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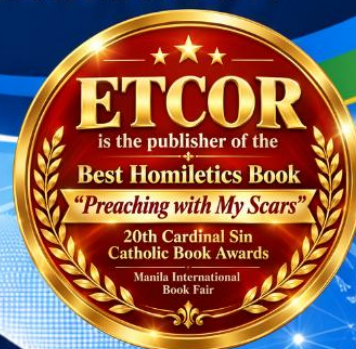
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Stakeholders' experiences during the resumption of in-person classes: A qualitative study in public schools in Bulacan, Philippines

Sheila Angelli Gaile B. Cacabelos¹, Ramadan DC. de Jesus², Frederick A. Inoncillo^{*3}, Ken Paul M. Espinosa⁴

^{1, 2, 3, 4} Baliuag University, Baliuag City, Bulacan, Philippines

*Corresponding Author e-mail: frederickinoncillo@baliuagu.edu.ph

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Abstract

Aim: This study explored the experiences of head teachers, teachers, students, and parents during the transition from distance learning to in-person classes in public schools in the post-pandemic era. It specifically sought to provide a basis for strengthening learning delivery, school readiness, and strategic planning for in-person education.

Methodology: An exploratory qualitative research design was employed. In-depth interviews were conducted with 44 participants, comprising 11 head teachers, teachers, students, and parents, respectively, from public schools in District VI of Bulacan, Philippines. Participants were selected through purposive sampling.

Results: Three major themes emerged: transitional experiences, challenges encountered, and coping strategies. Participants described both positive and challenging experiences during the return to in-person classes. Major challenges included health and safety concerns, poor student behavior, unmet academic requirements, and lack of resources. Participants also identified coping strategies such as advanced planning and preparation, classroom preparation, coordination with parents and local government units, adjustment to schedules and rules, and psychosocial support.

Conclusion: The transition to in-person classes required substantial adjustment among school stakeholders and was influenced by school readiness, resource availability, health and safety conditions, and stakeholders' capacity to adapt. The findings underscore the importance of collaborative learning continuity planning, adequate resources, responsive teaching practices, psychosocial support, and stakeholder engagement. Schools may use these findings as a basis for strategic initiatives that strengthen in-person learning, address learning gaps, and promote educational resilience.

Keywords: educational resilience, in-person learning, school reopening, stakeholder experiences, learning continuity

INTRODUCTION

The global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic triggered an unprecedented crisis in basic education, forcing over 1.6 billion learners across 190 countries out of traditional classrooms (UNESCO, 2021). To maintain instructional continuity, school systems worldwide abruptly shifted to emergency remote teaching, relying on digital platforms, television broadcasts, and printed modules (World Bank, 2024). While these measures prevented a complete halt in education, prolonged distance learning compounded global learning losses, widened equity gaps, and severely impacted the social-emotional well-being of young learners (Alejo et al., 2024). Recognizing the compounding disadvantages of prolonged physical closure, international health and educational bodies advocated for the safe and gradual reopening of schools, highlighting that physical classrooms remain irreplaceable environments for holistic development (UNICEF Philippines, 2021).

In the Philippines, the Department of Health reported 10,794 COVID-19 cases by May 10, 2020 (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2020). Globally, confirmed cases reached over 779 million with more than 7 million deaths reported to the World Health Organization as of June 28, 2026 (World Health Organization [WHO], 2026). The alarming number of cases resulted in the suspension of in-person classes, leading to the implementation of fully online distance and modular modes of learning as a means to sustain the educational process. This sudden shift resulted in numerous changes, with students being compelled to adapt to a new mode of learning. Even teachers, many of whom were

nearing retirement, found themselves either distributing modules or navigating the challenges of online distance classes. In accordance with Tria (2020), school closure has affected more than 1.2 billion learners worldwide with more than 28 million learners in the Philippines (UNESCO, 2021). Responses like community lockdown and quarantine of several countries have directed students and teachers to study and work from home, which led to the delivery of online learning platforms. However, the implementation of online learning posed different risks, problems, and challenges to both the teachers and students.

Following the advancement and breakthroughs in vaccine development, along with the decrease in COVID-19 cases, the authorities allowed the resumption of in-person events and social gatherings under strict safety protocols. Consequently, educational institutions were given the green light to restart physical classes in a restricted manner. On November 2, 2022, both public and private educational institutions had successfully shifted to a full-time and in-person learning modality. It was mandated that no school would be permitted to solely rely on remote or hybrid learning methods, with the exception of those utilizing alternative delivery modality. This significant change aimed to ensure that students could benefit from the advantages of in-person education while maintaining a safe and conducive learning environment, consistent with the *Policy Guidelines on the K to 12 Basic Education Program* (Department of Education, 2019) and the *Revised Policy Guidelines on Homeschooling Program* (Department of Education, 2022).

At the grassroots level, public schools in the Province of Bulacan encountered unique operational realities during this transition. Guided by the Schools Division Office of Bulacan, public elementary and secondary schools launched pilot implementations before scaling up to full in-person operations. Schools located within District VI faced distinct localized adjustments.

While policies were established at the national level, executing the return to physical classrooms placed significant pressure on key educational stakeholders—namely teachers, school heads, students, and parents. To bridge this gap, the present study qualitatively investigates the lived experiences, operational challenges, and coping mechanisms of primary stakeholders during the resumption of in-person classes in selected public schools across District VI, Bulacan. By examining the shared narrative across school heads, teachers, learners, and parents, this research aims to provide localized, evidence-based insights to inform school leadership policies, enhance disaster-resilient educational frameworks, and refine ongoing learning recovery programs in the post-pandemic era.

