

ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' REFLECTIVE JOURNALS: BASIS FOR AN ACTION PLAN TO PROMOTE QUALITY EDUCATION AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

FRANCES GRACE J. JETOMO

Sorsogon State University
jetomo.frances@sorsu.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

Education, in this unprecedented time, takes on a new landscape, and therefore students face new challenges. The purpose of this action research is to propose an action plan based on the profile of 77 Grade 8 students in a public high school in the province of Sorsogon and the issues revealed in their survey responses and reflective journals utilizing quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative data shows that most of them are from small or medium families which mostly belong to the poor or low-income sector. Almost half of the respondents are either the eldest or the only child in the family. Twenty of them are only using smartphones for online classes. The qualitative section reveals that the issues mostly revolve around their struggle in adjusting to online classes. The major problem encountered by a significant number of students is poor signal or internet connection. Other notable concerns are the number of activities and projects given and poor social life. An action plan is proposed based on the result of the study to give recommendations to the students, area chair, subject teachers, parents, and school officials on how to help the students cope and learn well in their online classes. Mainly, they need help to improve their time management skills and relational life. Hence, the teachers, parents, school officials, and other stakeholders are encouraged to take appropriate actions to address the concerns and suggestions expressed by the students regarding online classes to promote quality education amidst the COVID19 pandemic.

Keywords: *Distance education, reflective journal, action research, online classes*



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons
[Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Published by the National Research Council of the Philippines

INTRODUCTION

The onset of the COVID-19 crisis in the Philippines led the government to implement the Luzon-wide lockdown starting March 16, 2020. By then, the school year on all levels has not yet ended; therefore, distance learning has become the new norm. In the case of a public high school in Sorsogon, the School Year 2019-2020 ended by the end of May 2020. Hence, the students had a two-month break from school (June-July); but due to the challenges in preparing for the new normal in education and all the health protocols and restrictions, the start of the subsequent school year for basic education in public schools in the country was moved from August 2020 to October 2020, allowing for an additional two-month break from academics. The aforementioned public high school started the school year 2020-2021 on October 5, 2020, adopting online learning. The school has set up its learning management system and allowed the faculty to use other platforms like Google classroom to streamline the process of sharing files between teachers and students. Furthermore, synchronous and asynchronous learning modes were implemented. During synchronous sessions, the teachers conduct lectures, discussions, recitations, and other online activities with the students in real-time via Google Meet, Zoom, or other video conferencing platforms. When it comes to asynchronous sessions, the students are given tasks, assignments, or projects to accomplish during different hours and from different locations (Chou, 2002; Johnson, 2006; Mahoney & Hall, 2020; Offir et al., 2008; Rehman & Fatima, 2021; Yamagata-Lynch, 2014).

With this new set-up brought about by the pandemic, students are expected to encounter problems and challenges (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Dhawan, 2020; Hebebcı et al., 2020; Iivari, 2020; Lamsal, 2022; Longhurst, 2020; Neuwirth et al., 2021; Selvaraj et al., 2021). Some students may lack proper guidance and attention from their parents or guardians (Garbe et al., 2020; Garcia de Avila, 2020; Yuliejantiningasih, 2020). Furthermore, they may show behavioral problems which may affect their academic performance (Ellis et al., 2020; Muilenburg & Berge, 2005; Niemi & Kousa, 2020; Seyahi et al., 2020). Embedded in Ambisyon Natin 2040 of the National Economic and Development Authority (2016) is the goal for children to “receive quality education so that they realize their full potentials and become productive members of society.” Also, parents should provide “care, guidance, health, and education services” to their children. In addition, educators are expected not just to help students “obtain competencies but also develop character qualities” among the learners which may require adjustment in the “mode of delivery” of instruction (NEDA, 2016).

These parental and instructional responsibilities take on a new landscape especially due to the new normal in education. This new setup has led to challenges for parents and teachers, particularly for students. According to Muilenburg and Berge (2005), there are eight factors of student barriers to online learning, which are as follows: “(a) administrative issues, (b) social interaction, (c) academic skills, (d) technical skills, (e) learner motivation, (f) time and support for studies, (g) cost and access to the Internet, and (h) technical problems.”

In a survey conducted on students in Turkey and Denmark during the pandemic, Seyahi et al., (2020) found that a considerable number of students in both countries “expressed loneliness, boredom, and anxiety towards the future.” Other complaints that they noted are “decreased physical activity, sleep problems, eating disorders, and domestic abuse.”

Ellis et al. (2020) conducted a study “to examine stress associated with the initial COVID-19 crisis and the role of recommended coping strategies on mental health indicators among mid-to-late adolescents”. They emphasized that the factors which alleviate loneliness during the pandemic are the time spent with the family and connecting with friends virtually, as well as physical activity. Emphasis was also given to the importance of helping adolescents cope especially in this time of crisis.

Niemi and Kousa (2020) of the University of Helsinki, Finland conducted a case study of students’ and teachers’ perceptions in a Finnish high school during the COVID pandemic. Based on their findings, motivation is a key ingredient to empowering students’ capacity for online learning alongside “life management skills - how they organize their days, balance distance school and leisure time, and learn to maintain their wellbeing.”

Qualitative research conducted by Rahiem (2021) in Indonesia explored selected state university students’ learning motivation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results showed that the students were able to remain motivated due to their “mental fortitude,” encouragement from their social groups, especially from their families and friends, and their learning atmosphere and facilities.

With the need to address issues concerning online learning, this study focused on identifying and describing the situation of Grade 8 students whose ages range from 13 to 14 years old. Needless to say, it is a crucial stage of development especially as they adjust to a higher level of schooling. Consequently, teachers should be more intentional in dealing with these students well, especially those who are struggling at home and in their online classes to help them reach their potential as learners despite the pandemic.

