include translating activities to print modular learning modality and preparing distance learning materials appropriate to the intended users.

Subordinate Theme 1.1: Problem in Translating Activities into Print Modular Modality: As the teachers are used to plan kindergarten activities with the traditional face-to-face modality, they have difficulties this time in translating selected activities into print modular distance learning modality. These particular activities include the development of requisite skills for reading and writing. These are evident in the following selected responses of the teachers:

> The letter-sound identification, in particular, is a difficult skill to teach remotely. It must involve an active and face-to-face interaction which are not allowed as of this time. This is difficult to plan considering the limited allocation of resources as well as the degree of parent facilitation is concerned -Participant 11.

> Reading and writing are more difficult to plan because I need to visualize my pupils that they could be able to read and write with the guidance of their parents through the learning materials and learning activity sheet -Participant 6.

Subordinate theme 1.2: Difficulty in Preparing Distance Learning Materials Suited to Learners: The preparation of distance learning materials appropriate to the nature of the kindergarten learners is another problem that the teachers encountered. The teachers must ensure that while the instructional materials reflect the intended skills, they must be suited to the developmental characteristics of the kindergarten learners. The teachers shared that:

> We know that kindergarten pupils have short attention span in learning, and they don't like being bombarded with activities. So as teacher, I must consider their age and the complexity of the activities in preparing instructional materials -Participant 18

> It is more difficult to make learning materials for we are dealing with early stage developing child. Each instructional material must be easy to follow for the young learners while still educationally sound -Participant 12.

Superordinate Theme 2: Challenges in Distance Instructional Implementation

With the drastically changed situations due to the COVID-19 crisis, the delivery of distance instruction is another set of challenges that the teachers are faced with. These challenges cover limited structural resources to efficiently implement instruction; distance of houses that delay delivery of instructional materials; and lack of skills of parents in teaching and guiding their children.

Subordinate Theme 2.1: Distance of Houses that Delay Delivery of Instructional Materials: Since the most applicable modality to the socioeconomic context of the kindergarten children is print modular distance learning, the teachers commonly raised the problem of geographical proximity of houses from school which causes a delay in the delivery of instructional materials. This problem is reflected in the following narratives of the teachers:

> A problem I encountered during the distribution of instructional materials is the distance of school to the houses of the children. Some of the parents are not able get the instructional materials on time -Participant 13.

> The instructional implementation includes the distribution of modules. Some pupils live far away from school, so they receive the module late and we retrieve them late too -Participant 14.

Subordinate Theme 2.2: Limited Structural Resources to Efficiently Implement Instruction. With limited resources such as gadgets and internet connection for communication between the ends of the schools and homes, the teachers further experience a major barrier to efficiently implement distance instruction. The teachers narrated that:

> The problem that I encountered in delivering instructions is the communication since not all of my learners or their parents have gadgets for them to be updated in delivering the instruction -Participant 1.

> Communication between the parents and teachers is difficult since most of the parents don't have any means like cellular phone in case they have questions about the contents of the printed self-learning modules -Participant 15.

Subordinate Theme 2.3: Lack of Skills of Parents in Teaching and Guiding their Children. Since the shift to distance learning modality that mostly occurs at the confines of home, another major problem that the teachers revealed is the perceived lack of skills of the parents in teaching and guiding the kindergarten children. It was observed by the teachers that:

> These skills should be taught by an expert like teachers who are really trained in this area. But parents as facilitators of home-based learning are not so capable to teach due to lack of education and training -Participant 10.

> There are parents who tend to withdraw or refuse involving themselves in receiving the printed modules because they are not capable of assessing their children due to their educational background -Participant 16.

Superordinate Theme 3: Challenges in Distance Instructional Evaluation.

The evaluation is an important instructional component to monitor how much kindergarten children are learning despite the COVID-19 crisis and its educational impacts. The teachers, however, are faced with serious matters in this aspect, hindering them to get a complete vision of the learning progress of the kindergarten children. These matters pertain to issue on the validity of learning assessment performance of children and low level of assessment performance of the children.

Subordinate Theme 3.1: Issue on the Validity of Assessment Performance of Children. With limited to no face-to-face interaction, one of the challenges in distance instructional evaluation that the teachers expressed is the issue of the validity of assessment performance of kindergarten children. This issue is ostensive in their responses as follows:

> The issue that "Is this the child's work and ideas? Or is this the parents' work and ideas?" is something that I would personally ask myself and also to the parents because I don't even have an eye in their place -Participant 18.

