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Resilience is the Key: A Concurrent Mixed Methods Study on Surviving the Challenges of COVID-19 among Philippine Schools Overseas

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges among schools across the globe, including the Philippine Schools Overseas (PSOs). Using a convergent mixed methods design, this study investigated the perceptions, views and experiences of the respondents to the unexpected occurrence of COVID 19. In this approach, quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques were used in parallel with each other. Datasets were analyzed separately and merged at the point of integration where they are arrayed side-by-side and by using a joint display. A total of eighty-eight participants from PSOs participated the survey, and nine respondents participated in the phenomenological interviews. The chi-square analysis revealed non-significant association between the respondents' designation and their perceptions to surviving the challenges of COVID-19 in relation to challenges encountered, learning continuity, health and safety protocols, and lessons learned. Qualitative findings revealed that mitigating the challenges, pursuing learning continuity, observing stricter health and safety protocols, and learning from experiences are the best approaches to survive the challenges. The direct comparison of the quantitative and qualitative results allowed us to draw meta-inferences which were classified as confirming and expanding. The mixed methods analyses illuminated the overall aspects of how schools survived the COVID-19 challenges, thus creating a more complete picture of the phenomenon under study.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted various sectors in the industry in many different ways, and education is no exception (Kowalczyk, et. al., 2020; Dabrowski, 2020). The sudden occurrence of the pandemic has triggered global education crisis forcing schools all over the world to shut down conventional schooling and explore alternative learning strategies which became the basis for responding to the COVID-19 pandemic to maintain learning continuity during this period (Cheng et al., 2020). Delivery of learning occurred through internet facilitated online sessions, live streaming of educational content, modules, content delivery via television or radio, and parent facilitated knowledge (Dadrowski, 2020; Boca, 2021). The rapid adoption of technology as the primary resource in teaching-learning process has evidenced several challenges for teachers, students, and schools (Hidalgo-Andrade, Hermosa-Bosano, & Paz, 2021). Government mandated health and safety protocols such as

social distancing, wearing of masks, and partial and total lockdowns were taking place everywhere and schools were mandated to follow (Meccawy, Meccawy & Alsobhi, 2021). Teachers have to adapt to new modes of learning delivery and pedagogical concepts for which they have not been trained and learners who lack engagement to learn and don't have access to digital learning devices may fall behind (Schleicher, 2020). Schools also faced challenges related to assessments to validate learning, high-stakes examinations that determine admission or advancement to new education levels and institutions, are thrown into disarray when schools closed due to the pandemic (UNESCO, 2021).

According to UNESCO (2021) close to half the world's students are still affected by partial or full school closures. The Philippine Schools Overseas (PSOs) are one of those educational institutions affected by the pandemic and faced with the challenges of COVID-19. The PSOs are duly-registered educational institutions operating outside the Philippines and implementing the basic education curriculum of the Department of Education (DepEd). PSOs are established to address the educational needs of children of Filipinos overseas, and eventually facilitate their reintegration into the Philippine educational system. The schools also provide a venue for the teaching and propagation of the Filipino culture and heritage among Filipino youth overseas, and serve as a locus for Filipino community activity. As of 2016, there are 41 PSOs operating in 10 countries with an estimated 33,000 students currently enrolled, from pre-elementary, elementary, and high school levels (Commission on Filipinos Overseas, n.d.). The disruption has affected PSOs' education at all levels from pre-school to high school.

With the COVID-19 pandemic still likely to impact on schooling for the remainder of 2021 and perhaps beyond, this study investigated how PSOs survived the challenges of COVID-19. In particular PSOs faced dramatic changes in teaching and learning of which this paper looked into the challenges they encountered, how they implement learning continuity, health and safety protocols, and the lessons learned from the experience. Examining not only the perceptions of the respondents but understanding as well their lived experiences in the current situation, motivated the used of convergent mixed methods approach to generate a more complete and elaborated understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. The following research questions were addressed in this study:

- What are the significant associations between the respondent's designation in school and their perception to the unexpected occurrence of COVID 19, challenges encountered, preparedness for learning continuity, and lessons learned?
- In what ways do the phenomenological interviews serve to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding to the respondents' experiences to the unexpected occurrence of COVID 19, challenges encountered, implementation of learning continuity, health and safety protocols, and lessons learned?
- To what extent do the quantitative results and qualitative findings converge?