This study is expected to be beneficial to the following: to educators since they can have objective knowledge about students' issues which may affect their behavior; to the students' well-being for improved academic performance and social life; to the guardians or parents for they will be helped in raising their children well, especially during this time of pandemic in which students are forced to stay at home; and to the school administrators and other stakeholders as the findings of this research can be one of the bases for policy-making to ensure quality education amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

OBJECTIVES/PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The goal of this study is to identify the challenges encountered by Grade 8 students in a public high school in Sorsogon based on their profile and reflective journal to help address their problems and needs concerning their online classes to make sure that quality education continues amidst the pandemic. By identifying the challenges that they have encountered, this study also aims to propose an action plan so that the teachers, parents, school officials, and other stakeholders would know how to help the students cope and learn well in their online classes. This paper, therefore, addresses these research questions: 1) What is the profile of the Grade 8 students? 2) What challenges did the students encounter during the COVID-19 pandemic based on their reflective journals? 3) What actions can be proposed to address the challenges encountered by the students?

METHODOLOGY

This study is action research. It is defined as a wide variety of evaluative, investigative, and analytical research methods designed to diagnose problems or weaknesses—whether organizational, academic, or instructional—and help educators develop practical solutions to address them quickly and efficiently (Glossary of Education Reform, 2015). Moreover, Hult and Lennung (1980) define it as follows:

Action research simultaneously assists in practical problem-solving and expands scientific knowledge, as well as enhances the competencies of the respective actors, being performed collaboratively in an immediate situation using data feedback in a cyclical process aiming at an increased understanding of a given social situation, primarily applicable for the understanding of change processes in social systems and undertaken within a mutually acceptable ethical framework.

Other literature and studies describe action research as collaborative in nature because it involves the researcher, informants, stakeholders, and other participants, especially in terms of addressing existing problems and issues within an organization or institution given the research findings (Coghlan et al., 2014; Herr & Anderson, 2014). However, Banks et al. (2017) posit that:

not all action research is participatory in design and process, and not all participatory research is action-oriented. Nevertheless, there is usually some element of participation in action research (particularly in implementing findings), and some element of action in participatory research (as co-researchers learn and change during the process).

This research is evaluative, investigative, and analytical in nature in that it seeks to assess the students' experiences relative to online learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic zooming in on the challenges that they have encountered. Furthermore, this research is collaborative in that the action plan involves the students themselves, their parents, the subject teachers, and the school officials in addressing the problems to help improve the teaching-learning process despite the limitations.

The public high school adopted online learning with a Learning Management System (LMS) set in place. In this public high school, synchronous and asynchronous sessions are held following a class schedule. In a week, there are four (4) subject teachers who hold at least one virtual meeting with the class and give assignments to be accomplished for the week, while four (4) other subject teachers give activities that students can accomplish asynchronously.

The school offers Junior High School (Grades 7 to 10) and Senior High School (Grades 11 and 12). During the school year 2020-2021, Grade 8 and Grade 12 had two classes, while the rest of the grade levels had one class. The researcher purposefully chose the Grade 8 students to focus on a particular grade level and have a qualitative approach through students' reflective journal entries. In addition, they will be staying in the public high school for two to four more years if they decide to pursue their senior high school there taking the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) strand. Hence, it is ideal to know their academic concerns to address them early on and help them reach their potential. The Grade 8 students are composed of 77 students (33 boys and 44 girls).

Mixed methods or quantitative and qualitative methods of research were utilized in this study. A survey questionnaire created by the researcher through Google forms was used to identify and describe the profile of the Grade 8 students. This provided information about the respondents' age, sex, number of siblings, birth order or position in the family, family income bracket, and the employment status of their parents or guardians. The questionnaire was checked and validated by the campus research coordinator of the school where this research was conducted after the research proposal was reviewed and approved by the school's Campus Evaluation and Review Committee (CERCom). It was sent to the Messenger group chats of Grade and Sections 8A and 8B, respectively. Of the 77 Grade 8 students, 67 were able to fill out the form. As a supplementary source of data, the researcher also referred to the results of the enrolment and survey forms for students. Descriptive statistics were used in the data analysis of the students' profiles, particularly frequency count and percentage.

Furthermore, the students were asked to write a reflective journal entry on at least two (2) pages for the month of November 2020. Data were collected from the students' reflective journals in which they were given six (6) open-ended guide questions which revolve around the following themes: 1) online classes, 2) instructional support, 3) relational life, and 4) emotions felt amidst the pandemic. This is the major part of the study. Quirkos, a simple data analysis software, was used to code and group each student's reflective journal entries by themes. Of the 77 Grade 8 students, 57 were able to submit their reflective journals. The journal entries were mainly used for the qualitative part of the paper.

Based on the students' profiles and reflective journal entries, the issues revealed were identified. Thereafter, an action plan was proposed based on the results of the study.

FINDINGS

Profile of the Grade 8 Students

In identifying and describing the profile of the Grade 8 students, the following are some of the salient points from the data gathered:

Figure 1

Number of Siblings of the Grade 8 Students, SY 2020-2021

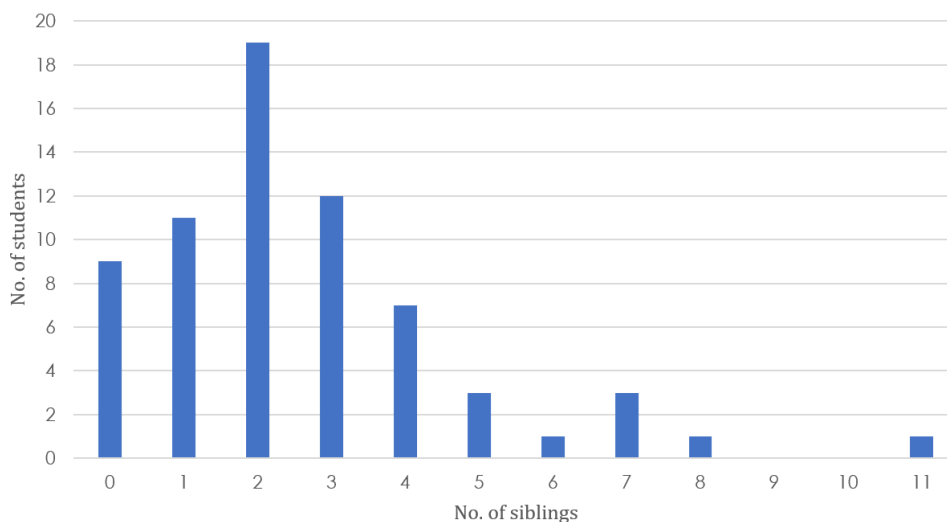


Figure 1 shows the number of siblings that the Grade 8 students have. It is noteworthy that of the 67 respondents, 19 (28.4%) have two siblings, 12 (17.9%) have three, 11 (16.4%) have only one sibling, 9 (13.4%) have no sibling, 7 (10.4%) have four, 3 (4.5%) have five, another 3 (4.5%) have seven, 1 (1.5%) has six, another 1 (1.5%) has eight, and another 1 (1.5%) has 11 siblings.

