

Disruption and the Quality of Instruction during the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Case of a Catholic School in Hermosa, Bataan, Philippines

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Abstract

This study determined whether there was a significant difference in the academic performance of students in a case Catholic school in Hermosa, Bataan, Philippines in the year immediately before the COVID-19 pandemic (SY 2019-2020) and during the first two years of the pandemic (SY 2020-2021 and SY 2021-2022). It also identified the strategies or measures implemented by the school which influenced the students' performance. Data were gathered through an online survey and interviews of the school's teachers, officials, and staff. The results of the paired samples t-test of weighted average grades revealed no significant difference in the academic performance of students between the first year of the pandemic and the year immediately before the pandemic. However, their academic performances in the year prior to the pandemic and during the second year of the pandemic were found to be significantly different. The school implemented several strategies or measures to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, including shifting to blended learning delivery mode, providing printed modules to students with poor or without internet connection, and close monitoring and following-up of students' learning. These strategies or measures were primarily guided by government memoranda during the said period. The instructions from the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines and the Diocese of Balanga served only as secondary guides. The findings of the study highlight that in the case of a Catholic school under a pandemic context, the formal educational management model takes precedence over the cultural model of educational management.

Keywords: COVID-19, cultural model of educational management, disruption, quality of instruction

Introduction

The global health emergency status of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) was finally ended by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 05 May 2023 (Rigby & Satija, 2023). Back in 2020, however, a total of 107 countries around

the world closed their schools as an initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Viner et al., 2020). In the Philippines, a maximum of 425 private elementary and high schools have closed since 2020 due to the pandemic. The said school closures had affected nearly 21,000 students across the country (Mateo, 2022).

These school closures and learning losses are expected to have a long-term negative impact on children. The learning losses, specifically, could affect these children's economic potential and productivity when they reach adulthood. Hence, the competitiveness of their countries could also be undermined (Cho et al., 2021).

Watkins (2022), meanwhile, reported that due to financial constraints, 860 out of 14,000 private schools in the Philippines closed down permanently. Over 700 of these private schools that closed down were Catholic schools. The school closures brought about by the pandemic not only disrupted the learning of the students, but also disrupted their lives.

Against this backdrop of school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, this study determined whether there was a significant difference in the academic performance of students in a case Catholic school in Hermosa, Bataan, Philippines in the year immediately before the COVID-19 pandemic (SY 2019-2020) and during the first two years of the pandemic (SY 2020-2021 and SY 2021-2022). It also identified the strategies or measures implemented by the school which influenced the performance of the students.

Since the case educational institution is a Catholic school, the study assumed that the school was guided during the pandemic by the cultural model of educational management. The expectation was that it used Catholic beliefs, norms, traditions, and values in particular when it responded to the challenges of the pandemic. The study, hence, was an attempt to confirm the applicability of the cultural model of educational management to the case Catholic school under the pandemic context.

Objectives and Significance of the Study

This study was conducted to: (1) determine whether there is a significant difference in the academic performance of students in the year immediately before the pandemic (SY 2019-2020) and during the first two years of the pandemic (SY 2020-2021 and SY 2021-2022); and (2) identify the strategies or measures implemented by the school which influenced the performance of its students.

It was the hope of the case Catholic school's principal that an independent or external assessment of their performance during the pandemic be conducted. He recognized that such an exercise would help the school administration identify which of their strategies or measures were effective, offering valuable insights for future preparedness in case of another pandemic or disruption. This study aims to fulfill that objective. In addition, the study intends to provide the Department of Education–Bataan (DepEd–Bataan) with feedback on how the case Catholic school in Hermosa, under its jurisdiction, had complied with the

department's memoranda during the pandemic.

Review of Related Studies

To confront the disruption in basic education caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Education implemented its Learning Continuity Plan (LCP) for School Year 2020-2021. Under the LCP, the learning modality to be implemented depended on the local COVID-19 situation and access to various learning platforms (Department of Education, 2020).

In October 2020, blended learning was adopted in schools across the country. Blended learning involves the conduct of online classes, distribution of printed materials or modules, and broadcast of lessons on television and social media (Childhope, 2021).

In higher education, the immediate response to the pandemic was the adoption of flexible learning. The flexibility in this learning modality applies to content, schedule, assessment, and access to digital and non-digital learning tools (Commission on Higher Education, 2020). Similarly, all constituent units of the University of the Philippines System responded to the disruption by adopting the remote learning modality (Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, 2020).

