Since January 2020 Elsevier has created a COVID-19 resource centre with free information in English and Mandarin on the novel coronavirus COVID-19. The COVID-19 resource centre is hosted on Elsevier Connect, the company's public news and information website.

Elsevier hereby grants permission to make all its COVID-19-related research that is available on the COVID-19 resource centre - including this research content - immediately available in PubMed Central and other publicly funded repositories, such as the WHO COVID database with rights for unrestricted research re-use and analyses in any form or by any means with acknowledgement of the original source. These permissions are granted for free by Elsevier for as long as the COVID-19 resource centre remains active.
A phenomenological study of synchronous teaching during COVID-19: A case of an international school in Malaysia

Anbareen Jan, PhD
School of Education, Faculty of Social Sciences and Leisure Management, Taylor’s University Malaysia, Subang Jaya, Malaysia

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
COVID-19
Synchronous teaching
Phenomenological case study
Remote teaching
Primary level learners

ABSTRACT

To curb the COVID-19 outbreak Malaysian Government enforced movement control. As a result many private schools with an ongoing term shifted to remote teaching. This phenomenological case study explored some issues which were faced by parents and learners of primary level students during synchronous teaching. Observation was carried out for a period of 13 days on 2 primary school students of a private international school of Malaysia. Observation was followed by interviews with the same participants, where their views and reflections regarding synchronous teaching were recorded. This data was further supplemented with brief interviews with parents, whose children were also in the primary level of the same school. Nvivo 12 was used for analysis. Following Saldana’s coding (2016), elemental coding methods were used, employing structural, descriptive, and in vivo coding. 62 nodes emerged during the first cycle coding process which were placed under 10 categories in the final analysis process. Results showed that parents’ continuous supervision and guidance was needed in addition to the teacher’s mentoring and direction when teaching online. Furthermore, data showed that one of the problems in remote teaching is lack of developing social skills of the learners as they cannot interact with their classmates in ‘real-time’. Synchronous teaching increases learners’ screen time which was not liked by parents. Interviews revealed that students also preferred in-class, face-to-face learning over synchronous learning. Though importance of remote teaching in this hour of crisis cannot be denied, this study concludes that implementing 100% online teaching for primary students is still at its rudimentary phase of effectiveness. This research holds high significance in opening up new perspective for educators and policy makers on how to effectively plan for online teaching in future.

1. Introduction

1.1. A brief background of COVID-19 situation

The Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) hit the World very hard. First identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, home to some 11 million people, the COVID-19 has become a pandemic in a short of span of 3 months, spreading to 188 countries and territories, infecting more than a million, and killing more than 11,000 (World Health Organization, 2020) at the time this paper was being written.

COVID-19 is highly contagious, hence the extremely quick spread. In order to curtail the spread, many governments, such as Australia, China, Italy, Malaysia, Singapore, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States etc., have enacted a shutdown, partial or complete. At the global level, it has surely caused a virtual shutdown of almost all economic, commercial and non-commercial, and governmental activities. Where on one hand, air-travel, tourism, entertainment, and ride-sharing have virtually halted; on the other hand, the online gaming industry; the online food delivery and most importantly remote teaching (synchronous and asynchronous instructions) are still functioning properly (Ramadan, 2020).

1.2. Synchronous and asynchronous instructions

Following the worsening COVID-19 situation, Malaysian government enforced a nationwide Restriction of Movement Order (RMO) or Movement Control Order (MCO) on March 18 till March 31, 2020 initially. Though implemented on March 18, 2020, RMO later became CRMO (Conditional Restriction of Movement Order) and was extended for a period of three months. Many schools adopted emergency remote teaching and introduced digital platforms for exchanging information. All on-site teaching and learning was called off and replaced with e-learning (Lim, 2020) and remote teaching. Thus, to make learning accessible and to facilitate communication between teachers, parents, and learners synchronous
(real-time instructions via videoconferencing, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, instant messaging etc.) and asynchronous (self-paced instructions via videos, lecture recordings and other media) instructions surged.

