

Literacy in Pandemic: Practices, Challenges, and Coping Strategies of MKO's in Online and Modular Learning Modalities

Rosalyn Gunobgunob-Mirasol*

Research Center for Social Sciences and Education, Department of English, Faculty of Arts and Letters, University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines

Corresponding author: Rosalyn Gunobgunob-Mirasol, E-mail: rgmirasol@ust.edu.ph

ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: January 11, 2023

Accepted: April 05, 2024

Published: April 31, 2024

Volume: 12 Issue: 2

Conflicts of interest: None

Funding: The research is supported by the Research Center for Social Sciences and Education of the University of Santo Tomas

ABSTRACT

This paper investigated the literacy practices, challenges, and coping strategies of the More Knowledgeable Others (MKO) in helping the learners accomplish literacy tasks included in the online and modular worksheets during the lockdown period because of COVID-19 pandemic. MKO is a person who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner; this includes the teachers, the parents, and the guardians. This study focused on the parents and guardians as they assume two significant roles during the time of pandemic, namely a teacher and a parent. Two hundred six parents and guardians were surveyed, and selected respondents were requested to participate in the semi-structured interview to provide opportunities to express their experiences during the pandemic. The results revealed that MKO's practices include their role as a: (1) support in children's school tasks; (2) spending read aloud time with their children; and (3) their use of Internet and gadgets. For the challenges, four subthemes emerged: (1) duality of roles; (2) lack of knowledge and skills; (3) Internet connectivity; and (4) financial challenges. With the challenges come MKO's coping strategies: (1) managing time wisely; (2) they provide unfathomable moral support; and (3) their faith in God. With the findings, this paper recommends creation of consultative body among parents so they can be included in the curriculum design for the education of their children.

Key words: Pandemic, Literacy Practices, More Knowledgeable Others (MKO), Reading

INTRODUCTION

As the pandemic severely hit the world, educational institutions are among those who grappled with abrupt and critical transitions to respond to the challenges of remote and virtual learning.

With children currently not able to study in the classrooms, the importance of learning at home is amplified. With this, the task of supporting children's learning has fallen on parents in a much larger rate, a significant burden particularly for those balancing the role of being a parent and a provider and those with limited schooling themselves (Kamei et al., 2020). As students and their teachers respond and react to new literacy experiences, parents also share the same difficulties and adjustments as well as sentiments to the new and safer way of transfer of knowledge during the global pandemic.

In the Philippines, not much has been done on the national front to manage the educational crisis during the pandemic. More than 28 million Filipino learners across academic levels needed to remain at home to conform to the government's quarantine measures (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2020). As

per the report of Department of Education (DepEd), more than 4 million have not been able to enroll in both public and private schools in 2021 (Philippine News Agency, 2021). Of those who enrolled in public school, 99% of the students received passing marks for the academic quarter of last year. In a survey conducted by the Movement for Safe, Equitable, Quality and Relevant Education, 86% of the 1,299 respondents learned less through the education department's take-home modules – so did 66% of those using online learning and 74% using a blend of online learning and module (De Guzman, 2021). For many, modular learning was seen more of a requirement rather than a tool for learning. Several accounts of teachers were noted stating that the modules returned were answered by the parents. With this, Superintendent Ruth Estacio of South Cotabato Schools Division called on the parents not to answer the modules. Therefore, it is evident that for parents who were employed full-time, as well as those who experienced job loss and financial challenges during this period, these childcare and teaching burdens may have been challenging. Nearly half of the parents of children in public schools (grades K-12) who responded to a national survey showed that they had difficulties accomplishing the many concerns while all the family

members were at home (Learning Heroes, 2020). Another survey revealed that parents' most critical needs included added cash to pay for essentials and help keep children "engaged in good activities" (Bailey & Shaw, 2020). With the multiple roles parents play, it is high time to look into the challenges and coping strategies of MKO's so that governmental and non-governmental sectors, especially educational institutions, convene together with other stakeholders, particularly the parents, to strategically plan programs that involve the MKO's in the curriculum so a shared responsibility and concrete action will be implemented to ensure that the learners are making the kind of lasting, meaningful connections that will result in real learning. With this, this paper deemed important that the background of the parents in terms of the number of children, types, and availability of internet connection at home, gadgets used in accessing educational platforms, availability of learning space at home, time spent in teaching the child, and reading beliefs and practices were explored. These aforesaid factors are important in determining the practices, challenges, and coping strategies of the participants in assisting their children to the different learning modalities experienced during the pandemic.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical underpinnings of this study are the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) by Lev Vygotsky and the School-Family-Community-Partnership Model of Epstein et al. (2002).