During the pandemic, business educators in Angeles City and Clark, Pampanga experienced several problems, including connectivity and device issues, sudden transition to remote learning, one-way stream of learning, difficulties in maintaining student interest, and the toll on their overall well-being. To solve these problems, educators recorded lessons in advance, conducted synchronous classes, adjusted assessment tools, and capacitated themselves through webinars and training (Felix, 2020). Despite these problems, De Leon (2022) found that the shift to remote or flexible learning modality was sound because the welfare of business economics students of a state university in Pampanga, as indicated by their consumer surplus, has not changed significantly after the transition from face-to-face to remote learning.

To ensure continuous learning during the pandemic, teachers across the country had to redesign their courses. These adjustments were guided by the policies of their educational institutions. However, students with limited or no internet access had difficulty complying with the redesigned courses (Dayagbil et al., 2021).

Kindergarten teachers were not exempted from the course redesign imperative. They had to translate activities into printed modules and prepare distance learning materials that were suitable for their target students. Some of the problems they encountered were the delay in the delivery of instructional materials due to long distances of houses, inadequate structural resources, inability of parents to guide their children, validity of assessment data, and children's poor performance (Cahapay et al., 2021).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the learning quality or academic performance

of senior high school students was affected by the design and implementation of instruction as well as the support systems in place (Sarmiento & Callo, 2022). The learning of public elementary school students, on the other hand, was affected by the quality and implementation of the printed modular distance learning (PMDL) modality. In addition, teachers had difficulty in assessing their students' activities and outputs, parents were found not equipped to guide their children, and student participation was inconsistent (Talimodao & Madrigal, 2021).

All these strategies or measures implemented by school managers during the pandemic must have been guided by a theory or model of educational management. In general, school managers engage in implicit theorizing when formulating policies or responding to challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Practice is always guided by theory. Theory provides the framework that helps managers understand the real meaning of events (Bush, 2002).

According to Bush (2003, 2007, 2010, 2020), there are generally six educational management models for the perusal of school managers, namely: (1) formal; (2) collegial; (3) political; (4) subjective; (5) ambiguity; and (6) cultural. The formal model views schools as hierarchical, uses rational means to achieve their goals, and is associated with the managerial leadership model. The collegial model, on the other hand, emphasizes shared power and decision-making among some or all members of organizations, which correspond to participative leadership model. The political model considers decision-making as a bargaining process, focuses on the distribution of power and influence in organizations, and is associated with the transactional leadership model. The subjective model, meanwhile, focuses on the perceptions of individual members of organizations rather than those of organizations or interest groups, associating it with the post-modern leadership model. The ambiguity model is primarily concerned with the uncertainty and unpredictability within organizations, where priorities are often unclear, and is linked to the contingency leadership model. Finally, the cultural model focuses on the values, beliefs, and norms of individuals which are expressed through rituals and symbols rather than formal structures of organizations, aligning with the moral leadership model (Bush, 2003).

A few studies have identified which educational management models are applicable to their schools. Skykes (2015), for instance, found a Southeast Asian language school not adhering to one particular model of educational management but predominantly used the formal model at the institutional level. Sepiriti (2021) found secondary schools in Lesotho using mostly the formal, collegial, and ambiguity models while Qutub (2021) found the formal model as the most dominant educational management model in a Saudi Arabian public university.

In summary, existing literature discusses the adoption of blended, remote, and flexible learning modalities as the primary strategies implemented by schools to cope with the pandemic. The implementation of these strategies as well as the support system influenced the academic performance of students. It was clear from the literature that any school strategy or measure is generally guided by an educational management theory or model.

However, no previous studies have identified the dominant educational management model in Philippine educational institutions, particularly in parochial or Catholic schools such as this study's case school. There are also no previous studies that investigated how Catholic schools in the Philippines, particularly in the Municipality of Hermosa or in the Province of Bataan overcame the disruption and ensured the quality of instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. These gaps in the literature are what this study aims to address.

