

## Back to face-to-face teaching: A comparative study of public and private school teacher's experiences

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### ABSTRACT

Full face-to-face classes have been reintroduced in schools for at least six months, yet there has been no research on instructors' experiences as classes resumed post-pandemic. This study, conducted in the municipality of San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, aimed to compare the experiences of public and private school teachers in relation to several factors: student demotivation, misbehavior, restructured classrooms, modified teaching and learning activities, limitations imposed by PPE, COVID-19 surge anxiety, and students' academic underperformance. Additionally, this study sought to identify the most effective strategies to address the challenges presented by the pandemic in delivering high-quality education. Results indicate no significant differences in the levels of experience between public and private school teachers, both of whom observed notable behavioral and academic adjustments among students. The Wellness and Support Services were highlighted as the most effective approach to managing pandemic-related challenges. Emphasizing students' mental and emotional well-being by providing access to counseling services, stress-reduction resources, and online support networks was recommended as essential for addressing these issues.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced unprecedented challenges in societal, political, and economic spheres, along with a crisis in education. Schools in 191 nations were closed due to the global shutdown. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (2020a), 1.6 billion (90.2%) students were unable to attend primary, secondary, or higher education institutions due to pandemic concerns. These closures aimed to maintain safe physical distancing and reduce the frequency of SARS-CoV-2 infections, COVID-19-related hospitalizations, and fatalities (Tagare, 2023).

Given the abrupt, volatile, and unpredictable nature of COVID-19, the educational system had to quickly adapt to new learning environments. However, extended closures could negatively impact the health and well-being of students and educators alike. Due to the lack of research on strategies to exit lockdowns, there is a critical need to explore various approaches that allow schools to reopen safely worldwide (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2020b). Closing schools during a disease outbreak

is an important public health measure, yet it can have significant negative consequences for children and adolescents. Students from low-income families face increased risks of food insecurity, domestic abuse, and economic hardship, as parents bear added caregiving responsibilities while trying to sustain their livelihoods. School absences could have long-term repercussions, particularly for the most vulnerable populations. Continuous lockdowns are unsustainable for youth and pose safety concerns in the long run (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2020c).

What are the possibilities for reopening schools? Ensuring that staff and students return as quickly as possible while maintaining safe physical distancing is crucial. One approach is to keep schools closed until widespread vaccination achieves 'herd immunity' or a cure is found. However, forecasts indicate that it could take three to five years for full vaccine coverage. Reopening schools in full would allow students to resume their education, though this could increase infection rates. As awareness grows about SARS-CoV-2 transmission among young people, schools and communities will better understand the implications of in-person learning (Hodgson, 2020).

In the Philippines, schools reopened with limited student and staff capacity. Currently, 25,668 public schools provide classroom instruction, representing 56.89% of the Department of Education's more than 47,000 public schools. Approximately 5.95 million students from kindergarten to 12th grade are attending face-to-face classes, with numbers expected to grow as safety standards are met despite regulatory relaxations (Tagare, 2023). The enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) implemented across Luzon included the entire MIMAROPA region. On May 1, 2020, this was downgraded to a general community quarantine (GCQ), though San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, remained under ECQ until at least May 15, 2020. Since March 17, 2020, all in-person classes have been prohibited in the province, including San Jose, necessitating a shift to online or distance learning for both basic and higher education.

This research is urgently needed, as classes have resumed after more than two years of global lockdown—the longest in educational history—highlighting ongoing issues in student learning and physical engagement (Monguillot et al., 2022; Alencar et al., 2022). The study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of public and private school teachers' experiences upon returning to face-to-face classes. Specifically, it will determine respondents' profiles in terms of gender and rank/position, and compare teachers' experiences regarding the following key factors: student demotivation, student misbehavior, classroom reconfiguration, adaptation of teaching and learning activities, PPE limitations, COVID surge anxiety, and students' academic underperformance. Additionally, the study seeks to identify strategies employed by teachers to address pandemic-induced challenges in teaching and learning. This research is critical for assisting administrators, teachers, parents, and students by exploring their concerns and apprehensions regarding school reopening. As teachers prepare to conduct in-person sessions, this research offers insights to academic stakeholders focused on their needs. Teachers, as vital figures in students' lives, are provided with resources through this study to enhance their support systems..