Method

Design

This study used the convergent mixed methods design (Creswell, 2015). This design involves the collection of quantitative and qualitative data separately and then merges the two datasets at the point of interpretation where

they are arrayed side-by-side (Creswell, Plano Clark, 2018; Creswell, 2022). The intent of using this design is to compare the results of the quantitative and qualitative data analyses using a joint-display, in this case, a matrix to obtain a more complete understanding of how the Philippine Schools Overseas survived the challenges of COVID-19. In this research process, two datasets were obtained and analyzed separately and merged together at the point of integration. A visual presentation of the research process is shown in Figure 1.

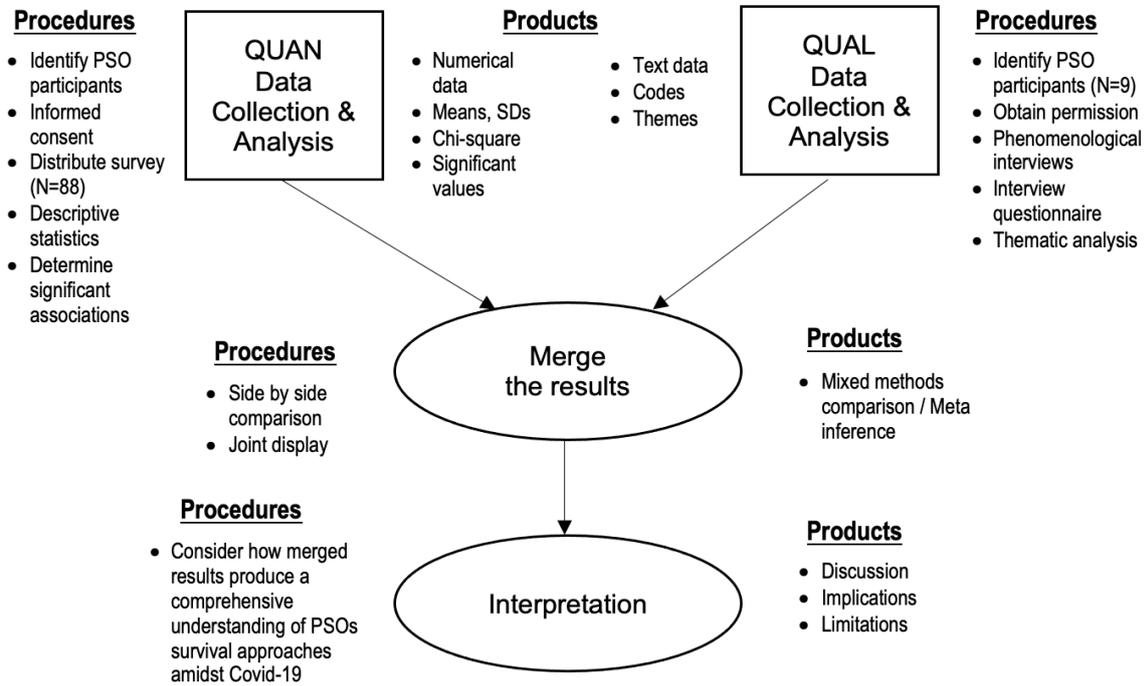


Figure 1. Procedural Diagram of Convergent Mixed Methods Research on Surviving Challenges of Covid 19 in PSOs

Participants

A total of 88 respondents participated the survey, only teachers and school administrators working in any PSOs (Middle East, 84% & Europe, 16%) were chosen to participate. We ran the survey for 6 weeks during the summer period of 2021. Ninety (90) survey responses came back, but only 88 were valid. Among them, 73 or 83% were teachers and 15 or 17% were school administrators. Teachers are the teaching staff while the school administrators are the school principals, vice principals, or department/unit heads. In the phenomenological interviews, 9 respondents participated. 5 (56%) were school administrators and 4 (44%) were teachers.

Data Collection

Quantitative data were collected through a survey using Google form that was distributed via email. The survey was a 50-item scale where participants rate their responses on a 5-point Likert scale. Through extensive literature review, the survey questionnaire was developed. To determine the validity of the questionnaire, face validity and internal consistency validity were conducted. A panel of 3 experts in the field of research was invited to review

the items in the questionnaire to determine if the test is a valid measure of the concept (Oluwole-Sangoseni, et al, 2013). To gauge the internal consistency of the survey questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were calculated (Bolarinwa, 2016; Trizano-Hermosilla, & Alvarado, 2016). For the overall questionnaire the Cronbach Alpha coefficient is .88 and each variable yielded a Cronbach alpha value of .62 (response to COVID 19), .87 (challenges encountered), .96 (learning continuity), .95 (health and safety protocols), and .90 (lessons learned). These values are above .50 which indicate a good internal consistency (Nyengane, 2007; Chakrapani, 2004). The face validity and internal consistency reliability test provided the validity and reliability of the developed questionnaire.

