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Special Education in a Remote Setting: Stakeholders' Stories and More

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ABSTRACT

Remote special education is a relatively new phenomenon. Since the beginning of special education in schools, direct and explicit instruction has been used for learners with autism. Learners, parents, and teachers as stakeholders struggle with alternative instructional methods. Parents are critical players in remote learning. They facilitate home-based learning through modular instruction. Parents help students engage when teachers facilitate online learning. Stakeholders are also alternatively referred to as frontline or grassroots remote special education implementers. This study elicited special education stakeholders' constructs in three areas: views on remote special education, essential special education practices, and policy building blocks. Three teachers and three parents with children with autism respectively participated. Using a semi-structured interview guide, data were collected via online interviews. From an interpretivist's lens, constructs were gleaned from participant narratives. George Kelly's Personal Construct Theory aided the *construction* process. Stuart Hall's *multiple readings* informed textual analyses. Findings suggest that special education stakeholders viewed remote learning as a shared responsibility. Eight essential special education practices were determined: *individualization*, *modification*, *accommodation*, *assessment*, *intervention*, *early detection*, *collaboration*, and *inclusion*. *Individualization* and *modification*, *accommodation*, teachers' competency, home program, and *collaboration* emerged as policy building blocks. Researchers' recommendations include (1) taking advantage of technology in *individualization*, (2) assessing the feasibility of online learning as an alternative learning modality, (3) providing teachers with comprehensive competency training, (4) supporting home programs as a supplementary educational intervention, and (5) considering telehealth and teletherapy as emerging *collaboration* strategies.

INTRODUCTION

There is something pressing or alarming about the state of learners with autism on the issue of them going to school and learning at the time of this pandemic. Issues like government responsiveness and parental or teacher roles come into play in this whole gamut of special education amid the new or next normal.

In response to school closures as pre-emptive measures to contain the COVID-19 spread, some local education policies on alternative learning delivery took effect (DepEd Order (DO) 12, s. 2020, DO 21, s. 2020, DO 42, s. 2021, DO 44, s. 2021). These guidelines ensure that learners with autism have access to education, even during the COVID-19 health crisis. They also aim to close the gap created by distance learning. While the provisions for 'access' to special education may be resolved, we cannot guarantee 'quality' when it is at stake.

Some loopholes leave autism learners marginalized (von Benzon, 2017). Insufficient and unequal access to appropriate educational and related services can cause this. With the "Return to School Roadmap" policy (US DepEd, n.d.), we confirmed how marginalized Filipino learners with autism turned out to be in terms of access to free and appropriate public education (FAPE). FAPE guarantees learners access to free educational and related services (therapy, psychological, and medical *assessment*) (The Rehabilitation Act, s. 504, 1973). In addition to educational access, the policy provides free services

that promote faster child development. These ancillary services are beneficial and critical for learners with autism (Çikili & Karaca, 2019; Mozolic-Staunton *et al.*, 2021). The main goal is to maximize their development (Pang, 2019). Recent local special education guidelines (DepEd 44, s. 2021) may be far from ideal compared to the foreign policy's components (i.e., strict implementation of individualized education programs, provision of rehabilitative support, and specialized services).

In the local setting, most parents who utilize public schooling are low-income and unable to afford related services (e.g., therapies and diagnostic and psychological *assessment*). The situation may result in insufficient access to necessary interventions (e.g., behavioral or social) through therapies and rehabilitative services. In this aspect, the Philippine school system still has a long way to thread.

The unprecedented health crisis must drive educational policymakers to conceptualize, craft, and implement policies that address the rising need for special education delivered via remote learning. Basham *et al.* (2015) further affirmed that special education operates due to *collaboration* among students with disabilities, families, professionals, and policymakers. Although the mode of instruction has shifted from face-to-face to home distance, the goal of special education remains the same – to assist children in reaching their full potential (US National Library of Medicine, 2021) and eventual community integration

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(Kauffman *et al.*, 2018). As a result, no crisis should ever have an adverse effect on the quality of special education services.