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

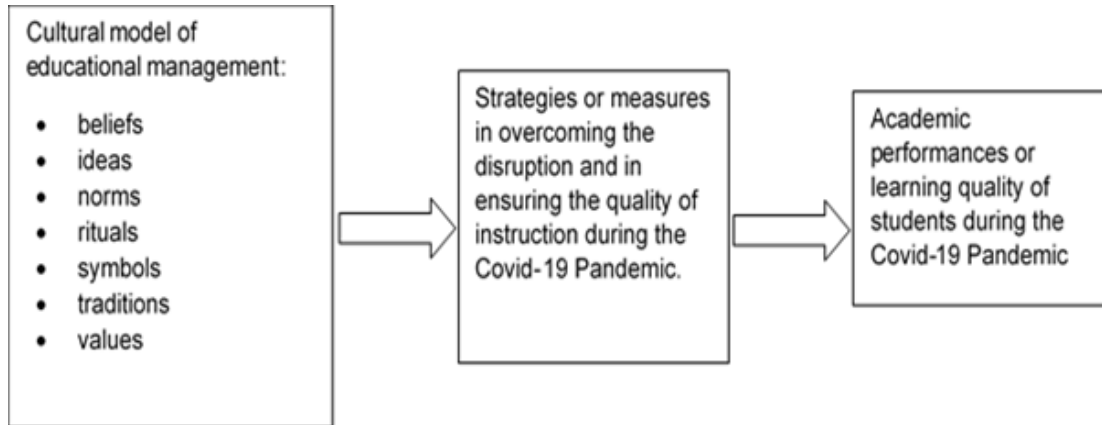
The cultural model of educational management served as this study's framework. According to this model, the behavior of members of an organization such as a school, is shaped by certain beliefs, ideas, norms, rituals, symbols, traditions, and values (Bush, 2003; Ghasemy & Hussin, 2014). This model is closely associated with the moral or ethical leadership style and offers a framework that can be used by school officials in carrying out their functions.

In addition, there are five other educational management models for the perusal of school officials: formal, collegial, political, subjective, and ambiguity models. These models are associated with the managerial, participative, transactional, post-modern, and contingency leadership styles respectively (Bush, 2003, 2007, 2010, 2020). In particular, the formal model of educational management consists of the structural, systems, bureaucratic, rational, and hierarchical types (Bush, 2020).

Figure 1 presents the study's conceptual framework, which is based on the cultural model of educational management as previously explained by Bush (2003, 2007, 2010, 2020). It suggests that Catholic beliefs, ideas, norms, rituals, symbols, traditions, and values influenced the strategies or measures of the case Catholic school in overcoming the disruption and ensuring the quality of instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. In turn, these strategies or measures affected the performances of students and the quality of their learning during the pandemic.

Figure 1

Elements of the Cultural Model of Educational Management and the Case Catholic School's Strategies or Measures to Overcome the Disruption and Ensure the Quality of Instruction during the COVID-19 Pandemic



Methodology

Research Approaches, Research Designs, and Units of Analysis

The study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative research approaches through case study and survey research designs. The case Catholic school, a parochial school offers a complete K-12 program, spanning from kindergarten to grade 12. The units of analysis were teachers, officials, and staff members of the school.

Data Gathering Methods

Data for the study were collected primarily through an online survey and secondarily through interviews. The online survey was conducted on May 4-15, 2023, and responses from 35 respondents were received. They were the teachers, officials, and staff of the case Catholic school who had been in service in the year prior to the pandemic (SY 2019-2020) and during the first two years of the pandemic (SY 2020-2021 and SY 2021-2022). The participants were identified by the school principal.

In addition, the interviews were held on May 4, 2023. The school principal and the Grade 10 teachers served as the interviewees. The Grade 10 teachers were chosen because they handled students who experienced the year prior to the pandemic (SY 2019-2020) and during the first two years of the pandemic (SY 2020-2021 and SY 2021-2022), providing valuable insights into the impact of these different learning environments.

The online survey questions were the following:

I. Academic Performances of Students

1. How would you describe the overall academic performance of your students before the COVID-19 disruption? Please click the appropriate

Likert scale score: 5 = excellent; 4 = very good; 3 = good; 2 = poor; 1 = very poor.

2. What is your basis or reason for your assessment in no. 1? Please state concisely.
3. How would you describe the overall academic performance of your students during the COVID-19 disruption? Please click the appropriate Likert scale score: 5 = excellent; 4 = very good; 3 = good; 2 = poor; 1 = very poor.
4. What is your basis or reason for your assessment in no. 3? Please state concisely.
5. What problems or challenges did your students face during the COVID-19 disruption? Please state concisely.