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHOD**

### **2.1. Research design**

The potential and restrictions in teaching when schools in the Philippines have reopened were determined using a quantitative design, specifically the descriptive approach. A descriptive survey design was used in this study, and questionnaires were given out to all the available basic education teachers who have teach online and now teaching face-to-face. Surveys are thought of as an inexpensive research instrument that can in a short amount of time, gather information from a lot of respondents. It is appropriate for this study to utilize a questionnaire based on a review of prior online learning literature because of the delivery, response collection, and production of trustworthy data..

### **2.2. Setting**

The research was conducted at San Jose Occidental Mindoro, tapping the public schools like Pilot Elementary School, Pag asa Elementary School and OMSC. The private schools are Mother Catherina School and Divine Word College of San Jose.

### **2.3. Sample**

For this study, 35 randomly selected teachers from Basic Education of which 21 are from public schools and 14 from private schools in San Jose, Occidental Mindoro was chosen to take part on the survey. All participants was given the same set of questions about how they implement teaching during the reopening of in-person classes and the problems, challenged, and concerns they faced.

## 2.4. Research instrument

The research utilized a questionnaire containing the two parts, the demographic profile and the teachers' experience. Teacher experience consists of the following factors: students are demotivated; students are misbehaving; re-frame the classroom; retrofit teaching and learning activities; PPE brings limit; COVID surge anxiety; and students' poor academic performance. At the end of the questionnaire, the participants were asked about some strategies they used to cope with these experiences.

## 2.5. Data gathering

The questionnaire was sent to a group of teachers online using the google forms. In google forms, the data can be downloaded in an excel format. It also has charts of gathered data where interpretation was easily done.

## 2.5. Data analysis

The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as weighted mean and percentage. Comparison was made as to whether there are different perceptions on the issue presented in the study among public and private school teachers.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1. Demographic profile

There was a total of 35 respondents, of which 21 are public school teachers and 14 are private school teachers (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic profile of the respondents

Rank/Position	Public School			Private School			Total
	Male	Female	LGBTQIA+	Male	Female	LGBTQIA+	
Part-time Teacher	2	0	0	0	3	0	5
Teacher I	0	5	1	0	4	0	10
Teacher II	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Teacher III	2	8	0	1	3	0	14
Master Teacher I	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Head Teacher I	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	6	14	1	1	13	0	35

### 3.2. Teachers' experiences

Teachers' consensus on the perception that students become demotivated upon the resumption of in-person instruction. The mean scores, 2.65 for public school teachers and 2.98 for private school teachers, both fall within the neutral or uncertain range. Additionally, public school teachers expressed uncertainty (mean = 2.95) regarding students' boredom in class, whereas private school educators showed agreement (mean = 3.93) on this issue (Table 2).

Table 2. Teachers rating on the factor students are demotivated.

Students are Demotivated	Mean Score	
	Public School Teachers	Private School Teachers
1. Students don't want to learn because they must adapt from online to face-to-face learning.	2.43	2.50
2. All the students are used to being online, so they know how to manage their time. Now that they are back in a face-to-face class, they are still getting used to it.	2.86	2.86
3. Most students get bored in class, so the teacher needs to motivate them to show up on time. The teacher also needs to help them get excited in class so they can be motivated	2.95	3.93
4. Students who don't want to meet in person because they know they can just turn in their work online.	2.38	2.64
	<b>Average</b>	<b>2.65</b>
		<b>2.98</b>

Legend: 4.51– 5.00- Strongly Agree; 3.5 1– 4.50 – Agree; 2.5 1–3.50- Neutral/Uncertain; 1.51 – 2.50 – Disagree; 1.00-1.50 - Strongly Disagree

Teachers' responses regarding students' attitudes showed that public school teachers (mean = 2.90) and private school teachers (mean = 3.50) were both generally indifferent or unsure on the matter (Table 3).

