

Parental role and responsibilities in preschool distance learning environment

Julie Anne G. Amistad

Abstract

This study explored the lived experiences of parents in the home schooling of their preschool children during the Covid-19 pandemic. It focused on the parental roles and responsibilities as parent-teachers, and the support they received from the school. Purposive sampling was used in this qualitative study in order to choose participants who had firsthand experience with preschool distance learning during the pandemic. Twenty parents from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds made up the sample, ensuring a thorough comprehension of diverse viewpoints. Based on the findings, parents played an active role in the learning process during the distance learning approach, facilitating and guiding their children through the modular lessons. To promote children's safe attachment, social-emotional competence, and cognitive development, they were expected to exhibit more positive emotions and greater levels of professional competence while doing remote learning. On the other hand, parents encountered variety of difficulties with distance learning, including the virtual environment, instruction delivery, unsatisfactory learning outcomes, challenges with the use and accessibility of technology, personal issues with health, stress, and their child's learning style. To ensure parents receive the resources they need, there must be strong collaboration and open communication between the school and parents. The results imply that planning for blended learning models in the long run should assist and ready parents to work as co-teachers.

Keywords: *parents role, responsibility, challenges, instructions, distance learning*

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About the author:

MAED, Instructor 1, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University, Mid-La Union Campus. Email: joy25amistad@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced an unprecedented reliance on distance learning at all educational levels; young children in preschool are particularly impacted, as their special needs regarding direct adult interaction and their early developmental stages present particular difficulties (Joo & Lee, 2022; Khera et al., 2023; Oppermann et al., 2024; Irwin et al., 2022; Shapiro & Bassok, 2022; Jalongo, 2021). The health crisis has made children more averse to online learning at home (Dong et al., 2020). Empirical evidence showed that families have found it difficult and problematic to adopt online learning during the pandemic (Dong et al., 2020; Chifari et al., 2021). In addition, parents' attitude toward online learning is negative when it comes to supporting their children's education at home (Dong et al., 2020). While it is expected that parents extend support for their child's learning at home and make their home the children's first learning environment, the experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic showed otherwise (dos Santos Laguna et al., 2021; Lantsoght et al., 2021; Shahali et al., 2023; de Jong et al., 2022; Whaley & Pfefferbaum, 2023; Mifsud, 2021).

The roles of parents have grown in the context of remote learning, and they must quickly adopt new technologies and instructional strategies (Knopik et al., 2021; Osorio-Saez et al., 2021). Parental adjustment to these new roles was found to be quick, and frequently without adequate resources or support (Garbe et al., 2020). While studies showed parental role on the online learning during the Covid-19 (Alshaboul et al., 2024; Jayanti & Indrakurniawan, 2022; Shal, 2024), only few studies focused on the lived experiences of parents as teachers to their pre-school children (i.e. Rohita & Krisnawati, 2022; Tish et al., 2023; De Dios, 2022; Arnilla et al., 2023). Majority of the studies focused on the challenges faced by parents on homeschooling their children but not on their main role as teachers to their children. Hence, this research study aimed to explore the lived experiences of parents as teachers to their preschool children during the Covid-19 pandemic. It specifically described the parental roles and responsibilities, support received from school, strategies applied in teaching and the coping mechanisms in dealing with distance learning.

The role of parents in educating their children has evolved dramatically since the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Rousoulioti et al. (2022), there is a need to emphasize the importance of active parental involvement during emergency situations and beyond. Hence, this study provides empirical evidence on the strategies applicable to parents in dealing with their preschool children in an online learning environment.