Vygotsky's (1978) influential concept of Zone of Proximal Development was originally developed to account for the learning potential of children. Vygotsky's theory stressed the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory views human development as a socially mediated process in which children acquire their cultural values, beliefs, and problem-solving strategies through collaborative dialogues with more knowledgeable members of society (McLeod, 2018). There is a consensus that the notion of the zone of proximal development and socio-cultural theory of mind based on Vygotsky's ideas are at the heart of the notion of scaffolding (Shabani et al., 2010). Vygotsky (1978) sees the Zone of Proximal Development as the area where the most sensitive instruction or guidance should be given - allowing the child to develop skills they will then use on their own - developing higher mental functions. This is where the role of the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) comes in. As defined by Vygotsky, MKO could be a teacher, a parent, or an older adult who have a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner, particularly about a specific task, concept, or process. In this study, the investigation will focus on parents as they give support or scaffold to their children.

The second theoretical underpinning of this study is the School-Family-Community-Partnership Model (SFCPM) developed by Joyce Epstein and her collaborators namely, Mavis G. Sanders, Steven B. Sheldon, Beth S. Simon, Karen Clark Salinas, Natalie Rodriguez Jansorn, Frances L. Van Voorhis, Cecelia S. Martin, Brenda G. Thomas, Marsha

D. Greenfeld, Darcy J. Hutchins, and Kenyatta J. Williams. Epstein et al. (2002) define parenting in six facets: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating. 1) Parenting skills to assist parents with understanding their children's learning needs, and helping teachers understand family needs; 2) Communication that allows for two-way, open communication between the school and home; 3) Volunteering that recognizes parents' talents and contributions both in and for the school; 4) Learning at home strategies that engage the family with their children's school work; 5) Decision making that includes parents as key stakeholders in making decisions that will impact student learning; and 6) Collaborating with the community to create mutual benefit by sharing resources and contributing to both school and community goals.

The home learning environment has an influence on a child's intellectual and social development that is over and above family socio-demographic factors such as parental education, socioeconomic status, and income, suggesting that a positive home learning environment has the potential to help children. However, many parents struggle with regular, sustained, and positive interactions with their child at home. This may be due to a lack of confidence, time, or capacity, or because they underestimate their impact on young children (Crew, 2020). This situation may have worsened because of the sudden shift of the learning environment. Parents may have been caught unaware of the immense responsibility this virtual and modular learning had on their shoulders.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The influence of homes to children's literacy development in general is undoubtedly immense. Significantly, the background of the family, including the educational achievement of the parents, the economic and social status of the family, as well as the kind of orientation the parents had may have an impact on the children's general reading proficiency.

In a study conducted by Abuhammad (2020), he reviewed the content posted on Facebook groups to delineate the perceptions of parents regarding the challenges of distance learning faced by their children during the coronavirus outbreak in Jordan.

Lee et al. (2020) analyzed social media posts in Korea that COVID-19 significantly altered the definition of home in Korea from the traditional place to sleep to a basecamp containing several major activities related to work, schooling, parenting, housework, shopping, leisure, and religion. They stressed that although the pandemic provided an opportunity to build emotional ties for some families, many families who were stuck at home experienced relational difficulties.

A survey conducted by Donga et al. (2020) of 3,275 Chinese respondents revealed that parents had negative beliefs about the values and benefits of online learning and preferred traditional learning in early childhood settings. They tended to resist and even reject online learning for three key reasons: the shortcomings of online learning, young children's inadequate self-regulation, and their lack of time and professional knowledge in supporting children's online learning. The study also revealed that the hardship

caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has made them suffer, thus they became more resistant to online learning at home. Unfortunately, the implementation of online learning during the pandemic has been problematic and challenging for Chinese families.

Spinelli et al. (2020) found out that household chaos predicted higher levels of parenting stress, which, in turn, was associated with less effective emotion regulation in children through the mediating role of parental involvement. The study also revealed that more stressed parents were less involved in their children's activities, decreasing children's effective emotion regulation. Furthermore, the lockdown constraints increased parenting stress.

It is evident that parental involvement increased during home-school. Bubb and Jones (2020) found that parents gained more knowledge about their children's learning, and that they had opportunities to play a more important role than before. However, they found that as the learners achieve a higher educational level, parental involvement decreased. Interestingly, Grade 10 learners would be less inclined to involve their parents in their learning. This poses a challenge to the parents/carers as they feel that their children wanted to become more and more independent.

Dealing with the lockdown and the sudden shift of classroom-based education to virtual and modular learning because of the global pandemic is indeed a stressful experience not only to the teachers and students alike, but more crucially, to the parents who needed to play multiple roles. Parents need to balance personal life, work, and children's upbringing.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This paper utilized both quantitative-descriptive and qualitative approaches were used to analyze the data. In this study, quantitative descriptive research method was used to systematically collect and analyze numerical data to describe or summarize a population or phenomenon (Unimrkt, 2023). An online survey was sent to 206 parents and a focus group discussion was conducted to gain better insights to the experiences of the parents in several types of learning modalities.