1.3. Implementation of remote teaching during COVID-19

China was the first to implement e-learning & teaching to curb the spread of this pandemic (Cai & Wang, 2020; Xia, 2020). During this period, identified as ‘School’s Out, But Class’s On’, school schedule was strictly followed lest the epidemic affects the learning, mental health, and development of students (Cai & Wang, 2020; Zhou et al., 2020). Educational institutions in Malaysia also implemented emergency remote teaching (Azahar, 2020) following the emergent COVID-19 situation. As remote teaching takes place in home settings, it requires involvement of parents during the whole teaching and learning process; especially in case of young learners it cannot be made effective without parental guidance, supervision and support (Cai & Wang, 2020; Zhang et al., 2020).

Literature has addressed the effectiveness of remote teaching: evaluating its effectiveness in teaching language courses (Enkin & Mejias Bikandi, 2017); teaching language to primary school children with the help of video conferencing (Stanley et al., 2017); views of parents on home-schooling (Sackett & Fletcher, 2017); and how can it strengthen the bond between parents and children (Xia, 2020). Moreover, contemporary research has discussed the impact of practical implementation of online education on society and education (Zhou et al., 2020), and has unveiled university level students’ sentiment of synchronous online delivery of instruction (Pastor, 2020). But what is missing from the mainstream literature are the issues involved in remote teaching as faced by parents and learners of primary level. This gives rise to the question: what are the issues faced by parents and learners of primary level students during synchronous teaching? Keeping the same in view, the objective attained was: to explore parents’ and learners’ experience of synchronous teaching (using online teaching tools, software and platforms) during remote teaching.

This paper explores the issues with synchronous instructions for primary students in Malaysia during the RMO. Since many of the private and international schools were still into their terms/sessions, to help students complete their term successfully, some of these international schools shifted to synchronous teaching via Google Classroom, Remind, Seesaw, and Zoom (Kanyakumari, 2020). This research holds high significance in turbulent and troubled times where no one knows when the COVID-19 situation will improve. It also holds significance in opening up new perspective for educators, policy makers, and parents on how to effectively plan for execution of remote teaching in such situation in future.

2. Materials and methods

For this phenomenological case study I used participant observation method. As case study can help to examine an object, person, program, phenomenon or an organization or phenomenon (Merriam, 2009) in the same vein, phenomenological case study defines the experience of a specific group of people in order to get the detail reality of certain phenomena (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). It helps the researcher in getting a deeper understanding of intrinsic human experience from the participant’s perspective. Thus the participant’s knowledge provides descriptive data, which helps in offering the firmer understanding of the participant’s life experience (Patton, 2002). Keeping the same in mind, I not only observed the participants but I was also actively involved in their remote teaching activities (Moustakas, 1994). Familiarity with the subjects’ culture and nature warranted the observational study, even though it was for a brief period of time.

Interpretivism paradigm was employed for this study (Coleman et al., 2002). Within interpretivism paradigm, my role as a researcher was not only of an interpreter but I was also part of what was being observed and was actively involved in the research process (Coleman et al., 2002; Neubauer et al., 2019, pp. 90–97). Social constructivism was used as a framework (Edwards, 2007; Schoolnik et al., 2006). Referring to constructivism, Phye (1997), as cited in (Chen, 2003) states that it “combines cognition from a developmental perspective with other important issues, such as motivation, self-directed learning, and a focus on the social context of learning” (p. 19). Thus, this paper presented remote teaching practices that apply constructivism to teaching primary level learners.

2.1. Research site

The study was conducted in a natural setting (Moustakas, 1994) – there are three bedrooms, a lounge comprising of TV and sitting area, a dining space, and a kitchen in the house. In this setting, each child had its own ‘learning zone’. Child 1 (age 10) would sit in her own room during the school hours i.e., from 7:45am to 3:00pm coming out only for rest-room or lunch break. Child 2 (age 5) would sit in the lounge during her online Zoom and self-learning sessions. The participants chose these spots voluntarily without any compulsion or influence till the end of the observation period.

