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## Research Article

### Scaffolding Remote Learning: A Phenomenological Study of Parents' Experiences in Times of Pandemic

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## ABSTRACT

COVID-19 poses significant risks to global education. It has shifted traditional learning in the classroom to remote learning at home. The Department of Education initiated a continuity plan in the Philippines that applies a remote learning approach. In remote learning, parents became active participants by being solid scaffolds for their children's learning at home. Through a phenomenological design, the study explored the lived experiences of parents during the pandemic times. The data was gathered through one-on-one interviews with each of the six parent participants, with strict observance of basic IATF protocols like mask-wearing and social distancing. The collected responses were transcribed, examined, coded, and broken down into themes. After data analysis, three significant themes emerged: the description of parents' experiences in scaffolding their children's remote learning, the help extended by the parents to minimize academic stress, and the effects of remote learning on their children's education. The analyzed data revealed that parents became successful scaffolders amid the struggles and lack thereof. Furthermore, parents realized that, while remote learning may not be the best option for their children due to demotivation in learning, it is one way to keep their children safe while learning. Based on the findings, significant measures may be adopted by the Department of Education, teachers, parents, and future researchers, particularly in enhancing modules and learning environments that are more learner-centered.

**Keywords:** Pandemic, Parents, Phenomenological study, Remote learning, Scaffolding

## Introduction

At this time of educational crisis brought about by the novel coronavirus disease

(COVID-19), providing a strong scaffold through the efforts of parents became inevitable in order to ensure the safety of both

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teachers and students. A massive educational crisis did not spare first-world countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, let alone a third-world country such as the Philippines (Department of Health, 2021). The Department of Education (DepEd) puts forward a plan for safe educational continuity amidst the challenges of COVID-19. Classes shifted to distance learning through modular learning at home (DepEd Order No.014s, 2020). Remote learning at home may not be the best option, but it facilitates the young learners' needs and opportunities while COVID-19 is still fluid in the country. Numerous studies were conducted on the lived experiences of medical front-liners in times of pandemic (Karimi et al, 2020; Norful, 2021; Sadang, 2020; Sundler et al., 2019). However, limited studies were conducted on the lived experiences of parents, particularly in one of the remote public schools in the province of Zamboanga del Sur. Thus, this study aimed to increase the availability of empirical studies that would reveal parents' experiences in scaffolding remote learning during health and educational crises through a phenomenological study.

## Methods

The study used a phenomenological research design in qualitative method to examine the lived experiences of the parents in scaffolding the remote learning of their children. Furthermore, it was used to examine exactly how the participants made sense of their experiences. The researchers gathered data from the six parent-participants. The research sampling design used a purposive sampling based on the set criteria: (1) a parent who has a child officially enrolled during the school year 2020-2021 in one of the elementary schools in the

Province of Zamboanga del Sur; and (2) a parent actively involved in the learning of his or her child. The current study employed self-made, semi-structured guide questions for a one-on-one interview with the parent participants. The three experts, who were in the fields of education and qualitative research, validated the questions. Furthermore, an informed consent form was secured from the six participants, stipulating their approval to a video or audio recording and their freedom to withdraw from the proceedings at any time without any explanation. The parent participants' and their responses' anonymity was ensured. The responses in interviews were spoken in Bisaya, a vernacular language in Zamboanga del Sur, Philippines. The Bisayan responses were transcribed and translated into English. The data were then analyzed using Hycner's (1999, cited in Groenewald, 2004). The excitation process involves investigating the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole". It is a way of transforming the data through interpretation. This explication process has five 'steps' or phases: bracketing and summarizing each interview, validating it, and, where necessary, modifying it phenomenological reduction, Delineating units of meaning, clustering units of meaning to form themes, extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews, and making a composite summary.

## Results and Discussion

### *Parents Lived Experiences in Scaffolding Their Children's Remote Learning*

The result of explication is summarized in Table 1 shows the lived experiences of the parents in scaffolding their children's remote learning.

*Table 1. Parents Lived Experiences in Scaffolding Their Children's Remote Learning*

Theme	Sub-themes	Frequency of responses
1. Status of the Parent during Pandemic Crisis	Robust condition	(4) P1, P2, P3 & P4
	Strictly followed IATF (health) protocol	(3) P2, P3 & P4
	Financially challenged	(3) P1, P3, & P4
2. Handling their Children's Learning	Made time to teach	(4) P2, P3, P4, & P5
	Faced difficulty	(5) P1, P2, P4, P5 & P6

Theme	Sub-themes	Frequency of responses
3. Identified Problems in Answering the Modules	Unready to take the role of as a teacher at home	(2) P2 & P4
	Unready to embrace independent learning at home	(2) P1 & P5
	Difficulty in understanding the modules	P1, P2, P3, & P6

Legend: P - parent participant

Parents are considered successful scaffolders in tutoring their children and keeping them motivated and working on their tasks (Wood et al., 1976). Amidst the negative effects of remote learning, parents quickly adapt to the current environment to address the learning gaps that have emerged in their children's learning in these challenging times (Bhamani et al., 2020). This is evident from the status of the parents during the pandemic. Many experience robust conditions even with strict observance of the health protocol, while others are financially burdened and uneasy with the additional task at home.

