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Research Article

Online teaching experiences during a global crisis: Private school teachers' narratives in the Emirates

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ABSTRACT

The educational sector, like many other aspects of human life worldwide, has faced unparalleled challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This study investigated the perspectives of conveniently selected secondary school teachers at a private school in the United Arab Emirates regarding the transition from in-person to online teaching, aiming to enhance the effectiveness of online learning. Employing a qualitative-descriptive design, the study generated findings that revealed that utilizing diverse teaching strategies and creating interactive online learning environments promoted student engagement. Moreover, teachers established a friendly and secure online classroom where students were encouraged to actively participate and share their thoughts on the subject matter. However, several challenges were identified, including technological difficulties, low student engagement, academic dishonesty, and feelings of isolation resulting from a lack of peer interaction, all of which significantly impacted the well-being of the participants. Despite these obstacles, teachers remained committed to their profession and maintained a passion for supporting their families. The study recommends encouraging teachers to continue integrating technology into the teaching and learning process, embracing innovative methodologies, and providing logistical and psychological support to effectively navigate the challenges posed by educational disruptions. Findings also provide a significant backdrop for the improvement of the implementation and effectiveness of digital education.

Keywords: *Online teaching, Pandemic, Private school teachers, United Arab Emirates*

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Introduction

The educational sector has not been exempt from the unprecedented challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected various aspects of human life worldwide. In particular, the pandemic has resulted in the compulsory adoption of virtual learning in educational institutions, resulting in diverse encounters among teachers and students alike, which have been noted to have an effect on the suitability of the teaching and learning milieu (Adnan, 2020; Bjursell, 2020). These encounters cover several limitations to online teaching and learning, including inadequate online teaching infrastructure, limited teacher exposure to online teaching, information gaps, and non-conducive home learning environments (Ali, 2020; Milan & Lemana, 2023; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021; Zhang, 2020).

During such a crisis, teachers have to play the dual task of teaching students via technological applications while also teaching themselves how to use them (Chatterjee & Chakraborty, 2020). Furthermore, while the provision of opportunities for interaction between students and teachers is a key advantage of face-to-face teaching, it may be challenging to replicate in distance education settings, particularly in the absence of adequate training (Joshi et al., 2021; Kundu & Bej 2021). This reveals that despite efforts to replicate the social, cognitive, and pedagogical dimensions of traditional classroom settings, online education falls short in replicating the intricate nature of classroom environments, including classroom management, arrangements, interactions, and spaces. With this, teachers faced the challenge of insufficient student engagement, as some learners exhibited a tendency towards absenteeism during virtual class sessions and non-completion of designated coursework. This circumstance posed a difficulty for educators in establishing a meaningful learning connection with their learners (Pratiwi & Priyana, 2023; Owusu-Fordjour et al., 2020). Additional accounts show that accessing a dependable internet connection was challenging, owing to geographical or financial limitations. As studies prove, this problem has been highlighted in countries like Bangladesh (Al-Amin et al., 2021), Malaysia (Chung et al., 2020), Ghana

(Adarkwah, 2021), the Philippines (Barrot et al., 2021), South Africa (Chisango & Marongwe, 2021), among others. These studies report that issues in the internet connection impeded teachers' ability to facilitate virtual lessons and engage with their learners.

From a bigger view, this unprepared and hasty shift to online teaching raised questions not only about the effectiveness of online teaching itself but largely about the ways the technology is learned and adopted by the teachers and the ways the learning is delivered through this mode. As teachers bear significant responsibilities in the execution of online learning and addressing any encountered obstacles, they have been found to be caught unaware of the situation and propelled to develop novel approaches to instruction and education during online classes (An et al., 2021; Howard et al., 2021; Nieto-Escamez & Roldán-Tapia, 2021). For instance, they had to integrate diverse multimedia materials, including videos, audio recordings, and digital textbooks, into their curriculum to effectively involve students and encourage participatory learning (Aswat & Tayibu, 2022; Ferri et al., 2020). Simultaneously, teachers were compelled to employ interactive pedagogical techniques, such as quizzes, polls, and games, to captivate pupils and furnish avenues for formative evaluation to facilitate the students in maintaining their motivation and engagement toward their educational pursuits during the pandemic (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Nieto-Escamez & Roldán-Tapia, 2021).