Qualitative data were gathered through phenomenological interviews using a semi-structured interview questionnaire. In a phenomenological interview, "questions are generally broad and open ended so that the subject has sufficient opportunity to express his or her view point extensively" (Giorgi, 1997). In asking questions, we adapted the recommendations of Benner (1994) wherein the questions were framed in the language and vocabulary of the interviewees to stimulate their perspectives and lived-experiences, then we listened actively to elicit areas for clarification and probing. The interviews were conducted via an online interface using Zoom video communication platform. Interviews were recorded and interview protocols were observed. The participants of the survey and interview understood that their participation was voluntary and they can withdraw at any point in the survey and during the interview. Collected data were stored in a safe database that is password protected.

Data Analyses

For quantitative data, descriptive statistics were generated to describe the profile of the participants and their perceptions to how they survive the challenges of COVID-19. A chi-square analysis was conducted to find out the association between the respondents' designation in school and their views to their response to COVID-19, the challenges encountered, the learning continuity plans, health and safety protocols, and lessons learned. Video interviews were transcribed to generate text data, then steps in qualitative data analysis was guided by the procedures of Krippendorff (2013) and Braun & Clark (2006). First, text data were read thoroughly several times to obtain an overall understanding of the participants' perspectives. Second, text data was divided into meaningful units. Third, units were condensed to reduce the text, but preserve the core. Fourth, condensed meaning units were coded. Fifth, text and codes were reviewed for consistency. Sixth, codes were compared based on differences and similarities and sorted into themes which are summarized in table 1. To establish the validity of qualitative data member-checking procedure and peer reviews were observed (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Results

The main study results pertaining to the perceptions, views and experiences of the respondents to the unexpected occurrence of COVID 19 in relation to challenges encountered, learning continuity, health and safety protocols, and lessons learned are presented first by topic. Then, the study's integrative analyses are presented second. The integrative analyses were intended to directly relate both data sets to provide a complementary picture and more complete understanding of the phenomenon.

Response to the Occurrence of COVID-19

Quantitative Findings

The survey results presented the perceptions of the respondents to their response to the occurrence of COVID-19. The results showed a mean score of 4.06 which indicated the respondents' "agreement" to the item descriptions in the response to occurrence of COVID-19. The five high scoring item descriptions were "I realized that the occurrence of COVID-19 is real" ($\bar{x} = 4.72$), "I observed that everyone, the teachers, staff, students, and parents are worried of the current situation" ($\bar{x} = 4.34$), "I made plans and thought of alternative means to continue the school operation, such as teaching and learning, and servicing parents, students, and the community" ($\bar{x} = 4.34$), "I am concerned about learning and teaching continuity amidst pandemic" ($\bar{x} = 4.19$), "I am concerned about the enormous workload of moving the classes online" ($\bar{x} = 4.19$). The chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 43.445$; $p = .216$) indicated non-significant association between the respondents' designation in school and their perceptions to their response to the occurrence of COVID-19. Therefore, the respondents' shared similar responses.

Qualitative Findings

The phenomenological interviews corroborated that teachers and school administrators were worried of the situation "So, our reaction was that we were worried but I told them, we should not be worried. We have to be pro-active right away. We cannot be reactive anymore because it's already here, we are now troubleshooters" (R6). They also expressed concern about learning continuity and the transition to a new learning platform. Respondents mused "I was a little bit skeptical really. My anticipation was that definitely the opening of the next academic year will be ah delayed". (R2); "How can really learning takes place in a way that you will simply be looking at each other in the monitor without contact between the teachers the students. I cannot imagine how things will be" (R1). Despite the situation, they remain positive by accepting the situation to move forward with future plans. "Of course, change is something that everyone is relatively afraid of and in this case, this is a drastic change in terms of the education sector" (R7). The interviewees have encountered mixed feelings of worry, fear, and uncertainty over what will happen with classes, assessments, and other significant activities impacting learning.

Challenges Encountered

Quantitative Findings

The respondents viewed very little challenges encountered during COVID-19 as evidenced by the mean score of 2.35. From the ranked responses, the 5 highest mean scores were "Difficulty in motivating students to complete work independently" ($\bar{x} = 2.97$), "Difficulty in assessing students' progress with learning" ($\bar{x} = 2.83$), "Difficulty in keeping track of students' completion of distance learning assignments" ($\bar{x} = 2.56$), "Problems to access with digital devices among students" ($\bar{x} = 2.44$), and "Problems with internet access" ($\bar{x} = 2.28$). A chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 50.046$ $p = .432$) was carried out to determine significant associations between the respondents' perceptions and their designation in school. The statistical results yielded a non-significant result which suggests that generally, respondents have encountered little challenges related to students' motivation, assessment, completion of

classwork, and internet access.

