

Hybridity: (Re)Conceptualizing Education for Social Justice through Narratives of School Managers

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Abstract

The pandemic triggered a sudden shift in teaching and learning modalities, exposing challenges worldwide. Education's role as an equalizer for social justice remains crucial, yet research on this concept, particularly during and after the pandemic, is limited. This study focuses on educational managers in Philippine higher education institutions (HEIs) recognized as top-performing in the 2022 Licensure Examination for Teachers. Using Narrative Inquiry, participants shared experiences of managing hybridity and advancing social justice in education, guided by Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Perspective and Fisher's Narrative Paradigm. Findings highlight the need for teacher training, ICT infrastructure, and a new institutional culture. HEIs and government play vital roles in ensuring education that is accessible, equitable, and of quality. The study recommends a proactive national strategic plan translated into context-based action plans per institution to address challenges, establish urgent mitigations, and enhance policies on equity and quality. Empowering school managers to design responsive plans tailored to specific contexts is essential to sustaining equitable education across levels and regions.

Keywords

ICT Infrastructures, Narrative Inquiry, Skills, Social Justice, Teacher Training

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed systemic flaws worldwide, particularly in education. Schools across the globe were disrupted, with many fully or partially shutting down. In the Philippines, the crisis tested the country's preparedness, especially in healthcare and education. Initiated in 2020, this research emerged in response. According to reports, schools were unequipped for equitable remote learning due to longstanding governmental neglect of inequality, inadequate infrastructure, unreliable electricity, and limited internet access.

Historically, the Philippines' colonial education system, influenced by Spain and the U.S., was once considered Asia's best. However, the transition to a republic led to a gradual decline in education quality, particularly in language, science, math, and technology. This background is essential in understanding the challenges of implementing hybrid learning and achieving social justice in education.

During the pandemic, schools shifted to online and blended learning, revealing gaps in infrastructure, especially in rural areas. Despite existing initiatives, like CHED's 2019 directive to integrate technology and interdisciplinary approaches, these efforts came too late to prevent disruption. The pandemic exposed the Philippine education system's lack of preparedness and highlighted a research gap in hybrid learning, especially within public institutions.

METHOD

Research Design

This qualitative study uses Narrative Inquiry to explore school managers' experiences during the pandemic, aiming to understand their perspectives and the emerging challenges in reimagining education. The research focuses on three objectives: (1) examining school managers' narratives, (2) identifying new and existing concepts in education, and (3) establishing ideas of hybridity for social justice.

Participants include program heads, coordinators, and deans from the top-performing schools in the 2022 Licensure Examination for Teachers in Luzon. These schools demonstrated resilience and commitment to quality education amid the shift to hybrid learning. Qualified participants held at least the rank of Assistant Professor, were licensed teachers aged 25 or older, and held a master's degree in education or a related field. The narratives were analyzed, and codes, themes, and categories were generated using NVIVO 12. They underwent interceding coding reliability with the saturation level of 93%.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this study were collected through in-depth interviews with school managers—program heads, coordinators, and deans—who served during the pandemic starting in 2020. Semi-structured interview questions, validated by expert researchers, guided the discussions. The

narratives were transcribed, coded using Narrative Coding, and analyzed through Mishler's Model, which includes identifying story structure, patterns, and sequencing.

Participants were anonymized (e.g., P-1) to ensure confidentiality. Observations were also made, with participants' consent, as secondary data to support interview findings. Additional data were sourced from official school websites and social media, when available, though the primary focus remained on the interview transcripts.

Ethical Considerations

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Description of the Situation

Participants consistently described the pandemic period as challenging. P-1 and P-3 emphasized the hardships of being a school chairperson during that time, while others used terms like "difficult" and "terrible." P-3 and P-4 likened the pandemic to "a thief in the night," noting that no one was prepared.

It is noted the unexpected crisis forced educational institutions to adapt quickly to the "new normal," leading faculty and students to use available technologies efficiently and reshaping the education landscape [1].

Specific Challenge

Participants (P-1 to P-6) shared similar challenges during the pandemic, mainly involving online classes, class monitoring, remote work, and the use of technology. P-1 and P-5 described the situation as "difficult," while P-2, P-3, and P-6 emphasized the abrupt shift to digital platforms. P-7, although experiencing similar issues, highlighted the added struggle of providing for seminary students and staff.

The core challenge was adapting to educational technologies. Despite the difficulties, the pandemic accelerated the normalization of online tools, making distance learning more viable and beneficial [2].

Specific Role

During the pandemic, all participants served as school managers—coordinators, chairpersons, or deans—tasked with leading their institutions through the crisis.

P-1, a long-time program chair, faced pressure from superiors, sometimes beyond official guidelines. P-2, a dean, took on nurturing roles, acting as a "mother" to students and "older sister" to staff, always on-call. P-3 held multiple roles, leading efforts to quickly re-engineer academic processes. P-4, newly appointed dean before the pandemic, led the creation of a white paper shared with national education bodies. P-5, ICT and OJT coordinator, focused on establishing policies for online learning and work readiness. P-6, principal of a rural high school and OJT coordinator, worked to secure resources for students and staff. P-7, academic dean and later VP for Academics faced the dual challenge of managing remote education and providing basic needs like food.

