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Date of publication: June 25th, 2021

Edition period: June 2021-October 2021

To cite this article: Cahapay, M. B. (2021). 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>

To link this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17583/rise.2021.7317>

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Involvement of Parents in Remote Learning of Children amid COVID-19 Crisis in the Philippines: A Transcendental Phenomenology

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(Received: 25 December 2020; Accepted: 29 March 2021; Published: 25 June 2021)

Abstract

This paper aimed to explore how parents give meaning to their involvement in the remote learning of their children amid the COVID-19 crisis. Based on Husserlian transcendental approach in phenomenology, the researcher sought to explore the world of 12 parents, specifically mothers, from Mindanao, Philippines through online interviews. The result revealed 36 significant statements forming four emergent themes. These themes underscore the experience of parental involvement in the remote learning of their children amid crisis as 1.) journeying through a myriad of changes; 2.) connecting with the child physically and emotionally; 3.) experiencing multifaceted difficulties in the process; and 4.) responding to the call of new challenges of parenting. These themes are further elaborated through textural and structural descriptions. A statement of the essence of the lived experience of parents as a result of intuitive integration is offered. Aside from theoretical contributions, the outcomes gained in this paper offer several future practical insights for crisis planning in education.

Keywords: parental involvement, remote learning, COVID-19 crisis, Philippines, transcendental phenomenology

2021 Hipatia Press

ISSN: 2014-3575

<http://doi.org/10.17583/rise.2021.7317>

Hipatia Press
www.hipatiapress.com



Implicación de los Padres en el Aprendizaje Remoto de los Niños en la Crisis del COVID-19 en Filipinas: Una Fenomenología Trascendental

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(Recibido: 25 Diciembre 2020; Aceptado: 29 Marzo 2021; Publicado: 25 Junio 2021)

Resumen

Este trabajo tuvo como objetivo explorar cómo los padres dan sentido a su participación en el aprendizaje remoto de sus hijos en medio de la crisis del COVID-19. Basado en el enfoque trascendental husserliano en fenomenología, el investigador buscó explorar el mundo de 12 padres, específicamente las madres, de Mindanao, Filipinas, a través de entrevistas en línea. El resultado reveló 36 declaraciones significativas que forman cuatro temas emergentes. Estos temas subrayan la experiencia de la participación de los padres en el aprendizaje remoto de sus hijos en medio de una crisis como: 1.) atravesar una miríada de cambios; 2.) conectar con el niño física y emocionalmente; 3.) experimentando dificultades multifacéticas en el proceso; y 4.) responder al llamado de los nuevos desafíos de la crianza de los hijos. Estos temas se elaboran aún más a través de descripciones de textura y estructura. Se ofrece una declaración de la esencia de la experiencia vivida por los padres como resultado de la integración intuitiva. Aparte de las contribuciones teóricas, los resultados obtenidos en este documento ofrecen varias perspectivas prácticas futuras para la planificación de crisis en la educación.

Palabras clave: participación de los padres, aprendizaje remoto, crisis COVID-19, Filipinas, fenomenología trascendental



The COVID-19 has created a monumental crisis around the world, disturbing social and financial systems. Since its first documented case in individuals exposed to a market in Wuhan, China in the late 2019, this highly communicable virus that is caused by a severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus has quickly spread across continents and in more than a hundred countries in just a few months (Lu et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2020). With the changing characteristics of the COVID-19, studies show that an infected person could pass the virus to about two to three other persons (Guarner, 2020). As of March 02, 2021, worldwide statistics confirm 113,989,973 positive cases of the COVID-19, including 2,531,542 deaths (World Health Organization, 2021).

The International Association of Universities (2020) initially reported that more than a billion students across the world are affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Thus, the current situation is divesting many children of educational gains at school (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). With learning continuity plans directing children to learn at home, parents assume a daunting responsibility. According to Brossard et al. (2020), the involvement of parents serves a significant position for the remote learning that is designed to continue learning but this time within the corners of the home. As such, decisions that shape remote education should be responsive to the need to ensure that all parents are capable to implement.

