
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Lived Experiences of Mothers of Deaf Children amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

Mary Stephanie A. Agbay¹✉ and Gengen G. Padillo²

^{1,2}Cebu Technological University-Main Campus

Corresponding Author: Mary Stephanie A. Agbay, **E-mail:** marystephanie.agbay@deped.gov.ph

| ABSTRACT

Mothers of deaf children encounter many difficulties in parenting their children amidst the pandemic. They need to cope with educational resources to help promote family-professional relationships and advance the effectiveness of the child's intervention. This research delved into the lived experiences of 14 mothers of deaf learners in the Division of Mandaue City during the COVID-19 pandemic, the school year 2021-2022. The interview guide was used to conduct in-depth interviews, during which the data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The study revealed that mothers experience difficulty handling their deaf children academically, for they have little or no knowledge of the basic concepts of sign language. The six themes that emerged in the study were: Parents Limited Ability to Communicate with the Hearing-Impaired Children, Problems in the Preparation of the Learning Environment, Modular Instruction was not Fitted for Special Education, Usefulness of Constructed Modules to the Mothers and Children in Understanding the Lessons, Teachers Association Aide the Mothers Modular Instruction and Usefulness of the Learning Guides Provided by the School to Educate the Child. The study concluded that mothers of elementary deaf learners with impairments had experienced multifaceted problems due to the absence of face-to-face instruction.

| KEYWORDS

Special Education, deafness, hearing impairment, qualitative phenomenological study, Philippines

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

In the world of silence, one would be left with the other senses' reliability: what one sees, feels, and touches. It is the challenge of understanding everything around when one has less ability or even the capacity to hear anything. This world is for students with hearing impairments: the world of deafness.

Being born with people who are deaf or hard of hearing is an excellent challenge for both mother and child (Davids et al., 2021). Mothers naturally are responsible for carrying their beloved child from conception in their womb up to bringing up the child (Linton-Dorsey, 1993). Generally, they are the first-hand persons who care for their children with or without disabilities. They nurture them to become law-abiding citizens and be as independent as possible (Huntington & Scott, 2020). They are the first teachers whom children learn through their support and guidance (Alwhaibi et al., 2020). With the implications of deafness, it has been a common observation in the Philippines that mothers and deaf children encounter many challenges even at home because of the miscommunication underlying the effects of less education and orientation related to nurturing children with such disabilities.

In Cebu, deaf organizations such as the Mandaue City Association of the Deaf have been advocating for deaf rights and deaf culture. This is to promote awareness that having a deaf child can happen to anyone and that there is help at hand for first-time mothers. This organization has also been offering sign language classes to cater to the gap in communication between a

child with hearing impairment and a hearing person, especially one's mother. Even with these helpful advocates, there are still issues and concerns in handling these children.

In light of this challenge, the researcher would like to know the lived experiences of mothers of deaf students. The researcher is a sibling of a person with a hearing impairment, who is a very active advocate and leader of Deaf culture and prefers to be called a Deaf person as to what is culturally accepted rather than a person with hearing impairments. The researcher would like to know other families' different problems, adjustments, and needs to provide the basic demands of having a deaf child.

As a teacher herself during the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher noted that deaf students struggle with most schools' modular distance learning modality. These students usually become confused with the lessons, providing less accurate answers to what would be expected from the lectures through the teachers' modules. Their mothers are expected to be the facilitators of learning at home. With the prevailing underlying challenges, these mothers have an additional obligation to cope with the responsibility of handling their children.

The end view of this research is to enhance mothers' relationships to promote the optimum level of learning development for deaf students.

2. Related Literature

The hearing loss and deafness of a person who cannot hear as well as someone with normal hearing – hearing thresholds of 20 dB or better in both ears – is said to have hearing loss. Hearing loss may be mild, moderate, severe, or profound. It can affect one ear or both ears and lead to difficulty hearing conversational speech or loud sounds. Hard of hearing refers to people with hearing loss ranging from mild to severe. Hard-of-hearing people usually communicate through spoken language and can benefit from hearing aids, cochlear implants, and other assistive devices and captioning (WHO, 2021).

Being born of a child with hearing loss is a stressful and unexpected experience for the parents. Understanding the experience of the mothers of children with hearing loss is crucial to provide appropriate care for this group of mothers. Concerns of mothers of children with hearing loss were categorized into three main themes: The nature of hearing loss, social concerns, and concerns about the future. Mothers of deaf children are experiencing a variety of concerns. To cope with these concerns, they need special consideration by society and health professionals. Modifying the concerns can decrease child-related stress and encourage them to be involved in child care (Ebrahimi et al., 2017).

According to Nicastrì et al. (2021), deaf children with cochlear implants (C.I.s) need a supportive family environment to facilitate language development. The families' quality of interaction and the children's language increased significantly more in the trained group than in the controls, and differences were still present after three years.