LITERATURE REVIEW

All continents and most countries opted for distance learning due to lockdowns and school closures brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the most progressive continents, such as Northern America, Europe, and Australia, and even in the less progressive ones, such as Africa and Central America, and some South Asian countries, online or virtual learning has been the most popular mode of learning delivery during the pandemic education. Almost every continent (according to peer-reviewed articles and studies available) adopted online or virtual learning as the primary mode of delivery during the initial phase of school closures due to pandemic lockdowns. North America provides effective special education by enacting legislation that guarantees children with disabilities free access to education and related (support) services such as therapies and specialized assessments. The other continents make a lesser effort.

Providing special education through online learning remains a difficulty on all continents. After a year of implementing remote learning, *Northern American* viewpoints on remote special education focus on returning to traditional in-person delivery of services. The benefits of direct and explicit instructions to children with autism have been documented in the literature (U.S. DepEd, n.d.; Verma, 2021). The United States Return to School Roadmap Policy (2021) provided direction and guidelines for the transition to face-to-face special education delivery.

Individualization and *collaboration* were highlighted in the available literature as essential practices that have been severely harmed by limiting face-to-face interactions (Pang, 2019; Harris *et al.*, 2021; Houtrow *et al.*, 2020; Bellomo *et al.*, 2020). The reason why, after a year of implementing online learning, most states in the United States enacted their Return to School Roadmap (2021) policy to return to traditional in-person (face-to-face) education. Other continents or countries do not appear to make the same decision as to the *Northern American* states. As a result, the resolution was quickly implemented to ensure a quick transition to in-person delivery.

Due to the loss of in-person special education delivery, *European* perspectives concentrated on the mental and psychological well-being of learners with disabilities and their parents (Logrieco *et al.*, 2022; Scarpellini *et al.*, 2021; Greenway and Eaton-Thomas, 2020; Shaw and Shaw, 2021). The situation is exacerbated by the fact that low-income families and students have limited access to the technology essential for online learning (Radina & Balakina, 2021). The overarching theme also prompted researchers to look into teachers' ability to provide remote special education (Mercieca *et al.*, 2021; Jurčević and Kudek, 2021). Due to the investigation, teachers found it challenging to handle the basic requirements of online

learning. This implies that providing special education services in person is still the most convenient means of teaching students with autism.

Even before the pandemic, most *African* countries had misgivings about the adequacy of their special education policy. Inadequate planning and response to the call for online learning in the *African* context implies a lack of attention to remote special education (Kamga, 2021; Mbazzi *et al.*, 2020). Meanwhile, based on the limited material available, it appears that the overarching subject in *Western Pacific* viewpoints is the impact of school closures on the *inclusion* of children with disabilities. These children had negative experiences as a result of the situation (Simpson and Adams, 2022; Smith *et al.*, 2020). The factors that contributed to parents' failure to support the remote education of learners with disabilities were investigated from an *Asian* standpoint on remote special education (Balwan *et al.*, 2020; Durgun, 2021). Stress, anxiety, and mental health issues (Althiabi, 2021) have been highlighted as factors induced by income disparity, unemployment, and technical barriers (Durgun, 2021; Supratiwi *et al.*, 2021). The loss of support services has a negative impact on parents and teachers (Abdelfattah *et al.*, 2021). On a positive note, a novel *collaboration* concept evolved. Telehealth and teletherapy emerge to replace face-to-face support services (Wong *et al.*, 2021; Abdelfattah *et al.*, 2021; Samadi *et al.*, 2020; McDevitt, 2021).

On the local front, reviews on remote special education centered on the government's response to the pandemic resulting in remote learning (Cahapay, 2021). The event paved the way for emerging the roles of parents as facilitators of home learning (April, n.d.).