Qualitative Findings

Interviewees described having challenges related to students' motivation, "I do not know if the students are really listening. They just open their cameras for attendance purposes, then after that they turn off their cameras and I could not see them anymore, if they are still there listening to the lecture". (R9) Others verbalized challenges related to student assignments and assessment, "There is a big challenge for us, how to assess our students when it comes to distance learning. But we believe that we can come up with the best assessment strategy to ensure that the assessment is still valid and still reliable" (R2). Access to digital devices and internet are also come of the challenges encountered, as reported by the respondents, "We encountered these technical problems, technical issues. For example, Wi-Fi because we have students or let's say some, that are only using cellular data." (R4) "Sometimes the internet connection is very slow" (R3), "The school offered to buy gadgets to our students that they pay in installment basis" (R4.) Interestingly, very notable interview responses were noted. Challenges related to teachers' psychosocial aspect were identified, respondents verbalized, "When it comes to the delivery it's not that really difficult for them, it was the psychosocial aspect of the teachers" Their worry is about their children. They cannot go out, so we were thinking how we can provide psychosocial support" (R6); "I was so emotional during the lockdown because I was alone in the accommodation" (R3), "I was really afraid. I'm living alone" (R8), "My main concern is my family" (R9). These responses related to the teacher's psychosocial aspect came out surprisingly and were not included in the survey. The interview responses however, did not only described challenges related to students' motivation, assessment, completion of classwork, and internet access but has included the psychosocial aspect of the teachers that has enriched and expanded the descriptions of the topic.

Learning Continuity

Quantitative Findings

There was no significant association between the respondents' designation in school and their approaches to learning continuity as indicated in the chi-square test result ($\chi^2 = 41.930$ $p = .221$). The overall mean score (3.65) indicated that they are very prepared for learning continuity. Among the item descriptions the top five high scoring items were "Ensuring availability of Learning Management System" ($\bar{x} = 3.86$), "Ensuring proper online classes sectioning and scheduling" ($\bar{x} = 3.77$), "Preparing teachers to do real time or live virtual classes on a video communication platform" ($\bar{x} = 3.69$), "Preparing student learning progress and assessment tools" ($\bar{x} = 3.67$), "Preparing teachers, students, and parents on the use of learning management system" ($\bar{x} = 3.67$).

Qualitative Findings

Interview participants expressed their preparedness when it comes to learning continuity. They confidently narrated their preparations, "We use EDMODO as our learning management system" (R6) "There are various available learning platforms that you can use, such as Zoom, Google classroom..." (R5), "Part of the preparation is personal preparation by educating oneself through attending webinars and online classes" (R1), "Our teachers

put all the learning tools on the google classroom, on the messenger, on the email.” (R4), “The school created schedules. We have synchronous classes, others are modular” (R9). They are not worried how to translate these new learning modalities to the students because proper orientation is part of the preparation, “I will orient them on how online classes will be done in my class” (R8). The interviewed participants expressed confidence in their learning continuity strategies.

Health and Safety

Quantitative Findings

Teachers and School Administrators perception to the health and safety protocols of the school does not differ statistically as evidenced in the chi-square test result ($\chi^2 = 36.980$, $p = .250$). Overall, schools are very prepared in this area with a mean score of 4.18. Among the indicators of health and safety, the top 5 high scoring items are: “Temperature checks at the school gates” ($\bar{x} = 4.36$), “Promoting proper hand washing practices” ($\bar{x} = 4.33$), “Improving cleaning and disinfection facilities” ($\bar{x} = 4.25$), “Issuing specific health and hygiene guidelines” ($\bar{x} = 4.23$), and “Providing alcohol-based hand sanitizing stations” ($\bar{x} = 4.19$). These health and safety protocols are strictly observed among PSOs.

Qualitative Findings

The teachers and school administrators interview shed insight on the common understanding of the school personnel to the health and safety protocols that schools need to observed in this time of pandemic. They confirmed the quantitative findings when they expressed the following responses: “We maintain social distancing. We wear masks. We have sanitizers. The school also distributed masks to students.” (R8), “We look into our courses and added health and safety course, observing necessary protocols such as social distancing, wearing of mask and face shield, requiring lab/PCR tests, decongesting crowded classrooms...” (R7), and “What we are doing is the students come to school wearing masks and gloves all the time. We also check their temperatures upon entering the school. Observe social distancing. The students really have to follow the school’s precautionary measures”. (R4). The pandemic situation has brought all employees and staff of the schools to a common health and safety protocols that must be practiced in schools.