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2017), the average household size in the Philippines in 2015 was 4.4 persons. Mangahas (2012) elaborated that “Filipino families come in various sizes, here called Extra Small, Small, Medium, Large, and Very Large, or XS, S, M, L, and XL for short.” XS is composed of one or two persons, S has three to four, M has five to six, L has seven to eight, and XL has nine or more persons in the household.

Based on the findings, 58 (86.8%) of the 67 Grade 8 respondents belong to a small to medium family. Only nine (13.4%) belong to a large or very large family having seven or more family members. Larger families usually suffer more from economic deprivation compared to smaller ones (Mangahas, 2012). Parents from small to medium families are able to provide for the basic needs of their children to a higher

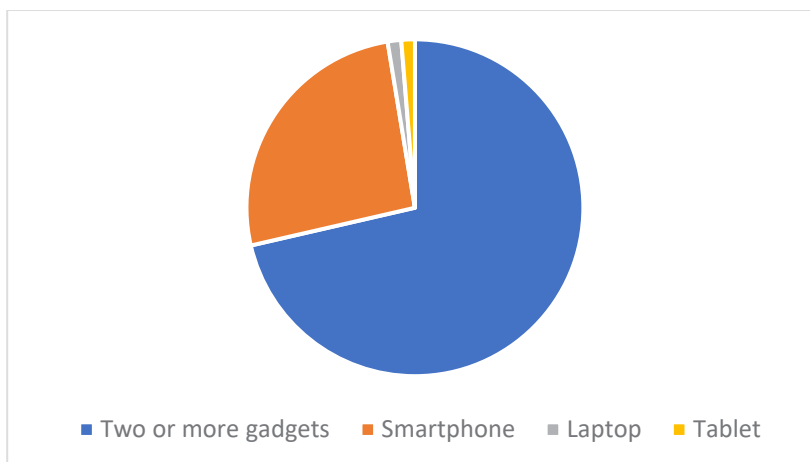
extent since they have fewer dependents. However, small to medium families may also experience financial struggle due to different factors such as the source of income, health issues, unemployment, overspending or having vices, poor financial management, etc. (Boadway et al., 2006). This is worthy of consideration, especially during a pandemic in which the economy suffers due to health protocols and restrictions. In the case of the students having online classes, they need to be provided with a gadget and a good internet connection or at least mobile data for online learning. This leads to the next table which shows the family income bracket of the Grade 8 students

The Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), as cited by Domingo (2020), released “income class brackets in the country, which the government uses to categorize families into social classes.” It states that as of 2018, the PIDS identified the following social classes (Table 1) based on monthly family incomes.

Table 1
Income class brackets of the Grade 8 students, SY 2020-2021

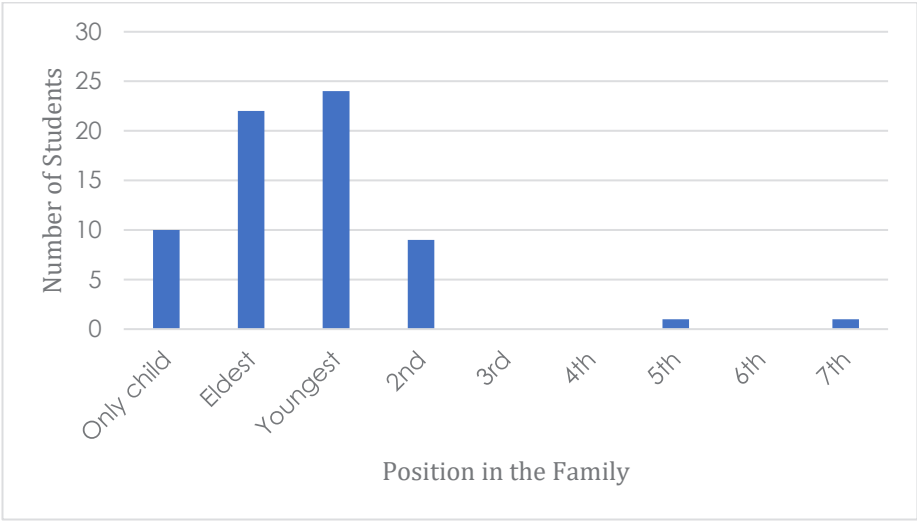
Social Class	Monthly Family Income	F
Poor	Below P10,957	18
Low-income but not poor	P10,957 to P21,914	19
Lower middle	P21,914 to P43,828	19
Middle	P43,828 to P76,669	11
Upper middle	P76,669 to P131,484	0
Upper middle but not rich	P131,484 to P219,140	0
Rich	P219,140 and above	0
	TOTAL	67

In the case of the Grade 8 students, 18 (26.9%) belong to a poor family, 19 (28.4%) belong to families with low income, 19 (28.4%) come from the lower middle class, and 11 (16.4%) are from the middle class. Going back to Figure 1, data show that most of the Grade 8 students belong to small to medium size family. Although this is a good indicator, it should be noted that based on Table 1, a significant number of these students belong to poor or low-income families. One of the implications of this finding relative to online classes is that several parents may have difficulty in providing gadgets for the students which are necessary for online learning.

Figure 2*Gadgets used by the Grade 8 students in their online classes*

Utilizing the results of the enrolment and survey form designed and administered by the admission office of the school on the Grade 8 students, the researcher was able to determine the gadgets that students use for online classes and other pertinent information. Of the 67 Grade 8 respondents to the researcher's study, 48 (71.4%) have two or more gadgets that they can use for online classes, which may include a smartphone, laptop, desktop computer, or tablet; 17 (26%) only use a smartphone; 1 (1.3%) uses a laptop, and another 1 (1.3%) uses a tablet for online learning. It seems more convenient to use a laptop or desktop computer for online learning, especially when reading texts and creating documents for submission in compliance with the activities and assignments given by their teachers. According to UTEP Connect (n.d.), one of the major problems in using smartphones for online classes is the element of distraction specifically due to popping messages or incoming calls. Moreover, it is helpful to use a "word-processing program on a laptop or desktop computer when finalizing an assignment," especially those with prescribed formats (UTEP Connect, n.d.).

