

## Parental Involvement of Children with Special Needs in Distance Education amid the COVID-19 pandemic: A Transcendental Phenomenology

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54476/apjaet/85922>

### Abstract

*This study delved into the lived experiences of parents in the involvement of students with special educational needs during distance learning amid the pandemic in the Schools Division of Valenzuela City during the school year 2020-2021. 20 selected parents participated in the face-to-face and online interviews to formulate themes on the essence of the phenomena, as well as the factors affecting the distance education of children with special educational needs. Results were based on multiple interviews wherein views regarding distance learning were adjustments and readiness, the experiences on their involvement were pedagogical, relational difficulties, and having an unstructured place at home. Furthermore, the challenges they encountered in their new role as a facilitator of learning were balancing responsibilities, establishing routines, and providing sufficient resources. Based on the themes formed from the significant statements of the participants, parents perceived that implementing distance learning amidst the Covid19 pandemic serves as a big adjustment in their role as a mother, wife, and substitute teachers to their children. They experienced difficulties in the pedagogical area which lacked knowledge in teaching strategies, and motivating the child are the things that they have to face during the new normal. In a challenging role as a facilitator of learning and household duties, parents should learn how to balance their responsibilities through time management and implementing a schedule. On the other hand, factors affecting the distance education of children with special needs were Psycho-social, psychological, emotional health, and attention.*

*Keywords: Transcendental phenomenology, parental involvement, children with special needs, lived experience, Valenzuela City.*

### Introduction

Parental involvement in the learners' academic accomplishment with special educational needs has an essential role to play in a child's life. The participation of a parent in a child affects the future of a learner. It is across the board for many. It is a catch-all term for many varied activities, including at 'home,' good parenting, assisting with homework, communicating with teachers, joining school functions, and actively taking part in governance.

However, despite this, it has been an observation that not all parents are seriously involved in their children's academic activities. In this pandemic, where the Department of Education ordered distance or online learning, parents play a significant role in their children's education and success.

In the implementation of distance learning, the Division of Valenzuela City has exerted all its efforts to effectively deliver the needed competencies with the parents' assistance and this includes the parents of LSENS. It is along with this premise that the researchers intended to delve into the lived experiences of parents' involvement in the children's school-related activities during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study is anchored on the model of Epstein and Dauber (1991) who proposed the six different types of parent-school connections as *Basic obligations of families*, *Basic obligations of schools*, *Involvement at school*, *Involvement in learning activities at home*, *Involvement in decision-making*, and *Collaboration and exchanges with community organizations*.

In addition, the Theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977) who suggested that the environment of the child is a nested arrangement of structures, each contained within the next, was elaborated in the *five ecological systems* wherein they are interrelated the influence of one system on a child's development depend on its relationship with the others. These are *microsystem*, *mesosystem*, *exosystem*, *macrosystem*, and *chronosystem*.

In connection with parental involvement, parents should consider the foundations of Gagne's Conditions of learning (1985). He proposed a series of critical conditions of learning that he regarded as important in the learning of different outcomes. These outcomes are verbal information, intellectual skills, cognitive strategies, motor skills, and attitudes.

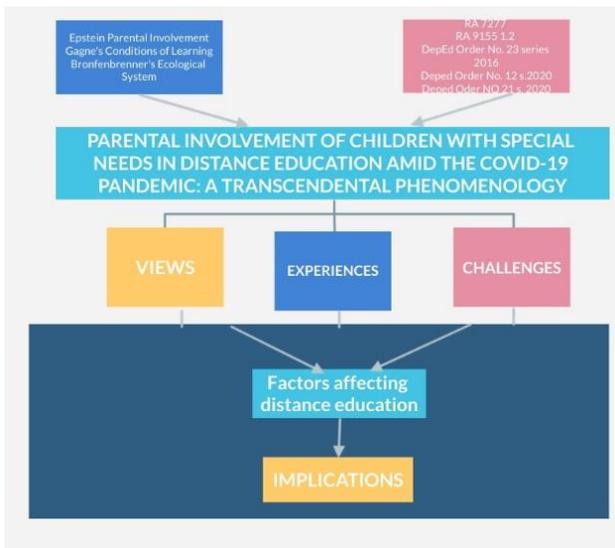


Figure 1. Parental Involvement of Children with Special Needs in Distance Education amid the Covid – 19 Pandemic