2.2. Participants

For this study purposive sampling technique was adopted (Coleman et al., 2002; Moustakas, 1994). The participants of the study were two sisters aged 10 and 5 (Child 1 and 2, respectively), both studying at an international private school in Malaysia. Both participants were students at primary level – child 1 was a student of year 6 and child 2 was in Year 1. Some parents, whose children were in the same school and the same year groups, were also selected for brief interviews. The interviews were conducted via whatsapp. Their views were used to supplement the observations.

2.3. Data collection

Data was collected from March 18 – April 03, 2020. Unstructured covert observation (Coleman et al., 2002) was carried out for 13 school days from 7:45am to 3:00pm. Observational data was supplemented with brief unstructured interviews with both the participants, where their views and reflections regarding synchronous teaching were recorded. This step was taken in order to clarify and support the data gathered from observations. To further confirm the data, some parents, whose children were studying in the same school and level were also interviewed informally. The questions from parents aimed at obtaining: their impression of emergency remote teaching; their personal and individual experience of using different online teaching tools and platforms for teaching and learning; and finally, their feedback on the impact of synchronous teaching on their child’s learning. Interviews with participants and selected parents were conducted to ensure that the data collected from observations and field notes is valid and trustworthy.

2.4. Ethical considerations

To ensure that the research does not violate any ethical concerns, the dual role of researcher-and-a-parent was kept in consideration. Flewitt (Flewitt, 2005) suggested that parents’ (or guardians’) consent should be sought when a research involves children below 16 years. For the research in hand no such concern was raised as they were researcher’s own children. Another important and relevant ethical concern is that a study should not influence a child’s behaviour (Thomas & O’Kane, 1998). This was ensured by conducting the research in an uncontrolled natural environment. Finally, confidentiality of the participants should be maintained (Kaiser, 2009; Surniak, 2018), hence I have not disclosed names of the participants, parents, or the school. Nevertheless, wherever it was needed, a pseudonym was used.
3. Data analysis and results

The first phase of analysis started as soon as I imported my 1st day observation data into Nvivo 12 software. By following thematic analysis approach, a coding system was applied to the observation field notes. Focusing on the research question, I created some nodes/codes by adopting an inductive approach (Kayapinar, 2014). With each new data (observation field notes and participants’ interviews), I entered it in Nvivo, and either assigned text from that data to an existing node, or created a new node. As data collection and data analysis was a continuous and concurrent process, therefore, I had to go back and forth from data to analysis and vice versa. Wherever I came across new data I developed a new node and the observation field notes and interview transcripts were revisited according to the emergent node(s). Everytime new nodes were created for the data which could not fit in the existing categories. For this first cycle coding process, elemental coding methods were used, employing structural, descriptive, and in vivo coding (Jan and Stephen SamuelAli, 2020; Saldana, 2016). During this process 62 nodes emerged including in vivo codes (see Appendix A). Similar nodes were merged together to form categories, while other nodes were classified as sub-category (child-node) or placed as new main category. The process was repeated until the categories with overlapping contents were either renamed or collapsed. The 10 main categories which emerged from the final coding process were: too many apps and technical issues, burden on parents, network issues, lack of developing social skills, duration of teaching online vs. face-to-face sessions, plenty of distractions in home environment, non-availability of teaching material and resources, too many assignments and activities, prolonged screen time, and teacher’s inexperience in terms of online delivery. These categories are elaborated in section 4.

4. Discussion

The following sections elaborate the major categories which emerged from the findings. It is written in first person, in researcher’s own experience.