In Malaysia, educational services for deaf children are relatively well developed, especially in urban areas, and include special schools and separate classrooms in mainstream schools. Many deaf children have cochlear implants and are educated in mainstream classrooms. The study of Khairuddin and Miles (2020) revealed that a small number of qualified teachers of deaf children teach through the medium of signed communication, yet parents are encouraged by health professionals to teach their children to speak with amplification.

In some related studies, Zaidman-Zait and Curle (2018) explored the experiences of parenting a child with a dual diagnosis of childhood deafness and autism spectrum disorder who underwent cochlear implantation. Three superordinate themes were identified: complexity, personal and family sacrifices, and parent-professional partnerships. These themes provide a rich account of mothers' interpretations of their experiences and reflect their numerous challenges. This study helps expand the literature on cochlear implantation for children with autism spectrum disorder and discusses implications for clinical and educational practice.

The study of Kobosko et al. (2021) divided deaf children into two groups: those who had a low level of global psychomotor development (Low global psychomotor development subgroup – LGPD) and others with medium or high scores (Medium/high global psychomotor development subgroup – MHGPD). The mothers of deaf children in the LGPD group assessed their investment in motherhood as lower than mothers from the MHGPD group. The mothers of the LGPD group rated their satisfaction with the child's rehabilitation as lower than mothers from the MHGPD group.

Park and Yoon (2018) suggest the need for comprehensive support services that consider deaf children and their parents, siblings, families, and schools. The study also provides clinical implications for social work practice with families with deaf children from culturally diverse backgrounds. Deaf children face many challenges in dealing with educational opportunities and ensuring the attainment of academic skills. A parent's involvement in the child's education can enhance academic performance. Akellot and Bangirana (2019) study sought the association between parental involvement and academic achievement among deaf children in Uganda. Parental involvement was not associated with academic achievement among deaf children in Kampala. Other factors associated with academic achievement need to be identified to enhance deaf children's performance at school.

The study of Kasin et al. (2020) revealed that the majority of parents of children who are DHH were functioning similarly to or better than the non-clinical samples in our comparison and within the non-clinical range for the included measures. According to Porter et al. (2018), parents or caregivers of children who are deaf or hard of hearing are required to make complex and rational decisions soon after the confirmation of hearing loss. Two decisions dominated these studies—implantable devices and

communication modality. Most papers dealt with decision-making in the context of bilateral hearing loss, with only one study focusing on unilateral hearing loss. The presence of a child with hearing impairment in the family is often problematic and needs psychological interventions.

Dianito et al. (2021) stated that amidst the global pandemic, everyone can be vulnerable and heightened by burnout. However, the most unheard and vulnerable voices linger among persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities (PWDs) are one of the concerns in society.

Dammeyer et al. (2019) investigated the impact of having a child with hearing loss on the lives of parents and families and have shown divergent results. Some studies have reported that childhood hearing loss is associated with parental mental health problems, such as depression and stress. Other studies report no impact on parental mental health and well-being. The study by Nittrouer and Lowenstein (2021) revealed that children with N.H. performed best, children with C.I.s performed poorest, and children with H.A.s performed intermediately to those groups. Children in all groups scored higher on the multiple meanings than the syntactic structure items.

Deaf/deaf or hard of hearing (DHH) children are at an increased risk of developing mental health problems, with growing evidence that they may experience more significant anxiety symptoms than hearing peers. Long et al. (2021) investigated whether Australian children with varying hearing loss experienced increased anxiety symptoms compared to hearing children. The study revealed that the children with hearing loss had fewer anxiety symptoms than their hearing peers. Parents' psychological distress was the only factor uniquely associated with child anxiety. Parents of children with hearing loss were found to experience more significant emotional distress than parents of hearing children.

The findings of the study by Brydges and Mkandawire (2020) show that, given the limited capacity of the state to deliver inclusive education, parents of children with disabilities express mixed feelings about the policy's true worth; while some parents applaud the system, others see it as a threat to their children's social integration and prospects. Robinson and Henner (2017) state that deaf people have developed and transmitted embodied knowledge over generations of inhabiting a different center. The core of this knowledge is the role of sign language in developing language, cognition, and social structures. Modern fields of science search for truth by deconstructing false narratives.

Huiracochoa-Tutiven et al. (2017) study draws on interviews with parents (and some grandparents) of DHI children in Ecuador, a country marked by profound inequality and considerable recent progress in poverty reduction enhanced provisions for people with disabilities. Despite progress, many carers are nevertheless critical of how new measures have been implemented and the schooling available to their child. They are also worried about their child's vulnerability, the likelihood of discrimination, and the possibility of abuse.

Most deaf children are born to hearing parents with little experience with deaf people, language, or culture. These parents struggle with how to raise a deaf infant who responds primarily to visual rather than auditory information. A program called deaf mentors was developed to connect these hearing families with a Deaf adult trained to help parents learn visual strategies effectively and, if desired, sign language to facilitate early language acquisition. Results found that these deaf mentors helped families create a context that provided the Keys to a High Quality of Life for Deaf Children. Notably, the program provided a new perspective that allowed families to understand that their deaf child was different but not broken (Hamilton & Clark, 2020).

