Emergency Remote Early Childhood Teaching: A Temporary Setting or Contemporary Necessity?

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic and the protection of social distance between educators and learners have impacted all levels of education – significantly, early childhood. It has hindered activities carried out in a direct meeting and has forced education in the 2020-2021 school year to continue through emergency remote teaching. The study determined the fundamental structure of the views of early childhood educators on emergency remote teaching to reveal how they are thinking forward regarding their teaching skillset for either the continuity or change of education in the next school year. A phenomenological design of qualitative research was employed, and a local sample of 10 educators voluntarily informed the study. Through the interviews, five theme clusters emerged that reflected their 88 significant statements. The results evidenced to the extent that early childhood educators view emergency remote teaching as beyond being a temporary solution to learning when a pandemic threatens physical classes, but its potential to become a contemporary necessity is premature and highly dependent on how families will respond and how schools will proceed as a result of their response. Thus, further exploration of professional development topics is needed to support early childhood educators to teach in any situation moving forward.

Keywords:

Emergency Remote Teaching; Early Childhood Education; Post-Pandemic Education; COVID-19

ABSTRAK

Pandemi COVID-19 dan perlindungan jarak sosial antara pendidik dan peserta didik telah berdampak pada semua tingkat pendidikan – secara signifikan, anak usia dini. Hal tersebut menghambat kegiatan yang

dilakukan dalam pertemuan langsung dan memaksa pendidikan pada tahun ajaran 2020-2021 dilanjutkan melalui pengajaran jarak jauh darurat. Studi ini menentukan struktur dasar pandangan pendidik anak usia dini tentang pengajaran jarak jauh darurat untuk mengungkapkan bagaimana mereka berpikir ke depan mengenai keterampilan mengajar mereka baik untuk kelangsungan atau perubahan pendidikan di tahun ajaran berikutnya. Sebuah desain fenomenologis penelitian kualitatif digunakan dan sampel lokal dari 10 pendidik secara sukarela menginformasikan penelitian tersebut. Melalui wawancara, muncul 5 klaster tema yang mencerminkan 88 pernyataan signifikan mereka. Hasilnya membuktikan sejauh mana pendidik anak usia dini memandang pengajaran jarak jauh darurat sebagai solusi sementara untuk belajar ketika kelas fisik terancam oleh pandemi, tetapi potensinya untuk menjadi kebutuhan kontemporer terlalu dini dan sangat tergantung pada bagaimana keluarga akan merespon dan bagaimana sekolah akan melanjutkan sebagai hasil dari tanggapan mereka. Dengan demikian, eksplorasi lebih lanjut tentang topik pengembangan profesional diperlukan untuk mendukung pendidik anak usia dini untuk mengajar dalam situasi apa pun ke depan.

Kata kunci:

Pengajaran Jarak Jauh Darurat; Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini; Pendidikan Pasca-Pandemi; COVID-19

1.   Introduction

Teaching at a distance has transformed the entire human experience of being an early childhood educator. Escalating in March 2020, the severity of COVID-19 and the consequent need for social distancing have gravely disrupted all levels of education. Regular face-to-face instruction can no longer be held safely by educators inside the classroom – most significantly by those teaching at the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten levels. Consequently, all schools were forced to rethink the educational paradigm and quickly adapt to the technology and trends long imposed by Industry 4.0. Thus, Education 4.0, as a school of thought, was accelerated by the pandemic at an unprecedented speed (Adelayanti, 2020). By the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, schools have mainly accomplished the herculean task of transitioning into a 'new normal' where most teaching and learning occur safely. By utilizing Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), schools have commendably transformed education on-demand by extending the learning setting outside of the classroom (Jassim, 2020).