In the Philippine educational context, Manila Times (2020) extolled the crucial role of parents in implementing various remote learning modalities amid the COVID-19 crisis. The Department of Education (2020) issued a learning continuity plan as schools reopened. One of the provisions of the plan is the adoption of remote learning in different modalities taking into consideration the resources and situations of the communities. The plan importantly underscores the role of parents in the implementation of its various learning delivery modalities (Pimentel-Tibon, 2020). For instance, it reminds that early grade levels need to be closely supervised by parents in the use of technology. It responds to the challenge of orienting the parents despite apprehensions as to whether parents are ready to take on this role.

However, despite the efforts to assist parents in this daunting task of educating their children at home, struggles are inevitable (Garbe et al., 2020). For example, Lee et al. (2020) recounted that amid the acute phase of the

COVID-19 crisis, half of the American parents in their survey felt overwhelmed by responsibilities to educate their child at home resulting in major depression and moderate or severe anxiety. Dong et al. (2020) also uncovered that Chinese parents view and experience implementation of online learning amid the COVID-19 crisis as challenging especially that some were neither trained nor ready to adopt online learning. As per the observation of the researcher, this unique experience holds a grain of reality to the context of the current research and perhaps of many countries around the world.

In connection to that, Euber (2020) observed that scholars are attempting to write down experience during the COVID-19 pandemic through written reports and oral histories. He stressed that history may concentrate primarily on the past experience, but in overwhelming periods such as the present crisis, it is a challenge to capture history through the experience at the present moment. One of the appropriate methods to capture the experience, specifically lived experience, is phenomenology. Smith (2007) described phenomenology as a research approach that describes the lived experience of individuals with a phenomenon. Creswell (2007) added that phenomenology explores the very essence of experience with that phenomenon.

As far as the most recent pandemics such as the H1N1 and the current COVID-19 are concerned, a review of studies on the lived experience using phenomenology as a research approach mostly focus on the workers in the allied medical fields (Corley et al., 2010; Guillaume et al., 2019; Sun, et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020). Some articles on the lived experience in the educational context revolve around the implications to teachers and students (e.g. Cahapay, 2020a; Kim, 2020; Reich et al., 2020; Suhail et al., 2020). There are also recent papers on how parents home educate their children (e.g. Cahapay 2020b; Garbe et al., 2020; Parczewska, 2020) but methodically, they do not seek to explore the lived experience. Other works give a glimpse into the lived experience of the parents in the learning of their children (e.g. Silano, 2012; Leach, 2015; Connel, 2018; Thompson, 2019) but the context is not set on a global crisis. The synthesis of knowledge and methodological gaps in these related works indicates a need to account for the lived experience of parents who are specifically placed at the front of remote learning of their children amid the COVID-19 crisis.

An examination of the lived experience of the parents as they live out

involvement in the remote learning of their children amid the COVID-19 crisis is significant in gaining deeper insights into the current overall educational situation. It will contribute new knowledge for scholars and researchers who are interested in the lived experience especially from the perspectives of parents amidst one of the unprecedented crises in human history. It will also provide practical inputs to authorities, administrators, and teachers to inform future policy decisions and develop appropriate programs or interventions that will respond to the related needs of parents.

Thus, considering the circumstances elaborated above, this paper aimed to explore how parents, especially mothers, give meaning to their involvement in the remote learning of their children amid the COVID-19 crisis. The researcher expects to discover the essence of parental involvement within the complexities of the changed situations.

Method

Research Design

A phenomenology is entailed as a research design in this study. According to Neubauer et al. (2019), phenomenology is a type of qualitative research that is interested in investigating the lived experience of individuals. Trace (2016) elaborated that phenomenology provides researchers with an ontology of ideal and real objects in which people can position their knowledge. Specifically, this present research found transcendental phenomenology developed by Husserl (1964) as the appropriate type of phenomenology to employ. A transcendental phenomenology is interested in epistemology or how it is possible to know something and demonstrates how inner states are important in identifying how knowledge about the world is formed (Tassone, 2017). Aligned to this emphasis of transcendental phenomenology, the present research aims to give meaning as to how parents, particularly mothers, involve themselves in the remote learning of their children amid the COVID-19 crisis.