These roles reflect the UNRWA's view of school managers as key figures in managing systems, people, and knowledge during crises [3].

Self-Description

Participants described the pandemic as a personally difficult time but emphasized the need to stay strong. P-1 reflected, "I came through the seasons," while P-4 called it "the hardest situation." P-2 highlighted the importance of trust in her team, believing they would always go the extra mile.

In terms of social justice, both responsibility and trust are essential to building a transformative and aspirational organization [4].

Actions and Decisions Made during the Pandemic

Participants made decisions during the pandemic based on urgency and available resources, all aimed at improving teaching and learning.

P-1 and P-5 acknowledged that while their choices weren't perfect, they were appropriate for the moment. P-4 and P-7 felt their actions exceeded expectations despite limitations. P-6 focused on creating effective online learning spaces. P-3 prioritized student mental health and outreach.

Overall, their actions aligned with their roles as school managers, consistent with the UNRWA's Leading for the Future framework.

Hesitation in the Use of Technology

Faculty members hesitate to use technology due to a lack of training and preparedness, especially with the abrupt shift to remote teaching. Some believe critical thinking is better fostered with traditional methods. Addressing this requires capacitating them in modern technology [5][6].

Mental Health

Participants reported mental health issues stemming from home and school environments. Limited resources, power dynamics, and lack of support contributed to these concerns, affecting both students and faculty. The need for guidance counselors and community support was highlighted, emphasizing the complex interplay of factors impacting mental well-being.

Mitigations for Quality Education

Participants focused on maintaining quality education in the new learning environment. Strategies included adhering to policies, providing interventions, utilizing tech-savvy personnel for support, maximizing online platforms, and institutionalizing online classes. Emphasis was placed on teamwork, community effort, and peer evaluation to ensure quality, despite the challenges posed by the pandemic [7].

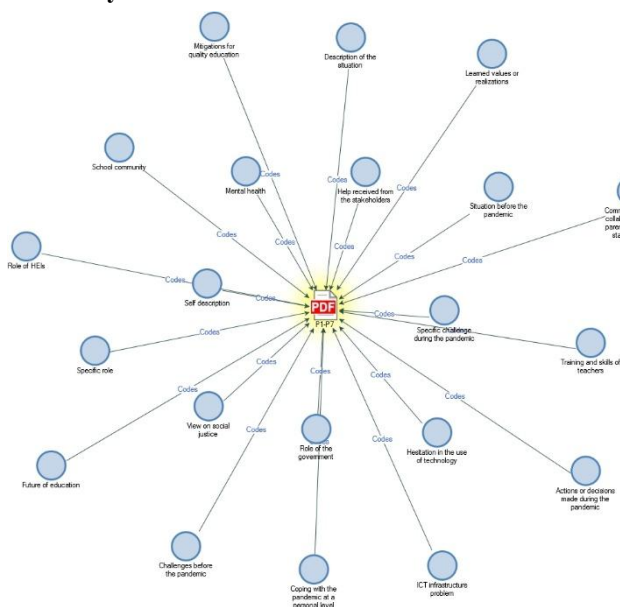
Communication or Collaboration with Parents and Stakeholders

During the pandemic, schools prioritized communication and collaboration with parents, students, alumni, and faculty. Efforts included informing parents about student progress, supporting students in dormitories, maximizing faculty collaboration, and seeking alumni assistance for technology. Challenges like limited internet access and lack of resources highlighted the need for partnerships to sustain remote learning [8][9].

Receiving Help from Stakeholders

Stakeholders, including alumni and student organizations, provided crucial support during the pandemic. This included free internet access, devices, and fundraising efforts. However, limitations in capacity and device quality were noted. Ensuring equitable remote learning requires addressing issues of motivation, accessibility, and isolation while maximizing the impact of stakeholder assistance [10][11].

Summary



The diagram above shows the summary of the common codes generated from the narrative of the seven (7) participants using NVIVO 12. These codes underwent inter-coding reliability with three (3) published researchers and are school managers. The most codes are the following: Description of the situation, Communication or collaboration

with parents and other stakeholders, Actions or decisions made during the pandemic, Mitigations for quality education, Mental health, Help received from the stakeholders, Specific challenge during the pandemic, Hesitation in the use of technology, Specific role, and Self-description

CONCLUSION

Participants described their pandemic experience as “challenging, difficult, and terrible,” citing full online classes, tech use, and class monitoring as major issues—often due to poor teacher training and limited ICT infrastructure.

Their decisions, though context-dependent, were considered appropriate and effective at the time, leading to quality education through cooperation with stakeholders.

They saw their pre-pandemic efforts as unrecognized preparation for the shift, though underutilized until the crisis. Key challenges included a lack of resources and training, which were addressed through urgent, collaborative responses.

Mental health concerns also emerged, prompting school managers to support both students and staff.

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