Future research on distance special education in a local setting concentrates on establishing the effectiveness of remote learning in delivering special education. Before the pandemic, distance special education via online modality has been explored for its viability but not in the context of pandemic. More investigation is needed to determine its effectiveness as literature confirmed that learners with autism are more responsive and receptive to direct and explicit teaching.

Low socio-economic households frequently overlook the educational needs of special education students who require technology and the internet. Another way of delivery for remote education, modular learning, is the most prevalent mode of delivery for SPED in the local environment. However, there is a dearth of evidence and study findings demonstrating the efficiency of modular learning as alternative special education delivery and parents as modality facilitators.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The health crisis has detrimental repercussions on education and learning delivery and outcomes. Learners with autism, as one of the most frequently marginalized learning groups, feel a great deal. By detailing their indigenous experiences, special education stakeholders

can provide rich narratives on remote learning. Their stories can inform special education policy crafting. This central question, “What can one glean from the narratives of special educators’ and parents’ lived experiences on the delivery of special education via remote learning?” governed the objectives of this study. The purpose of the study was anchored on the *construction* of personal constructs on three aspects of special education, namely: (a) views on the remote special education phenomenon; (b) essential special education practices; and (c) building blocks as potential precursors or triggers and inputs for policy crafting. These were attained by purposively selecting key players of special education as research participants; these were the special education teachers and parents whom we dubbed grassroots and frontline implementers of remote special education throughout this study.

Research Design

This study drew inspiration from the tenets of a qualitative inquiry. It was premised on an eclectic mix of narrative (Clandinin, 2016; Clandinin, 2006) and phenomenological approaches (van Manen, 2017; Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, as cited in Vicente, 2020). Narrative inquiry framed our belief that the context of remote special education is best seen from the lens or stories of our participants with first-hand experience of the phenomenon of remote special education. On the other hand, phenomenology allowed us to examine their narratives to extract the essence or meaning they had collectively shared about the phenomenon.

Site of Stories

The study examined stakeholders’ experiences with remote special education during their lockdown experience in Cabuyao, Laguna, Philippines. Parents and special education teachers collaborated to ensure access of learners with autism to education during the public health emergency. While the context may be similar in other special education settings and municipalities in terms of learning modality, our participants’ indigenous experiences were unique due to intervening variables that influenced how distance special education might be viewed in different locations. Variables included support, contextual understanding of local special education policies, and preparations made.

Storytellers

We investigated the narratives of three parents who served as home learning facilitators and three special education teachers as learning resource providers during remote special education in Cabuyao, Laguna, Philippines. We chose them based on set criteria. First, they have learners and children with autism availing themselves of remote special education (online and modular learning). Second, they have experienced face-to-face and remote learning to understand the modalities’ nuances. Third, they were willing to share their narratives in the context of this study.

Parents and special education teachers can best inform us about remote special education as a phenomenon.

Ethicality

The decision to undertake qualitative research with special education stakeholders on distance special education raised ethical concerns. We took precautions to mitigate unethical practices. We ensured participants’ voluntary participation. They met the participant selection criteria. We underscored the muted voices of our participants, who were often marginalized or subjugated in inclusive discourse. They were interviewed online. Online data collection followed health protocols. We sought their preference on interview platforms and schedules. We did not force them to disclose information they were hesitant to share. We secured their voluntary participation by discussing informed consent, including the study’s purpose, data collection procedures, potential risks, benefits, and nature of their participation. We guaranteed their anonymity in the study. We let them choose the interview’s date and time.

Data Construction and Reduction

We used a semi-structured interview guide to elicit, negotiate, and construct meanings from participants’ narratives. This technique could elicit deep meanings and surface constructs. It let us explore their lived experiences in their purest and most subjective form, which helped us in our sense-making. This technique allowed us to collect data reflexively through two-way interaction, where probing and follow-up questions led to data saturation. The goal was to understand the ontology or reality of remote special education as lived or relived by the frontline or grassroots implementers.

