

Insight into the COVID Pandemic's Effect on Private- and Public-School Teachers

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The COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on all aspects of society, especially education. For example, in mid-October 2020, when my supervisor asked me this question, “how are you doing today?”, my response was a simple one, “surviving.” This one-word answer has summarized the past school year so far. To be fair, at my workplace, administration often checks up with faculty members at least once a week, whether it is from the principal or the vice principal. While this may be the case there, other teachers may not be so lucky.

Since March 2020, teachers were tasked with striving to find different ways to adapt online learning to their students and their needs. Online learning is defined as “learning that uses internet technology that allows teachers and students to carry out learning” (Verawardina, et al., 2020, p. 386). It has been suggested that online instructors should be active in “provid[ing] direction and support for students in online course” (Sekulich, 2020, p. 17). For example, Sandars (2020) recommended that teachers conduct “synchronous online discussions that enable real-time participation” (p. 5). Moawad (2020) proposed that teachers be more accommodating for students by, for example, “giv[ing] their students more time” submitting work (p. 106). Being “clear about assessment methods” would help ease some stress for students because expectations are given (Moawad, 2020, p. 106).

This concept of “surviving” on a day-by-day basis led me to propose doing a research study on the effects of the COVID pandemic on private- and public-school teachers. From reading various research studies on the effects of COVID-19 on education, the main focus has been on the effect of the pandemic on students and not on the teachers. As a teacher, I want to

do a study that is focused on teachers, more specifically, a study on teachers' attitudes towards online learning.

Review of Literature

Minimal research has been conducted for instructors during the COVID-19 pandemic. A cursory search in online databases illustrates this. Moreover, research is predominantly focused on students and adolescents and the support needed for them. Dr. Sekulich (2020) "maintain[ed] that instructors need to provide direction and support for students" (p. 18). At the same time, she also suggested that teachers and students should "work together to fulfill clearly defined responsibilities" (Sekulich, 2020, p. 17). Similarly, Roy, Ray, Saha, & Ghosal concentrated on "students' perceptions" of online classes during the "COVID-19 epoch" (p. AC01). In a study conducted with Anatomy students, they focused on what would make Zoom classes more effective for students, ranging from allowing participants to join before the host and having less classes per week (Roy, et al., 2020, p. AC02). Roy, et al. (2020) found that some students prefer "asynchronous mode of teaching by uploading lectures in Youtube video" (p. AC02). At the same time, Sandars (2020) insisted that there is a "need for adaptability on the part of educators and learners" (p. 1).

Research has demonstrated that even though teachers are experiencing their own stresses during the pandemic, specifics are often focused on the impact the teachers have on their students. Zhou (2020) acknowledged that instructors, in person or online, have also been "affected by the COVID-19 epidemic and do experience psychological distress" (p. S76). However, children and adolescents psychologically reacted negatively to disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic "because of their immature cognitive and emotional regulation systems" (Zhou, 2020, p. S76). Even though it is known that teachers need "psychological services

alongside those provided to students,” the main foci of Zhou’s cooperative model were children and adolescents (Zhou, 2020, p. S77). Zhou’s model encouraged interaction and cooperation of the “school system,” the “social system,” and “the family system” for the betterment of children (Zhou, 2020, p. S77). According to Zhou (2020), the school system included the teacher-student relationship, peer relationship, and teachers’ psychological distress (p. S77). The social system was made up of the government and social organizations (Zhou, 2020, p. S77). The family system consisted of the relationship of parents to their children and themselves, along with their own distress (Zhou, 2020, p. S77). This model did not consider a teacher’s responsibility for managing the psychological distress of other students as well, not only a handful.