Review of Related Literature and Studies

This part includes various information pertinent to the study, including the historical context, theoretical framework, and conceptual framework. It also incorporates relevant literature and studies pertaining to the research topic, encompassing both foreign and local sources.

COVID-19 Pandemic

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Those who are infected by the virus experience symptoms that are mild to moderate respiratory illness, some do not need special medical treatment. While others, most especially those who are immunocompromised, are more likely to develop more serious illness when infected. Making sure that getting vaccinated is a must to be protected and to protect others too (World Health Organization, n.d.). Staying at home and lockdown strategies are the actions implemented to control the transmission of the disease (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021).

In response to the alarming number of cases, not to mention the high mortality rate caused by the virus, schools immediately closed their doors to lessen the risk of transmission. When the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak in March 2020, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization estimated that 107 countries had implemented national school closures affecting 862 million children and young people, roughly half the global student population (Hange et al., 2022). The sudden school closure resulted in learning gaps and major challenges in the delivery of learning, particularly in places with financially disadvantaged students who cannot afford the cost of technology-assisted learning. Moreover, according to Donnelly and Patrinos (2022), since school shutdown was abrupt, administrators and teachers were not prepared for it, and they were forced to build emergency remote learning systems instantly. Absence of personal interaction between teacher and learners is one of the limitations of the emergency remote learning system. Different learning modalities were used as part of remote learning systems, including online, modular, radio, and television.

However, the primary negative effect of school closure due to the pandemic is on students' achievement, specifically in primary and secondary education, which is the younger students. The use of digital technologies and remote learning are the alternatives. Another negative effect of the COVID-19 to students is with their mental and emotional health, there are projected data on the increased level of anxiety and depression among students during the



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pandemic that result in poor academic achievements (Hoofman & Secord, 2021). These negative effects of closing of schools are associated with the absence of physical presence of fellow students and teachers. Moreover, Punzalan et al. (2025) mentioned that depression is prevalent in both public and private schools.

Every new phase requires a lot of adjustments, but alongside are learnings for improvements as well. The pandemic certainly taught people to be resilient, adaptive and innovative despite the many obstacles the whole world had to hurdle.

Modular Distance Learning Modality

Modular distance learning modality is the commonly used type of learning in most public primary and secondary schools. This is the use of modules prepared by teachers with different tasks and learning activities based on the essential learning competencies. The advantages of modular distance learning are the following: learning continues when the learners adapt to change; parents realize their important role in their children's education; teach learners values; and teachers become open-minded with the challenges brought by pandemic. If there are advantages, disadvantages are also present in every situation, here are the disadvantages of modular distance learning: not all learners do their modules committedly; some parents pamper their children and do their task instead of them; and parents are having a hard time teaching their children using the modules (Anzaldo, 2021).

Philippine schools have used modular distance learning for two consecutive school years starting in 2020 until 2022. Ambayon (2020, as cited in Castroverde & Acala, 2021) stated that modular instruction is more operative in the teaching-learning method as equated to usual teaching approaches because students learn in their own stride. It is an unrestricted self-learning pace in which instantaneous reinforcement and a comment are provided to practice exercise, which stimulates the students and builds curiosity in them. Hence, this learning modality increases the student-centered approach in learning.

In-Person Classes

In-person classes or classroom-held instructions have a long and fruitful history. For many generations, people are used to the traditional classroom setup with the teacher being the facilitator of learning. Over the years, the system of education started to infuse technology into the delivery of learning, such as using modern classroom equipment and utilizing video and PowerPoint presentations. Regardless, instructions are still being delivered inside the classroom. The effectiveness of in-person classes has been explored and proven by many recent studies. Fernandez-Guzman et al. (2021, as cited in Odoño & Aureada, 2024), stated that in-person education is the most conventional kind of education. It is the most popular instructional approach in which learning materials are presented in person, one on-one, or, more typically, to a group of students in a closed classroom.

Unfortunately, the unprecedented consequences brought by the recent pandemic compelled schools to do away with in-person classes. In March 2020, many countries all over the world initiated nationwide school closures. This created opportunities for educators to use online learning to prevent students from falling behind academically, but it has created challenges as well. Although many students have benefited from remote learning during the pandemic, those from low-income families have experienced more obstacles that impede academic progress. Students from poverty-stricken homes, however, are not the only ones at risk of falling behind during this difficult time. Online learning is often less beneficial than face-to-face instruction for many students because it is implemented poorly (Morgan, 2022).

In the Philippines, limited to full in-person classes were already implemented in most of the schools during the academic year 2022-2023. It was done with prior assessment from the Department of Education to ensure that the schools are capable of handling in-person classes. But in spite of that, the reopening of schools was not exempted from further challenges. In the study conducted by Odoño and Aureada (2024), challenges faced by internal and external stakeholders during the conduct of in-person classes after the pandemic were highlighted.