Data collection included preliminary, actual, and post-interview phases. At the preliminary meeting, we asked participants to sign a consent form allowing us to use interview data. Zoom Meetings hosted the actual interview. We asked guide questions and follow-up and probing questions during this phase. They agreed to be recorded to facilitate later transcription. We scheduled a final meeting so participants could verify the transcribed data. The final interview enabled us to validate, crosscheck, and ask follow-up questions to saturate data.

George Kelly’s (1955) Personal Construct Theory (particularly, construct production) and Stuart Hall’s (as cited in Revilla, 2015) textual method (used interchangeably with multiple readings) framed the study’s data analyses. The construal process involved three stages: (1) *delimitation* [texts were processed and organized, removing nonsensical and irrelevant text elements], (2) *multiple readings* [(a) *literal reading* or what has been said in the text or participants’ actual narratives, (b) *interpretive reading* or what is not said or reading through or beyond the narratives, (c) *reflexive reading* or what could have been said in the text and exploring our role and perspective in interpreting the text, and (d) *theoretical reading* or what other texts say about the delimited text], and (3) *construction*

[constructs as the textual analysis' outcome].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Views on Remote Special Education

From an interpretivist standpoint, construing views about remote special education led our participants and us to construe some emerging constructs about

the phenomenon emerging from (a) being stakeholders in the new normal, (b) their meaning of remote special education, (c) the importance of remote learning access, (d) their memorable experiences, (e) their crucial roles, (f) preparations made, and (g) the nuances of remote special education.

Being a parent and a teacher in remote learning is a

Table 1: Emerging Views and Constructs on Remote Special Education

REFERENCE	as a set of PRINCIPLES (belief and theory system)	as a set of PRACTICES (practical application)
	<i>emerging Constructs</i>	<i>emerging Constructs</i>
On being a teacher/parent in the new normal (GQ [guide question]1)	<i>Learning is a shared responsibility</i>	<i>Parents' relearning and upskilling Parents building up authority</i>
On the meaning of remote special education (GQ2)	<i>Continuity of learning access</i>	<i>Embracing the role of a home learning facilitator</i>
	<i>Upholding the special education fundamental goals</i>	<i>Delivering the fundamental goals through practices of individualization and modification</i>
On the importance of learners' access to remote learning (GQ3)	<i>On becoming functional and productive individuals; avoiding regression</i>	<i>Establishment of learning schedules and structures</i>
On their memorable experience (GQ4)	<i>Parents co-share with teachers' mission</i>	<i>Parents' willingness to take extra miles</i>
On their crucial role in distance learning (GQ5)	<i>Teachers and parents as agents of change;</i>	<i>Teachers as learning resource providers; Parents as committed shadow/para-teachers</i>
On their carried-out preparations (GQ6)	<i>Remote learning as a brand-new learning environment; as a challenge to stakeholders</i>	<i>Modifying the routines at home; Committing to home learning schedules; ICT-based teaching-learning process</i>
On the nuances of remote special education (GQ7)	<i>Intensification of school-home shared responsibility;</i>	<i>Delivery of education services via online learning (teachers as facilitators) and modular learning (parents as facilitators); home programming as emerging practice</i>

shared responsibility, per guide question (GQ) 1 (*on being stakeholders*). As education and pedagogy experts, teachers must teach parents modular learning strategies. Parents must learn how to assist children during online learning. In remote learning, parents relearn and upskill their teaching strategies and techniques. It was not easy at first because parents must portray themselves as authority figures at home. This is consistent with Borup *et al.*, Feng and Cavanaugh, Lee and Figueroa, Makrooni, and Woofers (as cited in Garbe, Ogurlu, Logan, & Cook, 2020), who say parental involvement affects student progress. Parental support contributes to virtual learners' success. According to parent-participants in a study by Heyworth *et al.* (2021), rapport is the key to a successful home learning engagement for children with autism.