II. Strategies or Measures during the Pandemic

1. How did your school officials and teachers ensure the quality of instruction/teaching during the COVID-19 disruption?
2. What guided your school officials and teachers in implementing the measures for ensuring the quality of instruction/teaching?
3. How effective were those measures in ensuring the quality of instruction/teaching during the COVID-19 disruption? Please click the appropriate Likert scale score: 5 = very effective; 4 = effective; 3 = neither effective nor ineffective; 2 = ineffective; 1 = very ineffective
4. What is your basis or reason for the Likert scale score that you gave? Please state concisely:
5. What problems or challenges did you encounter in ensuring the quality of instruction/teaching during the COVID-19 disruption?

The interview questions, on the other hand, were the following:

1. What strategies or measures did you implement to overcome the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What strategies or measures did you implement to ensure the quality of instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What guided you in formulating and implementing those strategies and measures?
4. How would you describe the overall academic performances of your students in the year prior to the pandemic (SY 2019-2020) and during the first two years of the pandemic (SY 2020-2021 and SY 2021-2022)? Explain why they are similar or different.

The academic performance of 49 Grade 10 students in school years 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022 was assessed using their weighted average grades. These grades were obtained through the school principal. Grade 10 students were chosen as members of the sample class because they experienced the school year immediately before the pandemic (SY 2019-2020) and during the first two years of the pandemic (SY 2020-2021 and SY 2021-2022).

Data Encoding and Analysis

The data gathered from the online survey and interviews were encoded and summarized in a spreadsheet. The modal or most frequent responses were used

to answer the research questions on the strategies or measures implemented by the school officials to overcome the disruption and ensure the quality of instruction during the pandemic.

The weighted average grades of the students in the sample class were subjected to a paired samples t-test to determine whether the academic performances or learning quality of the students in the year immediately before the pandemic and during the first two years of the pandemic were significantly different.

A paired samples t-test was used because it compares the means of two measurements taken from the same group of individuals or objects. The purpose of the test is to determine whether there is statistical evidence that the mean difference between paired observations is significantly different from zero (Kent State University, n. d.).

A 5-point Likert scale was used by the respondents to assess how effective the school's strategies or measures had been in overcoming the disruption and ensuring the quality of instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. The said Likert scale had the following numerical scores and adjectival equivalents: 5 = very effective; 4 = effective; 3 = neither effective nor ineffective; 2 = ineffective; 1 = very ineffective.

A 5-point Likert scale was also used to assess the respondents' views on the overall academic performance of students in the year immediately prior to the pandemic and during the first two years of the pandemic. The said Likert scale had the following numerical scores and adjectival equivalents: 5 = excellent; 4 = very good; 3 = good; 2 = poor; 1 = very poor.

The study adopted the following typology of learning delivery modes from the University of the Philippines System's OVPAA Memorandum No. 2022-88, issued on June 20, 2022. These modes included:

1. Face-to-face instruction—a learning delivery mode where both the teacher and students meet in a physical classroom, and when teaching and learning occur at the same time.
2. Distance education—a learning delivery mode where the teacher and students are geographically separated, and when teaching and learning are mediated by technology and do not necessarily occur at the same time.
3. Blended learning—a learning delivery mode that is a combination of face-to-face instruction and online distance education.
4. Hybrid flexible (HyFlex)—a learning delivery mode that requires simultaneously holding face-to-face instruction for one set of students and online synchronous instruction for another set of students who cannot attend their class in person. It requires appropriate information and communication technology (ICT) equipment, sufficient internet connection, and adequate technical support for the teacher and students.

Ethical Considerations

A written permission to conduct the study was obtained from the school principal on April 20, 2023. All survey respondents were provided with detailed information about the study and gave their free prior and informed consent at the beginning of the online survey questionnaire. The name of the case Catholic school as well as the names or identities of the respondents and interviewees were kept anonymous. Finally, the author personally encoded the data from the online survey and interviews in a spreadsheet to ensure that they remain private and confidential.

Discussion

History and Organization of the Case Catholic School

The case Catholic school traces its roots to another Catholic school that was established in 1965 but unfortunately closed down in 1996. There was a clamor among the residents of Hermosa to reopen the school that had closed down in 1996. However, due to the government's cancellation of that school's permit or recognition and a pending legal case, the then Bishop of Balanga ordered the establishment of a new school.