Figure 3
Birth order or position in the family of the Grade 8 students, SY 2020-2021



Another factor to be considered is the student’s position or birth order in the family. Figure 3 shows that of the 67 Grade 8 respondents, 24 (35.8%) are the youngest in the family, 22 (33%) are the eldest, 10 (15%) are the only child in the family, 9 (13.4%) are the 2nd child, 1 (1.5%) is the 5th child, and another 1 (1.5%) is the 7th child. The implication of this finding, especially relative to online classes is that the eldest and those who are the only child in the family, 32 (48%), can only rely on their parents or guardians for instructional support; while the others who have older siblings can be taught or helped by their older brother/s or sister/s particularly in understanding the teachers’ instructions or some difficult concepts (Benigno & Ellis, 2004; Vedder, et al., 2005).

ISSUES OR PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY THE STUDENTS

Online Classes

Based on the reflective journal entries of 67 respondents, most of the Grade 8 students are having a hard time adjusting to online classes. The following statements are from some of the students who found online learning difficult.

“To be honest I think [it’s] kind of hard since [I’m] used to face-to-face [and not] online [classes]... I can do the work the teachers give me but even though [I’m] doing it [I’m] still not learning anything...”

"I'm one of those students having a hard time learning online... [Distance] and modular learning are not effective. The moment that our school announced that the modality of learning [would] be online or also known as [distance] learning, I got depressed. [It's] because I know myself [to be] a slow learner and prefer human interaction (face to face)."

Generally, a significant number of Grade 8 students indicated that one of the main challenges that they encounter in online classes is a poor signal or internet connection which leads to unclear lessons during synchronous sessions and difficulty in accessing online applications and submitting files on time during asynchronous sessions.

Another major challenge that they face is the number of activities and projects that they need to comply with and the insufficient amount of time given to accomplish them. A student noted that sometimes they were only given a day to comply with the activity. Some of them also expressed that they can hardly learn well since there are a lot of things to do; such is the case of these students who noted that:

"I knew online classes won't be that easy, but I never expected it to be this hard. [The] first few weeks were fine; last week was too hard for me. We had fewer synchronous classes than usual but the number of activities and projects given was overwhelming."

"[Because] of so many activities, I don't have enough time to study the lessons well because I need to move to other subjects to pass them on time."

The other challenges that the Grade 8 students expressed are the presence of distractions at home, lack of a conducive place to study, having to help with house chores, power outage, procrastination, poor time management, anxiety during recitation, difficulty in self-studying, having to use a smartphone in online learning, sharing a smartphone with a sibling for online classes, the problem with phone or laptop hanging and/or malfunctioning gadget, lack of materials for projects, and unclear instructions in some activities.

A student also expressed some concerns regarding their virtual meeting.

"In synchronous classes, some of our [teachers] did not [send] the code in [our] group chat, [it was sent] through direct messages resulting in most of my classmates being late for class. Synchronous classes [are] fine except when we have problems connecting to the internet and when the teacher [does not] really teach."

Concern was also raised regarding the accessibility of materials sent by the teachers.

"I sometimes have a problem when the teacher only gives an activity through Messenger because my other classmates who are active at the time keep on adding chats [making] the given activity hard to find that sometimes I don't notice when there is an [assigned] activity."

Two of the students who use smartphones for online classes expressed difficulty in accomplishing some tasks.

"I find synchronous and asynchronous sessions a bit hard because there are times [when] there are a lot of things to type and sometimes it's hard to type them on my phone."

"My experience [with] online classes so far, has been very stressful because [I'm] new to creating Microsoft Word documents and [it's] very hard [to make one using] a mobile phone."

Some students also complained about experiencing headaches due to long exposure to gadgets. Such is the case of these students who expressed that:

"I often experience headaches [because I] have been looking at the screen for too long and my parents get upset. I can't do anything [because] all of the tasks are online. I am [nearsighted] and I am worried [because] I don't want [my eye condition] to get worse."

"The bad thing about online classes is that your eyes and head hurt because of the radiation, and yet you do not learn anything/enough; for me, you can just pass an online class, not like before [in the face to face classes] where you actually learned something."

Some of the students' suggestions for online classes were also noted.

"Synchronous sessions demand participation from students and that [is a] challenge for those who are shy and quiet. From what I have observed in my synchronous classes, only a few of us attempt to answer and participate in the discussions, leaving an awkward silence when no one answers. I suggest that we be allowed during synchronous sessions to comment down our answers; in this way, the "quieter" students can participate as well."

"I do hope that there will be fewer activities in the future because all of the activities that are given right now are piled up and we still have projects that we need to do that are due in a couple of weeks."

"Despite this pandemic, I also expect that we'll be enabled to work independently and also collaboratively with my classmates. Moreover, as online students, I [hope] that we will be given enough time to complete all our requirements/activities. I hope that [our teachers] will be more understanding, particularly considering that we are all new to this "new normal," [that they will] be more approachable, and teach in such a way that we students will be more motivated to participate."

In contrast, a few students find online classes okay, engaging, and/or fun as attested to by the following statements:

"It's going great so far; some people may claim that [the teachers] assign [too] many activities, but for me, [the number of activities is] moderate."

"My experience in having synchronous and asynchronous sessions is okay because I don't have any problem with them, and [I'm] totally fine with how they have turned out; I do miss school but that's okay because I get to learn stuff and [I] can be more efficient with school and [I] can also engage in my hobbies more often now that I'm always at home."

"My online learning experience is engaging. It gives me a sense of joy in learning, which enhances my skills, abilities, and knowledge. It has helped me learn independently... by working from the comfort of our home. I also learn how to manage family time and school work. Online classes become an opportunity to gain new skills and experiences since we are connecting with others in a personal, creative, and human way through computers and electronic devices."