Subjects and Study Site

Two hundred six parents from a rural community were the respondents of the survey. Meanwhile, the focus group discussion came from low-income families. The respondents' age, gender, and the number of children attending school are reported in Table 1.

Instrumentation

A researcher-made questionnaire was distributed online. The questionnaire consisted of demographics such as their gender, age, occupation, educational background, and number of children studying in the public or private school. Part 2 of the questionnaire included questions on internet

connectivity, types of internet connectivity, gadget, time allotted for studying, availability of books at home, time spent reading with the child, beliefs about reading, specifically whether the parents believe that reading can help their child succeed in life, ways on how they help their children in answering the assignment, and reasons why they felt that it was too difficult for them to help their children in their studies.

The second part of the study is the focus group discussion. Two different sessions were conducted to gain better insights into the experiences, specifically the practices, challenges, and coping strategies of the participants in assisting their children to the different learning modalities experienced during the pandemic.

Data Gathering Procedure

The survey questionnaire was distributed to the respondents via google link. A paragraph containing the consent was reflected on the first page of the survey stating that the survey should take no more than 15 minutes of their time and that their participation was completely voluntary and anonymous. A focus group discussion was also conducted to provide opportunities for the respondents to share their experiences during the online and onsite learning sessions.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to the conduct of the study, a meeting was held via Google meet with the head teachers assigned to the target schools. They gave permission to the researcher regarding the conduct of the research. It was agreed that the advisers would distribute the instruments. The class advisers distributed the questionnaires during the issuance of report cards. Then the parents distributed the questionnaires to their son/daughter. Those who had internet accessibility, the google link was shared with them.

RESULTS

Prior to the conduct of focus group discussions with the MKO's (parents, grandparents, and uncles), a survey questionnaire was distributed to the participants to determine the number of children, types, and availability of internet connection at home, gadgets used in accessing educational platforms, availability of learning space at home, time spent in teaching the child, and reading beliefs and practices were explored. These aforesaid factors are important in determining the practices, challenges, and coping strategies of the participants in assisting their children to the different learning modalities experienced during the pandemic.

Gender of the Respondents

Table 1 shows the gender distribution of the respondents. The survey questionnaire was distributed to 206 participants; 199 or 96.6 percent responded to the survey. Of the 199, 173 or 87% of the respondents are female, while 26 or 13% were male. The age of the respondents varies. 20 or 10% of the participants belong to the 20–30 age group; 74

Table 1. Demographics of the respondents

Categories	No. Response (N=199)	% Response (N=96%)
Sex		
Male	26	13%
Female	173	87%
Age group		
20-30 years old	20	10%
31-40 years old	74	37%
41 years old and above	105	53%
Number of Children Attending School		
1-2	98	49%
3-4	75	38%
5 and above	26	13%
Internet Connectivity at home		
Yes	135	68%
No	64	32%
Type of internet connection		
Mobile data	119	60%
Wi-Fi	80	40%
Kind of gadget used in studying		
Cellphone	181	91%
Tablet	6	3%
Laptop	8	4%
Desktop	6	2%
Available Learning Space at Home		
Yes	183	91.5%
No	17	8.5%
Definite Schedule for Studying at Home		
Yes	167	84%
No	32	16%
Availability of Books at Home		
Yes	102	51.3%
No	97	48.7%
Time Spent Reading at Home with the Children		
Yes	159	80%
No	40	20%

or 37% of the respondents belong to 31-40 age group; and lastly, 105 or 53% of the respondents belong to 41 – above age group. The respondents' number of children attending school falls in a 1-2 children category, of which 98 or 49% of the respondents belong. This is followed by 75 or 38% of the respondents belonging to the 3-4 children category. While the least percentage of respondents, which is 5-above

category has 26 or 13% of the respondents. Furthermore, 135 or 68% of the respondents have internet connection, while 64 or 32% of the respondents have no internet connection. 119 or 60% of the respondents can access the internet using the mobile data, and 80 or 40% of the respondents can access the internet using the Wi-fi connection. Noticeably, 181 or 91% of the respondents use cellphone; 8 or 4% of the respondents shared that they use laptop; 6 or 3% of the respondents used tablet; and 6 or 2% of the respondents used desktop. 183 or 91.5% shared that they have a learning space at home; while 17 or 8.5% shared that they do not have a learning space at home. 167 respondents or 84% said that they have a definite schedule for studying at home; while 32 or 16% said that they do not have a definite schedule. 51.3% or 102 respondents shared that they have available books at home; while 48.7 % or 97 said that they do not have books at home. Lastly, 80% or 159 respondents shared that they have time reading with the children at home; while 20% or 40 of the respondents said that they do not have time reading with their children.