> We cannot always ensure that the pupils are the ones who are answering the printed modules, thus the problem I encounter in remote assessing is how to validate if the child learned the lessons well or could the child write and read -Participant 14.

Subordinate Theme 3.2: Low level of Assessment Performance of the Children. Another challenge that the teachers reported is the low level of assessment performance of the kindergarten children due to many factors. This challenge is depicted in the following responses of the teachers:

> Some pupils cannot cope up and I observed that there are some pages in the learning materials not fully answered or left blank -Participant 6.

> An issue that I am facing is that some of my learners still did not know how to write their names and identify letters -Participant 1.

Superordinate Theme 4: Innovations in Distance Instructional Planning

Despite the difficulties that come with the forced educational transformation because of the COVID-19 crisis, the teachers innovate in planning distance instruction for kindergarten children. They innovate particularly in the planning of alternative distance instructional delivery modes and preparation of instructional materials with consideration of the intended users.

Subordinate Theme 4.1: Adaption of Alternative Distance Instructional Delivery Modes. Because not all lessons can be effectively translated into activities in print modular distance learning, the teachers planned instruction using other instructional means. These innovations can be gleaned in the sharing of practices of the teachers:

> We have School Learning Resource Center revived recently with kindergarten instructional materials. We informed the parents to come over to borrow instructional materials - Participant 2.

> There are learners who were given free radios that can be used for listening radio-based instruction. It has been useful especially in sounding out letters -Participant 10.

Subordinate Theme 4.2: Preparation of Instructional Materials with Consideration of Intended Users. The intended users of the instructional materials have not only been the kindergarten learners but also the parents who act as partners in delivering the instruction. Hence, teachers have to prepare the materials considering both the learners and parents. The teachers disclosed that:

> I design instructional materials that are easy, direct, and translated to the mother tongue. In this way, the parents will be able to teach their child properly -Participant 12.

> I designed instructional materials that are easy-to-understand to the learners and based on the perspective of the parents or guardians who are our teaching partners -Participant 16

Superordinate Theme 5: Innovations in Distance Instructional Implementation

The sudden implementation of distance instruction because of the COVID-19 crisis proved to be fraught with many obstacles. This circumstance has also forced teachers to innovate in terms of how distance instruction can be efficiently and effectively delivered to kindergarten learners. The teachers devised feedback mechanisms between the parents and teachers; retrieval system of the instructional materials; and improvement of the quality of involvement of parents.

Subordinate Theme 5.1: Distribution and Retrieval System of the Instructional Materials. The geographical location of kindergarten learners from school is a major concern especially in the delivery of instructional materials. As a response, teachers implemented a retrieval system involving stakeholders. They detailed that:

> We distributed the modules and instructional materials house to house. We also requested the PTA and homeroom officers to help us facilitate the distribution of the modules and instructional materials -Participant 13.

We assigned dropping points and leaders to facilitate the distribution and retrieval of self-learning modules and activity sheets so that children who are located far from school can get their materials on time -Participant 14.

Subordinate Theme 5.2: Feedback Mechanisms between the Parents and Teachers. In order to address the communication gap between the teachers and parents that bars efficient delivery of distance instruction, the teachers created feedback mechanisms. The teachers imparted how these mechanisms are realized:

I made an online group chat, and I added all the parents or guardians of my learners for me to be able to reach them easily. So, there, for example, we make a schedule on the distribution of materials - Participant 17.

We created a Facebook group chat with parents for them to easily communicate when they have difficulties. For those without gadget or internet connection, they can easily send teachers a message or call through their own or borrowed cellular phone -Participant 5.

Subordinate Theme 5.3: Improvement of the Quality of Involvement of Parents. Parents have since then been seen to be an indispensable partner in educating the kindergarten children especially in these times when much of the learning has been transferred to homes. As such, teachers took steps to capacitate the parents. They described that:

We conduct orientation to parents in which we include sessions such as letter and sound identification and how to write letters properly following the blue-red-blue lines -Participant 11.

We have identified parents who are not capable to teach and find a legal guardian or older sibling to do so and be invited to attend to parent mentoring sessions -Participant 10.