Despite advances in hearing technology, a growing body of research, and early intervention protocols, deaf children fail to meet age-based language milestones—this gap in language acquisition points to the inconsistencies between research and practice. Clark et al. (2020) suggested that bimodal bilingual early interventions for deaf identification provide children with language foundations that lead to more effective outcomes. Recommendations that support implementing bimodal bilingualism at deaf identification include early intervention protocols, language foundations, and the development of appropriate bimodal bilingual environments.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) children must master at least one language (spoken or signed) to reach their full potential. Providing access to natural sign language supports this goal. Despite evidence that natural sign languages benefit DHH children, many researchers and practitioners advise families to focus exclusively on spoken language. While practical challenges remain in providing a sign language-rich environment, Hall et al. (2019) suggest that such challenges are worth tackling in light of natural sign languages providing a host of benefits for DHH children – especially in preventing and reducing language deprivation.

Hall et al. (2018) assess the influence of parental hearing status on deaf people's recalled access to childhood indirect family communication. Parental hearing status predicted deaf adults' recalled access to childhood indirect family communication. This study finds that deaf people with hearing parents were likelier to report limited access to contextual learning opportunities during childhood. Therefore, parental hearing status and early childhood language experiences require further investigation as possible social determinants of health to develop interventions that improve lifelong health and social outcomes of the underserved deaf population.

Quality health care is a fundamental human right enshrined in several international and domestic legislative instruments. In the Ghanaian context, there are reports that adults with disabilities encounter barriers in their attempts to access health care. Although many young deaf Adolescents (YDAs) who participated in this study indicated that it was not difficult to access health facilities, they claim to have encountered communication barriers. Sign language interpreters in health facilities and the

introduction of sign language courses in health training institutions to improve communication between health professionals and deaf patients have been suggested to address the barriers faced by YDAs in Ghana (Senayah et al., 2019).

Saliés and Batista (2020) indicated that the mothers represent themselves as "pro-active" and "caring" mothers as well as "reluctant" to accept their children's deafness. The reported speech was the primary strategy used in talks to solve conflicting situations and avoid confronting the lack of acceptance of their children's deafness.

These literature and studies have contributed to formulations of the variables needed to study hearing impairments.

3. Purpose of the Study

This study delved into the lived experiences of mothers of elementary deaf learners in the Division of Mandaue City during the COVID-19 pandemic, the school year 2021-2022 as the basis for implications for practice. Specifically, it sought to answer questions about the participants' difficulties in handling their deaf children to address these problems in handling children with hearing impairments during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Methodology

This section presents the design, the participants, the instruments, and the data analysis.

4.1 Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to gather data on mothers' lived experiences in handling deaf children in the province of Cebu from 2021 to 2022. The gathered data are the basis for implications for practice.

4.2 Participants

The 14 participants were chosen using the non-probability convenience sampling method. The following criteria were used to select the mothers of deaf children: a full-time housewife, a working mother as a kasambahay or a domestic helper, a full-time working mother, an OFW mother, and a mother who was a single parent. The participants were competent and credible enough to remember past events or experiences relative to their experiences as mothers in handling their deaf children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Therefore, the researcher utilized the purposive sampling method to choose the informants. The purposive convenient sampling method is judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling. It is a type of nonprobability sampling technique. This relied on the researcher's judgment regarding selecting the units to be studied, considering the total number of participants from the school administrator of Mandaue City Central SpEd School.

4.3 Instruments

The researcher used an interview guide containing open-ended questions concerning the mothers' difficulties to address these problems in handling children with hearing impairments during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before conducting the in-depth interview, the researcher uttered informed consent regarding the involvement of the research participants and their rights to confidentiality. After that, the participant's signature and date were indicated on the last page of the informed consent form. However, the examiners evaluated and validated the interview guide (I.G.) containing open-ended questions.

The researcher also used a field diary to note and record the participants' responses and a voice recorder to capture the audio responses during the interview.

This study employed in-depth interviews (IDI) and document analysis. The document analysis involved recording the interview transcript from the participants and then processing it to emergent using Colaizzi's methods.

4.4 Data Gathering Procedures

The procedures of this study were carried out with written permission from the Schools Division Superintendent of Mandaue City, who furnished an approval copy to the School Principal of Mandaue City Central SpEd School before interviewing the participants.

Gathering of Data. Before the initial contact with the mothers of deaf children, transmittal letters were sent via personal hand to the Department of Education Division Office of Mandaue City. This process asked permission to conduct the study from the College of Education, Cebu Technological University-Main Campus.

The researcher gathered the data based on primary sources from in-depth interviews. For this study, the researcher visited the households of the enrolled deaf children at Mandaue City Central SpEd School for an interview. They were given an introductory

letter outlining the following: 1) the purpose and significance of the study, 2) details of the discussion, and 3) consent forms with an explanation of confidentiality to make sure that they are well-informed regarding confidentiality in data gathering. The appropriate sample for a phenomenological study shall consist of 14 human participants. All participants chosen from the study are open regardless of gender and political views. This study utilized in-depth interviews to gather data to determine mothers' lived experiences relative to their deaf children's education during the COVID-19 pandemic school year 2021-2022.