Like any other country in the world, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) faced the daunting task of providing online education to 1.2 million students seemingly overnight (Khan et al., 2022; Masoud & Bohra, 2020). This was despite the fact that the UAE government had been planning for distance education through its smart learning programs since 2012. In early March 2020, the Ministry of Education issued an order mandating the closure of educational buildings, marking the beginning of a process that would ordinarily take several years or perhaps decades. Such a rapid transition from traditional in-class learning to remote learning may unfortunately lead to the overlooking of some aspects, including the suitability of the

technology and learning environments (Khan et al., 2022). Moreover, other schools in the country have run very quick and short training sessions for teachers, mostly online, focusing mostly on the features of the online platform, video conferencing apps, registration procedures to the system, and delivering lessons through a number of ways, including pre-recorded lectures and live sessions (Crawford et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2022).

On one hand, UAE government schools have been found to be in a favorable position due to their pre-existing infrastructures for e-learning, even before the onset of the pandemic (Khan et al., 2022). This is because the Ministry of Education has made available a range of platforms and educational resources for distance learning, which has helped to alleviate the challenges faced by public teachers and students (Almarashdi & Jarrah, 2021; Bawa'aneh, 2021; Khan et al., 2022). On the other hand, while public schools have been prepared by the government, it is possible that private schools in the UAE have adopted a unique perspective in addressing the issue of online learning amidst the pandemic.

As it appears, there is a significant dearth of scholarly literature pertaining to the manner in which teachers within the private school system assimilate and implement transitional online pedagogical approaches. Since this study sheds light on the teachers' online teaching approaches, challenges, and reasons to persist, the results of the study could enhance comprehension and expand the range of information pertaining to teachers' experiences in online educational settings. Ultimately, this could provide a significant contribution to the improvement of the implementation and effectiveness of digital education in privately owned schools located in the United Arab Emirates.

Methodology

The research design utilized in this study was qualitative-descriptive in nature whose objective is to generate descriptive narratives or textual depictions of the phenomena being investigated (Doyle et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2017). Qualitative-descriptive researchers focus on comprehending the distinct context of individual human experiences. This approach

necessitates adaptable and evolving research methods that are inductive in nature, yet preserve the integrity of the data without distorting it beyond recognition (Doyle et al., 2020; Ormston et al., 2014).

This study was conducted at one Philippine school in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. It is a school that follows the Philippine curriculum with an integration of the UAE curriculum for the mandatory teaching of culture, moral education, and the Arabic language. Furthermore, the school is run and operated by a group of Filipino businessmen and educators since 2013. While this is a Filipino school, it also accepts foreign students. This locale was determined based on convenience and practicality on the part of the researchers. Meanwhile, the participants of the study were 10 high school teachers, chosen via convenience sampling with a set of inclusion criteria: must be Filipino, working as a high school teacher, currently employed in this school and teaching online classes during the pandemic, and willing to be interviewed. While there were 12 high school teachers in this school that were invited, only 10 agreed to participate. Each of the participants was given a pseudonym (i.e., Teach1, Teach2, Teach3... Teach10).

The commencement of data-gathering procedures was authorized by the research committee of the Philippine Emirates Private School. Subsequently, following a thorough exposition of the study's nature and objectives, the participants indicated their assent to participate by means of their signed consent forms. The guide's validation was carried out by five research experts. The researchers then conducted virtual in-depth interviews via Microsoft Teams' online video conferencing. Each interview, which made use of a validated questionnaire covering questions about teaching approaches, challenges experienced, and motivations/reasons for working during the pandemic, lasted for 30 to 60 minutes. Following the completion of each semi-structured interview, the researchers proceeded to transcribe and code the recorded data. In the process of transcription, the researchers employed codes in lieu of actual names.