Table 3. Teachers rating on the factor students are misbehaving.

Students are Misbehaving	Mean	
	Public School Teachers	Private School Teachers
1. How to deal with their attitudes is hard for me, especially since it's hard to tell how they feel now that they've been in an online class for two years.	3.10	3.43
2. We see that reading and writing skills are not as good as they could be. Some students also have trouble being away from their homes.	3.24	3.29
3. When I teach face-to-face classes, I struggle with how the students act. I think it's about getting to know each other as teachers and students.	2.90	3.50
<b>Average</b>	<b>3.08</b>	<b>3.40</b>

Legend: 4.51– 5.00- Strongly Agree; 3.5 1– 4.50 – Agree; 2.5 1–3.50- Neutral/Uncertain; 1.51 – 2.50 – Disagree; 1.00-1.50 - Strongly Disagree

Both public school teachers (mean = 3.91) and private school teachers (mean = 4.24) firmly believe that setting up the classroom is important to ensure adherence to health standards (Table 4).

Table 4. Teachers rating on the factor re-frame the classroom.

Re-frame the Classrooms	Mean	
	Public School Teachers	Private School Teachers
1. In teaching my subject, physical contact is one of the challenges.	2.90	3.00
2. We need to link the possible activities to the IATF-mandated sports that are allowed in each municipality, which varies based on the IATF status of the municipality.	3.57	4.14
3. Preparing the classroom is crucial because you must ensure it is an excellent place to learn and follows health rules.	4.52	4.64
4. The challenges we face are getting ready for how the classroom will be run, especially in how we should remind them to keep their distance from each other, wear masks, wash their hands before and after class, and not touch other students.	3.95	4.64
5. I have to ensure that none of the planned activities will put my student in danger. This is why health protocols are essential.	4.62	4.79
<b>Average</b>	<b>3.91</b>	<b>4.24</b>

Legend: 4.51– 5.00- Strongly Agree; 3.5 1– 4.50 – Agree; 2.5 1–3.50- Neutral/Uncertain; 1.51 – 2.50 – Disagree; 1.00-1.50 - Strongly Disagree

Public school teachers (mean = 3.95) and private school teachers (mean = 4.21) believe that it is important to ensure that children benefit from the activities and performance assignments, and that the curriculum's content criteria are met (Table 5).

Table 5. Teachers rating on the factor retrofit teaching and learning activities.

Retrofit Teaching and Learning Activities	Mean	
	Public School Teachers	Private School Teachers
1. I find it hard to find activities similar to those we are used to, especially for skills involving contacts, like dances and exercises. So, we need to make outputs that involve the least amount of communication.	3.48	3.79
2. I've had to deal with many problems, but the biggest ones have been ensuring the activities and performance tasks are helpful for the students and meeting the curriculum's content standards.	3.95	4.21
3. When I'm getting ready for my face-to-face classes, the ways and methods I'll use to teach are the most difficult parts.	3.19	3.79
4. When getting ready for face-to-face classes, I've had trouble figuring out how to change my teaching methods, what strategies to use, and how to change every class activity so that it is performance-based	3.00	3.93
<b>Average</b>	<b>3.40</b>	<b>3.93</b>

Legend: 4.51– 5.00- Strongly Agree; 3.5 1– 4.50 – Agree; 2.5 1–3.50- Neutral/Uncertain; 1.51 – 2.50 – Disagree; 1.00-1.50 - Strongly Disagree

Public school teachers (mean = 4.05) agree regarding the use of face masks, face shields, and other barriers that limit students' ability to learn to their fullest potential. Private school teachers (mean = 4.54) largely concur with these points, where PPE places restrictions on their teaching and learning methods (Table 6).

Table 6. Teachers rating on the factor PPE brings limit.