In general, the highlights or good things that the students noted regarding online classes are the following: learning in the comfort of their own home, having a convenient class schedule, ensuring everyone's safety, not having to wake up early to go to school, spending less money and time to commute, learning new things, doing fun activities and projects, meeting classmates virtually after a long break,

being able to see and listen to teachers and classmates, having a flexible time to study, having easy access to learning materials, and being able to spend more time with the family.

Some students expressed their appreciation for their teachers.

“One of the good things that I’ve experienced during online classes is I’ve met new, dedicated, and hard-working teachers who are willing to help you and teach you [despite] the circumstances.”

“There are good things that I experience in my online classes like the teachers are kind, hardworking, and smart. They help us [when] we don’t understand some parts of [the lesson], they ask us if we have questions, they allow us to speak [in Filipino] so we can recite comfortably, and they listen to our opinions.”

“Moreover, my teachers are committed to helping everyone in our class and providing positive learning experiences. I am grateful for their tireless service in ensuring quality education.”

A student also noted that online classes help them in improving themselves.

“The students become more independent and self-disciplined, improve themselves and learn new skills like technical and communication skills.”

Online classes, according to a student, are a good way to redirect their focus during the pandemic.

“I guess that it’s a fact that even though [we’re] in a pandemic, the education system is doing its best to make sure that kids are well educated and not just staying home not doing anything. The other good thing is that online class distracts students from the whole global pandemic thing.”

Instructional Support

With the new normal in teaching and learning, students also need instructional support from their family members, either from their parents/guardians or from their older siblings or extended family members (Garbe et al., 2020; Garcia de Avila, 2020; Yuliejantiningasih, 2020). When students have a hard time understanding instructions and concepts, it would be helpful if they would receive such support. Based on the findings of this study, most of the Grade 8 students receive instructional support from at least one of their family members (parent/guardian, grandparent, older sibling/cousin, etc.). However, some receive little or no instructional support at all, especially those who are the eldest in the family or are the only child whose parents are both working. Here are some statements which express the students' difficulty having to cope with the demands of online classes at home on their own:

"My family doesn't give me instructional support for online classes. But they do help me with my projects when they can. I don't ask for their help because they have their tasks to do. I don't want them to be distracted. My mom and dad [have] work to do, so they are out of the house at [8:00 AM]. My siblings have school tasks, too; one has online classes like me, while the other has so many modules to finish."

"When it comes to school work, I don't often ask for help from my parents because they're busy and their tasks have doubled since the pandemic. They also help my younger sisters study because they need it more than I do, and I understand that."

"Sometimes, because they [the parents] are also busy with their work, I am left alone in the house the whole day."

Another reason for the lack of instructional support is the fact that some students may not be that close to their families.

"I don't usually ask for help especially from my family because [I'm] not close to them, but they give me moral and financial support."

Also, some of the parents are not able to give instructional support due to their educational background.

"My mother has trouble understanding some lessons and my father is not a college graduate. They aren't able to help me, [it's] hard for them; especially [understanding] the English language. We are just a small family in the house and my cousins [live] far."

Being worried about what the family members might say is also one factor for a student who expressed the following statement:

"I hardly ask or even mention anything about my classes to my family because I fear that they might say 'I am not doing good enough,' or 'I'm not listening well.'"

Relational Life

Based on the reflective journal entries of the 67 students, most of them are connected with their friends through chats/texts, and/or video calls. Most of them have been closer to their family during this time of pandemic and they have been forced to stay at home for almost nine months now. Only one of them explicitly expressed the lack of significant growth in terms of relationships within the family.

"Nothing has changed; my relationship with my family, particularly with my parents didn't grow. The wall between me and my parents remains, maybe because I'm too afraid to talk to them or open [up about] my problems. Even my guardians don't know how my life is going."

Moreover, some respondents expressed that they are not so connected with their friends and classmates online as elaborated in the following statements:

"Friends? I rarely even talk to them."

"Interacting with friends is what [I] find problematic. It just doesn't feel the same talking to them [on] screen as it does face to face. Although [I] can still message or call them, [I] still find it better to interact with them face to face."

"Lately, I have not been able to talk or chat with my friends. I do not like talking or chatting with other people online."

Poor signal and internet connection or the lack of which is also one factor that affects communication and relational life.

“My parents and my friends connect when we chat and have a video call. I miss my parents very much; our house does not have Wi-Fi, so it's hard when I'm not with them.”

“It's also hard to connect with other people amid the pandemic when you're in an area that doesn't have a strong internet signal. And it was depressing [too] when you need someone to talk to online because you're not that close to any of your family members, and the internet or signal won't cooperate.”

A struggle in having a conversation with relatives was expressed by a student.

“I don't communicate that much with my relatives since it's sometimes awkward and hard to start and keep a conversation going because my interests [differ] from the topics that they prefer to talk about.”

The difficulty in making friends with new classmates online was also noted.

“Making friends or getting close to my new classmates scares me a lot and is quite challenging for me. I'm a friendly type of person but [I'm] also shy; some of my classmates are intimidating, [I'm] afraid that they would snob me or what, so [I choose] to be silent and just go with the flow.”

Social interaction is one of the contributing factors to student barriers in online learning (Muilenburg & Burge, 2005). Therefore, there should be avenues in which students can develop their social skills by having meaningful interactions with other people, particularly with their classmates.

Emotions Associated with the Pandemic

In the student's reflective journal entries, the negative emotions expressed which are associated with the effects of the pandemic on their lives in general, are the following: sadness, feeling of isolation, loneliness, boredom, frustration, depression, stress, pressure, nervousness, anxiety, fear, and feeling of tiredness. Meanwhile, some of the expressed positive emotions include being thankful, happy, and hopeful which they attributed to their family and loved ones being safe, being able to spend more time with their families, being able to learn new things, being able to engage in their hobbies, and having faith in God that this pandemic shall pass. One neutral/stoic feeling that was expressed noted that the pandemic is inevitable.