Experiences on the Transition from Distance Learning to In-Person Classes

The COVID-19 pandemic changed education throughout the world, from traditional face-to-face classes to distance learning. Two years after school closure, schools slowly reverted to in-person classes as vaccines were discovered. Stakeholders have different perceptions toward the different learning modalities. Some learners prefer distance learning, specifically online learning with the use of different platforms. Students think that it is more beneficial since ICT (Information Communication and Technology) is available everywhere. On the other hand, face-to-face classes are also preferred by some. In-person classes create interpersonal relationships and can build connections that can help students and teachers express themselves in the classroom. Also, assessment can be more realistic with in-

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person classes (Stoian et al., 2022). There are positive and negative aspects of each learning modality. It is how students and teachers execute and accept learning.

Considering the resumption of in-person education in 2022, significant efforts have been made to assess the sentiments and viewpoints of students, aiming to enhance the implementation of safety protocols while also gaining insights into the future landscape of school life, encompassing both the teaching and learning aspects. There are studies that endeavors to foster a better understanding of students' experiences and perceptions, ultimately leading to a more effective and well-informed approach to ensure a safe and productive educational environment (Stoian et al., 2022). The experiences in the resumption of in-person class varied from one stakeholder to another.

Furthermore, a study conducted by Sulasmi (2021) revealed that in terms of readiness, in principle, the students do not mind carrying out face-to-face learning, and even the policy is very long-awaited. Nevertheless, there are still some students who object to face-to-face learning due to the massive spread of the COVID-19 virus and the unevenness of vaccination. For those who support the reason that home learning or distance learning makes it difficult for them to understand the subject matter and saturation in the process seems monotonous. Parental involvement was also seen as a significant factor in the successful implementation of in-person classes. When parents trust the process, understand the situation, and support the students, transitioning to in-person classes after the pandemic will run more smoothly.

Strategic Planning in Educational Institutions

The School Development Plan has been used in schools these days. It is used as proof that a school's operations run smoothly and follow systematic orders so an organization can never go wrong. Very seldom are those schools that are not using or implementing School Development Plans because agencies for both public and private educational institutions require such as part of the operational requirement.

Strategic planning is crucial for meeting evolving school and community needs by driving quality education through structured interventions. Based on findings from Priyambodo and Hasanah (2021), this process relies on formulating aligned annual plans, executing clear management strategies, and evaluating outcomes to make necessary program improvements. While strong support from stakeholders like teachers, students, and parents drives successful planning, improper formulation remains a key obstacle that schools mitigate through collaborative feedback and continuous coordination.

Synthesis

Existing studies have documented the effects of COVID-19 on learning continuity, modular instruction, student well-being, and the reopening of schools. However, much of the existing literature has examined individual stakeholder groups or specific aspects of the transition. Limited attention has been given to the integrated experiences of school leaders, teachers, students, and parents during the transition from distance/modular learning to in-person classes within a public-school context. Moreover, fewer studies have translated these multiple stakeholder experiences into school-level strategic initiatives addressing administration, learning delivery, curriculum, resources, and health and safety. The present study addresses this gap by examining the experiences of four stakeholder groups in public schools in District VI of Bulacan and using the resulting themes as a basis for strategic initiatives for post-pandemic in-person education.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored primarily on Social Constructivism (Schreiber & Valle, 2013), supported by the Theory of Participation (Lewis & Naidoo, 2004) and Social Learning Theory (Chen & Bryer, 2012). As the primary lens, Social Constructivism posits that knowledge, meaning, and adaptive behaviors are collaboratively constructed within shared social and cultural contexts, providing the core framework for analyzing how teachers and students co-create classroom norms and navigate interpersonal dynamics during the return to in-person classes. This primary foundation is complemented by the Theory of Participation, which broadens the scope to evaluate institutional stakeholder engagement, administrative decision-making, and community agency, as well as Social Learning Theory, which provides a behavioral lens to examine how observational adaptation, peer modeling, and collaborative coping mechanisms occur among participants. Together, these integrated perspectives actively inform the qualitative thematic analysis—serving as an analytical filter to interpret how institutional empowerment, shared meaning-making, and modeled adaptive behaviors shape stakeholder experiences throughout the transition.

Conceptual Framework

Education is considered a driving force behind economic development and social advancement in a country.

It is said that schools are planned, organized, and established institutions that help people socialize, improve their economic productivity, recognize, and realize themselves, and adopt the policies of the nation. Thus, quality education is a major concern in many societies across the world. It is therefore important that issues in education, most especially those related to the post-pandemic period, be addressed effectively.

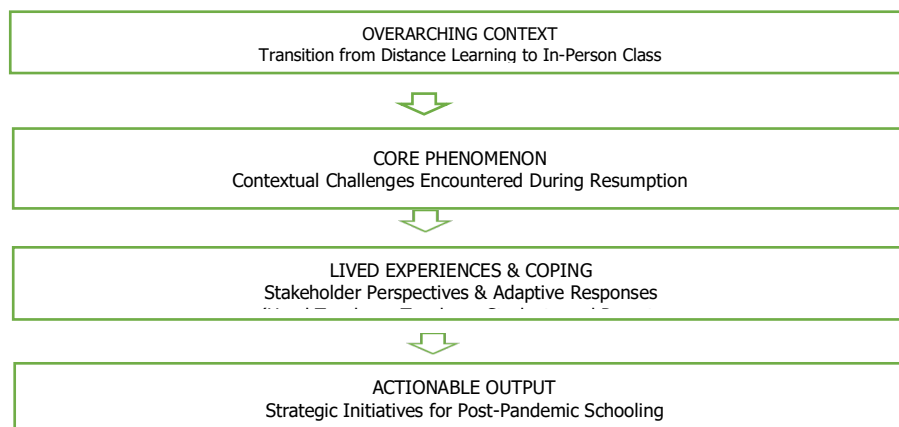


Figure 1. *Experiences of Public Schools in the Resumption of Classes in the Post-Pandemic Era*