The school's board is chaired by the Bishop of Balanga, with other members including the superintendent, the chief finance officer, the corporate secretary, the school director, and the school principal. The school's non-teaching personnel include the finance officer, the guidance advocate, the prefect of discipline, the record officer, the school librarian, the school nurse, and the school guard. The school also has three janitors and three canteen staff members.

The case Catholic school currently has pre-elementary, elementary, junior high school, and senior high school levels. Data from the school's record officer show a decreasing number of students during the first two years of the pandemic (SY 2020-2021 and SY 2021-2022). Table 1 compares the numbers of teachers, staff, and students in the year immediately before the COVID-19 pandemic (SY 2019-2020) and during the first two years of the pandemic.

Table 1

Number of Teachers, Staff, and Students of the Case Catholic School Before and During the First Two Years of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Units Compared	SY 2019-2020	SY 2020-2021	SY 2021-2022
Teachers	44	48	36
Staff	19	18	15
Students	1,597	1,422	1,291

Note. The values in this table are unique counts.

Socio-demographic Profile of Respondents

Six out of 35 survey respondents identified themselves as either officials or staff of the case Catholic school, while 29 identified themselves as teachers.

The respondents were 12 males and 23 females. Twenty-three respondents are single, while 12 are married. Seventeen respondents reside in Hermosa, while 18 reside in other municipalities within the Province of Bataan. Among the 35 respondents, only one has a master's degree, while the remaining 34 have bachelor's degrees. The years of service or employment with the school range from one to 25 years. Ten respondents have been in service for four years. The mean of the years of service of all 35 respondents is 6.5.

According to the school's call for applications to teaching positions posted at the Bataan Provincial Government's Public Employment Services Office (PESO), the minimum qualifications for applicants are: (1) bachelor's degree in education; (2) Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) passer, in other words, a licensed professional teacher (LPT); and (3) preferably a Catholic. The preference for Catholic LPTs is expected and understandable since the school is a Catholic educational institution run by the Diocese of Balanga, Bataan.

Academic Performances of Students Before and During the Pandemic

The results of the paired samples t-test showed no significant difference in the weighted average grades of Grade 10 students in the year immediately before the pandemic (SY 2019-2020) and during the first year of the pandemic (SY 2020-2021) ($M = -0.51020$, $SD = 2.03227$, $t = -1.757$, $p = 0.085$). This result suggests that the academic performance of Grade 10 students in the year immediately before the pandemic was not significantly different from their academic performance during the first year of the pandemic.

However, there was a significant difference in the weighted average grades of Grade 10 students in the year prior to the pandemic (SY 2019-2020) and their weighted average grades during the second year of the pandemic (SY 2021-2022) ($M = -1.38776$, $SD = 3.06741$, $t = -3.167$, $p = 0.003$). This result of the paired samples t-test suggests that the academic performances of Grade 10 students in the first year prior to the pandemic and during the second year of the pandemic were significantly different. The school principal attributes this difference to the fact that not all of their students were able to adapt to the remote learning modality. About half of them do not have a stable internet connection and are often distracted at home.

Using a 5-point Likert scale, the respondents were asked to rate the academic performances of their students in the year immediately before the pandemic (SY 2019-2020) and during the first two years of the pandemic (SY 2020-2021 and SY 2021-2022). The Likert scale scores had the following adjectival equivalents: 5 = excellent; 4 = very good; 3 = good; 2 = poor; 1 = very poor. The means of the Likert scale scores given by the respondents were 3.9 and 3.7 respectively. Both would round off to a score of 4 and have an adjectival equivalent of very good. The respondents were unanimous in attributing this rating to the strategies or measures implemented by the school officials, especially during the pandemic.

According to 71.4% of the respondents, the "very good" academic performance of students before the pandemic was evident from their high grades, while

28.6% of the respondents cited the active participation of students in class as evidence. On the other hand, 74.3% of the respondents thought that the academic performance of their students during the first two years of the pandemic remained “very good” primarily because of their high grades. Positive feedback from students and their parents was the basis of 14.3% of the respondents, while 11.4% of them cited active class participation. Based on the respondents’ collective perception, the academic performances of students in the year immediately prior to the pandemic and during the first two years of the pandemic are similar. Both are “very good” due to the aforementioned reasons.

Strategies or Measures Implemented during the Pandemic

Nearly 66% of the respondents identified the shift from face-to-face to blended delivery model as the most noticeable effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, 34% of the respondents identified the decrease in enrollment as the pandemic’s most obvious consequence. These effects of the pandemic were considered by all respondents as disruptions from the normal operations of their school.