The present study employed data analysis techniques as recommended by Moustakas

(1994) to examine the collected data. During the coding process, the researchers utilized horizontalization, which involves identifying and emphasizing noteworthy statements, sentences, or quotations that elucidate or depict the phenomenon under investigation. Upon completion of the entire data analysis process, each participant was subsequently requested to review the data once more and verify its precision. Ultimately, the accuracy of the data analysis was validated by three external research evaluators. Similarly, the researchers upheld an audit trail and maintained a reflective record throughout the entirety of the investigation, guaranteeing that the conclusions drawn were solely derived from the collected data and analyzed through rigorous theories and previous research.

Results

Teaching Approaches in Online Learning

Utilizing Different Online Learning Platforms. As online learning requires teachers to be patient with their students, they make sure that they are involved in classes regardless of how difficult it is to cope with this modality of learning. For the participants, in order to keep students interested and motivated throughout the learning process, as well as to give them a better grasp of difficult or abstract ideas, it is essential to use digital learning platforms that allow for the creation of multimedia content.

Online learning provides students with an abundance of information and resources at their fingertips. I try to make use of them so that my students can exercise their imaginations while studying online, like by making thought maps, generating digital storybooks, creating and editing vlogs, and stuff like that. – Teach1

Meanwhile, one of the participants imparted that she used various software to motivate students to be active and to check her students regularly and know when they handed in their work and activities. She expressed:

Aside from Teams, I am using Insights. I can see the activities that they've attached through that software. I make sure

to check in on time and use tools such as Google Forms. With that, I am able to check their work easier and I am able to give feedback... Hassle-free, efficient, and helpful for me and my students in many ways. – Teach2

Other teachers were also expressing how various online applications can help them with their lesson delivery:

I use innovative ways of engaging the students like online learning platforms like Mentimeter and Slido. They are fun to use, you know, interactive and attractive. Also, CourseWorks Discussion Board, where my students can collaborate on responses to a text or prompt, actively participate in class talks, and build off each other's understanding by using the threaded discussions feature. I use it, especially in our literature class. – Teach4

I prepare my PowerPoint presentation or something that I can show to the students and then we have a discussion; of course, I include the use of technologies introducing "Kahoot" to the students, having games, and other online applications. And the best thing here, they are mostly free online. – Teach5

When I use online games and quizzes, my students are more likely to comprehend and remember the lesson. They are also able to modify their comprehension and use of the concepts as new material is introduced and different contexts are encountered. This will help them develop their critical thinking skills... you know, the pandemic has been hard for all of us, I'm just trying my best to make learning a light and fun thing. – Teach7

The use of different online learning platforms vis-à-vis remote classes propelled by the pandemic helps teachers to engage their students in lessons more. Teachers share that the use of easily available online platforms promotes improved learning by giving students greater control over their education. Moreover,

they think that while they acknowledge the difficulties associated with online education, they also opine that with the proper resources, online learning can be a rewarding experience for students.

Encouraging Student Engagements. This theme delineates the usefulness of group dynamics in online learning which, according to the participants, can make students stay interested, develop a feeling of belonging, and hone their virtual teamwork skills. Although some students prefer working on their own, teachers consider assigning collaborative work as one of their teaching approaches because they have seen how this enriches the learning experience of students by taking shared ownership and responsibility for their learning while also being helped to build community and combat potential feelings of isolation or disconnection during the pandemic.

I do my best to integrate group dynamics by letting students figure out the lesson by themselves and allowing them to work together. This is different from physical class activities, but still, I want the students to talk, comment, and collaborate. They are assigned to meet one another virtually and talk among themselves. This is an avenue for the development of critical reasoning, speaking, time management, and leadership identities of students, especially during crucial times such as today. – Teach2

I let the students discover what the topic is all about. I give them a topic per group then let them collaborate on how they are going to report it. To make it systematic, I give responsibilities to each group member and rotate them on a regular basis. Different students can take on different roles, such as facilitator, notetaker, summarizer, and action manager. Learning teamwork here is learning how the real world works. – Teach 4

For these teachers, student collaboration is a fundamental spice of an effective online teaching. These statements express that online classrooms may provide students with more

chances for learning through interaction, collaboration, and individual responsibility than traditional classrooms. Hence, teachers suppose that real-world teamwork is modeled through collaborative efforts. They think their students gain valuable skills for the modern workplace through these group projects, such as communication, collaboration, and time management. Plus, collaborative learning not only offers students the chance to engage in team building and create positive group dynamics, but it also helps bring together students who may have felt isolated.