Academic effects notwithstanding, it is important to recognize the other effects the pandemic has had on young minds. Necessary precautions such as “travel restrictions, social distancing, and confinement” affects those considered vulnerable (Husky, 2020, p. 2). For example, Husky, Kovess-Masfety, and Swendsen (2020) found that French university students have experienced “significant psychological distress ... since the beginning of the confinement period (p. 2). Their research also suggested that culture can also have an impact on the distress and anxiety experienced because the “reported rates for psychological distress in Chinese university students” were lower both pre- and mid-pandemic (Husky, et al., 2020, p. 2). Similarly, van der Velden, Contino, Das, van Loon, and Bosmans (2020) found that the “Dutch general population was able to adjust to and cope with all the COVID-19 related changes and threats” (p. 546). These concerns and trends are important to recognize as this pandemic has had a major impact on developing young minds, as shown in research. However, the same amount of research has not been done for the educators who encounter these students daily.

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic has had on local teachers in terms of how they view themselves as teachers. Research has demonstrated that even though teachers are experiencing their own stresses during the pandemic, specifics are often focused on the impact the teachers have on their students. This study aims to answer: (1) how public- and private-school teachers view their capabilities as a teacher before and after summer professional development during the pandemic, (2) how supported they feel by their institution, (3) any improvements teachers feel they may need to work on, and (4) any aspects they feel confident in after the past few months.

Proposal

Plan for Collecting Data

To “provide a more complete picture,” a mixed methods approach will be used, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative forms of research (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 386). The quantitative research will provide initial results that the qualitative research can later expand on (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 386). Specifically, the design will be a convergent parallel mixed methods design to help “develop a complete and valid understanding” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 392). Both the qualitative and quantitative research will occur “concurrently” and have “equal priority” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 392). The results of both will be analyzed and merged at the end (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 392).

Participants

The participants to be studied will be approximately 100 teachers, at both local public and private high schools. While this may not be a large number of participants, it potentially provides a starting point for future research projects. I would like to have more participants, but

I can understand and appreciate the reluctance of some teachers due to COVID-19 and other related concerns. I will initially ask for permission either in person or online if they want to take the brief online survey. Once Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval is procured, I will email them a link via Qualtrics. Risks to participants is minimal since the only possible identifiers are the names and email address of potential participants. It will be stated in the Informed Consent document that all identifiers (name and email address) will be kept confidential. Additionally, the list of names and email addresses will be destroyed as soon as data collection ends.

Material

Using the Qualtrics program, I am planning to create and administer a survey containing a free-text introductory question, as well as Likert scale-type and open-ended questions. The free-text question provides background and context for the responder. Using a Likert scale, respondents would indicate how they agree with the following questions. They would respond by using the following answer choices – “Strongly Agree,” “Agree,” “Undecided,” “Disagree,” “Strongly Disagree.” Lastly, open-ended questions will be asked to allow teachers to provide some possible perspective for their answer choices in the previous section. Context and explanations will be provided for some ambiguous terminology. For example, “feeling physically supported” would refer to the school/administration providing the materials need to be successful in online learning. Listed below is an outline of the questions I plan to ask.

Survey Questions

- 1.) Free-Text Introductory Question

- a. Prior to March 2020, either as a teacher or student, what was your experience with online learning?

2.) Likert-Scale Questions

- a. "Compared with March 2020, my confidence and comfort level in teaching online have increased."
- b. "During Summer 2020, the professional development sessions I took improved my skills in at least one way"
- c. "My confidence and ability in using my school's LMS (learning management system) – Aeries – has increased since last school year."
- d. "I feel supported by my school ..."
 - i. Physically
 - ii. Mentally
 - iii. Psychologically
 - iv. Financially

3.) Free-Text open-ended questions

- a. Which aspect of online learning was the easiest for you and why?
- b. Which aspect of online learning was the greatest challenge for you and why?
- c. What is one aspect of my online learning methods you would like to improve and why?

Procedures

Informed consent will be obtained immediately prior to the beginning of data collection. This consent will open the online survey via Qualtrics. Prior to beginning the survey possible participants will be given a written statement that they may discontinue to complete or submit

the survey at any point during the survey. I will obtain consent via an e-mail inviting teachers and school administrators to participate in the survey online using Qualtrics. Once teachers receive the link via email, they will click on it and answer the questions in the survey.

Upon completion, the surveys will be returned to my email via Qualtrics and no identifiers will be attached. The surveys will be kept in a computer folder file electronically housed at Central Catholic High School, San Antonio, Texas. To access the surveys, a password will be required. No identifiers will be kept for any reason. Once the project is completed the data will be held onto for one year and then destroyed and deleted from the computer file folder housed at Central Catholic High School.