*[I] am in good health (P3).*

*[There is] a need to follow the guidelines in Health Protocol (P3).*

*[I] am facing financial difficulty (P4).*

On the other hand, the COVID-19 crisis did not affect all families equally, but caused particular harm to children of low-income and less-educated parents and to preschool age children, who are especially sensitive to developmental inputs. Based on the gathered data, parental insights on the effects of remote learning on children are mixed. Some parents feel more connected to their child's schoolwork, while others see this as an additional burden. The findings further validated another claim (Adonis, 2021), where parents working from home will now have additional work like providing guidance in their children's schoolwork.

*Parents/Guardian need to give time with their children to answer the module (P2).*

*The child does not know to answer the module thus need time to be thought (P4).*

*[I am] facing difficulty in teaching my own child on how to answer the module (P1).*

*Mother faced difficulty in teaching her child in answering the module (P5).*

Teachers, who have been prime movers in education for decades, have stayed in the background, allowing parents to embrace the weight of their new roles as scaffolders of learning at home. Three significant themes emerged from the problems experienced by the parent-participants in assisting their own children in answering the modules: an unwillingness to take on the role of teacher at home, an unwillingness to embrace independent learning at home, and difficulty in understanding the module.

*Struggled to teach my child in answering the module because the parent [I] just attained elementary level (P4).*

*The child no longer knows how to write and read than with a teacher (P1).*

*The child tends to guess because even the mother does not know the answer (P5).*

*The child face difficulty in answering the module; it needs help from the parents (P3).*

*The student has gadgets to use for research yet has a hard time understanding researched material (P2).*

The findings reveal the unpreparedness of both parents and their children when handling remote learning at home. Both are inadequate with the skills and knowledge needed to handle modules due to the level of understanding of the students, and the level of educational attainment of the parents. Moreover, learning materials in the Philippines are more teacher-centered and book-centered, as parents often believe that their children can only truly learn when they are bombarded with more activities (Adonis, 2021).

### **Help Extended by the Parents to Minimize Academic Stress**

Table 2 displays one emerging theme on the help extended by the parent-participants to their children in remote learning which hold

scaffolding activities. There are four emerging themes namely do it yourself, call a friend-neighbor, and access online information and counter check answers.

*Table 2. Help Extended by the Parents to Minimize Academic Stress*

Theme	Sub-themes	Frequency of responses
1. Scaffolding activities of the Parent-Participants	Do it yourself	(5) P1, P3, P4, P5 & P6
	Call a friend- neighbor	(4) P1, P3, P5 & P6
	Access online information	(1) P2
	Counter check answers	(1) P6

Legend: P - parent participant

Majority of the participants confess that they answer the module themselves.

*If the child cannot answer the module, mother/grandparents will be ones who will answer. (P5)*

*Strive to help my child in answering the module. (P3)*

*The child will answer a little then the mother will finish answering the module. (P6)*

*Mother teach, assist and even strive to answer the child's module. (P1)*

While other parents affirm, they *call a friend-neighbor* in answering or understanding the modules.

*If the mother or grandmother cannot understand the module, neighbor's help is being sought (P5).*

Further, one parent see the need to go online for further understanding of the modules.

*If [the module] cannot be understood, [she] will use gadget with internet connection (P2).*

Lastly, one parent discloses that they extend help by checking the modules for incorrect answers.

*Checks answer of the child if it's correct (P6).*

From the findings, the parents validate collaboration between parents and children in learning activities allow them (parents) to become a source of comfort in easing pain and worry and engage in conversations with their children to help them in alleviating their anxiety (Magsambol, 2021). Moreover, Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) that parents who are 'successful scaffolders' focused their children's attention on the task at hand and kept them motivated and working on the task.

In the local context, an education psychologist stresses that the Philippines was never, in the first place, actually prepared for emergency remote learning (Adonis, 2021). They assert that during the early months of the school year, parents admitted that they sometimes accomplished the tasks assigned to their children because of the high level of difficulty and the number of activities they had to finish in a day. They lamented that the tasks were difficult even for adults with higher educational attainment.

### **Effects of Remote Learning on Children's Education**

Table 3 exhibits two emerging themes that affect remote learning of the children amid pandemic: the positive and negative effects.