Reading Practices of MKO's

Home literacy practices refer to the everyday activities that occur in the home; these activities aimed at promoting language and writing skills (Tsamaase, 2010). However, with the unexpected changes suddenly brought about by the pandemic, not only do the students had difficulty in adjusting with the modular and online modes of learning, as reported by the MKO's, they also found themselves in difficulty and in confusion. MKO's had to adjust their activities to support their children. Three themes emerged from the interview question on the respondents' reading practices; they said that part of their activities include their role as a: (1) Support with school tasks; (2) Read Aloud Time; and (3) Use of internet and gadgets.

Support with school tasks

The major theme that surfaced with the interview as well as in the survey was the recognition of the role of MKO's as regards helping with school tasks. More MKO's also shared that they guide their children with school-related tasks:

I give support, guidance, and enough time to help her with her tasks; I also give inspiration. [Rita, a mother aged 35]

I am with them in their studies to support; I make sure that they follow their time of studying [Marcus, a father aged 40]

I help them with the difficult lessons; I am always ready to answer questions that may be difficult to answer by my child [John, an uncle and a father]

I am explaining topics that my child cannot understand; I also give examples about the lesson, and I make sure that she answers everything [Rose, a mother aged 42]

I reread the assignments, and explained to my child what the assignment was. I also find books that may help my child with the lesson, and I find an appropriate place for her to study at home [Tobit, a father aged 28].

They also shared that although they have difficulty because of their day job, they still manage to support their children as in the following statements:

I am helping them with their assignments after my work as a tricycle driver [Peter, a father aged 33].

I am helping my child during my day off [Monica, a mother aged 28]

After going home from work, I asked how my child's study was, and I look at the modules she finished answering [Clara, a mother aged 29].

Before going to bed, I check the things my child has accomplished. Even if I am at work, I tell him to call me up if there are concepts that he cannot understand [Sarah, a mother aged 40].

Almost all of them felt the need to support their children with their school homework, projects, unfortunately sometimes, they are the ones answering the assignments or modules:

Sometimes, I am the one answering the module for her especially if my child has difficulty answering the module; we're here helping her [Veronica, a mother aged 25].

I give ideas, I teach, and I allot time to answer the module correctly [Ruth, a mother aged 27].

I help my children through helping them to answer their modules [Teresa, a mother aged 27].

Read aloud time with the children

It was noted that some MKO's still have time to read aloud with their child; they said that it was an important support to their children to prepare them to read in the classroom. In this study, there are instances that the MKO and the children read together to better understand the task. Read aloud as shared with by the MKO's is not only concentrated on the narrative stories from the children's books, but also read aloud happens when both the MKO and the children try to understand the lessons from the module. One mother emphasized that she did not allow her child to read using cellphone and other available gadgets, but she made sure that she bought books for her child.

As much as possible, even if gadgets are very popular today, I still buy books, printed books, physical books and we read together [Catalina, a mother aged 40].

The importance of being able to hold a physical book was confirmed by M. Collette, a mother aged 28:

It is important that the children turn the pages from the printed books; it provides a distinct experience. That one which they can hold.

Use of internet and gadgets

With the sudden change in learning modalities, all educational institutions resorted to the use of the internet. Most of the respondents felt the need to have an internet connection, at least through mobile data. However, some respondents had difficulty in connecting to the internet because of poor connectivity; some needed to buy a cellphone or a laptop to catch up with the lessons. Primarily, if there are lessons or concepts that both the child and the MKO could not understand, they resorted with searching the answers using search engines like google search.

Because of technology, using my cellphone, although I am far from my children, I can still help them [Ana, a mother aged 25].

First, I search from the internet answers that I do not know from their assignments; second, I explain concepts that are not understood, and third, I am giving ideas [Agatha, a mother aged 27].

I help them by helping them search the internet for information about the lessons [Afra, a mother aged 25].

My child learns by herself, that's why she knows how to type, she also learns how to search through the internet also [Vanessa, a mother aged 43].

I am helping them by searching from the internet for necessary information about the lesson [Abigail, a mother aged 32].

Challenges Experienced by MKO's

With the inevitable changes in the learning modalities, not only the teacher and the students were affected by these changes, MKO's have been reported to absorb all these. The multiple roles MKO's have been playing have had an additional role with the change of learning environment of their children. The sense of disconnection from the physical presence of teachers was felt by MKO's. Now, MKO's need to extend their role not only as a mother, father, aunts, uncles, and guardians, but more importantly, as a teacher. Four themes emerged as challenges experienced by MKO's: (1) duality of roles; (2) lack of knowledge and skills; (3) internet connectivity; and (4) financial challenges.

Duality of roles

As the sudden change of learning modalities hit the families, MKO's have not been able to prepare for duality of roles. The immense responsibility became a burden to them on how they fulfill their role as MKO's as well as their role as teachers. Parents, usually mothers experience tremendous stress in fulfilling their roles:

It is difficult to help my child because of the many tasks at home. My husband works, and I do all the stuff at home, I am a cleaner, marketer, cook, and I need to feed my youngest child. It is difficult for me [Bridgid, a mother aged 26].