Welcoming Students' Feedback. While the majority of teachers and students across the globe are still navigating uncharted territory when it comes to online education, the participants feel that they needed to get feedback from their students regarding their online instruction. For them, this presents an excellent opportunity to inquire about particular challenges, in addition to proposing and receiving ideas and recommendations. They also highlighted how feedback is more crucial in online classrooms than in traditional ones.

It was not difficult to get feedback from students when I taught in a conventional classroom setting because I was able to communicate directly with them. I could do this by simply observing the behavior of each student and gauging how actively they are responding to my inquiries. In online education, I may not frequently interact with my students. So, I seek for comments weekly through Google forms. Comments helped me reflect on areas I need to improve on and I can use to connect more with my learners. – Teach3

I use Padlet; there my students are allowed to leave anonymous notes and comments regarding the session of the day. It's a fantastic method for eliciting as many answers as feasible. I feel it's effective because my students pay closer attention during class; it made them feel they were valued. It's a way to motivate them to learn effectively. In fact, it's a way for me to learn more from them. – Teach4

Teachers' narratives connote that with this kind of strategy, they can tailor their lessons to their learners' shared passions and interests so they could be more motivated and secure in their knowledge. By welcoming comments and suggestions from their learners, they were able to discover more ways to interact with them and other people. With this, one participant accentuated the importance of addressing various learning styles in online classes:

Teachers can advance to the next higher level of teaching when they solicit comments and suggestions for development from their learners and work to implement those. I believe every learner has a unique learning potential that can be nurtured; lending an ear to them is opening the door to their total development. We know, these kids of the 21st century know more in terms of technology; it's good for me to learn a thing or two from them. I may grow into a better teacher, one who has been confronted off-guard with the demands of online learning due to COVID-19. –Teach7

Participants are assertive about the notion that the feedback provided by students towards their teachers' way of teaching is beneficial to the overall process of online education. They have expressed their willingness and openness to receive feedback with the idea that for education to come to fruition, teachers are not dictators; they are accommodating listeners, most especially during a crucial time when everyone, teachers and students alike, is affected by the impacts of a global crisis.

Creating an Amiable Online Class. Teachers provide a welcoming relationship with their students to build a better learning environment online. For these teachers, implementing the "new normal" in the midst of an ongoing abnormal situation is already a challenging endeavor for many individuals. Hence, they endeavor to acclimate themselves and their learners to the recent changes that have impacted their lives by consistently implementing a positive and friendly student-teacher relationship.

When a teacher and student get along well during online classes, it's a good thing. They build trust and respect for each other. So, like, I try my best to know my students, give them some options, motivate them to be better learners every day, and even allow them to commit mistakes. I do this to show some love and support – we all need that now. –Teach4

If you're chill with your students, they'll do better in class and your classroom will be a cool and friendly place for everyone. I don't wanna come off as scary to them, you know? Why add up to the terror which the pandemic has given us? –Teach5

Despite the increased amicability and flexibility of teachers in online classes, it remains imperative for them to establish boundaries to prevent the possibility of exploitation or manipulation of the teacher-student relationship.

I treat my students as my friends but I am not saying that should be the treatment because they might be taking advantage of it; chill and not able to see the limitations of a teacher. –Teach2

Well, yeah, I'm a cool teacher, I can be strict sometimes on a positive note. Being strict towards the students is a good thing. Drawing a line is needed so that they don't go overboard and take things for granted. Yes, teachers are new to implementing online classes, but teachers are teachers. We need to facilitate our classes well. –Teach6

Participants have reported that exhibiting a friendly and approachable demeanor towards their learners can mitigate the challenges and psychological disruptions they encounter while pursuing their education during the ongoing global health crisis. However, these teachers have also emphasized the necessity for a certain level of discipline. Overall, they believe that there is an experience of inclusivity when positive relationships between teachers and students are present within a classroom setting. It

can be noted that for them it is imperative for an online classroom to foster an atmosphere that is conducive to learning. This can be achieved by promoting a culture of mutual respect, open communication, and enthusiastic engagement between the teacher and learners.