The conceptual framework illustrates the qualitative conceptual model for the study, structured vertically across four interconnected layers within a clear text-box diagram. At the top, the Overarching Context establishes the broader environment of the study, highlighting the transition from distance learning back to in-person classes. This feeds directly down into the Core Phenomenon, which centers on the contextual challenges encountered during the resumption of face-to-face instruction. Below this, the Lived Experiences & Coping box captures the subjective perspectives and adaptive strategies of key stakeholders—specifically head teachers, teachers, students, and parents. Finally, the diagram leads to the bottom box representing the Actionable Output, which synthesizes these stakeholder insights to formulate strategic initiatives for post-pandemic schooling, demonstrating a cohesive thematic progression from context to practical institutional recommendations.

Statement of the Problem

The transition from distance learning to in-person classes during the post-pandemic period presented public schools with multiple educational and operational challenges. After prolonged periods of modular and other distance-learning modalities, students, teachers, parents, and school leaders had to adjust to the demands of physical classroom instruction, renewed social interaction, health and safety requirements, academic recovery, and the availability and adequacy of school resources. These conditions resulted in varied experiences among educational stakeholders and required schools to develop appropriate strategies for managing the transition and supporting learning continuity.

Although previous studies have documented the effects of the pandemic on learning delivery and the challenges associated with distance education, there remains a need to understand how different educational stakeholders experienced the actual transition back to in-person classes and how they adapted to the challenges encountered during the process. Examining the perspectives of head teachers, teachers, students, and parents can provide a more comprehensive understanding of school readiness, learning-related concerns, health and safety issues, resource needs, and adaptive responses during the transition.

Therefore, this study was undertaken to explore the experiences of stakeholders during the resumption of in-person classes in public schools in District VI of Bulacan, Philippines, during School Year 2022–2023, with data collected from June 2022 to May 2023. The findings were intended to provide an evidence-based basis for recommendations and strategic initiatives that could strengthen the implementation of in-person classes and support educational resilience and learning continuity.

Research Objectives

General Objective

The study aimed to explore the experiences of stakeholders during the resumption of in-person classes in public schools in District VI of Bulacan, Philippines, during School Year 2022–2023, with data collected from June 2022 to May 2023.

Specific Objectives

Specifically, the study aimed:

1. To explore the experiences of stakeholders during the transition from distance learning to in-person classes;
2. To identify the challenges encountered by stakeholders during the transition to in-person classes; and
3. To examine the coping and adaptive strategies used by stakeholders in addressing the challenges associated with the transition to in-person classes.

Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What experiences did stakeholders have during the transition from distance learning to in-person classes?
2. What challenges did stakeholders encounter during the transition to in-person classes?
3. What coping and adaptive strategies did stakeholders use to address the challenges associated with the transition to in-person classes?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed an exploratory qualitative research design to obtain an in-depth understanding of stakeholders' experiences during the transition from distance learning to in-person classes. This design was appropriate because the study sought to explore participants' perceptions, experiences, challenges, and adaptive responses within their actual educational contexts rather than to measure predetermined variables statistically. Through qualitative inquiry, the researchers were able to examine the meanings and patterns emerging from the accounts of head teachers, teachers, students, and parents regarding the resumption of in-person classes. The design was therefore aligned with the study's objectives of understanding stakeholder experiences and identifying challenges and adaptive strategies that could serve as a basis for recommendations and strategic initiatives.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study were key educational stakeholders from public schools across the municipalities of Angat, Norzagaray, and Santa Maria within Division VI of Bulacan, Philippines. To capture a comprehensive, multi-perspectival understanding of the educational transition, the study utilized a purposive sampling scheme comprising four distinct stakeholder groups: head teachers ($n = 11$), teachers ($n = 11$), students ($n = 11$), and parents/guardians ($n = 11$), yielding a total sample size of 44 participants during the data collection period from June 2022 to May 2023. Selection was guided by specific inclusion criteria: head teachers were required to hold active administrative or supervisory roles overseeing phased in-person learning; teachers had to be full-time permanent faculty actively conducting both distance and face-to-face instruction; students needed to be officially enrolled during SY 2022–2023 with firsthand experience of the transition; and parents or guardians were required to be primary caregivers actively supporting their child's learning across both modalities. Across all groups, individuals unaffiliated with Division VI public schools or lacking direct, continuous exposure to the full transition period were excluded. Participant identification and recruitment followed a systematic four-stage protocol beginning with administrative authorization from the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent of Bulacan, followed by endorsement from local school heads to secure institutional access. School heads and class advisers acted as administrative facilitators by identifying prospective candidates and families with continuous enrollment. The researchers then formally contacted these individuals via phone calls, official school channels, or written invitations, verifying eligibility against administrative records and screening criteria regarding teaching load, grade level, and enrollment status. To ensure geographic representation, participants were recruited proportionally across the three municipalities, with the final quota of 11 participants per group ($N = 44$).