I am the only one working, and we need money to support our basic needs [Barbara, a mother aged 25].

This (online learning) comes together with so many tasks. I have many children at different levels. I do not know what to do when they simultaneously ask questions. The tasks are daunting [Catalina, a mother aged 40].

I do not have time for them because their study time is also the time to do household chores and our family business. I don't have time [Colet, a mother aged 31].

It's difficult for me because number one, I always have a duty in Barangay Hall, I cannot give my full attention. It so happened that my daughter was a solo parent, she is the only one earning, so she does not have time for her children. I have two grandchildren from her. Because nobody can take care of my two grandchildren, I asked

her to bring her other child to the province [Victoria, a grandmother aged 60].

Mko's lack of knowledge and skills

There is a huge gap between the experiences of MKO's in terms of school-related demands and activities during their time and the kind of learning environment their children experience today. Many MKO's believe that they have not encountered the topics being learned by their children. Some parents even believe that they lack the knowledge and skills to help their children, especially now that their children are more adept in learning the technology and the internet.

I cannot understand the lessons. It seemed that I had not studied those lessons. It was very difficult [Gertrude, a mother aged 42].

I already forget those that are being taught to the generation today. I lack knowledge and information [Agatha, a mother aged 27].

My child is more intelligent than I am [Ines, a mother aged 51].

What he is studying is beyond the scope of my knowledge. The lessons are very difficult for me already [Isabel, a mother aged 49].

I have limited knowledge. There are things that I do not understand in the module. What the students are learning today is more difficult than what I used to learn when I was a student [Lucia, a mother aged 54].

Internet connectivity

With the sudden shift to online learning modality, parents are forced to buy smart cell phones, laptops, or even tablets to cope with the demands of this modality. However, given the fact that they have bought these gadgets, the next problem everyone needed to face was internet connectivity. It seems that the speed of internet connectivity is highly affected by the internet infrastructure and the analog-era policies and laws. Most of the respondents felt that the inefficiency of online learning modality is brought about by internet connectivity.

Margarita (mother aged 27), Magdalena (mother aged 32, Rita (mother aged 47) experienced the following:

There is no internet connection, difficulty in data connection, losing internet connection. There is no stable signal, sometimes no signal at all.

Financial challenges

For most of the respondents, the need to buy a smart phone, a laptop, or a tablet seemed to be a burden for them. Not only those gadgets, but also the burden of printing and photocopying of the modules seemed to have a toll on them:

because not all parents have the means to print [the modules, no printer at home] or not all have gadgets like cellphones [Afra, a mother aged 33].

I do not have enough budget for the project [Rosalia, a mother aged 36].

...lack of budget, no work [Ursula (mother, aged 24); Agatha (mother, aged 27)].

I give extra allowance for load [internet load], this is an addition to the budget [Basilla, a mother aged 25
no internet connection, I cannot buy load for the internet because of lack of budget, no Wi-Fi [Benedicta, aged 45].

Coping Strategies of MKO's

Considering the challenges faced by the MKO's, it is interesting to note that amidst all the difficulties, they managed to survive the online and modular learning modalities. Three coping strategies emerged from the survey as well as the focus group discussion: (1) time management; (2) moral support; and (3) faith in God.

Time management

Time management seemed to be the most important consideration of the respondents to overcome the challenges of online and modular learning modalities. Effective and efficient time management may be considered a non-academic skill; however, it may help in attaining success in life, particularly in education. MKO's multiple responsibilities may take a toll on them, but looking at what they do to, time management is always considered an important factor in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities:

Camilla, Candida, and Caritas emphasized the importance of time management to help their children: *Allot time to the child. We should give enough time and attention to our children. I give time to explain lessons that they may find difficult* [Camilla, mother aged 23; Candida, mother aged 34; and Caritas, mother aged 44].

Give time for review [Constantinia, a mother aged 29]

There should be an allotted time for all the activities in school [Cera, mother aged 26; Charity, mother aged 31; and Cinnia, 37].

I guide them while they are doing their tasks in school [Cello, a mother aged 28].

Wake up very early in the morning so there is enough time to support children studying [Chona, a mother aged 24; Clare, a mother aged 26].

I do not allow her to sleep late, that is why I give time for her to study [Marie Clare, a mother aged 45].

Moral support

Moral support is also a non-academic skill that is considered important to all, especially to students who experience several transitions in education. This support may come from the family, teachers, classmates, and friends. When MKO's provide assistance, guidance, positivity, strength, and hope, children may have greater possibility of finishing their tasks and solving real life problems in the future.

I always tell her that [we] her family would just always be there especially when there are lessons that she could not understand [Nicanor, a father aged 32].

I always guide, teach, and remind my child [Monica, a mother aged 28]

I do not allow her to be tired or have the feeling of being stressed from her studies. I support her with her studies

[Collette, a mother aged 24; and Columba, a mother aged 31].