PPE Brings Limit	Mean	
	Public School Teachers	Public School Teachers
1. The biggest problems I have are with my students. Every time we do an activity, they have trouble wearing masks because they say they can't breathe. They always ask if the mask can be removed, but the protocol says you can't.	3.90	4.50
2. Face masks and face shields make it hard to talk; barriers make it hard to see the board; and kids tend to take off their masks in class, especially when doing different physical activities.	4.19	4.57
<b>Average</b>	<b>4.05</b>	<b>4.54</b>

Legend: 4.51– 5.00- Strongly Agree; 3.5 1– 4.50 – Agree; 2.5 1–3.50- Neutral/Uncertain; 1.51 – 2.50 – Disagree; 1.00-1.50 - Strongly Disagree

Teachers in both public schools (mean = 3.60) and private schools (mean = 3.93) agreed that COVID surge anxiety exists among students (Table 6).

Table 6. Teachers rating on the factor COVID surge anxiety.

COVID Surge Anxiety	Mean	
	Public School Teachers	Public School Teachers
1. When I was getting ready for face-to-face classes, it was hard to find students because many of them were afraid to come. Also, sometimes students got sick, which made everyone feel bad, especially the parents. Because the pandemic also affected the children's feelings, they were especially afraid to talk to other people.	3.71	3.71
2. The risk is that it could suddenly go up again and get COVID.	3.48	4.14
<b>Average</b>	<b>3.60</b>	<b>3.93</b>

Legend: 4.51– 5.00- Strongly Agree; 3.5 1– 4.50 – Agree; 2.5 1–3.50- Neutral/Uncertain; 1.51 – 2.50 – Disagree; 1.00-1.50 - Strongly Disagree

Public school teachers (mean = 3.70) and private school teachers (mean = 4.13) agreed on all elements related to students' poor academic performance (Table 7).

Table 7. Teachers rating on the factor students' poor academic performance.

Students' Poor Academic Performance	Mean	
	Public School Teachers	Public School Teachers
1. Some of the issues that arise have to do with how the kids would comprehend the subject given that the consequences of the Coronavirus occurred at least two years ago	3.76	4.07
2. Their reading and writing deficiencies, as well as distress when they had to leave their parents, were also noted by teachers	3.81	4.07
3. Teachers also saw that some children who hadn't attended class in nearly two years had behavioral issues.	3.86	4.43
4. It was the bonds and connections that the pupils shared. It's difficult for teachers and pupils to get along because they haven't seen each other in a while.	3.33	3.79
5. Since we began our in-person classes, the majority of my pupils have changed significantly, especially those who aren't accustomed to participating in the activities they do now.	3.76	4.29
<b>Average</b>	<b>3.70</b>	<b>4.13</b>

Legend: 4.51– 5.00- Strongly Agree; 3.5 1– 4.50 – Agree; 2.5 1–3.50- Neutral/Uncertain; 1.51 – 2.50 – Disagree; 1.00-1.50 - Strongly Disagree

### 3.2. Strategies used by teachers

Wellness and support services had the highest frequency, chosen by 30 teachers (n = 30), indicating that teachers prioritize students' mental and emotional well-being by providing access to counseling services, stress management resources, and virtual support groups. This was followed by regular communication (n = 28), blended learning (n = 27), professional development (n = 27), technology integration (n = 26), student engagement strategies (n = 25), clear instruction and expectations (n = 24), personalized learning (n = 19), modifications to the assessment process (n = 16), and synchronous and asynchronous learning (n = 14) (Figure 3).

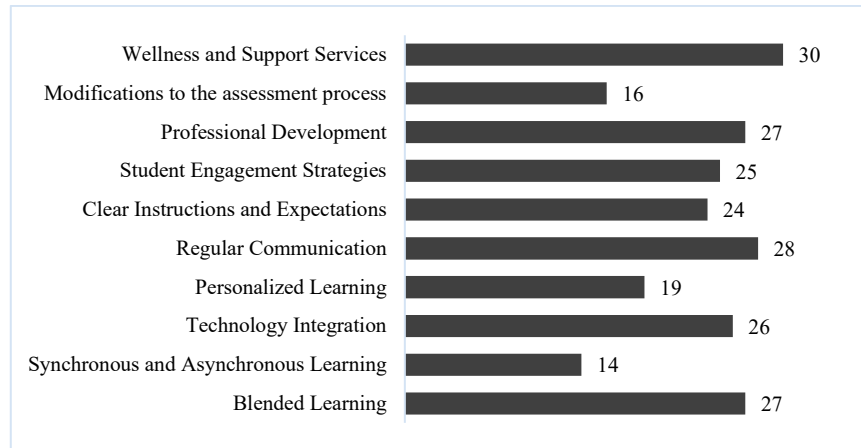


Figure 3. Strategies used by teachers.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