Despite the fast and forced adoption of different remote education systems and the fumbling efforts of most schools during their widespread closures, emergency remote teaching (ERT) is – as it happens – possible, practicable, and potentially meaningful to early childhood educators who are temporarily teaching at a distance. To expound, emergency remote teaching (ERT) is a temporary solution to learning when face-to-face classes are threatened by an emergency (e.g., a global

pandemic). Instruction during its implementation is designed in a highly responsive manner and is delivered using available information and communications technology until the emergency has been resolved. As Hodges et al. (2020) eloquently described it, emergency remote teaching (ERT) is an attempt not "to recreate a robust educational ecosystem but rather to provide temporary access to instruction and instructional supports in a manner that is quick to set up and is reliably available during an emergency or crisis." In other words, it is not to be equated with online education, including online teaching and learning, which are developed deliberately for an extensive period and delivered to be entirely online.

Arguably, studies in the past decade have been divided in their findings on the effect of technology use in teaching young learners. Some studies have evidenced that early exposure to technology can have profound adverse effects on the ability of young children to play, communicate and focus (e.g., Elkind, 2013; Keumala, Yoestara, & Putri, 2019; House, 2012). On the contrary, some studies have confirmed that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can help advance the creativity, cultural competence, and higher-order thinking skills of young children (e.g., Plowman & Stephen, 2003; McPake et al., 2005; Saruji, Hassan, & Drus, 2017). In consequence of the conflicting findings, teaching with technology was not seriously explored in early childhood education – that is, until the modern global pandemic made it necessary.

As the coronavirus outbreak continues to progress, it is apparent that remote teaching and learning will remain a preferred modality in continuing the education of young learners. While scholars are still divided on the subject of technology use at the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten level, early childhood educators stand united in continuing the learning journey for young children at home by gamifying content, integrating offline and online resources, and meeting synchronously or asynchronously in their virtual classrooms (Ferri, Grifoni, & Guzzo, 2020). Thus, when the pandemic ends, and the 'next to normal' begins, it may well mean that further consideration can be expected regarding emergency remote teaching in early childhood education.

The temporary solution, that is, remote education, may just become a contemporary necessity. Moreover, at this point in the 'new normal, early childhood educators may have acclimated to the ways of remote teaching. They may also be constructively responding to the reality that their skills need to continuously keep up to date to be more effective in teaching young learners during other post-pandemic public health and safety issues in the country, such as typhoons, that might make it unsafe or less than ideal for them to continue learning inside the physical environment of classrooms.

It is impossible to predict what will happen in the 'next to normal,' but it is possible to pay close attention to the lessons of the past – both distant and recent – and on that basis, think more advantageously about the future of early childhood education. Understandably, there is an urgent need to recover the pre-COVID-19 school systems, but beyond re-opening, there is also an opportunity to reimagine education and educators altogether.

Eventually, there will come a time that COVID-19 will no longer be the daily focus of our lives. When those better days do arrive, education systems should not just freely abandon emergency remote teaching and return to the face-to-face instruction without methodically preserving the lessons of the past and creating a point of reference for future disruptions that might make it unsafe or less than ideal for young learners to continue learning inside the physical environment of classrooms. Remote teaching in both emergency and more routine situations will ultimately become an essential skill set for educators. Additionally, schools will physically re-open with an opportunity to assess how prudent they were in implementing emergency remote teaching to maintain continuity of instruction. The natural attitude to equate emergency remote teaching with online learning must be faithfully avoided. Instead, full attention should highlight the strengths and identify the weaknesses to be better prepared for any future need to implement emergency remote teaching (Barbour et al., 2020).

In this regard, the researchers deem that a timely description of the views of early childhood educators on emergency remote teaching – whether it is a temporary solution or a contemporary necessity – is relevant mainly for their professional development in the 'next to normal.' After teaching at a distance for more than half of the school year and waiting for government mandates on how to learn in the next school year, now is an ideal time to learn how early childhood educators are thinking forward regarding their teaching skillset. Additionally, it is expected that the study is significant in this regard since it will contribute to the related literature on early childhood education and pandemic pedagogy.