I give my support and the proper time and guidance to whatever she is doing, and I also give inspiration [Connat, a mother aged 29].

Faith in god

The global pandemic seemed to be the worst case ever imagined by the generation today. It is evident that the respondents have a deep faith in God as most of the respondents verbalized that they believed in the power of God, that they will overcome all the difficulties especially the difficulty brought about by the modular and online learning.

I put my faith in God. Then, I have friends who would call me to pray with them. I have never lost my faith in God. I keep on talking to God, and so I was able to see how God acts in my life. If we only rely with ourselves, we have to believe in the impossible, because nothing is impossible with God. We have to believe in God, and we need ... [graces] from the Lord.

M. Jessica. *I just simply cry... I hold on to God.* [Demetria, a mother aged 48].

Just get over it; let's just pray about it. [Nathaniel, an uncle aged 39].

DISCUSSION

The different learning modalities experienced by almost everybody created a paradigm shift not only to the students and teachers, but also to MKO's as well. MKO's as emphasized by this paper are those people who are considered more knowledgeable than the learners themselves. They are also those expected to have a better understanding and experience than the learners. In this study, MKO's definition is extended to persons who give moral support and provide a nurturing and caring environment. It is evident that the support students need to overcome the challenges in their studies lies not only from the school and teachers as well; but more importantly, to MKO's as well.

The respondents of this paper were composed of mainly females (87%), males being just 13%. It seemed that there is a known expectation among societies that women are always in charge of taking care of the children. This implies that the traditional gender roles and the structure of women's economic participation (Power, 2020), where men usually are responsible with feeding the family; therefore, they must work. According to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC, 2020), this is an old pattern where we men are expected to do most of the care of home and then at risk of being penalized for seeming that serious about the work and career.

Parents or guardians aged 41- above found it difficult to teach their children using the technology available in the generation today. The generation of students today who are more exposed to technological advancements as compared with the exposure to technology (e.g., mobile phones, tablets, etc.) of their parents reflect that students (the digital natives) are more adept in using technology than their parents. Mature students are anecdotally thought to be more anxious

about technology than younger students, to the extent that they avoid using technology (Staddon, 2020).

Although most of the respondents have Internet connection it can be observed that many of them use mobile data, this means that they do not have a powerful or strong Internet connection, which is primarily needed in an online learning modality. The use of smartphones has made a stunning development in education. It made learning accessible to everybody. In this study, 91% of the respondents use mobile phones in their classes. These two (i.e., relying on mobile data and the use of cell phones) may pose a challenge to the learners. As parents may not be able to provide appropriate technological gadgets to further assist the child in their learning, it can be considered as one of the drawbacks of an online learning modality. Reading instruction could have been hindered by limited experience with technical equipment necessary for digital instruction and learning (Reimers and Schleicher, 2020; Rožman et al., 2022)

Majority of the respondents have a definite schedule of study time and a learning space at home, this kind of setup may ease the burden of the online learning; however, considering that online learning modality demands strong Internet connection and appropriate gadget, learning may also be difficult to the children.

Availability of books at home. 51.3% or 102 respondents shared that they have available books at home; while 48.7 % or 97 said that they do not have books at home. It is interesting to note that one of the practices of MKO's during the online learning modality is the read aloud time, since most of the respondents have available books at home, they can easily practice this. However, the challenge remains for the 97 respondents who do not have available books at home.

The three reading practices evident in this study are the following: (1) Support with school tasks; (2) Read aloud time; and (3) use of Internet gadgets. It is interesting to note that the respondents felt the need to support their children with their school tasks. Home education, with parents assisting their children to learn better, became the only resort during the online learning modality. Learning from home may have positive impacts on parents and children; however, it is easier said than done. For parents we please for children aged four to six years old, the principles of learning for preschoolers or early age groups are different from those elementary school aged groups that alone junior and Senior High School aged groups (Rohita & Krisnawati, 2021).

Reading aloud has several benefits for children. Gustavel (2021) listed several benefits of reading aloud: (1) fostering connections; (2) promoting compassion; (3) guiding students to show courage; and (4) continuing to nurture the community. While it might not be felt by the parents the benefits of reading aloud to their children, the connection between a mother and a child is evident. When parents make the children realize the emotions or feelings of the characters in the story, compassion is promoted. The confidence of the parents in reading aloud to the children is evidently a way of teaching the child to also be confident. If the activities of reading aloud to the children are part of the practices in the family,

there will surely be a bond between the parent and the child, thereby nurturing the relationship within the family.

The use of the Internet with several technological gadgets has been considered a necessity during the online learning modality. To learn and be able to access education, a family may need an Internet connection and smartphones at the very least. This has been the day-to-day practice or even a habit among parents and children. The National Center for Education Statistics (2021) revealed that access only through a smartphone is frequently more common for groups with lower rates of internet access overall. Significantly, even though smartphones can be valuable tools for staying connected, they offer more limited functionality for applications such as word processing or interactive learning platforms. In other words, overall levels of internet access mask added inequities in mode of access, which have implications for whether/how the internet can be used as an educational tool.