The participants' decisions to participate in this research study were entirely voluntary. The participants can refuse to participate or withdraw from the study. They were given a consent form to read, and the researcher also read it before participating in the interview. The consent form requires the participants to confirm that they are of legal age.

The study aimed to explain in general terms that anonymity was guaranteed, and the significance of candid responses was emphasized. The participants' records were kept private and not released without their consent except as required by law. The participants' identities are kept confidential. The voice recorder was used to record the interview and later transcribed without any information to identify the subject. After the data were transcribed, a translation of the responses was made, and the translation of the responses was transcribed and analyzed. The recorded response in the voice recorder was appropriately kept.

Ethical Considerations. The researcher personally provided the participants with the informed consent form requesting to participate in the research with the research study. The participants were personally informed of the study's purpose and had ample time to think and talk to anyone comfortable with them before deciding to participate in the study. They had the freedom to ask questions from the researcher regarding the study's content if they could not understand it very well. The participants were also informed that their participation was purely voluntary.

The researcher requested the participants to share their views regarding their difficulties and coping mechanisms in handling deaf children during the COVID-19 pandemic school year 2021-2022.

Trustworthiness of Research. The trustworthiness of a qualitative study can be increased by maintaining high credibility and objectivity. A research definition of trustworthiness might be a demonstration that the evidence for the results reported is sound and that the argument made based on the results is vital. The researcher invited the participants to participate in this study about their difficulties and coping mechanisms in handling their children with hearing impairments amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. To gain insights from people who will enrich and illuminate our understanding of actions, concepts, events, and practices.

Data Analysis. The data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis techniques in qualitative research to look into the data's commonalities during the interviews.

5. Results and Discussions

This section presents the data on the lived experiences of mothers of elementary deaf learners in the Division of Mandaue City amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.1 Demographic Profile of the Research Participants

This section presents the personal information of the mothers who have deaf children in terms of age, nature of work and job, total number of children, and number of children with disabilities and without disability.

Mothers' Demographic Profile

No.	Age (Years Old)	Nature of Work/ Job	No. of Children	No. of Children W/ Disabilities	No. of Children W/out Disability	Situation During the Pandemic
1	40	Housewife / Stay out Helper	2	1 deaf	1	I am okay Ma'am
2	42	Sari-Sari Store Business / Caregiving	4	1 deaf	3	I am okay, Ma'am.
3	35	Housewife	4	1 deaf ; 1 psychosocial disability	2	It was 2020; I am not okay because I got COVID. Ram-j was also admitted to the district because of his hyperacidity. Then it's okay; I don't have any symptoms; by God's grace, I was asymptomatic.
4	31	Housewife	1	1	0	It is okay; at least it is over.
5	27	Housewife	3	1 deaf	2	It is still okay, Ma'am, it's still okay.
6	36	Housewife	3	1 deaf	2	It's hard, Ma'am, because my partner has stopped working. The pandemic has caused the shifting of their job schedules, and he only works thrice a week. It's really hard.
7	46	Housewife / Purok Leader in Barangay	4	1 deaf	3	It is okay on my part because I am busy since I am a Purok leader. Actually, I'm engaged in seven: the women's association in our area, the coast guard, and Barangay Tipolo. I am also a choir coordinator in our church, so I'm really busy.
8	44	MEPZA Production Worker	1	1 deaf	0	It's okay.
9	43	Domestic Helper in Singapore	6	1 deaf	5	During the pandemic, I wasn't able to go home. I was stressed because I couldn't go home, and there was a lot of news about the pandemic. It was so stressful, but it was manageable, though. I was able to go home in March. I stayed four months in the Philippines and then came back here to Singapore. I made it up because I did not go home for some time.
10	39	Office Staff	1	1 deaf	0	"Striving."
11	36	Housewife	2	1 deaf	1	"By God's grace, we are all well and doing good."
12	35	Housewife	4	2 deaf	2	"Stress, but it is normal to feel stress."
13	36	Office Staff	2	1 deaf	1	"Not fine."

14	52	Housewife	6	1 deaf	5	"I think all of us are suffering now because of this pandemic. This pandemic changes our lifestyle."
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The data in Table 1 show that Participant 14, the oldest among the mothers included in this investigation at the time of the interview, was 52 years old. On the other hand, participant 5 was the youngest among them, 27 years old. The mean age is 38.71 years old. Most of the research participants were in the middle adulthood stage.

The focus of stage 7, the middle adulthood or generativity vs. stagnation stage, is to contribute to society and the next generation. Adults in this stage are often at the height of their careers. Many people are raising children. Regarding generativity, people may offer guidance to the next generation through parenting or mentorship. They may also offer to lead the way by leaving a legacy. Contributing to society's future can give people a sense of community and purpose. Regarding stagnation, some people may feel they have no impact on society. People who do not find their work meaningful may feel restless or isolated. Some may feel they have "peaked" and that their lives will only worsen in the future (Danielsson et al., 2017).