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achieved as parental consents, student assents, and participant agreements were sequentially executed. Methodologically, the decision to maintain a target sample of 11 participants per stakeholder group was framed around a purposive sampling strategy across the three municipalities rather than empirical data saturation alone. This fixed sub-sample size aligns with qualitative sampling benchmarks which demonstrate that a homogenous subgroup of 6 to 12 participants is methodologically sufficient to identify thematic patterns, meta-themes, and meaningful cross-group comparative insights while capturing diverse local geographic nuances across the division (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Instrument

The researchers used four researcher-developed interview guides to collect qualitative data from the four stakeholder groups: head teachers, teachers, students, and parents. The interview guides were validated by experts who specialized in educational management. These contained questions addressing the participants' perceptions, experiences, challenges, coping or adaptive responses, and recommendations concerning the resumption of in-person classes. The guide for the head teachers contained seven questions, the guide for teachers contained eight questions, the guide for students contained six questions, and the guide for parents contained eight questions.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers initially submitted a formal request letter to the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent of the Division of Bulacan, Philippines, to secure official approval for conducting the study in the participating schools. Upon obtaining permission, the researchers coordinated with the respective school heads to determine the most convenient schedules for interviewing head teachers, teachers, students, and parents, ensuring that instructional time and student learning hours were strictly preserved.

Prior to interviewing student participants, a dual-ethics protocol was implemented: written informed consent was secured from their parents or guardians with the assistance of class advisers, and written or verbal assent was directly obtained from the students themselves after explaining the study's purpose in an age-appropriate manner. Only students who provided personal assent and had signed parental consent participated in the study. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participant groups using predetermined interview guides with provisions for follow-up and probing questions. Specifically, the school head and faculty members participated in individual interviews conducted via online platforms such as Zoom, Facebook Messenger, and mobile phone calls, with each session lasting approximately thirty minutes. Meanwhile, learners and parents were interviewed in one-on-one sessions through phone calls and online communication platforms, specifically Zoom, Facebook Messenger, and Google Meet.

Participant confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the study. With explicit permission, all interview sessions were audio-recorded to ensure accurate data capture and were subsequently transcribed verbatim for qualitative analysis.

Data Analysis

To establish qualitative rigor and complete transparency in the data-gathering and analytical process, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews in English, Filipino, and Taglish across participating public schools in Division VI of Bulacan (Angat, Norzagaray, and Sta. Maria), administering them either face-to-face or via secure online platforms depending on accessibility and safety protocols. All sessions were audio- or video-recorded with prior informed consent and assent, transcribed verbatim by the research team, cross-checked against original recordings for transcription fidelity, and translated into English where necessary while preserving contextual nuances. Qualitative trustworthiness was operationalized through Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluator framework. Credibility was established through data source triangulation across the four distinct stakeholder groups (head teachers, teachers, students, and parents), member-checking of key transcript summaries with selected participants to confirm narrative fidelity, and peer debriefing sessions with senior qualitative researchers. Dependability was operationalized through an independent double-coding procedure wherein two researchers independently analyzed the dataset using a standardized preliminary codebook; coding variations were systematically reviewed and resolved in consensus meetings until 100% agreement on code applications and definitions was achieved. Confirmability was maintained through a detailed audit trail documenting raw transcripts, code evolution, and analytical decision-making, paired with individual reflexive journaling maintained by the research team throughout the study to identify, bracket, and minimize personal research bias regarding public school operations. Finally, transferability was facilitated through thick, detailed descriptions of the rural and semi-urban public school context during the SY 2022–2023 transition. All digitized transcripts, recordings, and signed consent forms were encrypted, stored in password-protected cloud repositories,



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and handled in strict alignment with research ethics and data privacy standards.

Ethical Considerations

The study strictly adhered to core principles of research ethics—ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, student assent, confidentiality, anonymity, and data protection—following formal administrative authorization from the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent (Schools Division Office of Bulacan) and participating school heads. Institutional permission for school site access and participant recruitment was granted through official administrative permit letters rather than a formal university Ethics Committee (REC) review. For adult participants (head teachers, teachers, and parents), written informed consent was secured prior to data collection. For minor student participants, a two-tiered consent process was strictly implemented: written parental/guardian consent was obtained first, followed by age-appropriate written student assent accompanied by a clear verbal explanation in English or Filipino. Participation across all four stakeholder groups was entirely voluntary, with participants explicitly informed of their right to decline answering specific questions or withdraw at any point without penalty, loss of benefits, or academic and professional repercussions. Permission to audio- or video-record interviews was explicitly granted via signed consent and assent forms, and complete participant anonymity was maintained by replacing names with unique alphanumeric codes (e.g., HT-01, T-01, S-01, P-01) across all transcripts, coding files, and reporting outputs. In full compliance with the Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173), all electronic audio files, transcripts, and code-key sheets were encrypted and secured in password-protected cloud storage accessible solely to the primary research team, while physical consent and assent forms were kept in locked storage, with all data scheduled for permanent deletion and shredding following a three-year retention period.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the qualitative findings regarding the reported experiences, challenges, and adaptive strategies of stakeholders during the resumption of in-person classes across public schools in Division VI of Bulacan (Angat, Norzagaray, and Santa Maria). Findings follow a structured qualitative analytical progression embedded directly into narrative paragraphs: Participant Evidence → Code/Category → Theme → Interpretation → Supporting Literature → Implication.