Superordinate Theme 6: Innovations in Distance Instructional Evaluation

Lastly, as instructional evaluation is a vital component of instruction that presents a picture of how the kindergarten learners are academically achieving in distance instruction, teachers need to guard its integrity. They innovate instructional evaluation through validation of child performance through different means and monitoring of learning performance through different approaches.

Subordinate Theme 6.1: Validation of Child Performance through Different Means. To yield a valid measure of the performance of kindergarten children, the teachers conduct validation through different means possible. These can be observed in the following responses of the teachers:

For the children afraid of the teacher, the parents administer summative assessment activities and take video and send to our group chat -Participant 8.

If possible and following the mandated safety protocols, I personally visit children at their homes and conduct an assessment to validate their performance -Participant 3.

Subordinate Theme 6.2: Monitoring of Learning Performance through Different Approaches. Constrained by limited close supervision, the teachers also constantly monitor the learning performance of the kindergarten children through personal and online means. They discussed that:

I scheduled every child twice to thrice a month to check the child progress. This is through online video conversation. I prepared some previous lessons to check how much understanding has the child got over the time and compare the child assessment scores with that in online assessment -Participant 18.

I did house to house assessment for those parents who seem not active in the learning of their children. I conducted evaluation and discussed those topics which are difficult to understand -Participant 15.

Discussion

Six superordinate themes cutting across the three instructional development phases emerged to be representative of the lived experience of the kindergarten teachers as they develop instruction in distance education amid the COVID-19 crisis. They are discussed as follows.

First, the superordinate theme 'challenges in distance instructional planning' depicts the struggles experienced by the teachers related to the suitability of the lesson when translated to distance learning modality and adapted to the nature of learners. Cahapay (2020) called this process as part of the unpacking practices. Foti (2020) echoed these unpacking problems in a study that, with distance kindergarten education, teachers have been encountering the lack of educational material appropriately adapted to the needs of the children. Crawford et al. (2021) supported this finding by mentioning an important concern that some regulations affecting kindergarten instructional design resulted in situations that were not developmentally appropriate for young children. This problem seems to be shared across grade levels (e.g., see Cahapay & Labrador, 2021 in remote high school science education).

Moreover, with 'challenges in distance instructional implementation' as a superordinate theme, teachers referred to the problems related to structural resources and parent skills. These problems seemed universally complemented in several studies. For example, Atiles et al. (2021) indicated technology used for teaching as an issue, citing that kindergarten educators have major internet connectivity problems. Reporting qualitative results from the views of parents, Dong et al. (2020) also reported that parents perceived online learning of young children as challenging because of their lack of professional knowledge in teaching children.

Similarly, the superordinate theme 'challenges in distance instructional evaluation' points out the issue encountered by the teachers on the validity of assessment and low level of performance of the children. Steed and Leech (2021) supported this theme by stating completion of assessments and evaluations is a major challenge in distance kindergarten education amid the current crisis. This concern on assessments and evaluations generally pointed out by the researchers in the field and predicaments specifically found in this study are reflected in the study of Kruszewska et al. (2020). They mentioned assessment concerns voiced by the teachers like lack of independent works of children and far fewer opportunities to directly assess these works.

On the other hand, 'innovations in distance instructional planning' as a superordinate theme features the opportunities opened by the teachers to adapt alternative teaching modes and materials with consideration of intended users, including the parents. Bassok et al. (2021) drew in their study some alternative strategies employed by the teachers like live group or individual meetings with the children and sending home physical materials for the children to use. Suggesting providing more interactive and quality kindergarten instruction, Alan (2021) also urged that such instruction should not only make the interaction between teacher and children possible but also make it easier for teachers to communicate with parents and to plan it with them.

Furthermore, another superordinate theme 'innovations in distance instructional implementation' highlights the strategies employed by the teachers in distributing materials, communicating with parents, and improving parent involvement. Dayal and Tiko (2020) reported that to augment the challenges of distance education, the kindergarten teachers created a Viber group to communicate with parents and children as well as send learning materials through it. Atiles et al. (2021) also mentioned that materials were either picked up at the schools or delivered at homes. Timmons (2021) and Cahapay (2021b)

suggested working with stakeholders like school principals, childcare centers, medical professionals, family support programs, software and technology companies, libraries, and social workers, to reach all children and parents.