Challenges of Online Teaching

Technical Difficulties and Unpreparedness. With the sudden transition to online learning, it is inevitable for teachers to experience challenges pertaining to technology. Technical difficulties experienced by teachers vary from poor internet connection to glitches in online platforms and even understanding how to use educational technologies. In terms of internet-related issues, one participant explained that because of having no internet connectivity on the campus, on one school day, all teachers were rather advised to go home. This was the case for them since teachers had to come to school where they would conduct online classes while their students were attending classes from home.

It's a very rare occurrence, but when we were in school, we lost the internet connection because we lost electricity in the whole building. So the classes were canceled at that time while they fixed the problem. –Teach1

When there were interruptions in the internet connection, teachers and students alike could not proceed with the next parts of the class. At some other time, due to this problem, they shared that many of their students could not join classes, hence the absences. Teachers are nevertheless found to be accommodating and understanding when these problems arise.

Some students have trouble with their internet connection when they're doing tasks like reporting or performing. Sometimes they get cut off or I can't hear them. There are also students who have issues with their laptops and microphones. Some of them just type their answers and say their mic isn't working, so they can't really participate. –Teach3

One time, my students complained that they couldn't hear me because my internet connection was poor and my voice was distorted. So, I had to repeat what I already explained. That took 10 minutes of my time, which I could've used for an activity. –Teach5

Most of the time it's the student with internet connection problems. And usually because of this, I would only see a few attendees in the class. If a student has internet connection problems and I happen to give a task that day, then I would adjust the date of submission to give time for the student to know the lesson and the task. –Teach4

From an alternative standpoint, the participants encountered challenges in devising and incorporating digital educational tools due to the sudden shift to the virtual learning environment. It can be acknowledged that the reason for their experience was attributed to insufficient teacher proficiency in adjusting pedagogical approaches for remote instruction.

There are so many cool ed-tech tools out there, but it's tough for me to get the hang of them right away. Sometimes it's kind of embarrassing that students know more about technology than us, teachers, they're always on their devices and stuff. I usually want to use online learning sites like 'menti.com' but I can't because I'm not really familiar with them. –Teach2

Similar to the global community, we experienced a sudden transition from traditional classroom instruction to virtual facilitation and dissemination of educational content. The lack of certainty regarding the correctness of our actions prompted us to seek input from our community to guide us toward the path deemed appropriate by them. But, I think we can acquire knowledge from this experience along the way. –Teach3

Participants expressed that technical difficulties were experienced in terms of poor internet connection, glitches, and the lack of knowing how to use educational platforms, which all can disrupt the class. While they have reported technical difficulties that have hindered the ability of students to actively engage in remote learning sessions, thereby suggesting that such difficulties may impede students' participation, they have found the opportunity to learn more about technological advances which they can apply to their teaching practices.

Lack of Student Engagement. With the absence of physical interactions, students tend to be less engaged in their studies. Less involvement from the students makes it much harder for teachers to teach their students and conduct lessons. Teachers' responses show that teachers have a harder time engaging their students in online learning due to this circumstance. For example, one teacher described how she really had to remind students multiple times to activate their cameras during virtual sessions because, accordingly to her, some students exhibit reluctance towards activating their cameras. She sometimes felt she was just alone in the online room.

Sometimes there wouldn't be any open camera and you wonder if there's someone watching or even listening while you talk. But when I ask questions, they are able to answer; there are just those that can't answer because they don't listen. These are passive students I have to put up with. –Teach1

Additionally, another challenge for teachers pertains to the issue of effectively involving students in the learning process. In the current times, students are compelled to transition towards the mode of online learning. This represents a novel approach to education for them. Engaging students in online teaching can be challenging for educators since students exhibit a tendency to become easily sidetracked and experience a decline in their ability to maintain focus, even in real-time instructional settings.