In terms of their nature of work and job, participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, and 14 were housewives, while participants 1 and 7 were at the same time a stay out helpers and purok leaders in barangay, respectively. Moreover, participants 2, 8, and 9 owned small convenience stores or *sari-sari* store business owners and caregivers, production workers, and overseas Filipino workers, respectively, during the interview. The figures indicate that predominantly, the mothers of hearing stayed at home to take care of them as Heng-hao (2016) posits that when a family has a disabled child, the mother usually takes on the caretaker role and carries the social stigma associated with disability.

As to the total number of children, participants 9 and 6 had the highest number, six (6), while participants 4, 8, and 10 had only one (1) child. These data show that most of the mothers' deaf children were small. However, there were families whose number of children was neither small nor big.

Based on the current economic condition, it would be hard to raise a big family since essential commodities are affected by the ongoing inflation caused by the global recession. Hence, families tend to apply family planning to limit the number of children and provide them with a decent and comfortable life.

Filipinos still prefer a smaller family size, the latest official population count conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) revealed. As the number of Filipinos continues to grow much slower, Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Karl Kendrick T. Chua said the country should work on having an optimal population size where every citizen gets essential services and becomes productive. He explained that there were cases where high population growth contributed to economic problems, and there were also instances where low population growth resulted in a lower potential for economic expansion (Leyco, 2021).

Concerning the number of children with disabilities, participants 3 and 12 had the highest number of disabled children of two (2), while participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, and 14 had only one (1) deaf child. This information shows that only one child in the research participants' family had a hearing impairment.

Having more than one child in the family with hearing problems would cause stress to the parents and siblings because this type of child has special needs aside from the basic needs of normal children. There is no question that when a family member has a hearing loss, treated or untreated, the loss impacts the entire family. Even when using hearing aids, most people with hearing loss still struggle to understand speech in challenging listening conditions (Jones, 2021).

5.2 Difficulties of Mothers in Handling Deaf Children at Home

Modular learning is the current learning modality of primary education in the Philippines. The traditional teacher-student practice has now been shifted to mother-child since mothers are the immediate assistants of their children in modular learning. Therefore, they play essential parts in their children's education (Dealagdon, 2021).

Since learning is inaccessible within the school, teachers must team up with the parents for the child's education. Therefore, parents play a vital role in this learning modality as they guide their children in their modules (FlipScience, 2020). Thus, mothers are most likely to take this role as claimed that mothers are the immediate person to assist their child's learning as their assistance dramatically impacts their child's learning (Choi et al., 2019). This means that mothers are teamed up with teachers to assist the learners in modular learning.

This section displays the narratives about the difficulties of mothers in handling their deaf children at home amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The first question was about the difficulties faced by mothers in teaching their children with hearing impairment at home.

5.2.1 Parents' Limited Ability to Communicate in Handling Their Hearing-Impaired Children

On the parents' limited ability to communicate with their deaf children, the parents were not formally trained in sign language, so they could easily communicate with their children, who could not generally communicate due to deafness.

The parents of deaf children had a hard time teaching their children at home with the adoption of modular instruction at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the challenges is their limited ability to use sign language since they lack the appropriate training. The decision to close schools is generally based on the scientific data that during influenza virus pandemics, lower social association among students is necessary to interrupt the spread of the virus (Abuhammad, 2020).

According to research on school students, the mean value of daily social association when schools are closed is almost half that of when schools are open. On the other hand, there is an increase in contact between school students' parents, and other adults when schools are closed (Eames et al., 2020).

The next issue that was studied relates to the problems and issues experienced by mothers in handling their children's education amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.2.2 Modular Instruction was not Fitted for Special Education

The mothers who took the role of home tutors using the teachers' self-learning modules were ineffective in enabling learning among special education learners.

The research participants' narratives show that the mothers who took the role of home tutors while face-to-face classes were still prohibited during the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic experienced lots of difficulties in teaching their deaf children at home.

One of the problems was their lack of formal training or schooling in sign language and their incompetencies in teaching. These are the major culprits behind why using modular instruction for special education learners was ineffective. Degamo and Sano (2021) revealed that parents' challenges were time management and the difficulty of teaching their children. Aside from these, parents were challenged on how to give the activities and engage their children in the given tasks. The pandemic has been going on for almost a year, yet it is still spreading nonstop in the country. The educational sector is most significant aside from the economy. Amidst the pandemic, learning should not stop, so students still learn.

The first module, published at the end of March 2020 – A Framework to Guide an Education Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic – is a tool to support education leaders based on a cross-national survey conducted between the 18th and 27th of March 2020. This second module is a collaborative effort between the Global Education Innovation Initiative at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and the OECD's Directorate of Education and Skills. It presents the first set of online educational resources to support the continuity of teaching and learning during the 2019-20 COVID-19 pandemic with education leaders worldwide. The resources were compiled from responses to the same survey used to produce the first module, and additional online sources were included to enhance the list to support the continuity of learning for students who have access to the internet and digital devices (Reimers et al., 2020).