Figure 1. The framework of the study
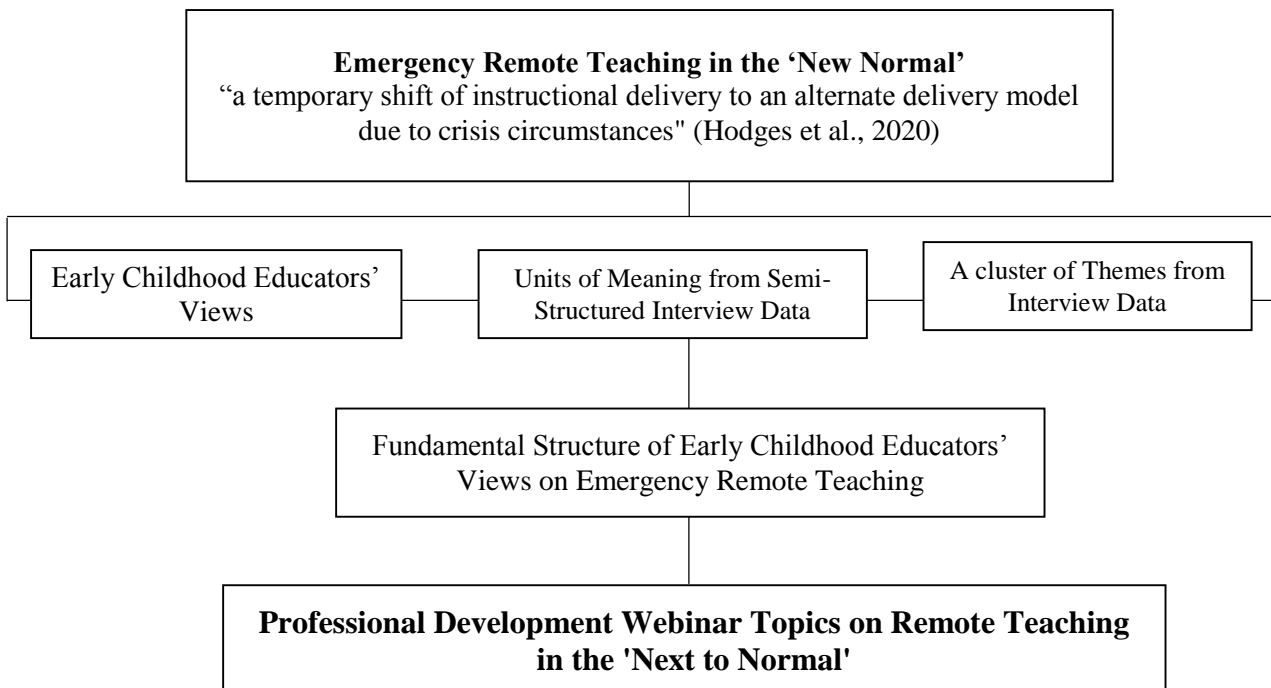
2. Methods

This study employed a phenomenological design of qualitative research. As a descriptive approach, phenomenology aims to describe the nature of a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2016). It centers on the phenomenon that researchers cannot fully comprehend but is not entirely unknown (Yildirim & Simsek, 2008). Hence, the phenomenon described in the study is the views of early childhood educators on emergency remote teaching with a particular interest in whether it is a temporary solution or a contemporary necessity.

In a qualitative research design, the basis for sample size is a matter of wealth of information and not a matter of representative opinions and views (Guetterman, 2015). Thus, a local sample of 10 early childhood educators who are teaching remotely for the first time due to the severity of COVID-19 was invited to inform the study voluntarily. Additionally, a larger sample was not feasible for the researchers given the inherent time and travel restrictions during the conduct of the study.

For confidentiality and privacy protection, the respondents are given the code names Teacher A – Teacher J.

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents

Code Name	Age	Teaching Experience	Assigned Level
Teacher A	23	Three years	Pre-Kindergarten
Teacher B	23	1 year	Kindergarten
Teacher C	26	Six years	Kindergarten
Teacher D	24	Five years	Pre-Kindergarten
Teacher E	21	1 year	Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten
Teacher F	24	Two years	Pre-Kindergarten
Teacher G	24	Four years	Pre-Kindergarten
Teacher H	24	Four years	Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten
Teacher I	26	Five years	Kindergarten
Teacher J	24	Four years	Kindergarten

The study utilized semi-structured interviews via Zoom, a secure video conferencing platform, to gather data.