With the presence of games and other temptations online, it is sometimes very challenging for some of us teachers to really make sure that our students are listening to us or, you know, trying to internalize the lesson. –Teach3

Lately, some students have been absent in the first period because they slept late. So I tell them to try to sleep early to attend the first subject because I monitor the present and absent students. ...There are students who are fond of reciting. They are always the ones answering my questions. But I also encourage other students so that they also get to participate. –Teach4

Teachers are having trouble getting students to show up to class and pay attention to what they are teaching. From their point of view, this is a very big problem. Even if they impose the rules, it is hard to get them interested. Based on these insights, the lack of student engagement in the online class often involves the students not opening their cameras, not participating, not attending classes, and having their attention diverted away from the class.

Academic Dishonesty. With the new mode of learning, it is hard for teachers to monitor if the students are cheating with their schoolwork. According to the participants, not only are students cheating during assessments, but they are also not the authors of their work and falsifying the scores they give to the teachers.

It's normal parents would also be there to help them maybe they have someone who can help them so I cannot really tell that hundred percent that they're the ones who are making their outputs or it could be one challenge also is with the presence of you know different platforms for researches they will just type everything and research everything on the net so it's not really something. The idea there won't be something coming from them it could be searched. –Teach3

I ask them sometimes "Are you sure that that is really your score?" So of

course, they are too shy to correct their scores in front of the class so sometimes the students would message me privately saying "Ma'am sorry this is my actual score." So sometimes they are the ones who are directly messaging me saying they have corrections with their scores. – Teach4

Thus, from these responses, it is evident that teachers are challenged in terms of implementing academic integrity in the conduct of online classes. So, teachers carry the viewpoint that the evaluation methods employed to measure learning outcomes in online classes, such as formative or summative assessments, may not accurately reflect actual students' learning and performance due to the potential for cheating during these assessments.

Sudden Wave of Sadness. This theme explicates that in the course of online teaching, teachers may be emotionally vulnerable, which means, there are instances where loneliness occurs behind their screens. As for them, it is the distinctive instructional circumstances posed by online teaching that necessitate this circumstance, propelling them to fulfill novel expectations, which they perceive as evolving cultural standards. In particular, the absences and the lack of active participation of the students are usually the cause of teachers' short moments of sadness and disappointment.

Unhappy. Yeah, when you're teaching in person, you can see who's there and what they're up to. Some people are paying attention, others are snoozing. Hey, even though you're trying your best to teach in front of them, they're just not paying attention. Who wouldn't be bummed about that? – Teach1

I'm feeling kinda down. It frustrates me when nobody answers my questions in class. No matter what, I'll still hit up the student to make sure they're still in on the convo. – Teach5

It can be noted that the act of instructing in a virtual setting exacerbates both pedagogical

and interactional obstacles, leading to heightened sensations of susceptibility among teachers, implying that the transition to online teaching resulted in different faces of stress and emotional challenges for educators.

Propelling Forces to Stay Afloat

Passion and Dedication in One's Job. As the new normal becomes the stable layout for most occupations, teaching has been impacted dearly. A reason for teachers to strive amidst the situation they are currently facing is that it is their passion; it is what they worked hard for in attaining throughout their whole life. With that said, their passion for their job and their determination to keep their work on track serve as one of the reasons why they are still pushing through with their job. Furthermore, the respondents have mentioned that they have ample ways of implying passion in their work.