Lastly, 'innovations in distance instructional evaluation' as a superordinate theme explicates the means that the teachers used to validate and monitor child performance through different approaches. McKenna et al. (2021) demonstrated various measures employed by kindergarten teachers to conduct instructional evaluations. These measures include observing as parents virtually administer the assessment, using a checklist to monitor assessment fidelity, using pictures sent by the families as complementary basis for assessment, and constantly communicating with the parents. Cahapay (2021c) also stressed the involvement of parents as an important element in successful instructional evaluation.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to explore the lived experience of kindergarten teachers on instructional development for distance education amid the COVID-19 crisis. Drawing from the lived experiences of the teachers in the field, this research was conducted to account for the difficulties and opportunities in attaining functional kindergarten education amid the virulent COVID-19 crisis.

The results showed six superordinate themes of challenges and innovations that cut across the phases of instructional development. When it comes to challenges in instructional planning, implementation, and evaluation, several problems were revealed related to the translation of activities into print modular modality, preparation of distance learning materials suited to learners, distance of houses that delay delivery of instructional materials, structural resources to efficiently implement instruction, skills of parents in teaching and guiding their children, validity of assessment data, and low performance of the children. As regards the innovations, different solutions were offered such as alternative distance instructional delivery modes, preparation of materials considering the intended users, distribution and retrieval system, feedback mechanisms between parents and teachers, improvement of quality of parent involvement, validation, and monitoring of child performance using different strategies.

This paper presents significant pieces of evidence that lead to an integrated knowledge of the lived experience of kindergarten teacher in instructional development amid a global crisis. By specifically exploring this lived experience drawn from the reality of events, it provides glimpse as to the need for measures to contextually address the challenges encountered and strengthen the innovations employed by kindergarten teachers in the field. It is suggested that several concerted efforts of the community stakeholders, school administrators, and teacher educators at the society, family, and school levels should be placed so that a relevant, appropriate, and responsive kindergarten education can be realized. First, teacher development programs focused on designing and assessing distance learning may be offered. Second, resilient technological access must be established to improve the implementation of the distance education. Third, families should also be trained on how to facilitate the learning of children. Lastly, extant support systems can be harnessed to address possible issues and continue good practices.

References

Ahmed, S. A., Hegazy, N. N., Abdel Malak, H. W. et al. (2020). Model for utilizing distance learning post COVID-19 using (PACT)™ a cross sectional qualitative study. *BMC Medical Education, 20,* 400. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-020-02311-1

Alan, Ü. (2021). Distance Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Turkey: Identifying the Needs of Early Childhood Educators. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 49*(5), 987–994. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01197-y

Atiles, J. T., Almodóvar, M., Chavarría Vargas, A., Dias, M. J. A., & Zúñiga León, I. M. (2021). International responses to COVID-19: challenges faced by early childhood professionals. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 29*(1), 66–78. https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293x.2021.1872674

Bassok, D., Weisner, K., Markowitz, A. J., & Hall, T. (2021). *Teaching Young Children during COVID-19: Lessons from Early Educators in Louisiana.* Study of Early Education in Louisiana. https://files.elfsightcdn.com/022b8cb9-839c-4bc2-992e-cefccb8e877e/20e038ec-8507-4b59-ad28-cc4a43a197b2.pdf

Bozkurt, A., & Sharma, R. C. (2021). On the verge of a new renaissance: Care and empathy oriented, human-centered pandemic pedagogy. *Asian Journal of Distance Education, 16*(1), i-vii. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5070496

Bozkurt, A., Jung, I., Xiao, J., Vladimirschi, V., Schuwer, R., Egorov, G., Lambert, S. R., Al-Freih, M., Pete, J., Olcott, Jr., D. Rodes, V., Aranciaga, I., Bali, M., Alvarez, Jr., A. V., Roberts, J., Pazurek, A., Raffaghelli, J. E., Panagiotou, N., de Coëtlogon, P., Shahadu, S., Brown, M., Asino, T. I. Tumwesige, J., Ramírez Reyes, T., Barrios Ipenza, E., Ossiannilsson, E., Bond, M., Belhamel, K., Irvine, V., Sharma, R. C., Adam, T., Janssen, B., Sklyarova, T., Olcott, N. Ambrosino, A., Lazou, C., Mocquet, B., Mano, M., & Paskevicius, M. (2020). A global outlook to the interruption of education due to COVID-19 pandemic: Navigating in a time of uncertainty and crisis. *Asian Journal of Distance Education, 15*(1), 1-126. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3878572