Plan for Analyzing Data

Quantitative Analysis

The Likert-scale-type questions will be analyzed quantitatively. The data will be scored in the following manner: “Strongly agree” will be worth 5 points, “Agree” 4 points, “Undecided” 3 points, “Disagree” 2 points, and “Strongly disagree” 1 point (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 258). I will use the computer program known as the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, or SPSS, to help evaluate the data (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 255). A product of International Business Machines, or IBM, SPSS will allow me to examine the dataset quantitatively (*IBM*, n.d.). It provides “statistical analysis and machine learning algorithms” (*IBM*, n.d.).

Using this program, I will examine both single-item and summed scores (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 258). Assigned to individual questions, single-item scores provide a “detailed, item-by-item analysis of the participants’ responses (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p.

258). Meanwhile, summed scores refer to the added scores “for several items that measure the same variable” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 259). I plan to calculate the mean, mode, and median which will easily allow me to characterize the data obtained (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 260). The mean is the “total of the score divided by the number of scores” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 260). The mode is the “score that appears most frequently” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 260). The median refers to the “middle response” after responses are ranked from highest to lowest (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 260). The data will be organized in tables/charts that will show the data in a structured fashion to help “summarize [the] statistical information” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 271). I will then be able to make “detailed explanations” based on the statistics obtained (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 271).

Qualitative Analysis

The open-ended questions found at the end of the survey will be analyzed qualitatively. Specifically, I will take a basic qualitative research approach to “explore multiple perspectives” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 289). I plan to collect and analyze the data, looking to “develop themes,” and “discuss general conclusions” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 289). To do this manually, I plan to print copies of the participants’ responses and analyze them by hand (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 358). Once I notate and code their responses, I will develop categories that will organize the data (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 362).

Known as themes, these categories are “larger patterns in the data that have emerged from the analysis” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 362). This design is the most practical one to choose, considering I want the participants to provide their own honest feedback. I plan to develop “a small number of themes” because providing detailed, rather than superficial,

information will most likely “adequately convey the complexity” of my research study (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 363).

Possible Applications and Implications

As the past few months have demonstrated, the COVID-19 virus shows no signs of disappearing. The number of positive cases increases, while the number of hospitalizations and deaths indicate the virus is still present in communities. In fact, as of November 14, 2020, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there has been 181,801 new cases of COVID-19, with total of 10,690,665 cases in the United States over the past several months (n.d.). Additionally, the potential impact of the pandemic on other aspects of society may still be felt in the years to come. One such aspect is education. While research has been done detailing the impact on students, teachers are often overlooked.

Hopefully, the research conducted in this proposal will shine a light on how educators have been affected by the pandemic. Teachers can reflect on the research results and see if they echo their sentiments. Administration can also review the research and see if their faculty has similar thoughts. This can potentially lead to conversation and dialogue occurring between administration and faculty. While they may not have the same sentiments, at least the opportunity for discussion is present. These dialogues may have a few positive effects. For example, it can potentially lead to improvement of faculty morale and relations, which can decrease faculty turnover.

Improving faculty retention from year-to-year would allow for more a cohesive and developed curriculum. In fact, cultivating faculty retention at a school would then enhance the quality of education for students, whether it is online, in-person, or some hybrid version of both.

Faculty retention leads to developing professional relationships between students and teachers, from when the students first enter the school to when they graduate and move forward in their lives. Since teachers will feel that their opinions and concerns matter, most likely, this will transfer over to their daily teaching methods. In other words, when they feel that they are cared for, teachers would most likely “perform better,” which can have a few positive effects (Jenkins, 2017). For example, this can “increase positive interaction” amongst the teachers and students, which would make the environment “more enjoyable” (Jenkins, 2017). A “more enjoyable” environment would allow learning and community building to occur (Jenkins, 2017). In fact, it is possible that the positive effects of these conversations may lead to the atmosphere that both students and teachers need in this mid-pandemic world we live in today.

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