To support these theories mentioned above, certain legal bases enacted in the Philippines which support the rights of people with disabilities, as well as Parental Involvement in a child's education to promote the academic success of the students, as stated in R.A. 7277 Magna Carta for Disabled Person indicated the rights and privileges, RA 9155 also known as the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, Section 1.2 Parents and Community Active Involvement on the Child's Education, DepEd Order No. 23 series 2016 Parental Involvement Enclosure No. 2 (3), Adoption of the Basic Education Learning

Continuity Plan DepEd Order No.12 s.2020, DepEd Order No. 21, s 2020 suspension of all national and regional activities

The theories and legal bases stated above are essential parts or the backbone of the study to thoroughly understand the importance of parental involvement particularly in the new normal. Providing knowledge to parents on pedagogical theories and laws helps them realize the parental support needed, and understand the nature of the child, in this way, parents will encourage to fully engage in school for the holistic development of their child.

## Objectives of the Study

This study delved into the lived experiences of parents in the involvement of children with special educational needs regarding distance learning during the COVID- 19 pandemic in the Schools Division of Valenzuela City during the school year 2021- 2022.

Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. To evaluate the views of the participants regarding distance learning.
2. To determine the experiences of the participants on their involvement in handling the distance learning of their children with special educational needs.
3. To analyze the challenges encountered by the participants in their new role as a facilitator of learning
4. To explain the factors affecting distance learning of children with special educational needs.

## Methodology

This study employed the Qualitative method specifically the phenomenological study. A *phenomenological study* describes the meaning for several individuals of their *lived experiences* of a concept or a phenomenon.

*Transcendental phenomenology* illustrated by Moustakas (1994), consists of identifying a phenomenon to study, bracketing out one's experiences, and collecting data from several persons who have experienced the phenomenon. The researcher then analyzes the data by reducing the information to significant statements or quotes and combines the statements into themes. Following that, the researcher develops a *textural description* of the experiences of the persons (what participants experienced), a *structural description* of their experiences (how they experienced it in terms of the conditions, situations, or context), and a combination of the textural and structural descriptions to convey an overall essence of the experience.

*Participants.* This study had 20 selected parents, particularly in the high schools in Valenzuela City Division. Their children are currently enrolled in K to 12 through the distance learning modality during the COVID-19 pandemic. To determine the parents as qualified participants, they must have direct experience in distance learning, their children who are presently enrolled have special needs, and their children must be at high school level and attending online classes to describe the views, experiences, and challenges of their involvement amidst COVID-19 pandemic

Table 1 shows the distribution of the participants.

**Table 1**  
*Distribution of Participants*

Environment	No. of parents interviewed	School Categories	Categories of Children with Special needs
Gen T. De Leon National High School	5	Large School	Specific Learning Disabilities, Developmental Delays, Intellectual Disabilities
Polo National High School	5	Large School	Specific Learning Disabilities, Developmental Delays, Intellectual Disabilities
Valenzuela National High School	5	Large School	Specific Learning Disabilities, Developmental Delays, Intellectual Disabilities, Orthopedic Impairment
Dalandanan National High School	5	Large School	Specific Learning Disabilities, Developmental Delays, Intellectual Disabilities, Autism
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>Large School</b>	

*Sampling Technique/Instrument/Data Privacy.* The purposive sampling technique (also known as judgment, selective or subjective sampling) was used. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method and it occurs when elements selected for the sample are chosen by the judgment of the researcher. Researchers often believed that they can obtain a representative sample by using sound judgment, which will result in saving time and money (Black, 2010).