The third aspect explored in this investigation relates to the usefulness of the learning guides provided by the school to educate the child.

5.2.3 Self-Learning Modules: Supplement Educational Needs amid the COVID-19 Outbreak

The mothers who explained the lessons to their deaf learners when traditional learning arrangement was still prohibited found the self-learning modules to be a great aid to continue learning among their children.

The use of self-learning modules was the most feasible way to continue the education of special education learners amid the COVID-19 outbreak in the Philippines, considering that in public schools, the student's family has limited resources to provide for the requirements of an online learning modality. In a distance education setting, the mothers or guardians assume the role of the teacher in explaining the lessons in the modules directly to the children using sign language. In this aspect, the mothers experience difficulty due to their limited ability to communicate using sign language.

For educators, the COVID-19 pandemic is a quintessential adaptive and transformative challenge for which no preconfigured playbook can guide appropriate responses. Although students with access to digital devices and the internet may not be the majority in most countries, supporting governments in establishing effective forms of online education will free up institutional capacities and resources in order to redirect their focus on delivering alternative learning methods for those students

who do not have similar opportunities. This annotated selection of online educational resources intended for students, teachers, and parents aims to support governments and other education leaders as they research and assess different ways to continue educating students during the COVID-19 pandemic. It can be used directly by those designing or improving a plan for education continuity (Reimers et al., 2020).

Some lessons are not found in the modules, but the students learn about this pandemic. These are the values of making an effort, time management, discipline, and experimentation. They also build their relationships with their parents from it. Patience is also evident in the making.

5.2.4 Teaching Special Education Learners is Perplexing

Attaining the goal of education is not one-sided. It is a two-way process. This means that education requires cooperation between the teacher and the learners. This task was more challenging when handling learners with hearing disabilities because the conventional teaching method was not applicable. Now that mothers are tasked with teaching their children using the self-learning modules, they realize the tough job of special education teachers in managing the learning environment and applying the most effective approach for this type of learner.

More students learn from the modules because they are open-minded. They are willing to accept changes and are flexible enough to handle their lessons. The entire pandemic is challenging for them to learn their lessons from the modules still. Most teachers think this pandemic is a challenge for them. At this time, they tend to put all their time and effort into doing their modules into realization. The lesson put into one module alone is a very rigorous thing. This is the time when the parents realize that teaching is never easy. They end up absorbing the feeling that they have become teachers now that this pandemic is roaming. Those parents who realize this are those who are optimistic and flexible as well. They do not blame the teacher for this (HelpLine Ph, 2022).

Moreover, this endeavor also studied the usefulness of constructed modules prepared by teachers for mothers and children to understand the lessons.

5.2.5 Self-Learning Modules Aided Distance Education

The mothers of special education learners perceived that the teachers' and coordinators' self-learning modules provided by the Department of Education helped them to learn about different lessons without books and other formalized learning materials.

The prevalence of poverty among families who have learners in public schools prevented them from securing the requirements in online learning, which was the best alternative platform to continue the educational exercise in the Philippines while the transmission of the COVID-19 disease was going on.

Thus, the Department of Education decided to adopt modular instruction to address the shortage of resources for the learners' families. This teaching approach requires the education authority and the teacher to prepare the self-learning modules and distribute them to the learners through their parents or guardians. In this context, the mothers of deaf and mute learners valued the benefits of this type of learning resource amid the health emergency.

The pandemic has paved the way for the implementation of distance education and one of its modalities is modular learning (Dealagdon, 2021). De Villa and Manalo (2020) define modular learning as the division of conventional courses into smaller chunks called modules. These modules are composed of only decongested learning competencies and are being distributed to learners. This learning modality has been used in primary and secondary education in the Philippines. According to a survey conducted by DepEd, modular learning has been the most preferred distance learning method for parents who have children enrolled in this academic year (Bernardo, 2020).

5.2.6 Lack of Knowledge of Sign Language Hindered the Efficacy of Self-Learning Modules

The mothers who acted as tutors in modular instructions amid the COVID-19 outbreak shared that knowledge of sign language is a must to become effective facilitators of learning using the learning resources provided by the subject teachers.

To attain the intended learning outcome for the school's special education curriculum, the learners' facilitators need to become knowledgeable about sign language to effect knowledge transfer to children with disabilities like the deaf. Without the appropriate knowledge of sign language, the meaning of the lesson cannot be transferred as due.

In communicating with people with hearing problems, like the deaf, knowledge of sign language is a must because they cannot speak or hear while communicating. However, some children could read the movement of the lips of the other party, but

not all. Hence, with the current adoption of modular instruction, the role of the parents as home tutors becomes even more challenging since had difficulty explaining the lessons contained in the self-learning modules to their deaf children. Sign language is the bridge that connects us to the world of those who have impaired hearing or verbal ability. An array of gestures made using hands, fingers, arms, head, and facial expressions besides symbols constitute sign language. It helps the deaf and the dumb to communicate with the people around them and vice versa. It enables them to understand the world around them through visual descriptions and, in turn, contribute to society (Rony et al., 2018).