Lessons Learned

Quantitative Findings

The survey showed non-significant association ($\chi^2 = 32.315$, $p = .598$) between designation and perception of lessons learned during the time of pandemic. Participants agree ($\bar{x} = 4.07$) to the statements related to lessons learned. Specifically, they rated the following statements as the top five lessons that they have learned during the time of the pandemic. “Made people appreciate time” ($\bar{x} = 4.27$), “Helped people recognize the importance of staying in touch with each other” ($\bar{x} = 4.22$), “Made schools adapt quickly to ensure academic continuity” ($\bar{x} = 4.19$), “Increased knowledge about online instruction among teachers, students, and parents” ($\bar{x} = 4.19$), “Provided opportunity to explore new learning modalities” ($\bar{x} = 4.16$), and “Realized the importance of being interconnected

globally” ($\bar{x} = 4.13$). These realizations are manifestations of a person’s resiliency to any given situation.

Qualitative Findings

The phenomenological interviews probed the interviewees’ realizations and lessons learned during the time of COVID-19. Interviewed participants discovered how they were able to cope the situation, “It helps us discover a lot of things that there are a lot of things that you can do to ensure learning and help the students learn.” (R8). They have learned as well that they are more than capable of handling any situation, “We are resilient. We are flexible. We make it a point that we are connected with each other. Because of our support system we draw inspiration and strength from each other. By supporting our teams, we inspire and motivate each other. Because we believe we will, we will overcome all of these.” (R2). Importantly, family support is always a part of coping and learning, “Because of the pandemic my family and I got closer. I manage the situation by always calling (by phone and video calls) my family.” (R3). However, the interviewed participants did not only describe these aspects related to adapting to new learning technologies, connecting with each other, but, important lessons pertaining to students’ attitude and a person’s spiritual dependency in times of pandemic were also expressed by the participants, “From the parents, they noticed that their kids or the students became more responsible. But with this online, they became more responsible, they became more serious and I think some of them really valued the education that is going on right now that the pandemic is here.” (R4). “God is really good. In every step of the way he has been there and has been very good. Everything really happens for a reason.” (R1) “God will still provide my needs. I don’t see the pandemic. I am not afraid. I don’t see the negative.” (R5). These revelations have expanded the insights related to lessons learned.

Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Data in a Joint Display

A side-by-side joint display was used to integrate the findings of the survey questionnaire and the phenomenological interview responses from teachers and school administrators. Integrating the quantitative results with qualitative quotes is an effective display technique for presenting data from a convergent mixed method study. In this design, we compare different results by topic to assess for confirmation or expansion between the datasets and to draw meta-inferences.

Table 1 shows how the quantitative data can be linked to the qualitative data. Column 1 shows the topics investigated, column 2 reported the mean scores and chi-square results from the survey, column 3 are the themes generated and supporting quotations of the themes from the participants who participated in the phenomenological interviews. The direct comparison of the quantitative and qualitative results allowed us to draw meta-inferences which are shown in column 4. The meta-inferences were classified into “confirming” and “expanding”. Confirming means the findings from both types of data corroborated and reinforced the results from the other. While expanding means that the two datasets diverged and expanded insights to the descriptions of each topic by addressing complementary aspects, thus providing a more complete understanding of the phenomenon.

Table 1. Joint Display of the Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings and the Mixed Methods Meta-Inference