Research Participants

Moser and Korstjens (2018) offered a progressive guideline for selecting the

participants in phenomenology, recommending that researchers may focus on fewer than ten cases. Furthermore, the participants in qualitative studies are sampled through combined purposeful and variation approaches with the main consideration that each participant will be able to furnish information relevant to the study (Vitcu et al., 2007; Suen et al., 2014). Particularly, in this study, 12 Filipino parents, specifically mothers, were recruited. They have children currently enrolled in K to 6 remote learning amid the COVID-19 crisis in education. They were chosen regardless of their age, religion, occupation, language, socioeconomic background, and educational attainment.

Research Context

This paper was conducted in a region in Mindanao, Philippines. As a response to the need to continue education amid the restrictions posed by the COVID-19 crisis, the country, through the Department of Education (2020), collaboratively developed the learning continuity plan for the school year 2020-2021. A key provision of this initiative is the adoption of the different instructional modalities, mostly remote learning, such as modular distance learning, online distance learning, and television- and radio- based instruction (Pimentel-Tibon, 2020). The plan underlines the vital position of parents in the successful implementation of remote instruction.

Data Collection Technique

The researcher aimed to gain insight into each world of the parents through interview procedures prescribed in phenomenology. Because of the restrictions caused by the current COVID-19 situation, personal interviews were not possible, thus an augmented form of interview called online interview was done individually with the participants. An online interview is a research method conducted using communication mediated by computers (Salmons, 2014; Stephens, 2021). Just like the personal interview, the online interview asked participants to describe what they think or feel about an aspect, which in this case, is the involvement of parents in the remote learning of their children amid the COVID-19 crisis. The procedure followed in conducting the online interview as a data collection technique in this research

is further discussed below.

Data Collection Procedure

Two stages of online interviews were performed for this study. The first stage involved the introduction to the current study. A consent form was given for every identified participant, stipulating the research purpose, data collection procedures, and potential advantages or disadvantages. Although the potential disadvantages were minimal, each participant was assured that, if at any time the process becomes difficult or agitating, they may stop. After obtaining consent from the participants, an interview guide containing questions was sent to them either through the Messenger chat box or email. The participants answered the questions mostly online at their convenience. The initial data were gathered and reviewed. The second stage involved the researcher arranging a time with selected participants to be interviewed online as a way to probe points of interest in their previous responses. The participants confirmed, clarified, or elaborated based on their initial responses. The added data were gathered accordingly. Then, for ease of organization, all the data gathered from the two stages were transcribed by the researcher in a continuous master transcript.

Data Analysis Framework

The researcher analyzed the lived experience of the participants through the particular process of interpreting the data prescribed for phenomenology. Specifically, the data analysis framework presented by Moustakas (1994) cited in Greening (2019) was carefully followed. The researcher went through four major phases of data analysis: identify significant statements in the transcript from the participants; classify these significant statements into meaning units or themes; synthesize the themes into a description of the experience of the individuals or textual and structural descriptions; and create a composite description of the essence of the lived experience. This framework was observed in writing the results of this paper as its cogent process matched with the goal to give meaning to the involvement of parents in the remote learning of their children amid the COVID-19 crisis.

Results

Phase 1: Significant Statements

The initial phase in the transcendental phenomenology analysis is the process of horizontalization, in which particular statements are identified in the transcripts that provide information about the experience of the participants. These significant statements are gathered from the transcripts and presented for the reader to glean the range of perspectives about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The result, as represented by selected sample significant statements, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Significant statements

Significant statements

“I have to balance my time because it entails changes. I am working from home and I also do household responsibilities.”

“I have to be patient. Do I have a choice as a mother? Well, strategies are badly needed in different situations.”

“As a working parent, I need to pause from my work tasks and sit with my child and read with her.”

“I have to set a daily routine. I make a list of the most important things I must get done and the things I would like to work on if I have time.”

“I have to involve myself for him to do his learning tasks on time. I have to set up a learning space that is as free from distractions.”

“I use positive reinforcements like encouraging her to listen to her teacher so she will have a ‘star’ or I buy her toys and chocolates.”

“I lower down my expectation. I always bear in mind that the important thing is my kid is learning.”

“At first, we have a lot of changes to do because we need to adjust some spaces and routines at home.”

“It is hard to be a teacher to my child because I do not know a lot of teaching strategies... to make her learn effectively.”