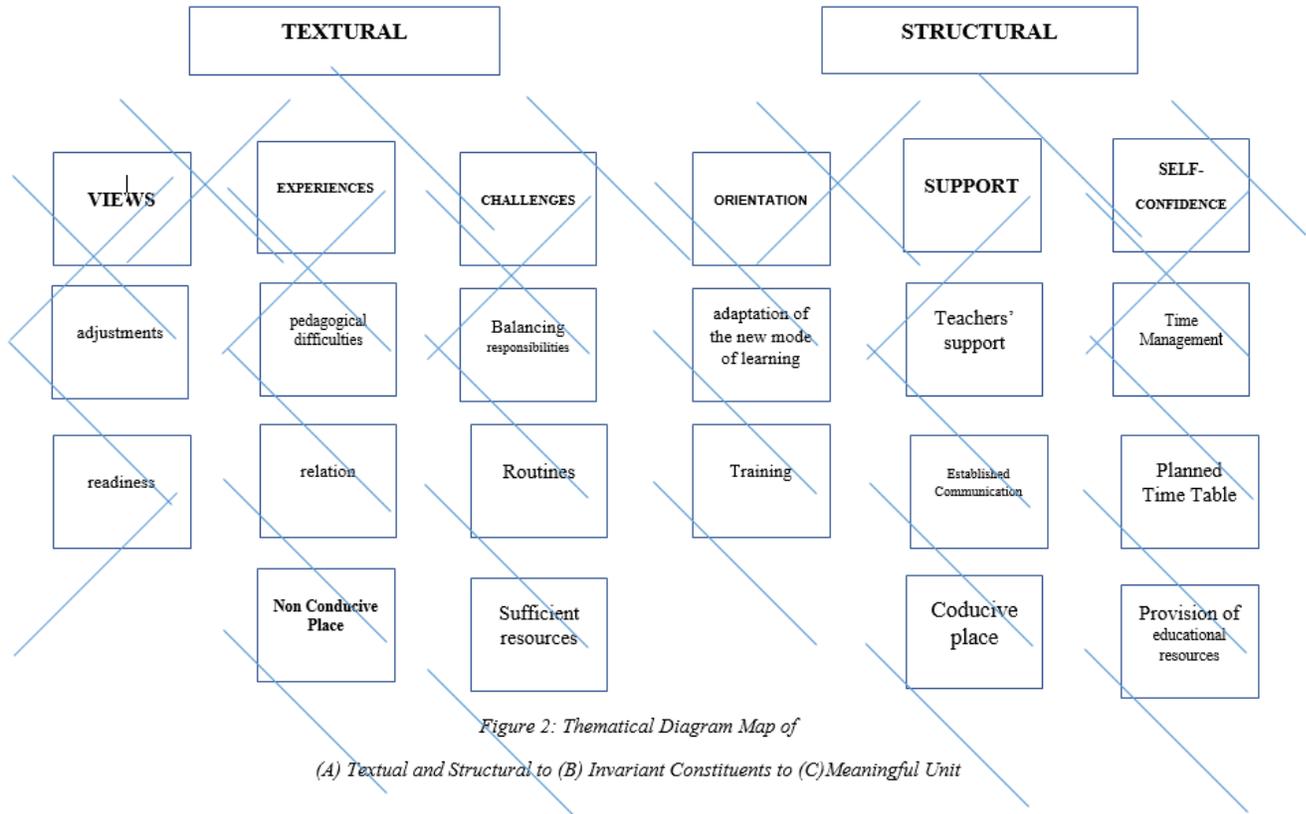
This study used the *researcher-made questionnaire* for the in-depth interview of participants. The interview was conducted online, but some participants also agreed to a face-to-face interview to validate their answers and seek deeper meaning in their lived experiences during the pandemic crisis. Observations were also utilized to have a direct experience of how parents assist their children with special educational needs in their respective homes, observing the health and safety protocols during this pandemic.

Abiding the Research Ethics of the DepEd Order No. 16 s. 2017 Research Management Guidelines stated that Conducting research often requires interaction with various people and communities. Education research in particular heavily focuses on learners and their immediate environment, Thus, researchers shall observe the highest ethical standards. Similarly, research managers uphold ethical principles in evaluating and implementing research proposals to protect our learners and communities, this includes ensuring confidentiality in handling the data of respondents and providing consent forms where necessary.

## Result and Discussions

### 1. Textural and Structural Themes

The significant statements and themes above were used to write a description of what the participants experienced. They were also used to write a description of the context or setting that influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon called imaginative variation or structural description.