4.1. Too many apps and technical issues

A day before the formal commencement of the remote teaching during RMO, parents were advised to install some applications (apps) into their devices. These apps included Google Classroom, Remind, Seesaw, and Zoom. During normal school days all kinds of communication between teachers and parents were done via Remind. The remaining three apps were specifically utilized during the RMO. I installed the required apps for my kids. Zoom and Google Classroom were working fine but I found that some features of Seesaw were not functioning properly. I had to struggle hard to find an alternate way of handling the app. The app worked fine when it was accessed using Google Chrome browser. It appeared to be more of a learning task for the parents than for the kids. A parent shared her views on Seesaw: “I feel that it could have been easier if the pages were editable within the Seesaw app as now it is double trouble. I reported to Ms. Sally the app is not user friendly as I installed in both mobile and laptop”. Similar opinion was expressed by another frustrated mom: “Uploading to Seesaw is like adding to the work. I need to snap and then upload as camera within the app doesn’t help to crop or get clear pictures.” She jokingly continued: “Moms must demand for payment for the holidays, we are doing most of the teacher’s task.” Related views were stated by another parent: “For now there is Remind, Zoom, Seesaw and Google Classroom to look for updates. I needed another device to scan the allocated QR code, which means I must have all the apps ready on all the available devices at home.”

Next day a quiz activity was assigned to the learners. The link could be opened by scanning the QR code. This quiz was created in Kahoot. My five year old was struggling hard as she had not only to attempt the quiz but also be on time. Additionally, two devices were needed for this assessment – she had to answer on one screen while looking at the questions on the other screen (this is how Kahoot works). In frustration I wrote to the School leadership: “there shouldn’t be new things coming up. The School should stick to Seesaw now. I think there shouldn’t be a different practice each day. Yesterday the parents got used to one way and today you introduced Kahoot. I have to hand over two devices to her (referring to my daughter).”

I inquired from the parents of the same year group and they were experiencing same issues. One parent shared: “I had technical issues where I cannot [could not] submit and receive anything from Seesaw. Ms. Jenny is checking with her technical team. So I am submitting via email.” Adding to this another mother expressed: “I only have 2 laptops. I laptop is for my work, which now my girl is using and the other one is used by my son in Year 3. I cannot attend call from my work as I have to devote my laptops to them”.

There is a wide range of online teaching and learning apps available. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses and hence should be used accordingly. Yet, they should not be used all at once, especially when the children and their parents are not experts in all of them. It causes additional stress, not only on the children, but on those parents who are aiding in the online learning.

Another noteworthy instance was when my younger child didn’t have enough battery in her device. It ran out of charge and I had to arrange for another device for her use. It took me some time to log in and make her join her class session. All this cost her class time. The same observation was reverberated while interviewing a parent: “all the devices need to be fully charged in the morning or [else I’d have to] drag power bank and wires [to charge them].”

The School assumed that all the learners would have one spare electronic device conveniently available for the online classes.

On a different note, parents’ responsibility increased as they had to ensure that all the devices had ample charge in them to be used every morning.

4.2. Burden on parents

Most of the task assigned to students needed parents’ guidance. For my 10 year old, updating and uploading were effortless but when it involved technical issues she would surely need my help. It was not that easy for the younger one. I had to help her with installing the apps, taking pictures of her finished assignments and then uploading them.

Once during a Zoom session the teacher was delivering instructions as if they were meant for parents and not for the students. I felt as if the teacher knew that the parents would be sitting with their children during the meeting session. I avoided sitting with my kids during their Zoom sessions as I wanted them to be independent learners, but once in the first few days of online teaching I casually entered my younger kids’ learning zone (since it was the first few days, she did not have any specific learning zone and she would sit with her tablet anywhere during Zoom session) for collecting something. I heard the teacher browsing the kids through the learning pack which included lesson plans for all subjects for that day. She continued with her walk-through irrespective of the fact whether any student was following her or not. She quickly told that I should have asked her if there were any specific lesson plans for all subjects for that day. She continued with her walk-through irrespective of the fact whether any student was following her or not. She quickly told that “today you need to do all the tasks given in the learning pack”. She didn’t even ask if the students had any questions in mind, whether they understood the lesson or not. This observation was echoed by a dissatisfied mother: “One more thing which I mentioned yesterday as well that teachers should be doing more work [and] not [the] parents. It’s like she gives instructions and then keeps assigning tasks to the parents. Just imagine having more than one kid at home and all in different classes. Please be a little considerate to [the] parents! We have to catch up our own work, run around home errands. I wish the teacher not only instructs but guides from time to time or [else] Zoom is useless. In fact Zoom is extra work too as we had to be on exact time (or else we will miss the session).”