Generally, the negative feelings that they have are caused by common stressors such as restriction from going outside and meeting people, especially their friends; fear that they or their loved ones would get infected by the virus; adjusting to the new normal, especially to online classes; having too many tasks to accomplish; distractions while having online classes; lack of instructional support from family; poor signal or internet connection; news about those who were infected and died due to the coronavirus and about the negative effects of the pandemic in terms of employment, etc.; and the effects of the consecutive typhoons. The following are some of the statements showing the respondents' emotions during this time of pandemic:

"This is [my] first time to experience [a] pandemic so [I am] really scared and even paranoid sometimes. When [I] found out what this virus can do, [I] got scared like many people."

"Public health actions, such as social distancing, are definitely necessary to reduce the spread [of the coronavirus]; but [I] can't help [but] feel isolated, lonely and [experience increased] stress and anxiety."

"It is normal to [feel] fearful and anxious during this time of pandemic and I realize that, as the coronavirus outbreak has shown, life can change very quickly, and [it is] very unpredictable... You become anxious thinking when the pandemic will end, or if the world will ever return to normal."

A student shared an unfortunate incident that led to feelings of frustration.

"I got robbed while sleeping; the smartphone that I use for online classes, for accomplishing my school activities, etc., containing all my files related to school and other important things was lost. After that incident, I could no longer sleep well, couldn't finish a meal, I get frustrated grasping for fancy words, [and] constructing sentences for my essays."

Some students expressed that they are struggling with online classes which causes feelings of depression and anxiety.

"The moment that our school announced that the modality of learning will be online or also known as [distance] learning, I got depressed. [It's] because I know that I'm a slow learner and [I] prefer human interaction (face to face)."

"I do not like synchronous classes because everyone can see my face which is something [that] I do not like because it makes me anxious. I also do not like speaking during synchronous sessions because I feel anxious when I realize that a lot of people I do not even know are listening to me."

These findings show some similarities with what Seyahi et al. (2020) found in their survey in which they concluded that a considerable number of their respondents expressed feelings of loneliness, boredom, and anxiety about the future during the pandemic. Although several factors may influence these negative human emotions, it should be taken into consideration how educational institutions could help lessen the extent to which these emotions are felt, especially relative to academic factors. In addition, Ellis et al. (2020) emphasized that helping adolescents cope especially in this time of crisis is highly essential.

ACTION PLAN

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher proposed an action plan to address the concerns of the Grade 8 students. Generally, the action plan aims to give recommendations to the students, area chair, advisers, subject teachers, parents, and school administration to help the students adjust and learn well from online classes.

Action Plan for the Grade 8 Students SY 2020-2021

Objectives	Tasks	Success Criteria
To give recommendations to the students based on the findings of the study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teach the students time management and tips to cope with the demands of online classes - Recommend the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. having a written or printed class/personal schedule posted on their study area b. regularly checking their class group chats, Google Classroom, or LMS for new assignments c. avoiding procrastination d. connecting with at least one of their classmates to update each other about their progress in online classes or to check on each other as friends e. making it a habit to ask their teachers questions when there are things that need to be clarified f. asking for help from their parent/guardian/older sibling regarding instructions, especially in understanding difficult concepts, and updating them about academic concerns and progress 	The students were informed about the findings of the study and how they can improve their performance in online classes and in relational life.

Action Plan (continuation)

Objectives	Tasks	Success Criteria
To give recommendations to the area chair, advisers, and subject teachers based on the findings of the study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inform the area chair and subject teachers about the concerns of the students regarding online classes - Propose the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. lessening the weight of projects so that students can focus on the Most Essential Learning Competencies b. posting materials on LMS or Google Classroom instead of sending them solely through the Messenger app c. allowing students to contribute to the discussion during the synchronous sessions by typing their answer/s on the chat box d. giving a longer time for students to submit their works e. sending the link to a Google Meet on the class group chat f. giving clear and detailed instructions for the activities g. intentionally creating a venue for the students to get to know each other better and be more comfortable with one another 	The area chair and subject teachers were informed about the concerns of the Grade 8 students based on the findings of the study.
To give recommendations to the parents based on the findings of the study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask for permission from the area chair to share the findings of this study with the parents of the Grade 8 students during the first PTA meeting - Recommend the following to the parents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. checking if their child has a written or printed class/personal schedule b. providing their child with a conducive place to learn at home c. providing instructional support to their child, if they are able, if not, at least, checking on their progress in their online classes d. helping them unwind especially during the weekends 	The parents were informed about the concerns of their children based on the findings of the study.

Action Plan (continuation)

Objectives	Tasks	Success Criteria
To give recommendations to the school administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The results of the study and the action plan shall be forwarded to the school administration through the dean and campus administrator. - Recommend the following to the school administration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. finding ways to help impoverished students not to be left behind in online classes setup by providing gadgets or implementing blended learning (a combination of online and modular learning) b. considering modular learning, especially for students with no appropriate gadget, or who experience poor Wi-Fi signal and/or internet connectivity. 	The school administration was informed about the experiences of the students during online learning.

Generally, the students were informed about the findings of the study and how they can improve their performance in online classes and in relational life. In terms of giving recommendations to the students, the researcher being one of their subject teachers taught them time management and gave them tips to cope with the demands of online classes. First, they were encouraged to have a written or printed class/personal schedule posted in their study area. This will help them manage their time well and avoid tardiness or absences, especially during synchronous sessions. Motivation is a key ingredient to empowering students' capacity for online learning alongside "life management skills - how they organize their days, balance distance school and leisure time, and learn to maintain their own wellbeing" (Niemi & Kousa, 2020). Second, they were advised to regularly check their class group chats, Google Classroom, or LMS for new assignments. Third, they were urged to avoid procrastinating. Having to deal with piled-up assignments would certainly cause unnecessary stress and anxiety. Fourth, they were encouraged to connect with at least one of their classmates to update each other about their progress in online classes, or to check on each other as friends. Connecting with friends virtually is one of the factors which alleviate loneliness (Ellis et al., 2020; Muilenburg & Berge, 2005; Rahiem, 2021). Fifth, they were encouraged to ask their teachers if there are things to clarify. Sixth, they were told to ask for help from their parent/guardian/older sibling, especially concerning understanding difficult concepts or instructions and update them about their academic concerns and progress (Garbe et al., 2020; Garcia de Avila et al., 2020; Yuliejantiningasih, 2020).