The challenges of MKOs in the online learning modality are duality of roles, lack of knowledge and skills, Internet connectivity, and financial challenges. Given the fact that MKO's play multiple roles at home, their most important role during this kind of learning modality was becoming a teacher to their children. Having said this, it is important that both parents and other MKO's also present at home are cooperating so that positive environment and optimal learning will occur. In a typical family, the mother acts as a housekeeper, protector, caregiver, and more importantly as a teacher to their children. On the other hand, fathers act as breadwinners, educators, protectors as well as the head of the family.

MKO's lack of knowledge and skills in terms of technological advancement hampers the opportunity to help their children. Many parents feel that their children are smarter than them in terms of the use of mobile phones and navigating the Internet. There are instances where in the children are the ones teaching their parents on how to use and navigate the Internet.

Internet connectivity is also a challenge for the MKO's. This coincides with the fourth challenge that they experience in terms of financial challenges. Being able to surf, navigate, and explore the Internet efficiently, one has to have more sophisticated mobile phones, laptops, or tablets. These technological gadgets are not cheap. Furthermore, to be able to access the Internet, one must buy a load or connect to a Wi-Fi, this will mean additional financial consideration to the family. Most of the respondents belong to a low-income family. They find it difficult to have a stable connection because move their mobile phones and their Internet connection.

With the challenges comes the coping strategies of the MKO's. Three themes emerged as coping strategies: (1) time management; (2) moral support; and (3) faith in God. Time management is crucial especially with the many roles of MKO's. While parents have to juggle around to fulfill their roles as teachers and parents, managing time and prioritizing things are two important considerations to finish the tasks. It is interesting to know that MKO's involved in this study consented on the idea that their priority

is to spend time with their children, most specially time to help their children with their studies. When children realize that they are being prioritized by their parents, they will have better perspective and confidence about who they are and their life in general.

The respondents admitted that they have several challenges and difficulties in life during the modular and online learning modalities, but because they believe that as parents, they are convinced that their important responsibility is to give moral support to their children. This coping strategy is significantly beneficial to accomplish not only their children's tasks but theirs as well. When children feel the assurance that their family is supporting them, they will feel a sense of higher self-esteem because they feel that they are being protected, supported, and loved.

Interestingly, the respondents believe to a higher Supreme Being. They believe that although they are in a very difficult situation, God is and will always be by their side. When all hopes fail, they still believe that God will help them. One respondent even said that if it seemed that there is no way she just cried and prayed to God.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the reading practices, challenges, and coping strategies of MKO's during the modular and online learning modality. Three reading practices were observed: (1) MKO's reading of the school tasks of their children, (2) the read aloud time, and (3) the use of Internet and gadgets. It can be noted that the reading practices are highly connected with school-related activities.

The challenges observed were the (1) duality of roles of MKO's, (2) lack of knowledge and skills in terms of the use of smart gadgets and exploring and navigating the Internet, (3) the Internet connectivity, and (4) the financial challenges. Even if one of the reading practices is the use of the Internet and gadgets, MKO's noted that Internet connectivity is also a challenge for them. Stronger connection of the internet posits a financial problem to the respondents because if the household wants to have a stronger internet connection, then a purchase of higher plan for an increased mbps or bandwidth is necessary. This coincides with being able to use smart phones and being able to connect to the Internet. Smartphones and Internet connectivity require a considerable amount of money. Since most of the respondents belong to a low-income family, these two were considered challenges.

Finally, three coping strategies were identified: (1) time management, (2) moral support, and (3) faith in God. These three coping strategies are very significant to the mental health of both parents and children. They need to have a stronghold of support, and this support can be from one another and from their faith in God.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study revealed that significant challenges are felt not only by the teachers and students, but among MKO's as well. These challenges require

significant investment of time, talents, and treasure not only within the home environment; local and national communities should realize the important role of families in the success of their children. Therefore, it is highly suggested that there should be a concrete program for parental involvement in terms of academic endeavor of their children. It is absolutely important to know that the road within each member of the family is emphasized. This entails a significant amount of time for parents, particularly with parents who are within the low socioeconomic status. Moreover, both national and local government units should also create a project for large and poor families with young children where, because of their condition, the acquisition of life-long skills and other learning may become compromised.

Although it might be difficult for MKO's to be a teacher to their children, we need appropriate program designs for parental involvement so that parents can also be better sharers of knowledge. Educational institutions should create a program for the parents on how to become effective teachers to their children. Moreover, schools can also create a consultative body composed of parents and allow them to take an active role in the design of the curriculum asking them to share what they think beneficial and important to their children. It is also important that schools involve the MKO's in projects that support attitudes and behavior and home management systems that foster genuine relationship between school and family.