During an interview when I asked the parents’ views, one of them
replied: “It is not only supervising, mentoring, and guiding the kids but also running around doing home chores. At times the device would run out of battery so I need to have an alternate device ready. When I was not around, the children would just spend time looking at the screen.” In the same vein another parent complained: “You see parents are also working off-site but we can’t leave our kids lost, lagging behind.” A distressed working mom responded: “I had 2 days of stress; I can vomit blood!” An activity was assigned for which the teacher needed dresses, shoes and pictures of the kids when they were toddlers. Regarding the said activity a parent expressed: “Yesterday, my wife had to search for my kid’s old shoes, dresses, photos. It was very challenging as she was also working from home.”

A parent from year 6 group stated: “I noticed though the School provides online learning, there is not much of teaching involved, it is mainly teacher assigning work and telling them what work to complete for the day. The kids have to figure out the learning by themselves, and of course us, parents, to guide them.” One more added to it: “Agree we have to coach them most of the times. I have my son asking me to explain most of the assignments to him.”

4.2.1. Additional ‘work’ for working parents

Where on one hand it was an additional duty for all parents, it was gruesome for working parents. Remote teaching assumed that all parents would be knowledgeable in all the subjects, in addition to having good teaching skills. There were a few students who had one or both working parents. While discussing with one parent she asked: “Do you have any tips on how to juggle between work-from-home and school-work for kids?” During interview a distressed parent added: “It is too stressful. I can’t be a worker and also a teacher at the same time. So my daughter has not been participating in any of those school-work.” Adding to the same, “I am juggling [between] work and school. I woke up at 6:00 am to work and prepare breakfast, get kids ready for their 1st Zoom [session] … Then when they are on Zoom I use my mobile phone to work. I [have] blocked all Zoom times in my work calendar. I wrote to the group leader to make the duration of Zoom a little longer so that kids are occupied with teacher and meanwhile we do our own tasks. For now the duration is too short, maximum 15 min, which is rarely useful. I hardly can reply to an email [while the kids are in Zoom session] and she is done. It is more like we are teaching everything and teacher comes for hi, hello”, a parent expressed.

In some cases the learners had to miss their Zoom sessions because of their parents’ official duties. This was shared by a working mother whose daughter was too keen on learning but according to the mother: “It’s okay to skip some of the sessions. I had to explain to my girl that mummy need to work. I am sure they [teachers] will understand. Because it is impossible to juggle 2 kids via 2 different systems from the School and working at the same time.” Similarly, if the parents were too busy they would simply allow their kids to skip a lesson or two, as one desperate mom expressed: “it’s ok! It’s Friday and they are only in year 1, I don’t [take] stress! My kid skipped some home learning work! (Laughs)” Most of the working parents had to face similar challenging situation as one mother stated: “For myself as I need to work from home as well, I just go into the Zoom session with the class teacher but I skip Art, Music and Physical Education.” Another parent said, “I have to give up my phone, laptop and set for my 2 kids. I don’t even have time and laptop to do my work. Maybe one can skip some of these activities and Zoom.”

Synchronous instruction was especially difficult for the working parents who were working-from-home, which means they had to attend to their official duties off-site, and meet their official deadlines. It was equally challenging for those parents who, though did not have any official obligation but, had to do their home chores, manage other domestic errands, etc. Teaching young children remotely became more of a responsibility for the parents and added to their workload.