Sign language is the bridge that connects us to the world of those who have impaired hearing or verbal ability. An array of gestures made using hands, fingers, arms, head, and facial expressions, in addition to symbols, constitute sign language. It helps the deaf and the dumb communicate with the people around them and vice versa. It enables them to understand the world around them through visual descriptions and, in turn, contribute to society (Hoffmeister & Wilbur, 2017).

In addition, this investigation explored the communication problems between the mother and the teacher relative to the distribution, use, and submission of the self-learning modules.

Meanwhile, President Rodrigo Duterte approved the recommendation of DepEd to defer the public school opening to October 5, 2020. This delay relieved the logistical limitations faced by the areas placed under modified, enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) or MECQ; while for the areas outside MECQ, continuous school orientations, dry runs, and delivery of learning resources in preparation for the opening of the classes were carried out. This decision was made in consideration of socio-economic factors such as the need to 1) avoid prolonged school disruption, which was associated with a range of social risks for the youth; 2) Encourage education-related economic activity; and 3) resume school-managed support systems. As the opening of classes run in the extraordinary school year, the DepEd adopted the BE-LCP, which permits multiple learning delivery modalities, including modular distance learning (MDL), online distance learning (ODL), TV/Radio-Based Instruction (TV/R), and Blended Learning – a combination of different distance learning modalities. The MDL involves using self-learning modules (SLMs) in print or digital format/electronic copy and various learning resources like learner's materials, textbooks, activity sheets, worksheets, study guides, and other study materials. The ODL allows live synchronous instruction, which requires a stable internet connection but is more interactive than the other types of distance learning. The TV/R utilizes SLMs converted to video lessons for Television-Based Instruction and radio scripts for Radio-based instruction. To help learners, parents, and teachers adopt these learning delivery modalities, SLMs are made available in print and offline/online digital formats (DepEd, 2020).

5.2.7 Teachers' Assistance Aide the Mothers in Modular Instruction

The mothers of deaf learners opined that they experienced no problem in distributing, using, and submitting self-learning modules.

The teachers communicate with the parents about distributing, using, and submitting self-learning modules for hearing problems, specifically for the deaf. So, despite the absence of face-to-face classes and interaction between the learners and the teachers, the parents who took the role of home tutors did not experience any problems relating to the self-learning modules since the teachers were accommodating and accommodating to their requests, queries, and concerns. Hence, the current adoption of modular instruction has enabled parents to become partners in learning about their children properly amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most countries shift instructional modality from face-to-face classroom interaction to online learning. However, financially disadvantaged or low socioeconomic students encounter various barriers and/or risks, including long-term educational disengagement, digital exclusion, poor technology management, and increased psychosocial challenges (Drane et al., 2020).

On the other hand, modular distance learning addresses these issues as it provides more flexible and inclusive access to education. This asynchronous modality allows students to move at their own pace. It requires students to continually complete assessments while delivering a learning experience that does not depend on face-to-face interaction with the teacher and fellow students (Dutton & Mohapatra, 2020).

Further, this study sought to identify problems in relation to the preparation of the learning environment.

5.2.8 Conducive Learning Environment at Home of the Special Learners

The mothers of hard-of-hearing learners revealed that their children can focus on studying their lessons at home because there are no distractions.

The mothers who participated in the interviews disclosed that there were times when their children could not entirely focus on studying and learning their lessons using the learning resources provided by the teachers for each subject because of myriad distractions. These distractions included noises from the neighbor, cellular phones, and others.

Dealing with the unanticipated challenges caused by COVID-19 has significantly impacted students worldwide. Universities have paused in-person classes while students have started a new online learning phase. While this protects students and helps reduce the spread of the virus, it still negatively affects student education. Many face challenges when learning online, including distractions when studying or attending classes at home. A primary source of distraction is digital technology. While electronic devices are required for online learning, they easily steal attention for long periods. Most students will hold or leave their phones on their desks while studying. There is a doubt that during this time, a text message from a friend can start a conversation that results in totally ignoring an assignment. Students might open new tabs, watch a fun video, or scroll through social media threads. To overcome this challenge, students are encouraged to put all devices out of sight while working and build a solid time management schedule to organize their studying, socializing, and free time. In addition to electronic devices, background noises can be a considerable obstacle to online learning. Sitting in a silent environment emphasizes background noises even more (Botros, 2020).