REFERENCES

- Abuhammad, S. (2020). Barriers to distance learning during the COVID-19 outbreak: A qualitative review from parents' perspective. *Heliyon*, 16(11). doi: 10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e05482.
- Bailey, J. P., & Shaw, O. (2020). How parents are navigating the pandemic: A comprehensive analysis of survey data. <https://www.aei.org/multimedia/how-parents-are-navigating-the-pandemic-a-comprehensive-analysis-of-survey-data>
- British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). (2020). "Economic Impact of COVID 19 on Women." Women's Hour Podcast, April 8. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000h1lm>
- Bubb, S., & Jones, M.-A. (2020). Learning from the COVID-19 home-schooling experience: Listening to pupils, parents/carers and teachers. *Improving Schools*, 23(3), 209–222. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480220958797>
- Can we count on parents to help their children learn at home?* (2020, May 28). Evidence for Action. <https://blogs.unicef.org/evidence-for-action/can-we-count-on-parents-to-help-their-children-learn-at-home>
- Crew, M. (2020). *Literature review on the impact of COVID-19 on families, and implications for the home learning environment*. National Literacy Trust.
- De Guzman, C. (2021, December 1). *The Philippines still hasn't fully reopened its schools because of COVID-19: What is this doing to children?* Time. <https://time.com/6124045/school-closures-covid-education-philippines>
- Donga, C., Caob, S., Lia, & H. Young. (2020). Children's online learning during COVID-19 pandemic: Chinese parents' beliefs and attitudes. *Child. Youth Serv.*, 118, 2–9.
- Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Simon, B. S., Salinas, K. C., Jansorn, N. R., & Van Voorhis, F. L. (2002). *School, community, and community partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* (2nd ed.). Corwin Press.
- Gustavel, W. (2021). Keeping story time alive in the pandemic. Edutopia. <https://www.edutopia.org/article/keeping-story-time-alive-pandemic>
- Kamei, A., Brossard, M., Cardoso, M., Mishra, S., Mizunoya, S., & Reuge, N. (2020). *Can we count on parents to help their children learn at home?*. <https://blogs.unicef.org/evidence-for-action/can-we-count-on-parents-to-help-their-children-learn-at-home>
- Learning Heroes. (2020, May 20). Parents 2020: COVID-19 Closures—A Redefining Moment for Students, Parents, and Schools. <https://bealearninghero.org/research/>
- Lee, J., Meejung C., & Miao S. (2020). How Has COVID-19 Changed Family Life and Well Being in Korea? *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 51(301–13). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26976652>
- McLeod, S. A. (2018, August 05). Lev Vygotsky. Simply Psychology. www.simplypsychology.org/vygotsky.html
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2021). Students' Internet Access before and during the Coronavirus Pandemic by Household Socioeconomic Status. <https://nces.ed.gov/blogs/nces/post/students-internet-access-before-and-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic-by-household-socioeconomic-status>
- Philippine News Agency. (2021, February 7). *Growing number of out-of-school youth 'cause of concern.'* <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1129909>
- Power, K. (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the care burden of women and families. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy*, 16(1), 67–73, DOI: 10.1080/15487733.2020.1776561
- Ribeiro, L. M., Cunha, R. S., Silva, M. C. A., Carvalho, M., & Vital, M. L. (2021). Parental Involvement during Pandemic Times: Challenges and Opportunities. *Educ. Sci.*, 11, 302. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11060>
- Rohita, & Krisnawati, S. (2021). The role of parents as teachers at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 538, 152–158. <file:///C:/Users/ACER/Downloads/125954498.pdf>
- Rožman, M., Meinck, S., & Chen, M. (2022). Impact of the pandemic on classroom teaching and learning. In S. Meinck, J. Fraillon, and R. Strietholt (Eds.), *The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Education. International evidence from the Response to Education Disruption Survey (REDS)* (pp. 54–83). Paris, France: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).
- Shabani, K., Khatib, M., & Ebati, S. (2010). Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development: Instructional Implications and Teachers' Professional Development. *English Language Teaching*, 3(4), 237–248. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1081990.pdf>

- Staddon, R.V. (2020). Bringing technology to the mature classroom: age differences in use and attitudes. *Int J Educ Technol High Educ*, *17*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-020-00184-4>
- Spinelli, M., Lionetti, F., Setti, A., & Fasolo, M. (2020). Parenting Stress during the COVID-19 Outbreak: Socio-economic and Environmental Risk Factors and Implications for Children Emotion Regulation. *Fam. Process* 2020, 2–15.
- UNESCO (2020). *Education: from Disruption to Recovery*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Unimrkt. (2023). *An Expert's Guide to Successful Quantitative Descriptive Research*. <https://www.unimrkt.com/blog/an-experts-guide-to-successful-quantitative-descriptive-research.php>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.