On the meaning of remote special education (GQ2), they believe that the modality provides learners with autism an opportunity for continued learning access. They uphold that the learning continuity amid school closures helps realize the fundamental goal of special education – learners reaching their fullest potential. To realize the goal, parents must embrace their role as facilitators of learning at home while the teachers provide them with necessary learning resources. The practices of *individualization* and *modification* were the crux of remote special education. These practices tailor fit learning and

education to learners' needs and disabilities. So, special education goals are met while students use this alternative learning modality. While parental involvement positively impacts the success of learners' education, unwitting parents cannot quickly grasp their role in their children's education in the remote learning landscape. When parents assume new and unfamiliar roles and responsibilities in distance education, they feel more instructional responsibility for their child's learning, according to Liu *et al.*, Boulton, and Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares (as cited in Garbe, Ogurlu, Logan, & Cook, 2020). As a result, parents struggle to understand their role in their children's education.

Through GQ3, *the importance of learners' access to remote learning* was determined. They believe that continued access to special education delivered remotely helps learners with autism become functional and productive individuals. The process entails the tedious and strict implementation of learning schedules, routines, and structures at home. Only then can parents avoid children's regression from poor home learning or program implementation. Structured learning at home that fits the child's schedule helps a child with autism succeed in remote learning (Heyworth *et al.*, 2021).

In their *memorable experience of remote special education* (GQ4), what memorable would be for the teacher-participants

was to learn that parents partake and co-share with them their mission of meeting the goal of special education. On the other hand, parents would be willing to take the extra mile by upskilling themselves with the necessary strategies to become effective para-teachers at home. As Adams, Harris, and Jones (2016) concluded, a *collaboration* between teachers and parents in the education of children with autism results in improved outcomes.

By inquiring about their crucial role in distance learning (GQ5), teachers and parents, as frontline implementers, are thought of as agents of change. Despite the bottlenecks and challenges of remote learning, they would adhere and be loyal to the special education goal. Teachers and parents collaborated. Teachers provided consistent learning resources, while parents served as shadow and para-teachers. Hernandez (2021) suggested that parents who educate their children at home produce positive results, especially when the child adjusts to the new learning environment.

Stakeholders view learning delivery as a challenge when asked about their *carried-out preparations* (GQ6). However, modular and online learning could give their children a brand-new learning environment. Integrating ICT into teaching-learning was challenging for teachers, while parents wanted to gain authority over their children. Parents must modify home routines and implement home learning schedules to build rapport and authority. Stenhoff, Pennington, and Tapp (2020) outlined some important home- learning-area considerations at home. This area should (a) have few distractions, (b) have clear physical boundaries [learning corner or table], (c) be near technological supports, and (d) designate specific school activities.

In GQ7, *nuances of remote special education* were engendered. Special education is anchored on a belief that the alternative learning delivery has intensified the school-

home shared responsibility. This was apparent when parents co-acted with the teachers during the modular learning. They would assume the role of para-teachers. While teachers were in their online classes, parents would shadow teach their children to ensure learning engagement. An emerging practice was strengthening the home program where parents mirror the learning and educational practices from the school (e.g., learning routines and schedules) to their homes. This finding is corroborated by Liu, Black, Algina, Cavanaugh, and Dawson (as cited in Smith, Burdette, Cheatham, & Harvey, 2016). They demonstrated that positive support and interaction among the parent, teacher, and school community enhance parental involvement in the education of learners.

Essential Special Education Practices

Emerging special education practices contribute to achieving special education goals: (a) *learners attaining their fullest potential* and (b) *community integration*.

First is *individualization*. This is the most immediate step toward realizing the fundamental goal of special education, as revealed by the participants. Developing a learning package and educational programs tailored to each child's needs necessitates an individualized education program (IEP). The United States Department of Education (US DepEd) considers the IEP as the cornerstone of high-quality education for students with disabilities (US DepEd, 2019). The IEP ensures effective teaching, learning, and improved outcomes for all children with disabilities.