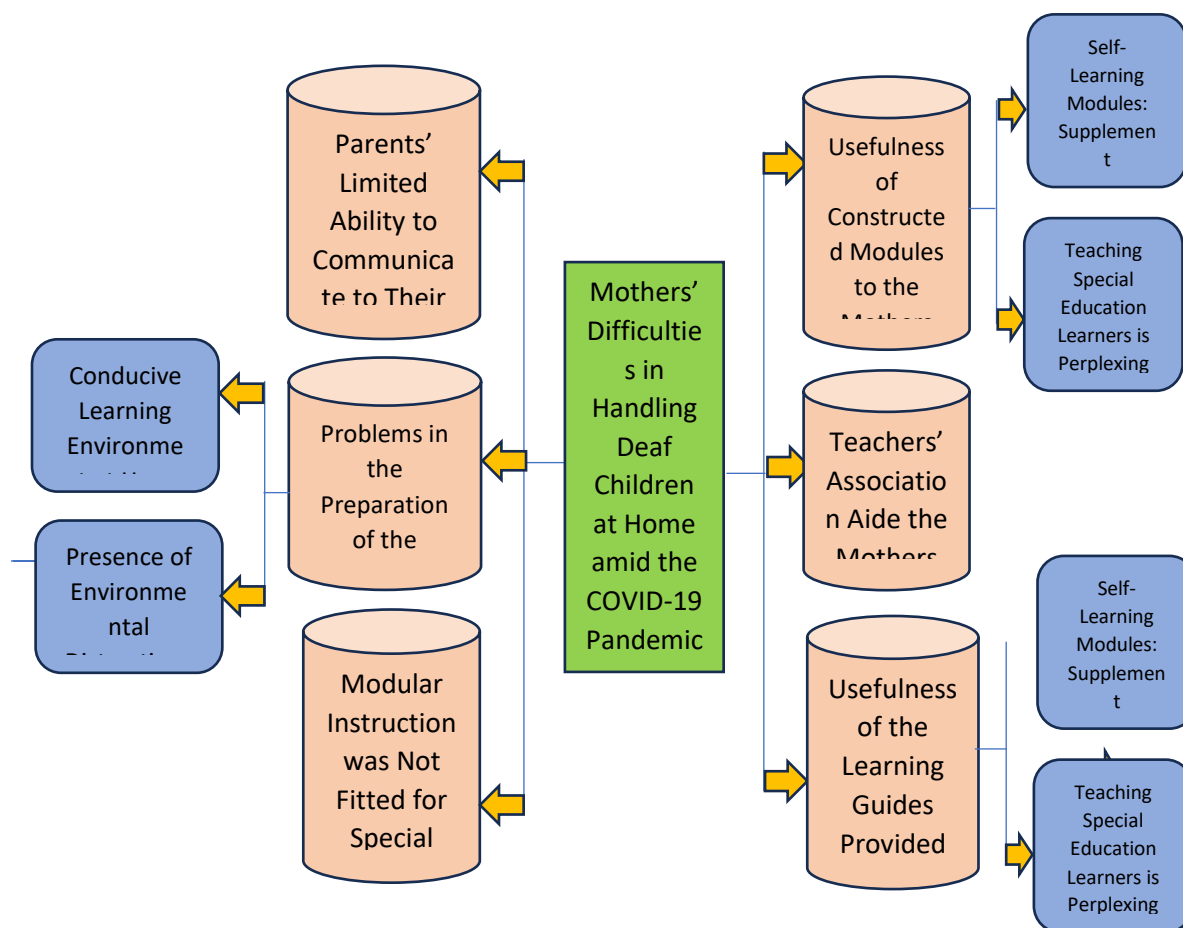


Figure 1

Mothers' Difficulties in Handling Deaf Children at Home amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

6. Findings

The findings of the study were summarized according to the stated subproblems:

On the participants' difficulties in handling deaf children, parenting deaf children present unique long-term challenges that can put mothers at risk for elevated levels of parenting stress. The personal and social coping resources available to families for managing these stressors and challenges influence their adaptation to the various challenges presented by childhood hearing loss. Findings revealed that mothers encounter many difficulties in handling their deaf children, including parenting stress, child acceptance, or parental support systems.

The consideration of parenting stress is essential, as it affects both mothers and children in several ways. These include increased risk for poor parent mental health outcomes, negative caregiving behaviors, and potential difficulties in implementing behavioral interventions to help their children. Stress experienced by mothers depends on multiple factors and can be influenced by different personal and social coping resources available for managing these difficulties.

7. Conclusion and Recommendation

The study concluded that mothers of elementary deaf learners have experienced multifaceted problems due to the absence of face-to-face instruction. The results have shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to more pressing issues that mothers encounter due to the absence of teachers who know how to handle their deaf children. Because of the pandemic, children lack proper educational support since mothers of deaf children are not fully knowledgeable on how to handle their children with disabilities. SpEd centers should provide more parental assistance through training and seminars to equip mothers of deaf children with the essential know-how to communicate with them. Also, a friendly relationship between the mothers and their teachers should be encouraged to have a warm and effective collaboration of parents and teachers for the child's development.

8. Study Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited to the lived experiences of mothers of elementary deaf learners in the Division of Mandaue City during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on the school year 2021-2022. The findings are context-specific and may not represent the experiences of mothers in other regions, with different educational settings, or under varying socio-economic circumstances. Additionally, the study only considers the perspectives of mothers, excluding insights from fathers, other caregivers, or the children themselves, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced.

Future research could explore the perspectives of other stakeholders, such as fathers, other caregivers, and teachers, to provide a more holistic understanding of the challenges and coping mechanisms involved in supporting deaf learners.

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