Remote teaching was not only physical and mental burden for parents but as one parent expressed, “school should look into this. They’re saving some operational cost due to the shutdown during MCO. I fear my bills would be too high for this month.”

4.3. Network issues

The teacher of year 6 would normally assign activities to the students and would ask them to come up with feedback, questions or conclusion in the succeeding session(s). Once an activity was given to the students and the teacher advised that in the upcoming session they would discuss the outcome of the activity. To start with, the internet was very slow and eventually it gave up. It took about 45 min for the network to restore. The next Zoom session was about to start and my child (age 10) had not even finished her previous assigned task. My 10 years old girl felt too upset as she could not complete the task as well and she would not be able to respond to the teacher.

Network issues were not only faced at the learners’ end, but they were also very evident at the teachers’ side. Often weak signals played their part during teaching due to which the sound broke, the video hung, or there was a lag between the two. Due to this the class could not be conducted seamlessly.

Thus, network issues, such as weak signals or no internet access was not taken into consideration during the remote teaching. The School simply assumed every parent to have a high-speed Internet connection.

4.4. Lack of developing social skills

Even though learners could complete all their lessons on time but what the traditional face-to-face classroom offered could not be effectively copied by synchronous instructions. In a traditional classroom setting students interact not only with their teachers but also with their classmates. But what I observed during the Zoom sessions was that they could ask or respond only to their teachers but they could not get any opportunity to interact among each other. Hence there was zero interaction among the class fellows. The teacher would ‘mute’ all the students and would ‘unmute’ only those who were asked a question or who would raise hand for queries or clarification. Sometimes, the teacher could not pay attention to all the learners as there was a limited time for each session, during which she had not only to assign the task but also explain that. Moreover, it was also observed that there was no emphasis on presentation and communication skills.

4.5. Duration of teaching online vs. face-to-face sessions

Related to the social and communication skills, it was noticed that synchronous teaching took less time as compared to face-to-face classroom teaching. Since all the lessons plans were designed before the start of the term, the teachers were exactly following the same. To quote an instance, the teacher sent the schedule according to which a lesson for English was from 10:30 a.m.–11:30 a.m. and another for Mathematics was from 11:30 a.m.–12:00 noon. But both the sessions ended at 11:00 a.m., which means the teacher taught everything in just 30 min which was initially scheduled to be 90 min.

It showed that during classroom there are more opportunities for exploration and explanations. Students are given more chances to ask questions and there are detailed discussion and activities for each lesson. A parent added to this: “I missed a session because I was occupied with finishing other tasks assigned to my child. I thought he will join the next class but to my astonishment both the classes were wrapped up in [the] first session.”

4.6. Plenty of distractions in home environment

School environment motivates students to learn and stay focused. At home, no matter how hard the parents try to make the atmosphere appropriate for study there is always distraction. Discussing with my elder daughter I found that she could complete her work on time while in school. According to her: “In school there is no distraction. You can finish your work quicker. Everything in my surrounding is stopping me from finishing my work in time i.e., tablet, TV, and my sister (laughs)
4.7. Non-availability of teaching material and resources

It has been observed that in classroom the teaching material and resources are readily available whereas in case of remote teaching, parents find difficulty arranging materials. The teacher used to inform the parents in the morning that specific materials would be needed for an activity which would take place later in the day. Since remote teaching was executed in an emergency situation during the RMG many resources were not readily available at homes. In some cases, where recycled items were required, activities were conducted but in case of non-availability of materials I made my kid(s) skipped the class.

The same had been affirmed by a few parents that non-availability of resources at home affected their kids learning. Quoting a parent: “Today, I have to run from one end of the apartment to the other measuring 10 objects in the house using my kid’s hand span and pace. Not everything is readily available. It is not a classroom.” Consequently parents had to adapt their own ways of doing the task. Some tried cutting corners: “I short cut it. She collects it and I estimated it, as I was on a conference call”, which eventually meant different, and perhaps, lesser learning for the child.