The researchers produced a shortlist of interview guide questions to ensure the quality and dependability of interview data. Although the researchers have three main questions beforehand, they still intended the interviews to be conversational to pursue any topical trajectories that may stray from the guide when appropriate. Thus, the interviews were supplemented by follow-up and probing questions that were not designed and phrased ahead of time and were largely dependent on the respondents' answers.

The three main questions used to collect the respondents' views on emergency remote teaching were predetermined but open-ended in nature.

How do you view emergency remote teaching at your assigned level?

In the context of public health and safety, how do you view the potential of emergency remote teaching after the pandemic?

In the context of professional development, how do you view the potential of emergency remote teaching after the pandemic?

An online consent form created using Google Forms was produced to discuss the nature of the study but also the rights and confidentiality of the respondents. Utilizing the online consent form, the researchers asked the respondents for their permission to record the interview and use their comments to directly inform the study. They were asked for their preferences about whether to remain anonymous or to allow the researchers to name them and their school of employment and quote them directly. They were also asked to indicate their preferences for using the video camera during the interview and the visual images shared or generated in the interview.

The researchers individually sent the respondents the formal invitation to participate in the study, the link to the online consent form, and the list of interview guide questions by electronic mail or social media communication. The respondents replied with their confirmation and availability. The interviews were recorded, and transcripts were produced. Subsequently, the gathered data was analyzed using the 7-step-process advocated by Colaizzi (1978) in descriptive phenomenological data analysis.

Step 1: Familiarizing the data

Step 2: Identifying significant statements.

Step 3: Formulating meanings.

Step 4: Clustering themes.

Step 5: Creating a detailed description.

Step 6: Developing the fundamental structure or succinct description of the phenomenon.

Step 7: Seeking verification of the fundamental structure.

In addition, the researchers went through the process of bracketing before collecting data. Through bracketing, the researchers identified their preconceived beliefs and biases to exclude them from the study. These were documented beforehand to acknowledge such preconceptions and suspend them not to impact the study.

After reading and rereading each interview transcription to familiarize gathered data, significant statements were identified, highlighted, and encoded in a separate document. In the separate document, meanings were assigned for each significant statement to ensure the exact words of the respondents were used. Staying true to the exact words of the respondents was paramount in determining the meaning of each statement.

The ten (10) respondents individually validated the five (5) clusters of themes through separate sessions via Zoom. All respondents agreed that the results should not be changed and did not want to add anything further. They all agreed that the results captured their views on emergency remote teaching at present and in the distant future.

3. Results and Discussion

Five (5) theme clusters emerged from the eighty-eight (88) significant statements: (1) a challenge overcome is a result of resilience, (2) a bored child is a lost learner, (3) a child, parent, and educator working together creates success, (4) a prepared educator is a better educator, and (5) an unexpected change is a change for the better. Specific statements were chosen to reflect each theme best and to capture the essence of the phenomenon.

Table 2. Theme Clusters Emergent from the Interviews

Theme	How many times was it mentioned across all interviews?	How many participants mentioned it?
A challenge overcome is a result of resilience.	22	9
A bored child is a lost learner.	12	7
A child, parent, and educator working together create success.	14	6
A prepared educator is a better educator.	17	7
An unexpected change is a change for the better.	26	10

3.1 Theme 1: A challenge overcome is a result of resilience.

Emergency remote teaching, in its earliest stage, is described by the respondents as a challenge. Overcoming the initial shock of the situation was the result, not only of their resilience and flexibility but that of their young learners and their parents as well.

Most of the respondents mentioned how the growth and adjustment of the young learners and their parents impacted their initial opinions for this new mode of teaching.

> *"...It was impossible to teach kindergarten, but now as time flies by...This is already our last term in our school year, so it shifted. I think that the kids already adapted to our way of teaching...you know...this kind of set-up." (Teacher J)*

> *"It's already been five months since we have these online classes in Zoom. So, I think now that we have already adjusted. We, the teachers, even the parents, and the kids are slowly adjusting to it. So, I think there is hope for ERT maybe after post-pandemic." (Teacher D)*

One respondent added that,

> *"This type of set-up made us discover or help us see a different side of our pupils because we are used to seeing them how they are and how they behave in school and not at home... We are seeing and understanding how they really are in terms of learning and how we can even see how the parents...how their parents are active in terms of helping them learn and with that...we can use that in the future as we continue or even if we change into a new system or type of teaching." (Teacher I)*

3.2. Theme 2: A bored child is a lost learner.

Being an early childhood educator is a physically interactive job. In the current state of emergency remote teaching, the respondents expressed that not being physically in proximity to their young learners makes student engagement a much more complicated task.