Cahapay, M. B. (2020). A case study of curriculum unpacking practices of a kindergarten teacher. *Journal of Curriculum and Teaching, 9*(2), 1-8. https://doi.org/10.5430/jct.v9n2p1

Cahapay, M. B. (2021a). How to Plan Lessons in the New Normal Education: A Reintroduction to Selected Instructional Design Processes. *Aquademia, 5*(1), ep21006. https://doi.org/10.21601/aquademia/10807

Cahapay, M. B. (2021b). Involvement of Parents in Remote Learning of Children amid COVID-19 Crisis in the Philippines: A Transcendental Phenomenology. *International Journal of Sociology of Education, 10*(2), 171-192. http://doi.org/10.17583/rise.2021.7317

Cahapay, M. B., & Labrador, M. G. P. (2021). Experiments Gone Wrong? Lived Experience of Filipino Teachers in Remote Science Education amid COVID-19 Crisis. *Asian Journal of Science Education, 3*(2), 90-101. https://doi.org/10.24815/ajse.v3i2.20981

Cahapay, M. B. (2022). The Phenomenon of Leading without Guidebook: Educational Leadership Practices of Philippine School Principals in Virulent COVID-19 Times. *International Journal of*

Educational   Leadership   and   Management.   10(1),   1-24. https://doi.org/10.17583/ijelm.2022.7666

Carvalho, S., Rossiter, J., Angrist, N., Hares, S., & Silverman, R. (2020). *Planning for School Reopening and Recovery After COVID-19.* Center for Global Development. https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/planning-school-reopening-and-recovery-after-covid-19.pdf

Crawford, A., Vaughn, K. A., Guttentag, C. L., Varghese, C., Oh, Y., & Zucker, T. A. (2021). "Doing What I can, but I got no Magic Wand:" A Snapshot of Early Childhood Educator Experiences and Efforts to Ensure Quality During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 49*(5), 829–840. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01215-z

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design.* Sage Publications, Inc.

Davies, I.K. (1973). *Competency-Based Learning: Technology, Management, and Design.* McGraw-Hill.

Dayal, H. C., & Tiko, L. (2020). When are we going to have the real school? A case study of early childhood education and care teachers' experiences surrounding education during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 45*(4), 336–347. https://doi.org/10.1177/1836939120966085

Dick, W., & Carey, L. (1990). *The Systematic Design of Instruction* (3rd ed.). Scott, Foresman, and Company.

Dong, C., Cao, S., & Li, H. (2020). Young children's online learning during COVID-19 pandemic: Chinese parents' beliefs and attitudes. *Children and Youth Services Review, 118*, 105440. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105440

Dowling M. (2007). From Husserl to van Manen: A review of different phenomenological approaches. *International Journal of Nursing Studies, 44*(1):131–42. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2005.11.026

Ferri, F., Grifoni, P., & Guzzo, T. (2020). Online Learning and Emergency Remote Teaching: Opportunities and Challenges in Emergency Situations. *Societies, 10*(4), 86. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc10040086

Feuer, W. (2020, September 15). At least 24 million students could drop out of school due to the coronavirus pandemic, UN says. *CNBC.* https://www.cnbc.com/2020/09/15/at-least-24-million-students-could-drop-out-of-school-due-to-the-coronavirus-un-says.html

Fink, S. (2002). *Crisis Management: Planning for the Inevitable.* Lincoln, NE: Universe Inc.

Foti, P. (2020). Research in Distance Learning in Greek Kindergarten Schools during the Pandemic of COVID-19: Possibilities, Dilemmas, Limitations. *European Journal of Open Education and E-learning Studies, 6*(1), 19-40. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3839063

Gromada, A., Rees, G., & Chzhen, Y. (2020). Worlds of influence: Understanding what shapes child well- being in rich countries. *Innocenti Report Card 16.* Florence: UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti.