2. Theoretical Framework

This research was anchored on the academic socialization theory (Puccioni, 2015) and ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Parent's academic socialization includes parents' attitudes, values, goals, expectations, beliefs about education, and the opportunities and activities they make available to their children (Puccioni, 2015). On the other hand, the ecological model notes that children's development occurs in several overlapping contexts (e.g., microsystems) and stresses that these contexts need to work well together (mesosystems) to optimize children's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Parental involvement is an essential factor for student achievement in traditional school settings. In fact, parent support has significantly contributed to learners' success even in a virtual learning environment (Borup et al., 2014; Liu & Cavanaugh, 2011; Lee & Figueroa, 2012; Makrooni, 2019; Woofter, 2019). However, parents must take on new and unfamiliar roles, and responsibilities as their children participate in online education while experiencing increasing instructional responsibility for their child's learning (Liu et al., 2010). As a result, parents often need help understanding their role concerning their children's online learning (Boulton, 2008; Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2009).

Feelings of parents towards remote learning are mixed. Some parents feel more connected to their children's schoolwork, while others see this as an additional burden (Selwyn et al., 2011). Sorensen's (2012) study revealed the most challenging and favorable aspects of online learning for parents, keeping their children on schedule while completing their coursework as the former and interactions with the child's online teachers as the latter. In addition, schools and teachers need more guidance to improve the parental engagement experience, especially with the effective use of technology (Goodall, 2016). Challenges that may impact parental involvement in remote learning settings include economic resources (Hohlfeld et al., 2010), lack of internet access (Hollingworth et al., 2011), lack of interest in using technology (Beckman et al., 2019), and having low digital self-efficacy (Povey et al., 2016). Research done on pre-pandemic virtual school learning environments shows that parents become learning coaches for students who spend a significant amount of their day online (Hasler Waters & Leong, 2014). When surveyed, teachers have identified the following parental scaffolds as helpful to the virtual learner: (a) organizing and managing students' schedules, (b) nurturing relationships and interactions, (c) monitoring and motivating student engagement, and (d) instructing students as necessary (Povey et al., 2016).

In order to ensure that their children are engaged in and participating in online learning activities, parents play a critical role in managing the home education environment for their children. Teachers and parents should collaborate to this end (Kim, 2020). According to Yan (2020), today's parents are frequently concerned with the diversions and responsibilities of daily living. Some parents cannot be involved in or frequently engage in their children's activities due to limited finances, restrictive work hours, and language barriers. Parents need to prepare to do the role of a teacher since the home turns into a classroom. Many parents need help to perform this task, especially those with limited education and resources. Moreover, parents or guardians are educational partners with teachers. They function as home facilitators and para-teachers who guide students in responding to the modular lessons during modular learning (Manlangit, 2020). The parental duty in this regard includes direct responsibility for all aspects of children's conduct and financial liability for their misconduct or negligence. Therefore, in the new normal, parents and other caregivers must play a more significant role in their child's learning and development than they have in the past, given that the majority of education now takes place in the home environment rather than on school campuses, without the physical presence of teachers.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study utilized a descriptive qualitative research design, particularly phenomenological method to describe the lived experiences of parents as preschool teachers during the pandemic. According to Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022), phenomenological design involves three aspects; the aim of the research, philosophical assumptions and research strategies. In this research, the lived experiences of the parents as teachers to their preschool children during pandemic were described.

3.2. Participants of the study

The participants of the study were the parents of preschool children enrolled in two elementary schools in the Philippines during the academic year 2021-2022. There were thirteen (13) parents from one school and six (6) parents from another school. The participants were chosen purposively; only parents with preschool children during the distance learning who consented for survey or interview were included. The objectives of the study were clearly

explained to the parents and they agreed to share their lived experiences in their role as teacher in the homeschooling of their children.

3.3. Data gathering instrument

The study aimed to conduct face to face interview but due to the pandemic restrictions during the data gathering it was not given permission. Instead of the interview, the questionnaire was sent to the participants through Google Forms for them to answer. The questionnaire dwells on their roles and responsibilities in the distance learning environment, school support to parents in performing these responsibilities, strategies used in teaching their children, challenges and difficulties encountered in teaching, and mechanisms in dealing with the challenges. The questions were open-ended and semi-structured, which was originally intended for interview. The interview questions were submitted for validation by an expert in a qualitative study.