+27 other significant statements

The result shows 36 significant statements shared by the parents, specifically mothers. These statements were a subjective extrapolation from the master transcript. There was no attempt to categorize them or to arrange them in a certain sequence. The researcher only presented how individuals viewed their experience as parents involved in the remote learning of their children amid the COVID-19 crisis. This process of horizontalization provides initial ideas as regards the views of the participants about the interest of the study. As Moustakas (1994, p. 95) described, the horizon is “the grounding or condition of the phenomenon that gives it a distinct character.”

Phase 2: Meaning Units or Themes

The second phase in the analysis removes the statements that are conceptually repetitive and not relevant to the interest of this paper. Then, the researcher carefully examined the remaining significant statements and clustered the statements into meaning units or themes (Moustakas, 1994). They are described and connected to the literature to explicate the concepts used by the parents. The result is presented in Table 2.

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Table 2.

Meaning units or themes

Theme	Sample supporting significant statement
Journeying through a myriad of changes	<i>“At first, we have a lot of changes to do because we need to adjust some spaces and routines at home.”</i>
	<i>“I have to balance time because it entails changes. I am working from home and I also do household responsibilities.”</i>
	<i>“I consider this crisis as bringing many changes in the ways of learning of my son.”</i>
	<i>“I and my husband are hands-on when it comes to her remote learning at this time.”</i>
Connecting with the child physically and emotionally	<i>“If there is a task that she was not able to do because it is difficult, I guide her.”</i>
	<i>“I need to pause from my work tasks and sit with my child and read with her.”</i>
	<i>“...I do not know a lot of teaching strategies to catch her attention and to make her learn effectively.”</i>
Experiencing multifaceted difficulties in the process	<i>“It is quite hard because even if I am a teacher myself, I do not have the power compared to her classroom teacher.”</i>
	<i>“Performing my tasks at work and home is not easy plus teaching my daughter with so many modules every day or week.”</i>
	<i>“I also learn from this experience as much as I can so that I can better assist my child in his learning.”</i>
Responding to the call of new challenges of parenting	<i>“I lower down my expectation. I always bear in mind that the important thing is my kid is learning.”</i>
	<i>“I just tell myself to embrace the reality because that is how learning takes place now....”</i>

The result shows that four themes emerged from the process. These themes express the experience of parental involvement as 1.) journeying through a myriad of changes; 2.) connecting with the child physically and emotionally; 3.) experiencing multifaceted difficulties in the process; and 4.) responding to the call of new challenges of parenting. They are further described and discussed as follows.

Journeying through a myriad of changes. The changes in human affairs caused by the current situation are reproduced at home as parents need to play new roles in the remote learning of their children. Thus, the involvement of parents in the remote learning of their children presents many changes. These changes entail a period of adjustments and adaptations to the fundamental role of parental involvement which now demands a new level.

The parents consider the situation as “bringing many changes in the ways of learning,” as expressed by Parent 5. She referred to the inevitability to “adjust to many aspects of family life” now that most of what used to be formal learning has to occur at home. Other parents concur that their involvement entails “a lot of changes,” as shared by Parent 12. For example, they have to “adjust some spaces and routines at home,” as part of the process of changes. On a significant note, such actions of the parents show openness to the changes despite the current difficult situation.

Connecting with the child physically and emotionally. One of the positive consequences of remote learning at home is that parents have become more involved with the education of their children. An important concept in the involvement of parents in the remote learning of their children at this time is the connection between the parent and the child in the learning process. This connection, to whatever extent, is characterized not only by a physical aspect but also an emotional aspect.

Some parents are “hands-on,” as Parent 8 termed her involvement in the learning of her daughter. She explained that she “cannot tell a very young child to do her lessons on her own” which is why she takes a personal approach in her involvement. Other parents act as a “guide,” as described by Parent 1. It happens when “there is a task that she was not able to do because it is difficult.” These sample contexts portray a connection that goes beyond physical presence and hinged on the emotional concern.

Experiencing multifaceted difficulties in the process. With little time to

prepare for the changes to accommodate the remote learning of their children, parents often encounter various stumbling blocks in the process. Hence, the difficulties are a significant part of the experience of the parents as they involve themselves in the remote learning of their children. These difficulties are structural, pedagogical, and relational, affecting different aspects of parent involvement.