Topics	Quantitative findings <i>Means, Chi-square p=.05</i>	Qualitative findings Themes Evidence of themes	Mixed Methods Meta Inference
Response to occurrence of COVID-19	$\bar{x} = 4.06$ (<i>agree</i>) $\chi^2 = 43.445$ $p = .216$	Mixed Feelings <i>“How can really learning takes place in a way that you will simply be looking at each other in the monitor without contact between the teachers the students. I cannot imagine how things will be”. (R1)</i> <i>“I was a little bit skeptical really. My anticipation was that definitely the opening of the next academic year will be ah delayed”. (R2)</i> <i>“So, our reaction was that we were worried but I told them, we should not be worried. We have to be proactive right away. We cannot be reactive anymore because it’s already here, we are now troubleshooters”. (R6)</i> <i>“Of course, change is something that everyone is relatively afraid of and in this case, this is a drastic change in terms of the education sector” (R7)</i>	<i>Confirming</i> Respondents described their feelings in response to the sudden occurrence of COVID-19 which confirmed to the mean score defined as “agree” and the χ^2 test show that the respondents share similar feelings.
Challenges encountered	$\bar{x} = 2.35$ (<i>very little</i>) $\chi^2 = 50.046$ $p = .432$	Deterrents to Learning <i>“I do not know if the students are really listening. They just open their cameras for attendance purposes, then after that they turn off their cameras and I could not see them anymore, if they are still there listening to the lecture”. (R9)</i> <i>“We encountered these technical problems, technical issues. For example, Wi-Fi because we have students or let’s say some, that are only using cellular data.” (R4)</i> <i>“Sometimes the internet connection is very slow” (R3)</i>	Expanding Respondents identified the challenges encountered that deterred learning amidst COVID-19, related to learning continuity. The mean score indicated very little occurrence of these challenges of which respondents concurred as shown in the χ^2 test. However, the quantitative survey did not include teacher’s psychosocial aspect of which the qualitative inquiry further expanded thus providing a complete picture of the concept investigated.

Topics	Quantitative findings <i>Means, Chi-square p=.05</i>	Qualitative findings Themes Evidence of themes	Mixed Methods Meta Inference
		<p><i>“There is a big challenge for us, how to assess our students when it comes to distance learning. But we believe that we can come up with the best assessment strategy to ensure that the assessment is still valid and still reliable” (R2).</i></p> <p><i>“When it comes to the delivery it’s not that really difficult for them, it was the psychosocial aspect of the teachers” (R6). “I was so emotional during the lockdown because I was alone in the accommodation” (R3), “I was really afraid. I’m living alone” (R8)</i></p>	
Learning Continuity	$\bar{x} = 3.65$ (<i>very prep</i>) $\chi^2 = 41.930$ $p = .221$	<p>Approaches for Learning Continuity</p> <p><i>“We use EDMODO as our learning management system” (R6)</i></p> <p><i>“There are various available learning platforms that you can use, such as Zoom, Google classroom...” (R5).</i></p> <p><i>“I will orient them on how online classes will be done in my class” (R8).</i></p> <p><i>“Part of the preparation is personal preparation by educating oneself through attending webinars and online classes” (R1)</i></p> <p><i>“Our teachers put all the learning tools on the google classroom, on the messenger, on the email.” (R4)</i></p> <p><i>“The school created schedules. We have synchronous classes, others are modular” (R9)</i></p>	<p>Confirming</p> <p>Understanding the importance of making preparations for learning continuity amidst pandemic is validated by the respondents as evidenced by the mean score described as “very prepared” and the χ^2 test which confirmed that school staff regardless of position work together to prepare for learning continuity.</p>
Health & Safety	$\bar{x} = 4.19$ (<i>very prep</i>) $\chi^2 = 36.980$ $p = .250$	<p>Stricter Health & Safety Protocols</p> <p><i>“We maintain social distancing. We wear masks. We have</i></p>	<p>Confirming</p> <p>Having a complete understanding of the health and safety protocols of the</p>

Topics	Quantitative findings <i>Means, Chi-square p=.05</i>	Qualitative findings Themes Evidence of themes	Mixed Methods Meta Inference
		<p><i>sanitizers. The school also distributed masks to students.” (R8)</i></p> <p><i>“We look into our courses and added health and safety course, observing necessary protocols such as social distancing, wearing of mask and face shield, requiring lab/PCR tests, decongesting crowded classrooms...” (R7)</i></p> <p><i>“What we are doing is the students come to school wearing masks and gloves all the time. We also check their temperatures upon entering the school. Observe social distancing. The students really have to follow the school’s precautionary measures”. (R4)</i></p>	<p>school is confirmed by the respondents as evidenced by the mean score which means “very prepared”. All school employees are aware of their health & safety protocols as shown in the χ^2 test.</p>
Lessons learned	$\bar{x} = 4.07$ (agree) $\chi^2 = 32.315$ $p = .598$	<p>Realizations</p> <p><i>“It helps us discover a lot of things that there are a lot of things that you can do to ensure learning and help the students learn.” (R8)</i></p> <p><i>“We are resilient. We are flexible. We make it a point that we are connected with each other. Because of our support system we draw inspiration and strength from each other. By supporting our teams, we inspire and motivate each other. Because we believe we will, we will overcome all of these.” (R2)</i></p> <p><i>“Because of the pandemic my family and I got closer. I manage the situation by always calling (by phone and video calls) my family.” (R3)</i></p> <p><i>“From the parents, they noticed that their kids or the students became more responsible. But with this online, they became more</i></p>	<p>Expanding</p> <p>Respondents expressed their realizations and lessons learned amidst COVID 19. Some describe opportunities while others expressed reflections. The mean score indicated agreement to these realizations. School employees share similar realizations and lessons learned. However, the qualitative findings further revealed realizations pertaining to spirituality and students’ attitude that expanded the overall results thus providing a more complete understanding of the concept.</p>