One (1) of the participants opted to have an interview due to lack of time. During the one-on-one interview, the researcher was able to probe on the answers and ask follow-up questions to the participant. With the participant's written consent, the interview video was recorded. This video allowed the researcher to observe nonverbal cues, such as verbal intonation, eye contact, facial expressions, interpersonal distance, touch, and gestures. Since participant combined the local Ilokano, Tagalog dialect, and English, video recordings were transcribed into the source language before translating into English. Transcripts were consistently checked against translated interpretations during analysis.

3.4. Data analysis

The researcher first set aside prejudgments and presuppositions so that the focus could be directed to the participants in the study. The researcher then delved into the information to thoroughly understand its depth and scope. To streamline and concentrate on particular data properties, the researcher utilized codes. After that, codes were examined to see if they seemed to form a meaningful pattern (Nowell et al., 2017). The information was then condensed into a more comprehensible group of essential ideas encompassing the text. The tale each motif communicates was then identified in a thorough study that the researchers wrote. The report's final analysis and write-up were then completed. The analysis results ultimately determined the significance of everyone's lived experiences. Included were direct quotes from the

participants. Additionally, longer quotations were used to help readers understand the original writings. The researcher consulted literature to make a convincing case for their topic selections and support the idea behind the story they had created.

Thematic design involves several steps: data collection, transcription, coding, and analysis. During the coding phase, the researcher identified and labeled relevant data segments, such as phrases, sentences, or paragraphs related to a particular theme or concept. The researcher then aggregated these codes into larger categories or themes, which describe the overarching patterns that emerge from the data.

3.5. Ethical considerations

Protecting human participants through applying relevant ethical norms is essential in any research study. In line with this, permission from the School Principal was requested before the data gathering commenced. A letter of invitation was sent before conducting the interview and uploading the questions through Google Forms. Moreover, the questionnaire includes the explanation of the study's goals, and the approximate time required to complete the questionnaire. In addition, the interview with one participant was recorded with written agreement of the participant. For privacy, video record was safely kept. The anonymity of the participants was strictly maintained throughout the entire study.

4. Results and Discussion

The following themes have emerged from the gathered data. Using thematic analysis, codes were used to diagnose the general answer, while the parents' statements from questionnaire and interview were analyzed carefully.

4.1. Parental roles and responsibilities during the distance learning environment

The participants described their roles and responsibilities during the distance learning. The parent became a co-teacher, assistant, supporter, and provider. It suggests that parents were expected to take on multiple responsibilities to facilitate their child's education while learning from home. As schools and educational institutions transitioned to online learning, parents had to step up and take on additional responsibilities to ensure their children continued learning effectively. The roles mentioned - co-teacher, assistant, supporter, and provider parent - suggest that parents had to be involved in various aspects of their child's education, such as

helping them with their schoolwork, providing resources and materials, and offering emotional support. Concerns about learner motivation, accessibility, learning outcomes, and responsibility balancing were expressed by parents (Garbe et al., 2020).

They further described their responsibilities as challenging, demanding, and requiring time management. A role that is very challenging for all parents during the time of distance learning. They mentioned it was difficult and needed time management before teaching their children. Working parents and housewives mentioned that they had a significant adjustment in their time to manage to guide their children with other tasks like work and chores at home. They struggle to keep their children focused during online classes using gadgets, internet connection, and time to supervise them. Parent 4 said, *"It's really hard to be a teacher and at the same time a full-time housewife... it's all online learning."* They are likely referring to the challenges of balancing both responsibilities; preparing and delivering lessons as a teacher and taking care of household responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for other children. This is further agreed by parent 9, stating that *"Balancing chores, work, and my child's school is extremely difficult."* Juggling household chores, work responsibilities, and managing the child's schooling is a highly challenging task. The participant expressed the difficulty of managing multiple responsibilities simultaneously. They likely feel overwhelmed and struggle to balance their domestic duties, professional obligations, and parental responsibilities. The everyday struggles many working parents face, particularly mothers, include the expectation to manage household responsibilities, work commitments, and childcare simultaneously. In addition, the online classes added to the challenges in adapting to new technology as parents have negative opinions about online learning and prefer traditional teaching methods (Dong et al., 2020).