The respondents identified the shift to the blended learning delivery mode as their main strategy for overcoming the disruption posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of their classes during the first two years of the pandemic (SY 2020-2021 and SY 2021-2022) were conducted remotely. However, they also had to print and deliver modules for students with poor or no internet connection to ensure continued learning.

According to 45.7% of the respondents, these strategies or measures for overcoming the disruption caused by the pandemic were guided by government memoranda, particularly from the Department of Education. Only 28.5% of the respondents said that their strategies or measures were guided by the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines, the Diocese of Balanga, and school officials. On the other hand, 25.7% of the respondents said that the needs of their learners served a significant role in their responses to the pandemic. Since the case school is a Catholic educational institution, one would expect its strategies or measures to be guided primarily by Catholic beliefs, ideas, norms, symbols, rituals, values, and traditions. However, in the case of the strategies or measures implemented by the case school to overcome the disruption during the pandemic, government memoranda served as the main guide. Regardless of the existence or occurrence of the pandemic, all public and private elementary and secondary schools in the country are expected to comply with DepEd memoranda. They are under the authority of the DepEd, and they simply had no choice but to comply with its orders. Failure to comply would result in suspension, or worse, revocation of their permit to operate.

Bush’s (2003) cultural models of educational management focus on the values, beliefs, and norms of individuals which are manifested by rituals and symbols rather than through formal structures of organizations. In the pandemic context, however, all public and private elementary and secondary schools in the country are forced to follow the orders or memoranda of the DepEd. The school managers are expected to make sure that their respective schools comply with

DepEd orders. This contrasts with the more value-based approach typically found in Catholic education. In this situation, values, beliefs, and norms have very little chance to manifest through rituals and symbols. Only 28.5% of the respondents perceive that their strategies or measures during the pandemic were guided by the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines and the Diocese of Balanga. During the pandemic, the values, beliefs, and norms of the Catholic church as well as the devotion to the school and the town's patron saint did not manifest in the strategies or measures implemented by the school (J. Mariano, personal communication, May 4, 2023). Instead of these cultural elements, formal structures such as the DepEd and school administrations dominated. This suggests that especially under a pandemic context, the cultural model of educational management may not be applicable to the case Catholic school. During a pandemic, the formal models of educational management may be more applicable since, according to Bush (2003, 2007, 2010, 2020) these models view schools as hierarchical and are behaving rationally to achieve their goals.

Using a 5-point Likert scale, the respondents were asked to assess the effectiveness of their strategies or measures in overcoming the disruption caused by the pandemic. The Likert scale scores had the following adjectival equivalents: 5 = very effective; 4 = effective; 3 = neither effective nor ineffective; 2 = ineffective; 1 = very ineffective. The mean score was 4, indicating that the respondents felt their strategies or measures during the pandemic were effective. Basically, they gave two reasons for the said rating. The first reason was that 71.4% of the respondents observed their students were able to adapt well to the blended learning delivery mode. The second reason, mentioned by 28.6% of the respondents, was the smooth implementation of both the blended learning delivery mode and the distribution of printed modules for students without internet connection.

The officials, staff, and teachers of the case Catholic school ensured the quality of instruction primarily through close monitoring and follow-up of students' learning, and secondarily through holding of webinars on remote or blended learning delivery modes. Close monitoring and follow-up of students' learning were mentioned by 57.1% of the respondents, while the holding of webinars on remote or blended learning delivery modes was mentioned by 22.8% of the respondents. The remaining 20.1% of the respondents said that they ensured the quality of instruction during the pandemic by conducting remedial classes for those students who were being left behind, following the memoranda of the Department of Education, and recalibrating the curriculum to better meet students' needs.

According to 62.9% of the respondents, their strategies or measures in ensuring the quality of instruction during the pandemic were guided by government memoranda, particularly from the Department of Education. Around 14.3% of the respondents said that they were guided by the webinars on remote or blended learning delivery modes. Around 11.4% of them said that they were guided by the needs of the learners, and finally, 11.4% of them were guided by the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines, the Diocese of Balanga, and the school officials. It should be noted for the second time that bureaucracy,

hierarchy, and rationality, as embodied in government memoranda, played a bigger role in guiding the case Catholic school's strategies or measures for ensuring the quality of instruction during the pandemic than the elements of the cultural model of educational management, such as Catholic beliefs, ideas, norms, symbols, rituals, values, and traditions.