Modification is the second emerging practice construct. As revealed, *modification* is adapting the curriculum or learning content to the child's unique learning needs and disabilities.

The third one is *accommodation*. Accommodating the learner

Table 2: Nuances of Some Special Education Practices

Practices Construct	Key Feature
<i>Individualization</i>	<i>tailoring educational programs based on learning needs and disabilities</i>
<i>Modification</i>	<i>changing the curriculum to suit the child's specific needs</i>
<i>Accommodation</i>	<i>modifying the environment to obtain access to the curriculum</i>
<i>Assessment</i>	<i>continual monitoring of progress and development</i>
<i>Intervention</i>	<i>managing behaviors that impede learning</i>
<i>Early Detection and Intervention</i>	<i>making available of the (educational) intervention programs upon detection at an early age</i>
<i>Collaboration</i>	<i>team teaching; working together to meet the goal</i>
<i>Inclusion</i>	<i>accessing the general curriculum in the least restrictive environment</i>

with autism entails changing the manner or environment in which the access to curriculum or learning content is being modified. As experienced, pandemic lockdowns caused school closures. Face-to-face learning is changed to remote, allowing learners with autism to continue accessing the curriculum and receiving special education services.

Fourth, the *assessment* of a child's learning needs across skills and domains (e.g., behavior, cognitive, communication and language, and self-help) helps decision-makers prioritize skills for the child's individualized program. Regular *assessments* are conducted to monitor the child's

IEP performance. Progress is monitored using *assessment* data. The *assessment* provides qualified support service professionals' (i.e., therapists, behavior analysts, and *assessment* and diagnostic specialists) findings on the learner's overall development and improvement. Only then can they meet learners with autism's needs. Teachers who do not assess students' learning needs may lead to learner disengagement. Children with autism who receive an education service based on proper *assessment* can maximize their academic, language, socialization, adaptive skills, and communication skills, according to Manti, Scholte, and Van Berckelaer-Onnes (as cited in

Murray, 2015).

The fifth practice construct involved intervention. Parents and teachers often witness learners' problem and unwanted behaviors. Managing these behaviors is crucial to preventing or mitigating learners' disengagement from the teaching-learning process. According to Bice (2009), for children with autism to reach their learning goals, teachers must reduce unwanted behaviors and promote appropriate ones. These strategies must be presented to parents to be effective as home learning facilitators.

Early Detection and Early Intervention as sixth practice construct emphasizes the critical role of early (educational) intervention after a child is diagnosed with autism at an early age. The importance of early detection and identification is the first step toward treatment planning (Dahiya, McDonnell, DeLucia, & Scarpa 2020). Similarly, the US Department of Health and Human Services (2021) stated that early autism diagnosis and intervention are more likely to have significant long-term benefits on symptoms and subsequent skills.

The seventh is *collaboration*. The IEP of a child must result from the efforts and decisions of school, medical, and allied health professionals. Occupational therapy, speech-language therapy, behavioral and psychological interventions, and diagnostic and *assessment* services are available in our setting. Autism-related support services can complement special education. *Collaboration* benefits children over time. A study found a link between child services and learning outcomes (Zazueta-Ruiz, 2018). Autism support providers must collaborate to meet treatment goals and progress (Center for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2022).

Last is *inclusion*. *Inclusion* is the single most crucial gain a child with autism can get from accessing appropriate and relevant special education. One of the participants even mused about it being the most outstanding achievement for the child and the teacher, "*Inclusion seems to be one of the milestones, an achievement. The highest achievement that can be*

afforded to a child with autism whom I teach is to reach the (level of) inclusion."

Building Blocks for Policy Crafting and More

A building block is operationally defined as a knowledge claim derived from participant constructs. They serve as potential sources of information or precursors for planning, designing, developing, and implementing special education policy in our local setting. Clustered and related participant constructs emerged from selected interview prompts relating to the support they received (guide question [GQ]8), the ideal support (GQ9), construing post-pandemic education (GQ10), and their contextual recommendations (GQ11).

