

## A RETROSPECT ON THE CHALLENGES AND LESSONS BROUGHT BY THE PANDEMIC

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The article 'With Schools Closed, Covid-19 Deepens a Philippine Education Crisis' written by Jason Gutierrez and Dan Bilefsky, (Published in the New York Times on Sept. 13, 2021 and Updated Sept. 15, 2021) focusses on the education crises brought by the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Education System of the Philippines, where they have presented learners' and parents' experiences that reflect the reality of how the education system is disrupted and negatively affected by the Pandemic.

The article provided clear and vibrant discussion on the struggles of parents as surrogate teachers or the readiness of parents as learning facilitators; economic divide; and digital divide as protruding educational concerns while the Philippines plunged into the most challenging educational crises.

In the same way, Lee (2021), on her article Covid-19's toll on youth in Southeast Asia, tackles similar concerns indicating the factors affecting the education, the so-called digital divide and the socio-economic divide. The inequality of access to the internet and other forms of educational technology and so as the low-income communities, according to her, will fall further behind and will worsen the remote learning gap.

Likewise, Heng (2021), on Exploring the Impacts of Covid-19 on Education in Southeast Asia: Challenges and Opportunities, echoes similar concerns affecting the education during the pandemic. He reiterated that education faces numerous challenges, and among these are the high economic cost of education to working parents, which according to him, will more likely stay home to look after their children.

Heng further specifies the issue of digital divide and educational inequality for students who lack access to a stable internet connection and digital devices, concluding that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds will continue to be at the disadvantaged end of the education divide.

Undeniably, the plight of the students and their parents who serves as their surrogate teachers is well reflected in the articles. This of course provided proofs that the experiences of learners and parents in our school, Tubo-Tubo Integrated School (TIS) is not an isolated case.

The experiences of Maritess Talic as surrogate teacher of her children mirrors the experiences of the working parents of TIS, who carry the burden of finding enough money to pay all the bills, and because of the pandemic, hurdle the difficulty of looking for extra money for their children's education needs including internet and phone bills and at the same time deal with their duty as surrogate teachers to their children.

Parents of TIS learners share similar sentiments and fears regarding their children's education and futures, since parents of TIS learners mostly were not able to finish their own education and they admitted that they cannot assist their children in learning the lessons.

However, as a school leader, along with my teaching staff, we never let such external factors affect our school that may deter us in delivering education to our learners and we kept on looking for opportunities to learn in every situation and in trying to overcome difficulties for the sake of the learners.

The three most important things that I have learned as school leader in dealing with the external factors affecting schools are:

A need to bridge the gap in digital divide. Marginalized and socially disadvantage learners especially those living in remote areas are at the receiving end of e-learning initiative. These children will be at a disadvantage end if the digitalization of the wider educational system prosper. Immediate action from the national government down to the local unit is imperative. However, until the national and the local government act and satisfy the needs for the e-learning including that of those living in the remotest area, school head should act promptly in addressing the learning needs of the underprivileged learners by adopting the most appropriate delivery mode of learning.

Strengthen school partnership with the stakeholders. Stronger partnership with stakeholders will open a wider avenue of opportunities in addressing issues and concern in the delivery of education. Stakeholders' support is vital in the operation of schools and in providing solutions to most prominent problems in the school especially during pandemic, like the lack of fund to supplement the needs in printing modules and in providing printing equipment for teachers. It can also address the issue of the parents having difficulties in serving as their children's learning facilitators by encouraging and finding volunteer learning facilitators or learning support assistant.

Promote research and innovation. It is important to understand the plight and difficulties of the parents on the education of their children, the needs of the learners, the weaknesses of the school system, and or the effectiveness of a program/project/activity. Through research, school and faculty alike will have a deeper understanding of an issue which will lead to innovative solutions and interventions.

According to the Department of Health, we are now seeing the end of the pandemic, but this end of pandemic should create a clear and glaring lessons that as school leaders, we should not get tired and weary of looking for ways and means to overcome the challenges. Instead, we should learn Grit and Resiliency. Grit is about making a consistent, sustained effort toward a goal even when we struggle, falter, or fail

temporarily. Resilience refers to our ability to recover after we have struggled, faltered, or failed. (Miller, 2020)

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