Yes, as a teacher, we have sworn that for better or for worse, we have to teach. Okay so, even if we are in the pandemic, we have to continue teaching and do double the work. I'm challenged, yes, but I am determined. – Teach1

My passion for teaching is the fulfillment that I have whenever I see that learning is there, that I'm helping the students, and that I have done something good for the students. This passion is unbreakable, not even a crisis can destroy it. – Teach3

I remain passionate about my job especially during the pandemic because I love those around me – my supportive co-workers, my sweet students, the kind and generous parents of my students... In this profession, I am growing, and I will continue teaching because this is my calling. – Teach 4

This is where I see the sense of fulfillment that I do anytime I see that students are learning, that I'm assisting them, and that I've done something positive for them. Since the school year has already begun

and I have already started working here, I am staying on for the benefit of my pupils since I don't want to leave them without a teacher in the least. – Teach5

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, educators remain resolute and committed to fulfilling their vocation as teachers. Their unwavering passion for teaching persists, undeterred by the current circumstances. This is the domain in which the participants envision themselves achieving personal satisfaction and flourishing.

Family Needs and Personal Necessities. For the participants, it is imperative for them with dependents to pursue employment opportunities while also attending to their personal needs and requirements. Securing employment to attain financial stability and lead an ethical lifestyle is a common aspiration among individuals, as it enables them to support their dependents and, above all, themselves. Notwithstanding the pandemic situation, this has served as a motivating factor for educators to persist in their efforts.

I have a family; I have a baby here, and I have kids in the Philippines also.. so my focus is on them. I provide for my family after all. –Teach1

Of course, I'm still working for...for the money, to earn, you know to have a living, to earn money, that's my number one reason for continuing this... this work. Yeah, risky but I need to earn to survive. – Teach3

The most important is the family, right? I have to continue working to provide for them in the Philippines. –Teach4

According to the participants' statements, providing financial support for their families and personal needs is a significant motivating factor for their continued employment. The necessity of securing a stable occupation provides a sense of tranquility, as it ensures the acquisition of a regular income that can be utilized for

personal sustenance or to support family members residing in one's country of origin.

Discussion

Teaching Approaches in Online Learning

The findings indicate that effective online teaching and learning experiences can be achieved through the utilization of online learning platforms, fostering student engagement, welcoming feedback, and creating a positive learning environment. Teachers are adapting to the "new normal" by striving to establish inclusive classrooms that prioritize mutual respect, open communication, and enthusiastic engagement. These findings align with the emphasis placed on varied teaching techniques and strategies by the University of Illinois Springfield's instructional strategies for online courses (University of Illinois Springfield, 2022), which highlight the importance of adapting to diverse learner needs and selecting strategies that align with specific educational objectives. While many instructional strategies available to educators were not originally designed for online instruction (Navarro & McGrath, 2022), online education can incorporate a range of teaching methodologies to accommodate different communication channels, such as student-student, student-faculty, faculty-student, faculty-faculty, student-others, and others-students. The instructional strategies outlined by the University of Illinois Springfield (2022) recommend the use of various approaches, including incorporating new technological methods like third-party videos and visual aids, to enhance interactivity and promote active learning. Furthermore, establishing a healthy, encouraging, and conducive online learning environment is essential (Pandit & Agrawal, 2022). This entails setting clear schedules, limiting screen time and distractions, incorporating engaging stimuli, addressing physical needs, recognizing small achievements, maintaining open communication with teachers, and seeking support when needed (Caprara & Caprara, 2022). By considering these factors, teachers can create an environment that supports students' academic growth and well-being (Aswat & Tayibu, 2022; Pratiwi & Priyana, 2023).

Challenges of Online Teaching

The findings illuminate the myriad challenges teachers encounter in the online learning environment, encompassing technical difficulties, student disengagement, academic dishonesty, and emotional strain. These challenges have emerged as a result of the substantial changes imposed upon teachers during the pandemic to ensure the continuity of student learning, including the adoption of remote and hybrid learning models and the integration of new technologies (Bawa'aneh, 2021; Ferri et al., 2020; Marshall et al., 2022). Yet, these changes are of paramount importance in fostering student learning and mitigating teacher attrition; hence, navigating these challenges effectively and deriving valuable lessons from teaching experiences amidst the COVID-19 pandemic is imperative. As the findings suggest, teachers have experienced burnout and decreased morale due to the increased workload and the need to adapt to new teaching methods rapidly. Hence, implications from studies of Baildon and Ong (2022) and Marshall et al. (2022) convey that school leaders and policymakers must be aware of the workload placed on teachers and provide them with professional development and support in implementing these changes. Additionally, they should consider virtual instruction options for specific student groups while prioritizing the well-being of teachers. Meanwhile, the introduction of new technologies and instructional approaches during the pandemic presents opportunities for positive impacts on future learning (Masoud & Bohra, 2020; Ferri et al., 2020). Hence, it is likewise important to evaluate the changes made to schooling during the crisis to identify which practices will endure beyond the pandemic (Brown & Krzic, 2021). In essence, the pandemic has provided valuable experiences that can inform how teachers, schools, and governments respond to maintain continuity in learning. However, significant work remains to be done to ensure students stay engaged in education and enhance the quality of learning, so encouraging teachers to continue utilizing the technologies implemented during the pandemic and fostering innovative practices are crucial for navigating the