The area chair and subject teachers were informed about the concerns of the Grade 8 students based on the findings of the study. In the action plan, the researcher proposed the following: a) lessen the weight of projects so that students can focus on the Most Essential Learning Competencies (these may be required in some subjects but not in all), b) post materials on LMS or Google Classroom instead of sending them solely through the Messenger app, c) allow students to contribute to the discussion during the synchronous sessions by typing their answer/s on the chat box (especially for those who are too shy to speak), d) give longer time for students to submit their work, e) send the link to a Google Meet on the class group chat, f) give clear and detailed instructions for the activities, and g) intentionally create a venue for them to get to know each other better and be more comfortable with one another. Aside from helping them to learn well together, they will be able to engage with others online. As mandated, educators are expected not just to help “obtain competencies but also develop character qualities” among the learners including the social aspect of their growth (NEDA, 2016).

Meanwhile, these are the recommendations addressed to the parents: a) check if their child has a written or printed class/personal schedule (this should be posted within their study area); b) provide their child with a conducive place to learn at home (at least a quiet area); Rahiem (2021) found that the learning atmosphere is one of the factors that help keep students motivated in their studies; c) if able, provide instructional support to their child; if not, at least check their progress in their online classes; d) help them unwind especially during the weekends. As emphasized by Ellis et al., (2020) and Rahiem (2021), the factors which alleviate loneliness are the time spent with family, connecting with friends online, as well as physical activity, especially during the pandemic.

Finally, the following are the recommendations that were forwarded to the school administration: a) find ways to help students from low-income families not to be left behind in online classes by providing gadgets or implementing blended learning (a combination of online and modular learning); and b) consider modular learning, especially for students who lack the appropriate gadget, who experience poor Wi-Fi signal and/or internet connectivity. The students will be assisted to remain motivated with the “learning atmosphere and facilities” which are provided for them (Rahiem, 2021).

This action plan was developed to help improve the learning conditions of the students, especially in the next school year with the cooperation of the stakeholders, particularly the faculty members, parents, school administration, and even the learners themselves. It is recommended that further study on the concerns of students about online learning be done in a wider scope to address other problems and cater to their needs to ensure quality education amidst the pandemic.

CONCLUSIONS

The Grade 8 students mostly belong to small or medium family sizes. A significant number of these students belong to poor or low-income families. Of the 67 respondents, 32 (48%) constitute the eldest and only child in the family, and 20 (29.8%) use only a smartphone for online classes.

In light of the findings of the study, the revealed issues mostly revolve around their struggle to adjust to online classes. The major problem encountered by a significant number of students is poor Wi-Fi signal or internet connection. Another notable concern is the number of activities and projects given with very little time to accomplish them. Some students receive little or no instructional support from their family members. Some also find it hard to connect with their classmates, friends, family members, and relatives.

An action plan is proposed based on the results of the study. The general objective is to inform and give recommendations to the students, area chair, subject teachers, parents, and the school administration on how to help the Grade 8 students cope with the demands of, and learn effectively in their online classes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researcher extends her heartfelt gratitude to everyone who participated in this action research, especially to the students, area chair, faculty members, parents, and school administration. She also thanks her family, particularly her mother for being her number one supporter. Foremost, she thanks the Almighty God for the wisdom, guidance, and sustaining grace in accomplishing this worthwhile task.

REFERENCES

- Atmojo, A. E. P., & Nugroho, A. (2020). EFL classes must go online! Teaching activities and challenges during COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. *Register Journal*, 13(1), 49-76.
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Arif-Nugroho-7/publication/341750033_EFL_Classes_Must_Go_Online_Teaching_Activities_and_Challenges_during_COVID-19_Pandemic_in_Indonesia/links/5ed7223545851529452a5285/EFL-Classes-Must-Go-Online-Teaching-Activities-and-Challenges-during-COVID-19-Pandemic-in-Indonesia.pdf
- Banks, S., Herrington, T., & Carter, K. (2017). Pathways to co-impact: action research and community organising. *Educational Action Research*, 25(4), 541-559.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09650792.2017.1331859>
- Benigno, J. P., & Ellis, S. (2004). Two is greater than three: Effects of older siblings on parental support of preschoolers' counting in middle-income families. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 19(1), 4-20.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0885200604000079>
- Boadway, R., Cuff, K., & Marceau, N. (2006). Income Volatility and Low-Income Support Programs.
<https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.335.4509&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Chou, C. C. (2002, January). A comparative content analysis of student interaction in synchronous and asynchronous learning networks. In *Proceedings of the 35th annual Hawaii international conference on system sciences* (pp. 1795-1803). IEEE. <https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/abstract/document/994093/>
- Coghlan, D., & Brydon-Miller, M. (Eds.). (2014). *The SAGE encyclopedia of action research*. Sage.
<https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=hNfSAwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=Recent+literature+and+studies+describe+action+research+as+collaborative+in+nature+as+it+involves+the+researcher,+informants,+stakeholders,+and+other+participants.&ots=LoNDYfOSbs&sig=LqI62VYvPHsDWKcioQwBJdvl5Qg>