Topics	Quantitative findings	Qualitative findings	Mixed Methods Meta Inference
	<i>Means, Chi-square p=.05</i>	Themes Evidence of themes	
		<i>responsible, they became more serious and I think some of them really valued the education that is going on right now that the pandemic is here.” (R4)</i>	
		<i>“God is really good. In every step of the way he has been there and has been very good. Everything really happens for a reason.” (R1) “God will still provide my needs. I don’t see the pandemic. I am not afraid. I don’t see the negative.” (R5)</i>	

As can be seen in Table 1, teachers and school administrators interview responses generally confirmed to the statistical results. There was no significant association between the respondent’s designation in school and their perceptions to the unexpected occurrence of COVID 19, challenges encountered, learning continuity, health and safety protocols and lessons learned. They reported related feelings and lessons learned; and followed the same approaches to learning continuity and protocols to health and safety. Notably, Table 1 further revealed that some participants described having encountered challenges related to their psychosocial aspect and made realizations related to their spiritual beliefs and students’ attitudes towards learning that expands the breadth of the descriptions of the topics related to challenges encountered and lessons learned.

Confirming

Response to Occurrence of COVID-19

The survey participants showed agreement to the item descriptions of their responses to the occurrence of COVID-19. The statistical result also showed non-significant association between the respondent’s designation in school and their perception to the topic. The interviewed participants expressed mixed feelings of worry, concern about learning continuity and uncertainty of what will happen in the future. The phenomenological interview results therefore confirmed the survey results.

Learning Continuity

The survey results of the learning continuity aspect did not achieve statistical significance as regards to the respondents’ views on their learning continuity and their position in the school. Respondents indicated that they are very prepared for learning continuity amidst pandemic. In the interviews, the participants described the learning continuity approaches that they employed such as using ensuring availability of learning management system and learning, training the teachers, creating proper scheduling, and orientating the students and parents to

the new learning modality. The qualitative results confirmed the quantitative results.

Health and Safety

There was no significant association between participants' designation in school and their perceptions to health and safety protocols. Their responses showed high evidence of rigorously following stricter health and safety protocols in schools. The interviews further reinforced their understanding to properly observe, execute, and maintain health and safety practices at all times making the participants aware that COVID-19 is a situation that demands a cohesive and common protocol that schools must follow.

Expanding

Challenges Encountered

The challenges encountered are those related to students' motivation, assessment, completion of classwork, and internet access. Statistically, the respondents expressed that they experienced little challenges. However, the challenges encountered was expanded upon in their interviews. The respondents did not only describe the aforementioned challenges but also described challenges related to psychosocial aspect of the teachers. Several respondents expressed that their main concerns are their well-being, their children, and their families. Providing support to the psychosocial aspect of the teachers would minimize the challenges encountered.

Lessons Learned

Statistically, participants agree that they have acquired lessons learned brought about by COVID-19 situation. The most common lessons learned were those about learning continuity, opportunities to learn new things, and the importance of technology to stay connected and the importance of time to spend with family. However, the phenomenological interviews expanded the lessons learned by describing how students' attitude changed for the better and how a person's spirituality become strengthened by the situation. Interestingly, this finding was not included in the survey items. Thus, creating a complete understanding of the phenomenon.

Discussion and Implications

The results of the study provided a complete picture of how Philippine Schools Overseas survive the challenges of COVID-19. The survey results described their feelings in response to the sudden occurrence of COVID-19 that came at an unprecedented speed of which the qualitative findings corroborated having mixed feelings towards this experience. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to further anxiety and weariness within the teaching profession that extends to all schools impacted by COVID-19. Creating a system that supports educators to improve their practice as a result of school closures is crucial and beneficial (Dabrowski, 2020). Therefore, schools must endeavor to cultivate a culture the promotes positive thinking and feeling on individual basis and within the entire organizational context. On learning continuity, both quantitative and qualitative results highlighted PSOs preparedness to shift to new learning modalities. A study in Saudi Arabia confirmed that during emergency crisis,

schools in Saudi are prepared to transition to remote learning by implementing digital communication and online learning tools (Meccawy, Meccawy & Alsobhi, 2021). With the presence of technology in the classroom, many educators were already familiar with online learning platform, the pandemic situation has encouraged them to discover new ways of utilizing technology to its fullest function to ensure learning continuity (Hung, 2003).