## 2. Views of Participants Regarding Distance Learning

Views of the parents vary from one another due to different factors that influence their views such as environment, socioeconomic status, and religion. ethnic groups and the like. With regards to distance learning, it is important to consider the socioeconomic status and capability of the parent for the parents to provide the full support needed in terms of resources, assistance, etc. Educators should not generalize every family's perspective on distance learning because they have different situations facing overcoming problems during a pandemic crisis.

Themes from the responses of the participants on their views about distance learning, the following emerged: Adjustments and readiness.

### Theme 1- Adjustments

Everything that comes new gives every individual some feelings of discomfort and causes hinders proceeding in the next direction. These were the feelings of parents when they faced the role of teachers to have their children continue learning at home. Parent 5 claimed that: *"It is a huge adjustment such as the use of the internet, substitute teacher at the home of my child"* (p 5) Giannotti M. et al (2021) in their study, confirm and extend some of the initial findings on family adjustment during COVID-19 pandemic and brings some novel evidence on the influence of specific COVID-19-related factors on parental, couple, and child well-being during the lockdown.

## Theme 2 – Readiness

Some are not ready to embrace the new demand of distance learning since they are not technically equipped. Proper Training must conduct and provide for all the parents to avoid inadequacy of skills to assist their child at home. Parent 17 reiterated that: *“It is not easy for some who are not ready for any changes” (P 17).*

### 3. Experiences of the Participants in their Involvement in Handling the Distance Learning of their Children with Special Educational Needs

Most responses of parents shared their difficulties on how to deal with the new set-up of learning such as teaching strategies, techniques, motivation, and other areas that pertain to teaching and learning at home. The following themes emerged: pedagogical difficulties, relation difficulties, and non-conducive place.

#### Theme 1- Pedagogical difficulties

The lack of pedagogical knowledge of the parents is the main experience of the parents which needs to address the difficulties experiencing teaching and learning in times of pandemic.

Garbe (2020) asserted that a Lack of parent content knowledge or pedagogy was a barrier described by nine participants. Survey respondents that identified their predominant struggles as content knowledge or pedagogy discussed their lack of training to become an educator, especially students with special educational needs were left unmet by teachers due to the lack of capacity of schools, internet access, and diverse students’ special needs and also left unmet by parents because of a lack of time, content knowledge or pedagogy, communication, and/or resources. One parent supported this by saying: *“I understand the lesson, however, having a hard time implementing strategy since there is a specific strategy for my child with special needs.” (P 8).*

#### Theme 2 - Relation difficulties

Not all of the parents can freely express their concerns directly to the teacher, there are some apprehension and hesitation to message the teacher due to the volume of work, and other school papers works could hinder them to bother the teacher. Establishing a collaborative relationship is advantageous to improve a child’s academic performance of the students, it is not limited to giving feedback at the end of the grading period, but also the area of improvement should also be raised. The parent confessed: *It is hard to teach, sometimes, it obstructs me to raise some concerns to the teacher online”.* (P 10).

This claim holds as well for parents who had to bear the remote learning of their children in their homes. Parents experience structural, pedagogical, and relational difficulties as they get more involved in the remote learning of their children. Zainuddin et al. (2020) affirmed that difficulties regarding the educational change to remote learning are expected to exacerbate inequalities, especially across disadvantaged communities around the world.

#### Theme 3 – Non-conducive Place

Our home is a place where we can take a rest, spend time with the family and do some recreational activities. A school is a place that we assume is conducive to learning due to enough lighting, ventilation,

a chair with back support, and a blackboard. A home is not a place for formal learning, yet setting up a specific place in our house for online learning attributes the child's focus on study away from other distractions such as putting up comfortable chairs and tables, sufficient lighting and ventilation can urge the child to focus because she/he is conditioned in a conducive place of learning. A Parent confessed: *"It seems unusual, there are many distractions on my child online and answering the module at home. (P 12).*

#### 4. Challenges Encountered by Participants in their New Role as Facilitators of Learning

Parents took distance learning amidst the pandemic crisis as a challenge. A new challenging role that has to fulfill new duties as a substitute teacher at home. These are the themes based on the responses of the parent participants: balancing responsibilities, routines, and sufficient resources.