Research Question 1: Stakeholders' Transitional Experiences

Theme 1: Transitional Experiences

Regarding positive transitional experiences, stakeholder narratives highlighted a strong preference for face-to-face instruction despite lingering health concerns. Parent P-03 noted, *"Entering the classroom again was frowned upon at the beginning due to the virus, but it was something that really needed to be done. Our children were simply passing modules without truly understanding the lessons."* This sentiment was reiterated by Teacher T-01, who emphasized, *"The immediate feedback in the classroom is unmatched. When a student is confused during a lesson, I can spot it right away from their facial expressions and assist them immediately, unlike in modular mode where learning was completely delayed."* Student S-07 similarly stated, *"I was happier returning to school because I could ask my teachers directly whenever I didn't understand the topic. In modular learning, I was mostly guessing."* From these statements, the codes and categories Direct Real-Time Feedback vs. Distance Comprehension Loss and Restoration of Structured Instructional Supervision emerged, directly informing Theme 1 (Transitional Experiences). Interpretation of these categories indicates that stakeholders perceived direct classroom interaction as essential for establishing immediate feedback loops and visual cues that resolve learning confusion promptly. This aligns with post-pandemic qualitative research indicating that direct classroom interaction is frequently associated with enhanced learner motivation, clearer concept understanding, and reduced instructional lag compared to asynchronous distance modalities (Abanid et al., 2025). Consequently, the practical implication is that school administrators should prioritize structured face-to-face interaction for core competencies while evaluating how to design blended tools that preserve real-time feedback mechanisms.

Conversely, stakeholders also described significant challenging experiences during the initial re-entry phase. Head Teacher HT-11 reflected on the administrative strain: *"The first few weeks were exhausting. We had to break two years of habits where students worked at their own pace in their pajamas. Re-establishing basic classroom discipline and morning routines required tremendous effort."* From the household perspective, Parent P-08 explained, *"It was a major culture shock for us parents too. We had structured our daily household chores and work schedules around modular submission days. Transitioning back to early morning preparations and school drop-offs disrupted our daily household economy."* Student S-02 added, *"I felt overwhelmed during the first month. Being surrounded by so*

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many people every day after staying home for so long made me feel exhausted and socially drained by noon." These participant accounts generated the categories Routine Disruption & Behavioral Re-adaptation and Social Fatigue from Shared Physical Spaces, which fall under Theme 1 (Transitional Experiences). These narratives reveal that re-entry presented major behavioral, logistical, and social friction, requiring participants to unlearn home-centered habits and rapidly re-adapt to structured campus schedules. Literature confirms that prolonged emergency remote learning induced routine distortion and social desensitization, making physical re-entry psychologically and behaviorally challenging for both educators and learners (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023). Therefore, educational institutions should consider designing structured re-orientation programs during major operational shifts to allow stakeholders adequate time to rebuild social stamina and daily discipline before introducing heavy academic workloads.

Research Question 2: Challenges Encountered

Theme 2: Challenges Encountered

Health and safety anxieties constituted a primary challenge during early school reopening. Parent P-06 expressed deep apprehension regarding viral exposure: *"My primary worry as a mother was exposure. In our homes, we could control who our children interacted with, but in school, we couldn't verify if other students were adhering to health standards or carrying the virus."* Teacher T-05 detailed the operational burden: *"Managing a class of over 40 students while constantly monitoring whether their masks were worn properly or if they were sharing utensils was extremely stressful for us teachers."* These verbatim statements informed the categories Perceived Loss of Exposure Control and High-Density Safety Protocol Management, aligning under Theme 2 (Challenges Encountered). Interpretation of these data suggests that stakeholder anxiety largely stemmed from a perceived lack of control over health compliance in high-density settings, directly affecting early attendance and teacher focus. Studies on post-pandemic school reopenings demonstrate that parental and teacher confidence relies heavily on visible safety mitigation measures and transparent health communications from school leadership (Dinh et al., 2024). The practical implication is that school heads must enforce transparent health monitoring protocols and establish clear, consistent communication channels with families to maintain stakeholder trust.

Regarding learner adjustment and engagement, educators observed marked behavioral disengagement among returning students. Teacher T-02 reported, *"Students returned with very short attention spans. After 15 minutes of lecture, many would zone out, lay their heads on their desks, or scroll on their hidden phones out of habit."* Student S-04 shared the internal hesitation experienced during class: *"I felt very shy and nervous whenever the teacher called on me to recite. I wasn't used to speaking in front of a class anymore, so I preferred to remain quiet even if I knew the answer."* These accounts established the categories Diminished Attention Spans and Recitation-Induced Social Anxiety, contributing directly to Theme 2 (Challenges Encountered). The narrative evidence demonstrates that prolonged isolation and self-paced study altered classroom norms, resulting in shortened attention spans and social hesitation. Qualitative literature confirms that extended time away from structured classroom environments is frequently accompanied by drops in active social participation and sustained academic focus (Hari Rajan et al., 2024). Consequently, school systems should equip educators with targeted professional development in active learning strategies, student-centered engagement techniques, and supportive classroom management tailored to re-engaging passive learners (Llaguno & Paulete, 2026).