Hannafin M. J., & Peck, K. L. (1988). *The Design Development and Evaluation of Instructional Software.* Macmillan Publishing Company

Hodges, C., Moore, S., Lockee, B., Trust, T., & Bond, A. (2020). The Difference Between Emergency Remote Teaching and Online Learning. *EDUCAUSE Review.* https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning

Kim, J. H., Araya, M., Hailu, B. H., Rose, P. M., & Woldehanna, T. (2021). The Implications of COVID-19 for Early Childhood Education in Ethiopia: Perspectives from Parents and Caregivers. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 49*(5), 855–867. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01214-0

Knirk, F. G., & Gustafson, K. L. (1986). *Instructional technology: A systematic approach to education.* Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Kruszewska, A., Nazaruk, S., & Szewczyk, K. (2020). Polish teachers of early education in the face of distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic – the difficulties experienced and suggestions for the future. *Education, 3-13*, 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2020.1849346

McKenna, M., Soto-Boykin, X., Cheng, K., Haynes, E., Osorio, A., & Altshuler, J. (2021). Initial Development of a National Survey on Remote Learning in Early Childhood During COVID-19: Establishing Content Validity and Reporting Successes and Barriers. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 49*(5), 815–827. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01216-y

Moser, A., & Korstjens, I. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 3: Sampling, data collection and analysis. *European Journal of General Practice, 24*(1), 9-18. https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375091

Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research, 42*(5), 533-544. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y

Penner, J. L., & McClement, S. E. (2008). Using Phenomenology to Examine the Experiences of Family Caregivers of Patients with Advanced Head and Neck Cancer: Reflections of a Novice Researcher. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 7*(2), 92–101. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690800700206

Philpott, D. (2021, March 30). 'Generation C': Why investing in early childhood is critical after COVID-19. *The Conversation.* https://theconversation.com/generation-c-why-investing-in-early-childhood-is-critical-after-covid-19-157095

Punzalan, N. (2020, October 03). Teaching in the time of pandemic. *Philippine News Agency.* https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1117336

Rotas, E. E., & Cahapay, M. B. (2020). Difficulties in remote learning: Voices of Philippine university students in the wake of COVID-19 crisis. *Asian Journal of Distance Education, 15*(2), 147-158. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4299835

Salmons, J. (2015). *Qualitative online interviews: Strategies, design, and skills.* Sage Publications, Inc.

Spiteri, J. (2021). Quality early childhood education for all and the Covid-19 crisis: A viewpoint. Propspects. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-020-09528-4

Steed, E. A., & Leech, N. (2021). Shifting to Remote Learning During COVID-19: Differences for Early Childhood and Early Childhood Special Education Teachers. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 49*(5), 789–798. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01218-w

Tadalan, C. A. (2021, February 01). Coronavirus pandemic highlights failures of Philippine education. *BusinessWorld.* https://www.bworldonline.com/coronavirus-pandemic-highlights-failures-of-philippine-education/

Thomas, S. P. & Pollio, H. R. (2002). *Listening to patients: A phenomenological approach to nursing research and practice.* Springer Publishing Company, Inc.

Timmons, K., Cooper, A., Bozek, E., & Braund, H. (2021). The Impacts of COVID-19 on Early Childhood Education: Capturing the Unique Challenges Associated with Remote Teaching and Learning in K-2. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 49*(5), 887–901. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01207-z

UNESCO (2020, March 24). 1.37 billion students now home as COVID-19 school closures expand, ministers scale up multimedia approaches to ensure learning continuity. *Author.* https://en.unesco.org/news/137-billion-students-now-home-covid-19-school-closures-expand-ministers-scale-multimedia

UNICEF (2020, December). Nutrition, for every child: UNICEF Nutrition Strategy 2020–2030. *Author.* https://www.unicef.org/media/92031/file/UNICEF%20Nutrition%20Strategy%202020-2030.pdf

Willis, B. (1993). *Distance Education: A Practical Guide.* Educational Technology Publications.

Yıldırım, B. (2021). Preschool Education in Turkey During the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Phenomenological Study. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 49*(5), 947–963. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01153-w

About the Authors

- Michael B. Cahapay (Corresponding author); mbcahapay@up.edu.ph; College of Education, Mindanao State University, General Santos City, Philippines; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0588-0022
- Janice B. Lorania; janice.lorania@deped.gov.ph; Schools Division of Sarangani, Department of Education, Philippines. https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4128-2369
- Mark Gil P. Labrador; markgil.labrador@deped.gov.ph; Schools Division of South Cotabato, Department of Education, Philippines. https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9087-980X
- Nathaniel F. Bangoc II.; nathanie.bangoc@deped.gov.ph; Region XII, Department of Education, Philippines. https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1111-0507