Many parents reported structural difficulties with not having a “stable internet connection,” Parent 7 reported. This problem affects the learning of her son as “he cannot attend to synchronous activities.” Some parents further admit experiencing pedagogical difficulties when they “do not know a lot of teaching strategies,” Parent 11 disclosed. Because of this, they find it challenging most of the time to catch the motivation of their children and make them “learn effectively.” Other parents also say that they encounter relational difficulties when their respective child “does not obey,” Parent 2 stated. They observed that children behave differently at home “as compared when teachers instruct in the classroom.” These situations depict the struggles of parents as they get involved in the remote learning of their children.

Responding to the call of new challenges of parenting. The drastically changed face of education presents new challenges and also higher levels of parental involvement. It is worthy to note that parents actively respond to the call of new challenges of parenting amid the COVID-19 crisis. They adapt to the situation as much as they can and try to focus on the essential end that learning may still take place amid the difficult situation.

The parents “learn from this experience,” as Parent 3 articulated. They look at the situation as a learning opportunity so they “can better assist” their children. The parents, when it comes to their expectations of the kind of learning of their children, also tend to “lower down,” as Parent 10 uttered. They always remember that “the important thing” is that their children are “learning” at this difficult time. They likewise tell themselves “to embrace the reality,” as Parent 4 put into words. This form of acceptance is attributed to the reason that learning at home “is how learning takes place now.”

Phase 3: Textural and Structural Descriptions

From the initial data analysis that generated the themes, the researcher provides a textural description and structural description of the phenomenon. The themes are synthesized into a description of the texture or the “what.” Then, the textural description is examined from different perspectives or imaginative variation and eventually arrive at a description of the structure or the “how” (Moustakas, 1994). The following narrative is the discussion of the textural description and structural description of the lived experience of the parents on their involvement in the remote learning of their children amid the COVID-19 crisis.

Textural description. The participants used key terms such as “changes” and “challenges,” with related terms like “adjustment,” “adaptation,” “hardships” and “difficulties” in their narratives. One participant described parental involvement at this point as characterized by “changes now that we play a major role in teaching our child” which needed them to “adjust to many aspects” and eventually “embrace the reality” in the process. The parental involvement was also described by another participant as something that “challenges me as a mother on how to motivate her to study” which echoes the sentiments of other participants who elaborated that “I have difficulty with time” and it is particularly “hard to be a teacher to my child.”

Structural description. Most of the parents spoke of parental involvement as occurring in one central space that conflicts with other spaces in which the experience of parental involvement emerges. The remote learning as the central space is portrayed by one of the parents who highlighted that “I and my husband are hands-on when it comes to her remote learning.” The existence of other spaces of work and home is depicted by one participant who said, “I am working from home and I also do household responsibilities.” Furthermore, the nature of the central space and other spaces is overlapping which mirrors the struggles of the participants as they navigate through their multiple roles. As one parent explained that “I really find time to check on her, but I have difficulty with time. I arrive from work in the evening and I am exhausted to review her works.”

Phase 4: The Essence of the Lived Experience

Lastly, the textural description and structural description of the experience of the parents were then assimilated into a compound description of the phenomenon through the research process called “intuitive integration” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). This description serves as the structure of the fundamental “essence” which captures the meaning attributed to the experience of the parents on their involvement in the remote learning of their children amid the COVID-19 crisis. It is as follows.

The involvement of parents, specifically mothers, in the remote learning of their children amid the COVID-19 crisis is an experience that is fraught with many changes marking their family lives. It opens new levels of connection between the parents and children not only physically but also emotionally. Within the course of this experience, parents encounter various structural, pedagogical, and relational difficulties. However, parents rise above the situation to dynamically respond to the call of new challenges of parenting brought by the current global crisis.

Discussion

This transcendental phenomenology paper aimed to explore how parents, particularly mothers, live out their experience as they involve themselves in the remote learning of their children amid the COVID-19 crisis. This paper uncovered four emerging themes underlying the essence of the lived experience.

First, theme 1 expresses the initial encounter of parental involvement in the remote learning of children amid the COVID-19 crisis as “journeying through a myriad of changes.” Lee et al. (2020), in their survey, described that the educational migration to remote learning at home amid the COVID-19 crisis necessitated many changes for most of the parents. These involved changes as regards online resources, play dates, meal schedules, sleep patterns, and balancing duties. Many parents find it difficult as they also have to deal with changes in other spheres of their lives such as work. However,

despite these difficult changes, it can be noted that parents still appear to be open about the opportunities. Bubb and Jones (2020) found out that parents and children were quick to adapt to remote learning and it was well-received by them.