Parent 5 further said, *"Their responsibility as teachers is very challenging."* The challenges that come with the role of a teacher include but are not limited to lesson planning, student engagement, behavior management, and student assessment. Parent 7 agreed that *"It is a little bit challenging."* The sentiment is further shared by Parent 8 that his responsibility is *"Very heavy responsibility because it requires extra time and effort."* The participant acknowledges the weight of this responsibility and potentially indicates that it could be overwhelming. In addition, a parent-as-teacher position can significantly affect parent-child relationships, resulting in frustration for both parent and child. This dynamism usually happens after their online classes with their teachers. With online learning, parents and guardians

assume responsibility as an integral component of the child's learning environment. They must be a part of the team responsible for the child's educational experience. Hence, parents play notable roles in their children's studies in blended learning.

4.2. School support in performing parental responsibilities

It was the school's duty to give the parents all the necessary help and guidance on how they would teach their children at home. Consistent follow-ups, reminders, and coordination with parents and teachers were done. This means the school regularly communicated with the parents, providing consistent follow-ups and reminders. Parents were generally satisfied with the level of support provided by school districts and agreed with the school closure policy, although there were some areas of struggle (Garbe et al., 2020). The school provided recorded videos and meetings online through Google Meet and Zoom. Parents mentioned that schools are very understanding when accomplishing requirements; they give enough instructions and activities. Books and modules were given for the children to answer and practice to enhance their lessons. Parent 3 said, *"They give us specific instructions and activities that we will teach and help our children."* while Parent 5 stated that *"They discuss it during their zoom class."* The discussion is a regular or planned part of their class curriculum or agenda. This indicates active engagement in the class, which was also attended by the parents. Moreover, Parent 7 even supports this by saying, *"The teacher is giving an advanced topic for the learners."* By introducing advanced topics, the teacher challenges the students to expand their knowledge and develop new interests or skills.

Parents are a critical component in the relationship between school and students. The significance of good and healthy cooperation between parents and other teachers is a well-known and extensively investigated topic in education. Several studies have demonstrated that parent-teacher collaboration enhances children's academic achievement, work habits, social skills, and emotional well-being (i.e. Msacky et al., 2024; Luna & del Valle, 2023). Epstein (2001) asserts numerous reasons for forming and establishing a partnership between the school, the family, and the community. The primary purpose of this is to assist students in achieving academic success. Other reasons include improving a school's climate and programs, developing parental skills and leadership, connecting families to others in the school and community, and assisting teachers with their work. These reasons emphasize the importance

of parents' active role in their children's education and maintaining a solid and positive relationship with schools.

4.3. Parental strategies in teaching children

Though most are not knowledgeable on how to teach their child formally, they did their best to use some strategies for their child. Aside from the support and help from the school, parents were further taught how to approach their children. The participants mentioned time management and a reward system.

Parent 1 answered that the *"reward system or suhol (bribe)"* is useful in dealing with their children. They said that using a reward system or offering a bribe can effectively manage their relationship with their children, implying positive reinforcement must be utilized to enhance good behavior in children. They may view giving rewards or incentives as more constructive than punishment or discipline. However, the word "bribe" may further suggest a potentially negative connotation, implying that the reward system could be seen as an attempt to manipulate the child's behavior rather than genuinely encouraging positive actions.

Other parents further shared that to minimize the use of gadgets, arts and crafts were further used to enhance the activities and to keep them busy. This is based on the common answers of parents: *"I include art activities for my kids to have fun while learning."* Art-based activities may further help enhance children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Additionally, art activities can help foster children's self-esteem and confidence, which may positively impact their overall academic performance. A similar response was further given by Parent 5, stating, *"I show my child colorful crafts or visuals in giving examples because it attracts him to listen."* By using colorful crafts and visuals to give examples, they can capture their child's attention and keep them focused on what they are saying. They recognize the importance of engaging their child's attention and acknowledge that visual aids are effective tools to use. The participants' emphasis on using visuals to communicate with their child suggests that they are attuned to their child's learning needs and are taking steps to create a positive learning environment.