*Table 3. Effects of Remote Learning on Children's Education*

Theme	Sub-themes	Frequency of responses
1. Positive Effects	Safe education at home	(4) P1, P2, P5 & P6
	Inexpensive education	(2) P1 & P2

Theme	Sub-themes	Frequency of responses
2. Negative Effects	Decreased quality in education	(5) P1, P2, P3, P4 & P5
	Demotivated pupils	(3) P1, P2 & P6
	Difficulty in workload	(2) P1 & P4
	Dependence on parents and other support individuals	(1) P2

Legend: P - parent participant

The positive effects of remote learning on children's education: safe education at home, and inexpensive education. Theme 1 on safe education at home was evident in the utterances of the participants.

*I can watch over my children inside our home (P1, P2 and P6).*

*The child can be take cared of at home, and be taught by the mother herself (P5).*

Theme 2 on inexpensive education on the part of the parents.

*No spending for allowance and fare going to school (P1 & P2).*

As the Department of Education postponed the opening of classes for the school year 2020-2021 from August 24 to current date. Learning of the pupils held at home in compliance with the directives of President Rodrigo Duterte to delay face-to-face classes until a coronavirus vaccine becomes available (Hohlfeld et al., 2010). This unprecedented challenges impact parental involvement in remote learning settings include economic resources (Eunoia Counseling, 2020); in the case of the participants, it lessens their expenses at home.

Four D's emerged as themes on the negative namely decreased quality in education effects of remote learning on children's education namely demotivated students, difficulty in workload, and dependence on parents and other support individuals. For Theme 1 on decreased quality in education emerge from the responses of five participants.

*[Children] learned a little compare to teachers who teach [them] (P1, P2, P3, P4, & P5).*

Theme 2 on demotivating the pupils to do modules is distinct in the responses of the participants as they articulate:

*The child became lazy in studying especially anwering the module (P1, P2 & P6).*

*The child is not motivated to answer if the parent is the one teaching (P5 & P6).*

Theme 3 on the difficulty in workload emerge as participants assert:

*Teaching child becomes a barrier to the parent (P1 & P4).*

*Teaching child becomes a barrier to the parent (P1).*

*For the mother, this [module] becomes additional workload at home (P4).*

One participant discloses theme 4 on too much dependence on the parents/guardians.

*The child depends in answering the module (P2).*

Diosdado San Antonio, education under-secretary for curriculum and instruction in the Philippines, "acknowledges that traditional learning was one of the flaws of the Philippine education system. Traditional mindsets take time to change" (Wang et al., 2020). This sudden change of the educational system to remote learning resulted to the adverse effects on children (Saavedra, 2021). Based on the findings, young learners are accustomed to interacting with other students and teachers as they work in groups, participate in classroom discussions alongside friends, and banter during break times. They are not accustomed to sitting in front of screens in isolation (or do pure module assignments), thus, lack of social interaction can reduce child's motivation.

Furthermore, despite the heroic efforts of most countries, education opportunities, quality and effectiveness remain low [16]. In the recent survey of government responses to COVID-19 by UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank reveal that in only half of the cases there is close monitoring of the usage of remote learning. And in those cases, remote learning is being used by less than half of the student population. Therefore, he further claim parents now have a completely different perspective on

how much they can do to support their children's learning. Alongside with the effort to support their own children, the parents also need to increase in collaboration between school administrators, teachers, and parents to reach a balance in minimizing both the negative health and education impacts.

## Conclusion

COVID-19 challenged the educational system in the Philippines to promote safe educational continuity (Department of Health, 2021). As a result, teachers, who have been the primary drivers of education for decades, have remained in the background, allowing parents to embrace the weight of their new role as co-teachers at home. During the educational crisis, the majority of parents became active participants in continuing education under the new normal by serving as a strong scaffold for their children's remote learning at home (Bhamani et al., 2020). Remote learning at home may not be the best option, but it meets the needs and opportunities of young learners while COVID-19 is still in effect in the country.

The scaffolding work of the parents remains crucial to the future level of growth of the child in the proximal development region (ZPD). Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is the field between what a learner can do by himself and what can be achieved with the support of a knowledgeable peer or instructor. By introducing scaffolding practices into the ZPD, a child can be taught any topic effectively. Through learning events, learners are escorted and monitored to get them to the next level.

The findings of the study reveal that, though parents are inadequate in skills to assist their children's learning, along with the additional workload at home, they strive to do well and are determined to invest time and guidance in their children. To minimize academic stress experienced by the pupils, parent participants did scaffolding activities such as, but not limited to, doing the modules themselves, calling a friend or neighbor, accessing online information, and counter-checking the answers done by their children. Parent-participants take the effects of remote learning on children's education from

two perspectives: the positive effects referred to safe education at home and inexpensive education in times of crisis; and the negative effects summarized in the 4Ds, namely decreased quality in education, demotivated pupils, difficulty in workload, and dependence on parents and other support individuals.

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