##### Theme 1- Balancing Responsibilities

The new role assumed by parents as substitute teachers while their children continue to learn at home during the pandemic was a great problem for them at the start. They have other responsibilities at home as breadwinners or housekeepers and teaching their children in all subjects assists the teacher needs time to balance all responsibilities. One Parent commented that: *"Doing our household chores and teaching my child at the same time is a challenging responsibility as a parent. (P 19)* Another one exclaimed: *"When I am at work then I need to open his account to assist on his online class because there is no one who will assist my child. " (P 9)*

The simultaneous task of the parents is a challenging responsibility without proper scheduling. To solve this issue, time management should be a part of parents' daily life due to the gargantuan tasks that they must perform to address all the responsibilities.

In the study by Garbe (2020) where the occurrence of school closure and remote schooling presented a struggle to balance responsibilities. The concern for various responsibilities competing for the limited resources of time and energy was frequently expressed by respondents.

##### Theme 2 – Routines

During the pandemic, children must stay at home for safety and protection. The activities they used to do at school are not a part of their daily routine anymore, especially their socialization with peers, hence, there are less motivated to do their tasks when parents facilitate it. Parent 17 asserted that: *"Hard to get the attention of my child."(P 17).* This was the confession of the parent about her child who manifests different moods; sometimes has the mood in studying, and sometimes when her child attends the online class, she does not want to speak even under the guidance of the parent. Although special education students have exceptional rules with regards to conditioning the child in learning due to their delays, deficiency, and impairment, establishing a routine at home, and setting timetables to lessen the restlessness of the child. It also makes the child responsible due to the predictable activities that he/she has to accomplish in a day.

Parents around the world are rightfully concerned about how their children's routines are disrupted extensively. To combat this issue, they have designed homemade timetables according to which children should have something to do at most times and should have a normal sleep-wake cycle. *Implementing a*

*schedule* helps children feel less restless and more productive. It can also prevent unnecessary internet and computer time. Bhanami et al(2020).

### Theme 3 - Sufficient Resources

The majority of the parents use mobile phones in distance learning; however, some do not have a stable internet connection and rely on the mobile data load from their earnings. In the municipality of Valenzuela where they provide tablets and pocket wifi for those who do not have a stable internet connection at home, yet buying a weekly mobile data load could cut their monthly budget to provide all the needs for the family. One claimed that: “*Slow internet connection and insufficient load.*” (P 7). Another immediately agreed that: “*Insufficient devices, he borrows from his brothers, sometimes he needs to wait before he can use and do his assignments*” (P 3).

Asio J. (2021) Internet connectivity will pose a big challenge among students for their online learning. This idea also applies to the institution, the school administration, the faculty, and the staff.

### 5. Factors Affecting the Distance Education of Children with Special Educational Needs

On the account of a series of interviews, research and observation, the researchers came up with the factors affecting the distance learning of children with special educational needs such as *psycho-social, psychological components, emotional health, and attention.*

*Psycho-social.* Since the suspension of classes remains in effect, students have limited chance to interact with their classmates without the presence of face-to-face interaction like collaborative group work, peer teaching, group pairing, and other activities that enhance their social skills through interaction especially children with special educational needs should not learn themselves in an isolated room, but they have to experience a variety of learning experiences. Parent 4 asserted that “It is hard for my child who has a speech delay which needs social life to improve it”.

*Psychological.* MELCS or Most Essential Learning Competencies is the focal point of the continuity plan of the Department of Education wherein most essential skills are included and contract all the common competencies into one competency to the necessary skills needed in every grade level, however, during the first year, the implementation students and parents were not prepared to embrace the new demand of learning due to sudden unpredictable changes which the students need to embrace for continuity of learning.

According to Zhou (2020), in managing psychological distress in children and adolescents following the Covid-19 Epidemic: A Cooperative Approach declared that the marital and parent-child systems may be challenged by major disasters, which will in turn damage relationships, exerting negative effects on mental health. Family and psychological services can improve such relationships and help to build a functional family atmosphere.

*Emotional Health.* Hasan and Bao (2020) provided additional guidance for parents on how to support their children’s emotional health and learning, with the goals of improving harmony in homes and encouraging families to follow public health recommendations.