Using a 5-point Likert scale, the respondents were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of their strategies or measures in ensuring the quality of instruction had been during the pandemic. The Likert scale scores had the following adjectival equivalents: 5 = very effective; 4 = effective; 3 = neither effective nor ineffective; 2 = ineffective; 1 = very ineffective. The mean score was 4.2, implying that for the respondents, their strategies or measures in ensuring the quality of instruction during the pandemic were effective. Nearly 54.3% of the respondents attributed the effectiveness of their strategies or measures to positive feedback from students and their parents, while 45.7% of the respondents attributed it directly to the students' output.

Problems Encountered

Poor or no internet connection was the biggest problem encountered by students during the first two years of the pandemic. This was according to 57.1% of the respondents. This aligns with the findings previously reported by Dayagbil et al. in 2021. Another major issue, reported by 20% of respondents, was distractions at home, leading to a lack of focus and motivation among students. Meanwhile, failing grades, poor mental health state or depression, and dishonesty during examinations were the minor problems identified by the respondents. Each of these minor problems were reported by 5.7% of the respondents.

These problems are among the risks and opportunities identified previously by Winthrop in 2020. The said author highlighted the tendency for distance learning approaches, especially asynchronous online classes and modular delivery mode, to make learning solitary and passive. He also expressed concern for the teachers being overwhelmed with tasks.

According to the school principal, the moment he learned that almost half of their students have poor or no internet connection, he immediately ordered the printing of modules for these students. This solution, however, gave rise to another problem. Soon enough, the teachers reported that the parents were doing the required exercises in the printed modules. Hence, giving a fair or just assessment of students' outputs became a huge challenge for the teachers. This problem with printed modules and the corollary problem on assessment were also found by Cahapay et al. in 2021.

During the interview on May 4, 2023, the school principal also explained that online or remote classes yielded mixed results. Students who were able to adapt to this new learning delivery mode saw improvements in their grades. In contrast, those students who were distracted at home or felt depressed due to the absence of interaction with friends and classmates saw a decline in their grades. Hence, it is difficult to conclude whether online or remote learning is appropriate for all the students of the case Catholic school.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the academic performance of students during the first year of the pandemic was not significantly different from their academic performance in the year immediately before the pandemic. However, a significant difference was found between their academic performances in the year prior to the pandemic and during the second year of the pandemic.

The shift to the blended learning delivery mode, provision of printed modules to students with poor or without internet connection, and close monitoring and follow-up of students' learning were the strategies or measures implemented by the school during the pandemic.

The school was mostly guided by government memoranda during the said period. The instructions from the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines and the Diocese of Balanga served only as secondary guides. Only 28.5% of the respondents perceived that their school's strategies or measures during the pandemic were guided by these Catholic institutions. The interview with the school principal confirmed that Catholic beliefs, values, and norms did not manifest in their strategies or measures during the pandemic. This suggests that the cultural model of educational management is largely inapplicable in a pandemic context.

The main problems identified by the respondents of the study were poor internet connection and their students being distracted at home, or lacking motivation or focus.

Recommendations

This study recommends continuing the printing and distribution of modules to students with poor or no internet connection. It also recommends maintaining the teachers' efforts to closely monitor and follow-up on students' learning progress.

Since a reliable internet connection remains unaffordable to most students and distractions at home are beyond the teachers' control, this study recommends designating a spacious room in the school as a learning common. This room can be equipped with internet and wireless fidelity connections for the benefit of students with poor or no internet connection. The room's layout should be designed to follow physical distancing and other COVID-19 protocols. In case the school faces a budget constraint to implement such a measure, it can solicit donations from the members of the parish and alumni of the school that had closed down in 1996. After all, these alumni consider the present Catholic school as the successor of their high school. Very recently, these alumni launched a fund-raising campaign to support the construction of comfort rooms near the school's covered court.

In the future, this study can be replicated to include other Catholic and diocesan schools in Bataan such as the Saint John Academy in Dinalupihan, the Holy Rosary Parochial School in Orani, and Saint Catherine of Siena in Samal. It

is interesting to investigate whether Catholic beliefs, ideas, norms, symbols, rituals, values, and traditions indeed influence not only the hiring policies of these schools but also their strategies or measures for ensuring the quality of instruction during and after the pandemic.

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