Academic deficits presented another critical hurdle upon returning to physical classrooms. Head Teacher HT-04 described the extent of learning loss: *"We discovered severe learning losses, particularly in reading comprehension and basic mathematical operations. Many high school students were performing at elementary-grade proficiency levels because modules were often answered with help from family members."* Student S-10 confirmed this personal struggle: *"It was difficult to keep up with the current grade-level topics because I forgot the previous lessons from the modules. I struggled during individual quizzes."* These statements formed the categories Unmasked Foundational Skill Gaps and Discrepancy Between Module Completion and Functional Proficiency within Theme 2 (Challenges Encountered). The data indicate that self-administered modular learning obscured underlying skill gaps, which became apparent only when direct, unassisted in-person evaluations resumed. Global literature documents reported learning gaps in core foundational skills following extended periods of remote learning, particularly where home assistance obscured individual student mastery (Sabates et al., 2021). Thus, educational authorities should institutionalize baseline diagnostic assessments at the start of academic cycles, supported by structured remedial bridging programs before advancing complex grade-level competencies (Perlas, 2026).

Finally, operational resource constraints heavily impacted school reopening. Head Teacher HT-07 detailed the administrative financial burden: *"Our Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE) budget was severely stretched. We had to procure gallons of alcohol, liquid soap, thermal scanners, and build additional handwashing*

stations without receiving immediate supplementary funds." Teacher T-08 described the field-level impact: *"Sometimes our school ran out of basic sanitation supplies mid-week, forcing teachers to purchase rubbing alcohol and disinfectants out of their own pockets to keep their classrooms safe."* These participant statements derived the categories MOOE Budget Deficits and Out-of-Pocket Teacher Expenditures for Safety, fitting under Theme 2 (Challenges Encountered). Interpretation reveals that unfunded health mandates severely strained operating budgets, compelling staff to divert personal or classroom funds to sustain basic hygiene supplies. Educational finance research demonstrates that resource-constrained public school districts bear a disproportionate burden during health transitions without targeted government interventions (Weldon, 2026). The implication is that policymakers must allocate dedicated emergency contingency grants to public schools during health crises to prevent the diversion of core instructional funds and personal teacher expenses.

Research Question 3: Adaptive Strategies Theme 3: Adaptive Strategies

In response to operational friction, stakeholders employed advance planning and preparation strategies. Teacher T-04 explained the pedagogical preparation involved: *"We had to re-engineer our instructional plans weeks before classes opened. We created simplified, highly interactive lesson modules designed to gradually rebuild students' study habits."* Head Teacher HT-02 highlighted the administrative coordination: *"As administrators, we conducted weekly planning sessions with faculty to map out entry protocols, classroom schedules, and learning recovery targets before welcoming students back."* These narratives yielded the categories Proactive Instructional Re-engineering and Administrative Transition Mapping, aligning with Theme 3 (Adaptive Strategies). These findings indicate that advance preparation and collaborative lesson redesign were essential for establishing clear expectations and regaining instructional momentum. Adaptive lesson pacing and collaborative pre-planning are recognized in literature as effective mechanisms for supporting instructional recovery following operational shifts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Therefore, curriculum planners should incorporate built-in flexibility into standard curriculum frameworks, granting teachers latitude to adjust lesson pacing based on real-time diagnostic observations.

Regarding instructional adjustments, teachers modified their classroom delivery to address varying student readiness levels. Teacher T-10 noted, *"I couldn't just teach the prescribed grade-level curriculum directly. I spent the first few weeks conducting bridging activities and grouping students according to their skill levels so no one was left behind."* Student S-01 shared how this approach helped learners: *"Our teachers slowed down the pace and used more visual aids, group activities, and step-by-step explanations, which helped us catch up on difficult topics."* These accounts created the categories Targeted Bridging Activities and Differentiated Skill-Level Grouping under Theme 3 (Adaptive Strategies). The qualitative interpretation demonstrates that teachers successfully modified their pedagogical pace to meet students at their actual functional levels rather than enforcing rigid grade-level expectations. Pedagogical literature underscores that differentiated instruction and targeted scaffolding are essential for managing wide skill disparities in transitional classrooms (Desinguraj & Ebenezer, 2021). Consequently, teacher training programs should emphasize flexible scaffolding methodologies and formative remediation techniques for secondary educators navigating transitional cohorts.

Classroom preparation involved tangible modifications to the physical learning environment. Head Teacher HT-09 described the extensive physical preparation required: *"We reorganized every classroom—spacing desks, installing clear signage, fixing window ventilation, and placing hand-sanitizing stations at every doorway."* Parent P-01 reflected on the reassuring impact of these measures: *"Seeing the clean, organized classroom with proper safety signs made us feel much safer about sending our children back to school."* These accounts formed the categories Spatial & Ventilation Reconfiguration and Visible Safety Signage Installation within Theme 3 (Adaptive Strategies). The data show that physical adaptations to campus facilities provided a visible demonstration of safety that significantly eased anxiety among returning students and parents. Environmental research confirms that visible physical safety modifications reduce stress and improve occupant confidence on educational campuses (Makaremi et al., 2024). Implication-wise, school facility management policies should incorporate adaptable spatial guidelines into standard campus planning for future health or environmental emergencies.