A respondent expressed that interaction is necessary so that active online learning during synchronous classes would be differentiated from passive online learning through YouTube.

> *"We need to interact with the student. So, during online class, some of the nurseries...three years old...four years old. They really would not listen to you. Some will not follow if you say, 'Let us sing and dance!' So, some would just sit there and watch you as you dance, as you sing. So, it is tough to connect [s] with them if they are just watching you on screen. Some of them would think it is the same with YouTube that they would just watch." (Teacher B)*

Most respondents pointed out that young learners are just not developmentally ready to sit and pay attention for extended periods. Thus, they are most likely to lose their learning momentum.

"Firstly, they have short attention span[s], and then if you are not with them physically, you cannot let them sit down...things like that." (Teacher J)

"They get sleepy. They get bored because, you know, they are just facing the screen." "Their world is playing, and it is tough for us to engage with the kids through online class only." (Teacher D)

3.3. Theme 3: A child, parent, and educator working together create success.

Home-school collaboration is the key to success in emergency remote teaching, most significantly at the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten levels.

The respondents pointed out that the most fundamental reason for the acceleration of home-school collaboration is that the parents and guardians had to replace the physical presence and interactions of the early childhood educators.

"...When we say early childhood [education], it is more on experiential learning, so 'learning by doing' inside the classroom. However, now, you do not see them [the children], and it needs cooperation with the parents." (Teacher E)

"What I could do right now, at most, is to encourage your child to sing and [go] stand up. Unlike before, in the classroom, I would hold their hands or make them stand up so that they will follow." "I highly encourage the parents that if their student or that their child is not that participative during online classes that they show their child that it is okay to follow [the] teacher and that it is okay to sing and dance." (Teacher B)

"... collaboration between parents and teachers... That is how we can help the pupils learn because they learn in their environment and far from them. So, how can we reach them? How can we understand them more? It is with their parents and working collaboratively and working side by side." (Teacher I)

Three respondents shared unexpected benefits out of the enhanced home-school collaboration.

In terms of managing the class, one respondent said that,

"For the teacher, an advantage is we do not get to reprimand...We do not get stressed with that...Now, it is a mommy who will reprimand...If they do not sit down, it is up to them. They listen to their mommy more, compared to us." (Teacher F)

In terms of communicating class performance to parents, two respondents (Teacher H and Teacher J) mentioned that parents no longer rely heavily on teacher-written reports since the current

delivery of instruction allows them to see their child's actual performance and receive immediate feedback.

Still, home-school collaboration is not without hurdles, particularly in terms of assessment. The respondents are very much concerned that assessment in emergency remote teaching may not reflect the actual performance of the young learners. In current circumstances, the respondents can only rely on their trust and respect in the parents and guardians to ensure that their children answer in front of and behind the camera.

> *"...Parents and caregivers get very competitive. They even coach kids the answers. So, maybe that is one challenge really that we still do not know how to address. (Teacher D)*

> *"...I can hear somebody whispering the answers. I told the parent that, but when we had the next test, the parent did it again. It is easy to scold or correct a child, but it is not easy to correct an adult. You cannot correct adults. So, that is what I was thinking." (Teacher H)*

> *"Every exam, the mother would whisper the answer. We could not assess properly because they would want to help their child to answer as parents. So, we could not do anything about it, despite the many reminders to not help their child; we really could not assess if they are the ones answering." (Teacher F)*

One respondent (Teacher H) expressed an understanding that parents and guardians have their reasons for answering instead of their children, but it should be known that this practice is developmentally problematic for young learners who are only beginning to read, write, and count. The same respondent (Teacher H) also conveyed that it exacerbates existing inequalities as the progress of the young learners is observed to be dependent on the amount of effort exerted by their parents.