A total of 35 responses were received, of which 21 are teachers from public schools and 14 from private schools. The number of teachers varies between public and private schools due to the fact that public school teachers are generally more open to participating in this kind of research study. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, public school teachers were also more likely to participate in professional development activities, which many believe are essential for teachers throughout their careers to update and improve their teaching skills. This was supported by Almonicar (2023), whose research stated that although teachers in public schools may lack scientific training, they are willing to participate in any research endeavor.

More students attend public schools than private ones, requiring increased supervision. This has led to children becoming demotivated and inattentive due to the large number of subjects to cover, as well as difficulty adjusting after extended absences. Teachers faced challenges when face-to-face classes resumed, including maintaining health protocols, adopting new teaching strategies, and managing time. Additionally, teachers emphasized the importance of ensuring students benefit from activities and assignments while meeting curriculum standards, with the development of instructional materials and new strategies being essential for adapting to the new normal (Jakara, 2022).

The PPE issue presented a challenge at the beginning of face-to-face classes. With the multi-wave pandemic dynamics of 2021 hitting most countries hard, healthcare systems reaching their limits, and schools transitioning to hybrid and partial face-to-face classes, it is essential to understand teachers' fears of infection and risk perception.

Regarding the effect of COVID-19, anxiety was observed among both students and teachers, which was also stated by Paco and Delfino (2023). Teachers worried about their health and the health of their families as they adjusted to hybrid teaching during the post-pandemic period. In addition, they were concerned about medical bills and their ways of handling the situation, though this did not lead to significant psychological stress.

In terms of academic performance, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are evident in education. The study results suggest that children's academic performance was impacted by the abrupt shift in learning methods. This finding aligns with the research of Grubic et al. (2020), who stated that the closure of schools disrupted students' daily routines, which are crucial for maintaining focus and discipline in their studies. The lack of a structured environment made it harder for students to stay on track with their academic responsibilities.

In facing these challenges, teachers need to find effective ways to continue delivering quality education to students. Wellness and support services are the primary strategies used by teachers to cope with the challenges of reopening classes after the pandemic. This indicates that teachers prioritize students' mental and emotional well-being by providing access to counseling services, stress management resources, and virtual support groups. According to Paco and Delfino (2020), people worldwide have found themselves coping with new professional roles. Currently, teachers are initiating and applying various ways to cope with the challenges encountered in the reopening of classes, such as maintaining positive well-being, social support, openness to change, and job awareness of the new normal in education.

## 5. CONCLUSION

After more than two years of campus shutdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic, public and private schools in San Jose, Occidental Mindoro resumed traditional five-day face-to-face classes. This study compared the experiences of teachers from both public and private schools, revealing several key conclusions. The majority of respondents were female, with most holding positions ranging from Teacher I to Teacher III.

The teachers' experiences were influenced by several factors. There was no significant difference between public and private school teachers in their perception of student demotivation following the return to face-to-face classes. Both groups expressed neutral or uncertain views regarding students' behavior and attitudes. Additionally, teachers from both sectors agreed on the necessity of re-framing classroom arrangements, while they were neutral or uncertain about retrofitting classrooms. Public school teachers acknowledged that the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) limits classroom dynamics, while private school teachers strongly agreed with this view. Furthermore, there was no notable difference in the anxiety expressed by teachers from both sectors concerning COVID-19 surges. A common observation among all respondents was the poor academic performance of students upon their return to face-to-face classes.

To address these challenges, respondents identified the need to prioritize students' mental and emotional well-being through wellness and support services as a key strategy. This emphasis on student well-being underscores the importance of supporting both the emotional and academic recovery of students in the post-pandemic educational landscape.

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