Additionally, with the help of technology, downloaded educational games and videos were also used. Parent 3 said, *"Optimizing the use of technology by letting her watch educational videos and play educational games online."* They propose allowing the child to watch educational videos and play online games. As a parent, teacher, or caregiver who wants

to enhance a child's learning experience through technology, they recognize that technology can be a valuable tool for learning and want to take advantage of it. They hope to engage the child's interest by suggesting educational videos and games while imparting knowledge and skills, reflecting positive attitude towards technology and its potential to support learning. Parent 7 agreed, "*I include playing and watching educational videos to incorporate the topics the learner needs to learn.*" Using videos, they can cover various topics and make the learning process more engaging and interactive. However, children's digital learning has also been debated and criticized (Radesky et al., 2016; Jiang & Monk, 2015), concerning online risks and dangers, addiction to videos, social isolation, and physical health issues.

This study showed that using positive parenting technique is an excellent way to teach children discipline and morals, which is every parent's dream. However, it is a challenging feat. Furthermore, knowing that the parent-child relationship is a two-way street is essential. In other words, a partnership is needed between a parent and their child. When parents acquire effective parenting skills, they are empowered to bridge the generation gap. As parents understand the balance between setting limits, encouraging, and discouraging, their children will become better learners.

4.4. Challenges and difficulties encountered during teaching

The participants' typical response revealed that challenges and difficulties encountered while teaching their children are the following; attitude problems, time management, difficulty in explaining, lack of focus, and emotional problems.

Parents 1 and 4 said their children usually get tired and do not want to do anything. This behavior may occur at a specific time of day, such as late afternoon or evening, or after prolonged periods of stimulation or activity. They may be concerned about their child's lack of interest or motivation, which could indicate underlying issues such as fatigue, stress, or boredom. To address this, parents and caregivers may need to adjust their expectations and schedules, and offer breaks downtime, or new and engaging activities to keep their children interested and motivated. Additionally, it may be helpful to identify any underlying factors contributing to the child's fatigue, such as poor nutrition, lack of sleep, or health issues.

They further added "*We always have misunderstanding. They were very lazy to do modules or simple tasks. They cannot easily understand the topic sometimes, and I have to read and teach it once again for them to understand.*" As they struggle with comprehension,

they had to invest additional time and effort to re-teach the material. On the other hand, Parents 3 and 7 said that “*time management*” and the “*the child is easily distracted due to the home environment.*” The child's home environment impacts their ability to focus and complete schoolwork. One parent further agreed, “*The only difficulty I encounter is the lack of time to teach the learners due to my responsibilities as a mom and my work.*” They express that their roles as mothers and workers need help finding time to teach effectively. This situation may cause frustration or stress on the part of the parents, balancing their responsibilities with their professional duties. In the context of teaching, this can significantly impact students, who may need more instruction and attention to succeed. It further highlights the importance of support systems for working parents, such as flexible schedules, affordable childcare, and understanding employers.

Parents 4 and 5 further shared that children cannot easily understand the topic. They have to read and teach it once again for them to understand. The children’s level of comprehension is less developed than that of adults as they are still developing their cognitive abilities as learners and may require extra support to comprehend complex topics fully. By recognizing the unique learning needs of children, educators, and parents can help ensure they receive the support they need to succeed academically. Additionally, parents 11, 12, and 13 agreed that the main problem with their children is the need for more attention and focus. Children's lack of attention and focus can be related to various factors, such as ADHD, anxiety, or excessive screen time. It can further be a symptom of underlying emotional or behavioral issues that may require professional help. Additionally, a lack of attention and focus can have negative impacts on a child's academic and social development, as well as their self-esteem. It is common for parents to struggle with their child's attention and focus, and it is crucial to address these issues on time. Seeking professional help and implementing strategies to support a child's ability to concentrate can improve their overall well-being and success. Some parents need more patience, time, attention, and approaches to keep their children motivated when it is time for modules or online classes. Some children do not follow or obey their parents because it is still a big difference when a real teacher is there to teach them.