> *"...The development of the children depends on the effort of the parents…The most success came from the most hardworking parents or the parents who sat down with their kids, and you can see that those who are struggling in the first term came from parents who were also struggling on how to balance work from home and then teaching their kids and then submitting the kids' tasks on time." (Teacher H)*

Furthermore, parents and guardians are just not trained to think like an early childhood educator, so it can be expected that some could not readily see the significance of the prepared learning activities concerning the development of their child. This caused great concern for the same respondent (Teacher H) and resulted in a later realization that there is a need to train educators to train parents regarding learning procedures, appropriate interactions with their young learners, and their learning activities.

> *"I am just the one instructing. Only half of the work is mine. I am just one half of the school this time, and the other half is them [the parents], and they do not get much help as we do." (Teacher H)*

3.4. Theme 4: A prepared educator is a better educator

Emergency remote teaching ushered a culture of preparedness in the respondents, particularly for post-pandemic education.

All respondents expressed that the uncertainty of how education was going to be delivered pushed them to update their knowledge and skills to adapt to changing realities. Their responses described the collective reaction of schools during the early stage of emergency remote teaching, and that was to utilize professional development webinars that were already available to them to begin making determined efforts to deal with the key issues and questions around teaching through a pandemic. Eight respondents briefly mentioned that their schools subsequently tailored their newly gained knowledge and skills to conduct their virtual training on their elected learning management systems and video conferencing platforms, while two respondents narrated that it was entirely self-training. Regardless, the respondents conveyed the significance of being adequately prepared to teach with Information Communication Technologies (ICTs). Since they are already teaching through technology, teaching with technology felt like a natural progression that was highly accelerated by the pandemic. Indeed, the shift to emergency remote teaching was not easy, but the respondents pointed out that it was easier for them than others who have actively avoided technology until it suddenly became necessary. They shared that the current emergency has created a lasting impression that will echo the need to learn, unlearn and relearn educational technologies years into the future.

With the future being much more uncertain than before, the respondents determined that emergency remote teaching is an essential faculty skill set for aspiring teachers in the distant future and that the development of such skillset would be central to a school-specific learning continuity plan.

Two respondents (Teacher E and Teacher G) added that if the skill of teaching remotely in an ongoing emergency will be required or continually developed for the next batch of post-pandemic educators, it just might save them from the added anxiety and self-doubt that is inherent when there are too many unknowns about returning to classrooms.

Another respondent (Teacher H) determined that training teachers for emergency remote teaching skills can be likened to training for first aid skills. They are most helpful if they are retained and recalled when required. In this connection, the same respondent (Teacher H) added that the professional development webinars that emerged in the current emergency condition must continue even when the country has reached a more stable situation because educators have so much to gain and nothing to lose by staying prepared.

"It is like [an] emergency response, like first aid…We are not hoping for an emergency, but we know how to [do] first aid if something happens. So, it is more or less like that. If we stop giving the webinars, it is like we stop giving emergency skills for the teacher in case this one will happen again." (Teacher H)

3.5. Theme 5: An unexpected change is a change for the better.

The respondents describe emergency remote teaching as a new and necessary change that was unplanned.

A respondent expressed that it is a highly unconventional way to introduce the school to young learners.

"We are used to being in school...to be with the children in the physical classroom...not online. We are used to the idea that as kindergarten teachers, especially in the pre-kindergarten area, we will introduce the school...how and what schools are too young children or young learners. So, we do not have that one during this time...during this school year. However, then again, we had to continue the learning of our pupils. It is not good to stop…" (Teacher I)

Another respondent stated that the alternate mode of instruction is necessary to fully maximize young children's future well-being.

"...Age[s] zero to six... their absorbent mind craves independence, and it is very open to new knowledge, so we need to stimulate that, and we also need to maximize their sensitive periods. In [ages] zero to six, [there are] so many sensitive periods, and we do not want that we miss out on it." (Teacher A)

It can no longer be denied that the breadth and depth of the coronavirus crisis are genuinely unprecedented and will undoubtedly create enduring effects in the process of teaching and learning. One respondent (Teacher H) added that the pandemic might have even caused varying degrees of trauma in families. Some families might be ready to return to pre-pandemic normalcy, but others might continue to stay at home. Thus, remote education, blended education, or perhaps fully online distance education will inevitably be necessary to accommodate such families in post-pandemic education.