challenges posed by COVID-19 while teaching (Brown & Krzic, 2021; Wekerle et al., 2022).

Propelling Forces to Stay Afloat

Teachers continue to exhibit unwavering dedication and passion for their profession amidst the current situation. Witnessing student learning and growth brings them profound fulfillment, motivating them to persevere. Moreover, the fulfillment of family needs and personal necessities serves as a strong driving force, ensuring financial stability and support for their dependents. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the impact of pandemic-related safety measures on teachers' productivity and their self-doubt in navigating unprecedented circumstances (Hargreaves, 2021; Taylor & Frechette, 2022). Despite these challenges, teachers have demonstrated remarkable efforts and devotion during the COVID-19 school closures, going above and beyond their call of duty (Jones & Kessler, 2020). The closure of schools has shed light on the essential role of teachers, leading to discussions on fair compensation that aligns with the demands of the teaching profession. Teachers face complex decisions, balancing their responsibilities as caretakers of students with their obligations to their own well-being and loved ones. In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the existing professional marginalization experienced by teachers for years (Hargreaves, 2021). Despite limited resources and adversities, teachers have showcased their ability to create remarkable impacts on students, families, and communities. Their resilience and dedication deserve recognition and support.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the potential for effective online teaching and learning experiences through the implementation of various strategies. By leveraging online learning platforms, fostering student interaction, providing feedback, and creating a supportive learning environment, educators have successfully adapted to the current paradigm shift. To ensure inclusivity and cater to the needs of diverse learners, it is crucial to employ a range of

pedagogical approaches aligned with educational objectives.

While online education offers advantages, challenges such as technical obstacles, student disengagement, academic dishonesty, and emotional stress persist. The study emphasizes the importance of addressing these issues through the support of educational administrators and policymakers. Measures like reducing workloads and organizing stress-relieving activities can help alleviate educators' burnout and low morale resulting from increased work expectations and the need to adapt rapidly.

The ongoing pandemic presents a unique opportunity to examine the benefits and drawbacks of online learning for future education. To develop sustainable strategies beyond the crisis, a comprehensive analysis of the implemented changes is necessary. Meanwhile, despite the challenges, educators have demonstrated unwavering dedication and passion for their work, finding fulfillment in witnessing their students' growth. The study underscores the exacerbated professional marginalization experienced by educators during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the need for recognition and support. Therefore, this study aims to draw government attention to the specific concerns and requirements of private school teachers transitioning to online pedagogy. It advocates for governmental intervention, policies, or initiatives to address the identified challenges and provide resources or training to empower private school teachers in navigating the online teaching environment successfully. By urging government involvement, the study seeks to contribute to the improvement of online education practices in private schools, benefiting both teachers and students alike.

While this study provided valuable insights into online teaching, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. Firstly, the study's narrow focus on one specific school in Abu Dhabi, UAE hinders the generalizability of the findings to a broader range of educational contexts. Secondly, the small sample size of only 10 high school teachers, selected through convenience sampling, raises concerns about the representativeness of the experiences captured. Additionally, the potential biases and subjectivity of the researchers may have influenced the

analysis and interpretation of the data, impacting the objectivity of the findings. Future research may be conducted to address these issues and further explore the phenomenon at hand.

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