Stakeholder and community coordination served as a crucial strategy to overcome financial and material shortages. Head Teacher HT-06 explained how resource gaps were bridged: *"When our school budget fell short for physical health infrastructure, we reached out to our municipal mayor, barangay captain, and alumni. They donated handwashing facilities, alcohol, and face masks."* Parent P-09 added, *"Parents volunteered during Brigada Eskwela to paint, clean, and install safety barriers in classrooms. It was a joint community effort."* These excerpts established the categories External Resource Mobilization (LGUs/Alumni) and Volunteer Community Labor (Brigada Eskwela) under



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Theme 3 (Adaptive Strategies). Interpretation indicates that cross-sectoral partnerships with local government units, community leaders, and parents successfully supplemented limited school budgets. Educational governance literature emphasizes that multi-stakeholder community partnerships are critical for institutional resilience during post-crisis recovery (Mutch, 2023), while teacher involvement in school-wide program decision-making further highlights the importance of stakeholder participation in school-level initiatives (Lugasan et al., 2026). Thus, school administrators should formalize operational partnership frameworks with local government units and community stakeholders to ensure sustained support during major transitions.

Finally, prioritizing psychosocial support was essential for addressing the socio-emotional needs of returning stakeholders. Teacher T-11 described the initial classroom priority: *"We dedicated the first two weeks primarily to socio-emotional learning and psychosocial processing. We focused on listening to students' experiences and easing their anxieties before diving into heavy academic topics."* Parent P-04 noted the outreach extended to families: *"The guidance counselor and teachers held orientation meetings for us parents on how to support our children emotionally during the return to school, which helped us manage household stress."* These accounts generated the categories Socio-Emotional Processing Time and Parental Guidance Counseling, aligning with Theme 3 (Adaptive Strategies). The narrative evidence reveals that prioritizing socio-emotional processing during early re-entry reduced transitional anxiety and created a supportive environment for learning recovery. Scholarly research confirms that embedding structured psychosocial care improves student emotional resilience, reduces stress, and mitigates educator burnout during institutional transitions (Cai & Meng, 2025; Iguban, 2026). The practical implication is that school systems should formally embed mental health wellness initiatives and guidance services into standard operating procedures during major institutional changes.

Conclusions

The qualitative findings of this study reflect the self-reported experiences, perceptions, and adaptive strategies of head teachers, teachers, students, and parents within selected public schools in Division VI of Bulacan during the return to in-person classes. Participants described multi-faceted adjustments across daily routines, social interactions, instructional delivery, and administrative responsibilities, reporting both positive aspects and operational friction during the transition. These findings are also consistent with recent research examining teachers' experiences and adaptation within changing educational contexts (Ochoa, 2026).

Furthermore, participant accounts highlight health and safety anxieties, student behavioral and engagement adjustments, observable learning gaps, and school resource limitations as the primary challenges experienced during this period. These qualitative descriptions suggest that managing operational shifts in public schools involves addressing not only physical campus readiness, but also the instructional and socio-emotional experiences of returning learners and educators.

The adaptive strategies described by participants emphasize the perceived value of advance planning, pedagogical and spatial adjustments, community coordination with parents and Local Government Units (LGUs), and integrated psychosocial support. Together, these accounts illustrate stakeholder perspectives on collaborative, learner-centered practices during major operational shifts.

From an educational practice standpoint, participant experiences suggest the potential utility of responsive instructional planning, targeted remedial support, baseline diagnostic assessments, and flexible school leadership. Because this study was conducted within a specific geographic context—selected public schools in Division VI of Bulacan—these conclusions reflect the subjective accounts and perceptions of the participating stakeholders and are not intended to represent generalized or objectively measured outcomes for all public school contexts. Nevertheless, they offer contextual insights that may inform future learning-recovery discussions, curriculum planning, teacher professional development, and emergency preparedness initiatives.

Recommendations

Based on the qualitative accounts and perceptions shared by participants, the following recommendations are offered for consideration by school administrators, educators, curriculum leaders, and future researchers:

1. **Strengthening Transition and Continuity Planning:** Participating schools and similar institutions may consider refining learning-continuity and transition plans through collaborative engagement among school heads, teachers, students, parents, and community partners. Such frameworks may systematically address the health, instructional, and resource-related considerations identified by local stakeholders.
2. **Diagnostic Assessment and Responsive Instruction:** Teachers are encouraged to utilize baseline diagnostic and formative assessments at the beginning of transition periods to identify observed learning gaps.



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Instructional activities, pacing, and classroom support may then be adjusted according to students' demonstrated functional levels.

3. Targeted Professional Development: School divisions and school heads may consider providing professional development activities focused on re-engaging passive learners, applying differentiated instruction, managing transitional classroom behavior, and integrating basic psychosocial responsiveness into daily instruction.
4. Resource Management and Community Partnerships: School leaders may enhance campus preparedness by prioritizing core facility improvements, sanitation supplies, and instructional resources. To alleviate budget constraints, school heads are encouraged to sustain and formalize collaborative linkages with Local Government Units (LGUs), barangay officials, and community stakeholders for resource mobilization.
5. Integrated Psychosocial Support Services: Schools may consider embedding structured socio-emotional and mental health support programs into standard orientation and guidance services for both students and teaching staff adapting to major institutional changes, subject to institutional resources and policies.
6. Policy and Strategic Framework Integration: Education policymakers and curriculum leaders may draw upon these localized stakeholder experiences when formulating future school-reopening guidelines and learning-recovery policies. The proposed strategic framework—structured across needs assessment, planning/implementation, monitoring/evaluation, and sustainability—may serve as an adaptable guide for organizing school-level actions across health preparedness, instructional alignment, resource management, and stakeholder engagement.

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