- Dhawan, S. (2020). Online learning: A panacea in the time of COVID-19 crisis. *Journal of educational technology systems*, 49(1), 5-22.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0047239520934018>
- Domingo K. (2020). *Who are identified rich, poor? Gov't shows income class brackets in PH*. ABS-CBN Corporation ABS-CBN News. <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/09/17/20/who-are-identified-rich-poor-govt-shows-income-class-brackets-in-ph>
- Ellis, W. E., Dumas, T. M., & Forbes, L. M. (2020). Physically isolated but socially connected: Psychological adjustment and stress among adolescents during the initial COVID-19 crisis. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science/Revue canadienne des sciences du comportement*, 52(3), 177.
<https://psycnet.apa.org/journals/cbs/52/3/177/>
- Garbe, A., Ogurlu, U., Logan, N., & Cook, P. (2020). COVID-19 and remote learning: Experiences of parents with children during the pandemic. *American Journal of Qualitative Research*, 4(3), 45-65. <https://www.ajqr.org/article/parents-experiences-with-remote-education-during-covid-19-school-closures-8471>
- Garcia de Avila, M. A., Hamamoto Filho, P. T., Jacob, F. L. D. S., Alcantara, L. R. S., Berghammer, M., Jenholt Nolbris, M., Olaya-Contreras, P., & Nilsson, S. (2020). Children's anxiety and factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic: An exploratory study using the children's anxiety questionnaire and the numerical rating scale. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 17(16), 5757.
<https://www.mdpi.com/793224>
- Glossary of Education Reform. (2015). *Action research*.
<https://www.edglossary.org/action-research/>
- Hebebcı, M. T., Bertiz, Y., & Alan, S. (2020). Investigation of views of students and teachers on distance education practices during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic. *International Journal of Technology in Education and Science*, 4(4), 267-282. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1271267>
- Herr, K., & Anderson, G. L. (2014). *The action research dissertation: A guide for students and faculty*. Sage publications.
<https://books.google.com.ph/books?id=OsnBAwAAQBAJ&lpg=PP1&ots=0xf1Xo08Hm&dq=Recent%20literature%20and%20studies%20describe%20action%20research%20as%20collaborative%20in%20nature%20as%20it%20involves%20the%20researcher%2C%20informants%2C%20stakeholders%2C%20and%20other%20participants.&lr&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false>

- Hult, M., & Lennung, S. Å. (1980). Towards a definition of action research: a note and bibliography. *Journal of management studies*, 17(2), 241-250.
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-6486.1980.tb00087.x>
- Iivari, N., Sharma, S., & Ventä-Olkkonen, L. (2020). Digital transformation of everyday life–How COVID-19 pandemic transformed the basic education of the young generation and why information management research should care? *International Journal of Information Management*, 55, 102183.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0268401220310264>
- Johnson, G. M. (2006). Synchronous and asynchronous text-based CMC in educational contexts: A review of recent research. *TechTrends*, 50(4), 46-53.
<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.455.5438&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Lamsal, B. (2022). Exploring issues surrounding a safe and conducive digital learning space in Nepal: A preparation for online education in the post-pandemic era. In *Socioeconomic Inclusion During an Era of Online Education* (pp. 246-263). IGI Global.
<https://www.igi-global.com/chapter/exploring-issues-surrounding-a-safe-and-conducive-digital-learning-space-in-nepal/307367>
- Longhurst, G. J., Stone, D. M., Duloher, K., Scully, D., Campbell, T., & Smith, C. F. (2020). Strength, weakness, opportunity, threat (SWOT) analysis of the adaptations to anatomical education in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. *Anatomical sciences education*, 13(3), 301-311.
<https://anatomypubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/ase.1967>
- Mahoney, J., & Hall, C. A. (2020). Exploring online learning through synchronous and asynchronous instructional methods. In *Exploring online learning through synchronous and asynchronous instructional methods* (pp. 52-76). IGI Global.
<https://www.igi-global.com/chapter/exploring-online-learning-through-synchronous-and-asynchronous-instructional-methods/253559>
- Mangahas, M. (2012, February 10). *Economic deprivation and family size*. Inquirer.
<https://opinion.inquirer.net/22811/economic-deprivation-and-family-size>
- Muilenburg, L. Y., & Berge, Z. L. (2005). Student barriers to online learning: A factor analytic study. *Distance education*, 26(1), 29-48.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01587910500081269>

- National Economic and Development Authority. (2016). *Ambisyon Natin 2040*. Pasig City: NEDA. <http://2040.neda.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/A-Long-Term-Vision-for-the-Philippines.pdf>
- Niemi, H. M., & Kousa, P. (2020). A case study of students' and teachers' perceptions in a Finnish high school during the COVID pandemic. *International journal of technology in education and science*. <https://helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10138/319017>
- Neuwirth, L. S., Jović, S., & Mukherji, B. R. (2021). Reimagining higher education during and post-COVID-19: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, 27(2), 141-156. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1477971420947738>
- Offir, B., Lev, Y., & Bezalel, R. (2008). Surface and deep learning processes in distance education: Synchronous versus asynchronous systems. *Computers & Education*, 51(3), 1172-1183. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0360131507001406>
- Philippine Statistics Authority. (2017, June 20). *Philippine population surpassed the 100 million mark (results from the 2015 census of population)*. <https://psa.gov.ph/population-and-housing/node/120080#:~:text=Average%20household%20size%20in%202015,of%2092%2C097%2C978%20persons%20in%202010>
- Rahiem, M. D. (2021). Remaining motivated despite the limitations: University students' learning propensity during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Children and youth services review*, 120, 105802. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105802>
- Rehman, R., & Fatima, S. S. (2021). An innovation in Flipped Class Room: A teaching model to facilitate synchronous and asynchronous learning during a pandemic. *Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences*, 37(1), 131. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7794122/>
- Selvaraj, A., Radhin, V., Nithin, K. A., Benson, N., & Mathew, A. J. (2021). Effect of pandemic based online education on teaching and learning system. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 85, 102444. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0738059321000973>

- Seyahi, L. S., Ozcan, S. G., Sut, N., Mayer, A., & Poyraz, B. C. (2020). Social and psychiatric effects of COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning on high school students: A cross-sectional web-based survey comparing Turkey and Denmark. *MedRxiv*.
<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.10.21.20217406.abstract>
- UTEP Connect. (n.d.) *5 Pitfalls to avoid when using your smartphone for school*.
<https://www.utep.edu/extendeduniversity/utepconnect/blog/september-2017/5-pitfalls-to-avoid-when-using-your-smartphone-for-school.html>
- Vedder, P., Boekaerts, M., & Seegers, G. (2005). Perceived social support and well being in school; The role of students' ethnicity. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 34(3), 269-278.
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10964-005-4313-4>
- Yamagata-Lynch, L. C. (2014). Blending online asynchronous and synchronous learning. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 15(2), 189-212. <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/irrodl/1900-v1-n1-irrodl04928/1065292ar/abstract/>
- Yliejantiningasih, Y. (2020). The implementation of online learning in early childhood education during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Jurnal Pendidikan Usia Dini*, 14(2), 247-261.
<http://journal.unj.ac.id/unj/index.php/jpud/article/view/15747>