Five building blocks emerged as precursors for policy inputs and recommendations. They can serve as catalysts to enhance existing special education guidelines and policies on remote learning.

Taking Advantage of Technology in Individualization and Modification

These two practices set apart special education from typical or regular education. It is revealed how the K-12 Basic Education Curriculum (Most Essential Learning Competencies [MELC]) influences the process of IEP making as emphasized by the teacher-participants, "*Most essential learning competencies (MELC)-based IEP; the child's (educational) goal is still based on the MELC curriculum.*" A teacher-participant also shared how technology has helped provide a platform for the remote practice of *individualization*, "*There is a meeting through Gmeet or Zoom. Instead of giving them hard copies to jot down or list their goals for the whole school year, we provide word templates and documents to send to them by email, and when they receive the email, they will download it (file). They will type in their goals and the goals of the therapists involved in their children's education.*" Parents further validated the role and importance of technology and *collaboration* in doing the IEP. They and the teacher found

Table 3: Nuances of Some Special Education Practices

Related Constructs	Building Blocks
<i>Curriculum as the crux of the holistic learning process;</i> <i>Bridging learning loss and gaps through regular (distance) feedbacking</i>	<i>Individualization and modification:</i> <i>taking advantage of technology in individualization</i>
<i>Viability of online learning after the pandemic;</i> <i>Sustainability of ICT as part of pedagogy;</i> <i>Conjunction of remote and in-person modalities;</i>	<i>Accommodation:</i> <i>online special education as an alternative learning delivery</i>
<i>A desire for continuous professional development;</i> <i>Remote delivery of skills training</i>	<i>Teachers' competency</i>
<i>Parents' appreciation of teachers' efforts;</i> <i>Parents' appreciation of teachers' sense of connectedness;</i> <i>Parents' appreciation of sustained network and linkage;</i> <i>High regards to special education teachers;</i> <i>Empathetic understanding of teachers' complex roles;</i> <i>The necessity to intensify parents' partaking in remote learning;</i>	<i>Intensification of the home program:</i> <i>learners being able to master and generalize skills in various setting</i>
<i>The need to sustain pre-pandemic best special education practices on collaboration;</i> <i>Telehealth and telepractice as emerging remote collaboration strategy;</i> <i>Teletherapy as a novel way to access support; and</i> <i>Access to remote specialized supports and services vis-à-vis telehealth</i>	<i>Collaboration:</i> <i>emergence of telehealth and teletherapy</i>

an alternative when face-to-face interactions become restricted; as a parent-participant attests, *“In making the IEP, we are the ones to be interviewed. We participate through an online interview.”*

Online Special Education as an Alternative Learning Delivery

Accommodation involves changing how learners with autism access special education. Alternative learning modalities (i.e., online and modular learning) warrant learner access to special education services amid school closures. The remote delivery of special education services has resolved the challenge of having continued access to special education. Technology was crucial in ensuring that learners with autism have access to special education; as expressed by a teacher-participant, *“The advantage of online learning is that, even if the learner is far away, you can still teach him. Whatever the distance you have, the learning process will continue no matter how far as long as there is an online class.”*

Teacher's Competency

This has emanated from teachers' desire to acquire professional development activities and programs aiming to target skills development to render them effective in handling learners' exceptionality. According to CDC (2022), children with autism behave, communicate, interact, and learn in ways that are different from typical children. When learners' need for specialized instruction has surfaced as a nuance of special education, the teachers must equip themselves with skills and competencies, enabling them to meet the needs of learners for specialized instruction. A teacher-participant revealed the importance for teachers to be updated with the *“right techniques and strategies for training behavior, and how to address or teach properly.”* Further, another teacher-participant revealed, *“It is crucial that we develop our skills as special education teachers so that we can better help each child develop their (other) skills (e.g., social and behavior), not only academically.”*