Furthermore, theme 2 “connecting with the child physically and emotionally” voices the wholistic aspect of parental involvement in the remote learning of children in virulent times. Jaiswal (2017) stated that parents play an active role in nurturing the development of their children. They provide financial support, emotional support, material support, and motivational support. Weis et al. (2006) added that through the involvement of parents, the children develop not only cognitive and social skills but also positive affective domain. Within the current context, Zainuddin et al. (2020) that remote learning at home offers an opportunity for parents and children to be with each other. This learning process occurring at home does not only offer physical attachment but also emotional bond.

On the other hand, theme 3 “experiencing multifaceted difficulties in the process” brings the struggling points in the experience of parental involvement in the remote learning of children during disruptive moments. The changes brought by the COVID-19 crisis have created barriers to the ways of providing moral, social, personal, and professional support in the bigger context of institutions (Alevizou, 2020). This claim holds true as well to parents who had to bear the remote learning of their children in their homes. Parents experience structural, pedagogical, and relational difficulties as they get more involved in the remote learning of their children. Zainuddin et al. (2020) affirmed that difficulties regarding the educational change to remote learning are expected to exacerbate inequalities especially across disadvantaged communities around the world.

Lastly, theme 4 “responding to the call of new challenges of parenting” shows the resolution of the experience of parental involvement in the remote learning of children amidst the current situation. Bhamani et al. (2020) uncovered that to address the challenges of remote learning, parents use strategies such as following a strict schedule and occupying children with creative activities. It is important that parents keep a positive response to the challenges. A recent study by Morelli et al. (2020) showed that the confidence of the parents of their abilities mediated the influence of psychological distress

and regulatory emotional efficacy of parents on the emotional regulation and negativity of the children. Applying its implication to the context of remote learning, it is important that parents maintain optimism in the remote learning of their children as these elements create a ripple effect on the learning outcomes of their children.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of parental involvement in the remote learning of children amid the current challenging period presents a timely need to capture history through the lived experience at the present moment. Following the Husserlian transcendental approach in phenomenology, this paper aimed to explore how parents, specifically mothers, give meaning to their involvement in the remote learning of their children through interview procedures. Set in the context of a developing country and amid the global crisis, this paper contributes information in this particular field of interest.

The result of this study initially generated significant statements that formed the four emerging themes of the lived experience of the parents as they involved themselves in the remote learning of their children. These themes highlight the experience of parental involvement as 1.) journeying through a myriad of changes; 2.) connecting with the child physically and emotionally; 3.) experiencing multifaceted difficulties in the process; and 4.) responding to the call of new challenges of parenting. Furthermore, these themes of the lived experience of parents can be framed within the textural description and structural description of common expressions and intersecting spaces. These themes and descriptions create the statement of the essence of the lived experience of parents as they involved themselves in the remote learning of their children amid the COVID-19 crisis.

This paper, through the compound description of the phenomenon, contributes theoretical knowledge about how involvement in the remote learning of children is experienced by a group of parents, specifically mothers, in a developing country and amid a disruptive period. Several practical insights can also be drawn from this study for future crisis planning in education. These lessons include the development of relevant intervention programs that will address the needs of parents, particularly home teaching

methods and behavior management strategies, during emergencies that necessitate education to be transferred at home; the creation of a unit in schools to promote emergency preparedness among the parents, guardians, caregivers, and learners; and the establishment of effective communication channels among the parents, learners, teachers, school administrators, local government units, and other concerned agencies.

Some limitations should also be carefully observed when interpreting the results of this work. First, while the number of participants in this study was adequate based on the sample guidelines, the researcher believes that the data saturation has not been completely reached. It should be further noted that all parents involved in this research were mothers. It would be equally interesting to obtain the perspectives of fathers as regards their involvement in the remote learning of their children. Lastly, as online interviews offered feasible means to gather the needed data for this paper amid the restrictions, it would have been better if online observations were also performed. It is recommended that researchers build on these points to fully explore other possible themes in different contexts in the future.

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