The COVID-19 crisis has somehow strengthened the integration of technology and education providing opportunities for students and teachers to acquire new knowledge in diverse settings. The PSOs are schools situated overseas in particular, the Middle East and Europe. Schools in these countries are better prepared to shift to remote learning delivery, however, survey and interviews revealed that there are few challenges encountered especially related to students' motivation, assessment, completion of classwork, and intermittent internet access. However, an unanticipated part of the interview that went beyond these immediate concerns to what may be an important aspect of education that needs attention, that is the psychosocial aspect of the teachers. Studies (Hidalgo-Andrade, Hermosa-Bosano, & Paz, 2021; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et. al., 2021) have reported that COVID-19 has created unprecedented psychosocial challenges for teachers since during the lockdown they suffered stress accompanied by symptoms of anxiety, fear, worry, and depression due to the pressure to adapt to the new situation. Therefore, school administrators should provide psychosocial care especially to teachers who are experiencing this challenge to help them cope better with the crisis, promote active learning, and perform their teaching role better.

Educators and school leaders of PSOs have demonstrated robust preparations for a safe in-person learning. The survey and interviews described the ways schools implement and practice health and safety protocols in the classroom and the entire school environment to prevent the spread of the virus. The UNICEF (2021) has clearly defined the key important role that schools play is to ensure that students are able to continue their education in a safe and healthy environment by establishing proper health and safety procedures and protocols in the classroom. Therefore, schools should work closely with public health authorities to stay informed of the current situation and implement appropriate procedures in accordance with established protocols from government authorities to ensure the protection of the wellbeing of the students, teachers, and those around them (UNESCO, 2021). The prescribed health and safety protocols would reinforce existing COVID-19 safety frameworks that will be implemented continuously among PSOs and other educational institutions.

Amid this context of challenging situation, there are valuable lessons that PSOs learned. In the survey and interviews, respondents expressed their realizations and lessons learned, some described opportunities while others conveyed reflections. Indeed, this pandemic paved the way for creativity, innovation, and opportunity. The crisis afforded the opportunity to strengthen the bond between teachers and families brought about by the development of various communication platforms (Dabrowski, 20221) and offered new insights into the adoption of e-learning in emergency situations (Meccawy, Meccawy & Alsobhi, 2021). In addition, interviewees narrated lessons learned on a personal level that was meaningful to individual participants, of which they described how the pandemic crisis strengthened their spirituality and changed the attitudes of the students for the better. According to the study of Kowalczyk, et. al. (2020), the Covid-19 pandemic has cause different human responses and reactions, spiritual faith being one of them is the hope that gives a person a sense of security. Their research proved that a person strengthens one's spirituality in the face of crisis. A study of Ismaili (2021) evaluated

students' attitude towards online learning amidst COVID-19, the study found out that students exude positive attitudes and engagement to the new online learning delivery. Thus, as PSOs cope and learn from the crisis, there is an immense potential for schools to emerge stronger than before COVID-19. PSOs, government agencies, and stakeholders can collectively work together to harness the opportunities presented by COVID-19.

Contribution To Mixed Methods Research

The used of convergent mixed methods study further illustrated the benefits of integrating quantitative and qualitative data. The two analysis strategies used were side-by-side narrative and joint display of quantitative and qualitative data. The direct comparison of the quantitative and qualitative results allowed us to draw meta-inferences which were classified as confirming and expanding. This study demonstrated the value of mixed methods approach to better see how the results confirm a common understanding and expand insights to the descriptions of each topic by addressing complementary aspects, thus providing a more complete understanding of how PSOs survive the challenges of COVID-19 of which the researchers recommend to future mixed methods researcher to apply similar approach in their future research projects.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the study illuminating some insights to the way PSOs survive the challenges of COVID-19, this study poses some limitations. First, only few participants responded and participated the survey, making the sample size small, therefore not representing the entire population of PSOs. However, the premise of using of both quantitative and qualitative approaches combined provides a better understanding of the research data than either approach alone, even with a small sample size (Creswell & Plano, 2018) mitigates this limitation. Second, our results must be considered with caution as most participants were PSOs from the Middle East and Europe and data was not analyzed based on the participants' institutions and specific locations, it seems likely that the situation of those PSOs in different locations such as in China and Southeast Asia are not the same. Lastly, our participants have high access to the internet limiting our capacities to generalize our results to the general population of schools.

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