Intensification of The Home Program

Instilling the principle of shared responsibility between home and school positively impacts learners' education. In the new normal education, the parents are the co-owners of the goal of special education. With remote learning, parents have been appreciative of the teacher's complex role in their children's education. Their role as home learning facilitators made them realize the difference teachers make to their children, as can be sensed from a parent-participant, *“I can feel now the importance of the teacher. How hard the teachers work. How do they handle the children at school? Now, we can see what they are doing is difficult. We only care about one child while the teachers care for many, but they can do it. The value of the teacher is more visible now.”* Likewise, a teacher-participant articulated the importance of the home program, *“The home program is essential for a child with special needs where the parent has consistent follow-up and has a mirroring style or set up at home. What the teacher teaches in school is also taught by parents at home.”* Ozonoff and

Cathcart (1998) further confirmed that home program intervention effectively enhances development in young children with autism. Parents are taught how to work with children with autism in the home setting, focusing on cognitive, academic, and prevocational skills essential to later school success.

The Emergence of Telehealth and Teletherapy

Special education necessitates for *inclusion* of specialized instruction and support. The *collaboration* of these professionals expedites the development of learners optimally. However, the restrictions on face-to-face interactions made it difficult for learners to access specialized support and services. Sustained *collaboration* with support providers has been made possible through teletherapy, telepractice, and teleservices. The ongoing limitations in face-to-face interaction made it difficult for them to collaborate with the support providers. However, a teacher-participant hypothesized that it would be easier to collaborate with the support providers via online means, *“Face-to-face (collaboration) was even more challenging whenever there is a collaboration between the developmental pediatricians, occupational therapist, speech therapist or the PT (physical therapist), and the lead teacher. In face-to-face, you need to set schedules. You need to know the schedules of each professional to meet in one place. Sometimes there are delays because some involved therapists are not available at certain times and days. Face-to-face is even more challenging, but now in distance learning, it is faster to meet together through Zoom or G-Meet. Each professional involved in a learner's education can meet together and converse (in the distance).”* Teletherapy, teleservices, and telepractice are ways forwards in terms of *collaboration*. As further confirmed by Wong, Lam, Lau, and Fok (2021), Samadi *et al.* (2020), and McDevitt (2021), teletherapy and teleservices are among the innovative practices in terms of provision of necessary support and services to learners with autism and parents during this time of the pandemic.

CONCLUSIONS

The education of learners is a shared responsibility between the home and school, as viewed by special education stakeholders. Parents became co-owners of special education's goal of maximizing students' potential. Remote learning allowed parents to intensify and inculcate the elusive home program. Parents must create a structured learning environment at home with routines and schedules. It is the only way learners can get the best education during school closures.

Individualization, modification, accommodation, assessment, intervention, early detection, collaboration, and inclusion are essential education practices that affect the delivery of special education services. Special education services must revolve around these practices to be relevant and appropriate. Future special education policies must incorporate these practices. Only then can we say we have taken all possible steps to give learners with autism the relevant, hence, appropriate education they deserve.

Autism-specific educational guidelines and policies are needed. To ensure contextuality, policy provisions must emanate from the lived experiences of those who have a first-hand account of the phenomenon. Personal constructs of grassroots implementers about remote special education can inform decision-making and policy crafting. These knowledge claims can help policymakers contextualize special education policies for the new and next normal.

This research has many limitations in terms of contributing to the body of knowledge. Nonetheless, this can serve as a springboard for academics interested in evaluating the relevance and appropriateness of special education delivery in our local setting. Some potential directions in special education are: (1) an investigation of the viability of online learning as a special education modality in post-pandemic time; (2) determining how technology might aid in many aspects of special education, such as *individualization, accommodation, assessment, and collaboration*; (3) another study addressing the challenges that children with autism from low-income families have in terms of receiving special education via in-person delivery; and (4) identifying the difficulties and bottlenecks that the Department of Education is experiencing in the delivery of special education and the actions that should be taken to mitigate or eliminate these obstacles.

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