*Attention.* A low attention span adds to the problems. The lack of human touch, the absence of opportunities for collaborative learning, and most importantly the lack of support for hands-on learning for complex subjects like math and science are big concerns for achieving quality education (Chari, 2020).

## Conclusions

Based on the themes formed from the significant statements of the participants, parents perceived that implementing distance learning amidst the Covid19 pandemic serves as a big *adjustment* in their role as a mother, wife and a substitute teachers to their children. They experience *difficulties in pedagogical* areas which lack knowledge of teaching strategies, and motivating the child are things that they have to face during the new normal. A challenging role as a facilitator of learning, and household duties should learn how to *balance responsibilities* through time management and implementing a schedule.

From views, experiences, and challenges of parental involvement and observations conducted, factors affecting the distance education of children with special needs are Psychosocial, Psychological, Emotional Health, and Attention.

## Recommendations

The study revealed the views, experiences, and challenges of parents as they took responsibility as substitute teachers at home. To make distance education possible, the Education sector, government officials, school administrators, teachers, parents, and students must collaborate to meet emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. This outcome of the research study will be a great help to the following to sustain and improve the delivery of distance learning.

*Department of Education.* The urgent response of the sector manifested the flexibility of the teachers, students, and parents to adhere to the new learning delivery. Varieties of seminars and workshops were provided to all teachers in preparing for distance learning. However, some of the parents admitted that they are not ready to adopt the new implementation due to a lack of skills, particularly in pedagogical and technological areas. To combat this, effective orientation and workshop seminars wherein parents can be technologically equipped to assist their children at home. Provide comprehensive views on what and how to fulfill their duty as a parent and substitute teacher at home specifically pedagogical skills for children with special educational needs.

*Government Officials.* One of the challenges faced during this implementation is the provision of sufficient resources. Local government units and non-profit organizations should take a hand in and support the needs of teachers, parents, and students. Allocate the budget for devices, stable internet connection, and other educational resources needed for distance learning.

Furthermore, there are factors affecting the distance learning of their children with special needs like emotional and psycho-social, psychological assistance for students who have difficulties with adjustments and transitions must also give attention to programs for the special education department such as emotional. mental and physical welfare of the child should be assisted. In addition to these, distance learning alone is not enough to address the special needs of the children, therefore, a hybrid mode of learning delivery must be planned to assist special education students with their special needs for instance medication, continuous therapy, etc. With the help of the government, this will be possible if lawmakers support the needs and put this in effect for the benefit of special education students.

*School Administrators.* Administrators must come up with a plan to help parents balance their time at home and school, seminars that improve their time management, and establish routines that can help fulfill their multiple roles. In that way, parents will be highly encouraged to be actively involved in their children's learning. It is also suggested that they should plan to help parents by providing conducive places at home. With the proper orientation of children's needs for distance learning, educating parents on how important to give their children a conducive and comfortable place could contribute to their active participation during online classes.

*Teachers.* Under the guidance of School Administrators, teachers must establish effective communication by constant communication, answering their queries teaching, and guiding them on what they should comply with. In some cases, parents who have a hard time utilizing online learning should seek assistance not solely from the teacher's effort alone, but also with the help of government officials and school administrators to meet both needs of the teacher and parent relationship in times of pandemic.

*Parents.* To prepare and adjust themselves to the new demand of distance learning, parents must engage them in all workshop seminars provided by the school. taking advantage of the programs for the benefit of the parents in their struggles and difficulties in teaching their children at home. Concomitant with rights and equal education are the responsibilities of the parents to be actively involved in the holistic development of their children with special needs.

*Researchers.* Since the study is limited to the area of Valenzuela City were successfully implemented distance learning with the full support of the local government and guidance of the School Administrators in the Division of Valenzuela City, however, some areas specifically rural where areas cannot able to finance and provide the needs of the teachers, students as well as the parents to be actively engaged in the distance learning. It is also highly recommended that researchers to take considerations of conducting studies in some rural areas and be able to describe their experiences, views, and challenges in the implementation of distance learning.

*Future Researchers.* For further research, it is recommended to conduct research not only during the COVID-19 pandemic but also in the post-pandemic whether it will be a blended classroom set-up that can adapt to children with special needs.

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