The respondents determined that schools can only press forward from the 'new normal' into the 'next to normal' of education due to emergency remote teaching. At this point, the respondents have certainly considered that there may no longer be an 'old normal' to settle back into. Although teaching and learning at a distance are not firmly established in the country, the incidental learning at home when schools shifted to emergency remote teaching has naturally convinced several parents that this alternate delivery of instruction can provide another dimension to formal schooling and can come with unexpected benefits. A respondent (Teacher H) mentioned that some parents might

highly prefer this delivery of instruction because of its transparency. They can see in real-time what their child is learning and how the teacher is interacting with their child.

Unsurprisingly, the respondents themselves have shared several such unexpected benefits. One respondent (Teacher A) mentioned that the immediate need for a learning management system surprisingly paved the way for non-disposable or renewable teaching materials that benefit both the current and incoming educators. Two other respondents (Teacher C and Teacher G) also added that it created opportunities to cut daily commute costs and to enjoy the company of family.

It can be surmised that the statements of the respondents, in aggregate, reveal that a deliberate decision to not reimagine post-pandemic education, despite the enormous effort of transforming lessons and engaging in emergency remote teaching practically overnight, is just utter regression and will not reform anyone for the much more uncertain future.

One respondent (Teacher D) pointed out that teaching with technology and technology training is a disruption in education that is, in fact, already long overdue in the country. While one could remain frustrated that it took a pandemic to spring schools into action, that should not detract from this sudden shift in education.

Having experienced emergency remote teaching, most of the respondents look forward to its development into a more progressive response by schools when they are affected by natural disasters, such as typhoons, that make it unsafe to continue learning inside the physical environment of classrooms. Additionally, the respondents perceived that when the country has reached the conditions to allow for limited face-to-face instruction, emergency remote teaching will simply be remote teaching and will shape early post-pandemic education into a combination of remote and face-to-face instruction. Three respondents (Teacher A, Teacher D, and Teacher G) added that in the distant future, emergency or regular remote teaching might just become a solution to complete the required number of school days and to reduce student absenteeism.

3.6. Discussion

The results of the study on emergency remote teaching being an essential faculty skillset is consistent with the review of Hodges et al. (2020) that first presented how vital a skill it is for professional development as well as the continuity of education in the event of post-pandemic public health and safety issues. Expectedly, the results are only much more contextualized to the views of the local sample of early childhood educators who naturally tied the skill of teaching remotely in an ongoing emergency to a school-specific learning continuity plan which the Department of Education, through DepEd Order 013, S.2020, required private schools to submit to show their alternate delivery modes of learning when face-to-face instruction is prohibited.

Moreover, the significant statements regarding the possibility of requiring or continuously developing emergency remote teaching skills are positively connected to the study of Trust and

Whalen (2020) that explored whether educators should be trained in emergency remote teaching. Specifically, the statement on training for emergency remote teaching skills to be likened to annual training for first aid skills potentially answers the concern expressed in their study about the effectiveness of a one-time professional development training. In addition to self-directed learning and collaborative practices, if schools can purposely develop emergency remote teaching as mandatory training at the start of the school year, the next batch of post-pandemic educators can become entirely ready to teach in emergencies, and educators who had the first-hand experience during the COVID-19 pandemic can quickly move through the skills they remember and spend more time relearning the skills that they may have forgotten. Interestingly, the statement on training to prevent a subsequent rise of common mental health problems like anxiety and self-doubt may also help widen the scope and purpose for developing such professional skills.