These experiences are the similar findings of Wang et al. (2020). When parents and children work together on learning activities, they can spend much more time with each other. In these situations, parents can be a source of comfort to help ease their children's pain and worry and can talk to them to help them feel better. It has been suggested that parents should

be taught how to help their kids feel better when things are uncertain. Hence, an online schooling system with parental support guidelines could help improve the bond between children and their parents. On the other hand, distance learning using networks or online learning has many challenges faced by parents. Parents at home replace the role of teachers in school; teachers only guide children to learn through materials or teaching materials prepared through learning media for students. Parents are the ones who play an active role at home to teach their children to learn. Challenges faced by parents in online learning, such as limitations and media resources, limited time, and mastery of technology, demand that parents must change and follow through, especially in the post-modern era. Parents can no longer fully assign responsibility to the teacher in learning activities; they must be able to guide, help and direct their children so that they stay caught up in learning (Esplana, 2022).

4.5. Mechanisms in dealing with challenges during distance learning

To deal with the challenges, parents revealed the following: rest time for their children, playing with them, and time management.

Parents 1 and 13 said that they let their children rest and then get their attention because they believe it is paramount to give some breaks to their children. Parents understand the importance of giving their children time to rest and recharge before engaging with them again. This could allow their children to have some alone time or engage in a calming activity before discussing important matters or having a conversation. Allowing children to rest before seeking their attention is fundamental to positive parenting. By prioritizing their children's well-being and needs, parents set an excellent example for them and promote healthy habits. Taking breaks can improve focus and concentration, reduce stress, and increase productivity. This approach encourages open communication and can help foster a positive parent-child relationship. It is an effective way for parents to support their children's development and success.

Other parents said "*Creating a play or game that can help my child learn as well as have fun; I want to design a game or activity that will be entertaining and educational for my child.*" They recognize the importance of making education fun to encourage their child's interest and enthusiasm. Further, creating a game or play that combines learning and fun is an excellent way to motivate children to learn. By incorporating play and enjoyment into educational activities, children are more likely to engage with the material and retain the

information they have learned. This approach can be especially effective for young children who may still need to develop a strong interest in learning. Designing a game or play that combines learning and fun can encourage children to engage with educational material and develop a lifelong love of learning. This is further supported by parent 4, saying, "*Setting their own time for study and time for play is my solution.*" They normally balance study and play, which may be particularly relevant to children. A good rhythm of their routine is a big help; they know the time for study and play. As parents maintain patience with their children, taking breaks is critical for them too. Parents should give themselves some space when the stress of their child's schooling threatens to overwhelm them. If their child is too young to be left alone, they must take a 15-minute breather in another room or step outside for a few minutes to clear their head.

5. Conclusion

This study finds that parents, who served as facilitators or at-home teachers, were extremely important to their kids' education during distance learning. However, the virtual environment, managing the delivery of instruction, guaranteeing high-quality learning outcomes, technological difficulties, worries about their child's well-being, stress, and different learning styles were some of the identified difficulties parents had to overcome. Similarly, parents had difficulty managing their time while juggling their roles in their children's education and their personal and professional obligations.

While the study emphasizes the necessity of parental role in children's education, it also highlights the crucial impact of parental support to the children's educational success. In the post-Covid educational setting, parents are expected to maintain the same amount of support as teacher to their children. Hence, schools are expected to provide sessions to equip parents with necessary skills and knowledge handling and helping their children learn effectively. As an extension of students' learning, schools need to ensure that homes also provide a conducive learning environment to the children. It is imperative that parent-teacher relationship is enhanced, communication is kept open and collaboration is emphasized.

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ORCID

Julie Anne G. Amistad – <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-2644-2506>

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