Regrettably, the study results show that emergency remote teaching has exacerbated already existing issues such as equality due to the overwhelmingly unequal parental support, engagement due to the added spatial distance between early childhood educators and young learners, and assessment due to excessive parental involvement. These urge early childhood educators to continue to problem-solve and hyper-prepare for either the continuity or change of emergency remote education in the next school year. The most convenient way known now is through professional development webinars. Based on the study results, they may benefit significantly from webinars that will begin tackling the identified issues well before reaching the 'next to normal' or post-pandemic education. Webinar topics such as (1) narrowing the gaps in academic achievement between young learners with full parental support and young learners with partial parental support at home, (2) unpacking a scientific and developmentally appropriate way to engage young learners when teaching through a screen, (3) cultivating a home-school culture of honesty and integrity through authentic assessments for early childhood education, and lastly, (4) training parents of young learners to think like an early childhood educator might equal the demand and the success of previous professional development webinars that mainly introduced the reality of teaching through a pandemic and the information and communication technologies to be used.

In addition to the issues that were made worse by the pandemic, the results also revealed experiences that were made better and benefited the personal lives of educators. Consistent with the findings of Müller and Goldenberg (2020), the lack of daily commute possibly explains the added ease in balancing the work and family life of educators. From time management and productivity perspective, they have unexpectedly benefited from teaching remotely in their homes because they can efficiently manage their work schedule around family commitments. Significantly, the results also connect to the reality that the salaries of educators in the country are often not competitive, yet they still have to pay for the materials they need to teach. It somehow became a financial breather for them that they unexpectedly no longer have to pay for their daily commute, which is also a work-related expense. Thus, working from home due to emergency remote teaching need not be universally worse for most educators most of the time.

Furthermore, the results on emergency remote teaching being a more progressive response by schools when they are affected by natural disasters are consistent with the report of Barbour et al. (2020) that detailed how schools in the near, post-pandemic period need to be better prepared to maintain instructional continuity in circumstances of a crisis. In the pre-pandemic past, regardless of the scale of the disaster, education is often the first to be disrupted in the country (Ireland, 2016). Recurring natural disasters, such as typhoons, force schools to close on an annual or semi-annual basis. However, having experienced emergency remote teaching, schools are allowed to update their disaster response, become more resilient, and enable teaching and learning flexibility in both emergency and routine situations. In addition, schools are urged to be sensitive to the varying degrees of trauma in families brought about by pandemic-enforced societal shifts. Consistent with that of Bozkurt et al. (2020), the case of the country on emergency remote teaching is divided between families with access to the internet and computers which can take full advantage of learning remotely and disadvantaged families who need to find alternative ways to continue learning. In this regard, schools need to play a leading role in making post-pandemic education meaningful and accessible for both families by making remote education, blended education, or perhaps fully online distance education an available and viable option.

In essence, early childhood educators view emergency remote teaching as a new and necessary change that highly accelerated teaching with technology and home-school collaboration but exacerbated already existing issues of inequality, engagement, and assessment. It is now beyond being just a temporary solution, but its potential to become a contemporary necessity in early childhood education will depend mainly on how families will respond and how schools will proceed due to their response. In the meantime, early childhood educators continue to problem-solve and hyper-prepare while educational leaders continue to ponder on plans to reimagine post-pandemic education by shifting to either blended or fully online distance education.

4.   Conclusions

The data gathered from the interviews have evidenced to a certain degree that early childhood educators view emergency remote teaching as a shift in education beyond being just a temporary solution to learning when a pandemic threatens physical classes. However, it is still premature to establish it as a contemporary necessity in early childhood education because certainty in its enduring effects is not yet an established truth. The reimagination of education due to emergency remote teaching still depends mainly on how families will respond and how schools will progress due to their response when the country has reached the conditions to allow for limited face-to-face instruction. In the meantime, early childhood educators continue to problem-solve and hyper-prepare for either the continuity or change of emergency remote education in the next school year, presumably again through professional development webinars that intend to tackle the exacerbated issues on equality, engagement, and assessment. While this study illuminated the initial, present, and future views of early childhood educators on emergency remote teaching, additional research is needed to improve support, preparation, and professional development in post-pandemic education.

As an outgrowth of the study, the researchers recommend further exploration of professional development topics to support not only the ongoing learning and growth of early childhood educators but also to improve their feelings of preparedness to teach in any situation moving forward.

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