4.8. Too many assignments and activities

Early morning parents would receive a learning pack from their children’s class teacher. That learning pack would include all the activities for that day. The number of activities assigned per day varied but it was observed that there were more activities as compared to what the students used to have in one day before they went remote. This was affirmed from the participants during interviews. My 5 year old said: “We don’t have so much to do in school.” The same was found from an interview with a parent, who while quoting her son said: “My son told me he is given more exercises during this movement control order than in school. I think kids are doing more exercises with parents’ guidance.” Another parent added: “Year 1 learning pack is too much for the kids.”

4.9. Prolonged screen time

Kids nowadays are already spending most of their time in front of screen, be it a tablet, laptop, or TV. Synchronous teaching added to their screen time. It was noticed that most of the activities required them to use different typing and drawing software. Even for improving learners’ reading skills, E-books were recommended. My 5 year old amusingly shared: “When teacher asks do on book, I do it. When teacher asks not to do on book I do that. At home all the work I am doing on my tablet.” To add, no attention was paid on handwriting. The statement was affirmed by a parent: “… by the way, yesterday I observed that it is too much of screen time for them now. Once work is done they need to watch TV or play games on tab.” Another parent inquisitively added, “Isn’t it too much screen-time for kids?”

A mother of primary level student expressed her views: “Nowhere in schools are such scheduled tasks given daily. They are just in year 1. They are getting more used to screen. At this time when it’s world crisis level and kids need to be taken care at home as everything is closed down. They demand for fun games that they like to play, more love, and care. I don’t like to ask my kid to get up early in the morning to do all this. Once this is solved they can do it all. For now, more important is staying safe and happy.”

4.10. Teacher’s inexperience in terms of online delivery

It was observed that subject teachers were unable to maintain discipline during their synchronous teaching sessions. In addition they could not pay attention to all the students. Since subject teachers were scheduled to meet the learners only once a week, they were not much familiar with online teaching tools. Alternatively, class teacher faced some issues handling her first and second sessions but later got accustomed and could manage Zoom sessions. Regarding the same, one parent complained: “Every time they are online with teacher, it turns into a massacre, they just keep talking altogether and teacher does not know how to handle.”

5. Conclusion

This study highlights some issues which parents and students faced during remote teaching. The aim of this paper was to explore parents’ and learners’ experience of synchronous teaching, implemented during RMG. Though the importance of remote teaching in this hour of crisis cannot be denied, the study concludes that implementing 100% online teaching at primary level is still at its rudimentary phase of effectiveness. It has been found that teachers followed the same teaching style as when teaching face-to-face in classroom. There was minimum or almost no student-student, and student-teacher interaction in synchronous teaching. The same problems were mentioned by Stanley (Stanley et al., 2017). Furthermore, it has also been affirmed by Zhou et al. (Zhou et al., 2020), that some learners “due to lack of self-control and self-learning ability, lacked face-to-face teacher or even parental supervision, online learning became a form, and the autonomous learning effect was not satisfactory” (p. 516). Moreover, not all learners are same, whereas data showed that teachers assessed all the students in the same manner. Furthermore, how does the teacher assure that each student is following the instructions? How can a teacher assure that all the students are equally learning? How to motivate learners to be independent learners? Since there was limited time for each session, therefore, synchronous teaching lacked teacher’s timely feedback and error-correction.

In the same vein, findings showed that remote teaching cannot develop or improve social communication skills of the learners. This study endorsed Wang et al. (Wang et al., 2020) that “there is also a lack of discipline and ritual in online education. Further, long-time online teaching can have a negative impact on students’ mental and physical health” (p. 5).

5.1. Recommendations

Keeping in view observational data as well as participants’ perspective, there are a few suggestions for synchronous teaching:

- While devising lesson plans, infrastructure issues, home environment, time-constraints and non-availability of resources should be taken into consideration.
- Teachers should design such models for remote teaching which can focus not only on students’ learning but also help them become independent learners. Moreover, teacher should brief students about the task, let the students complete and then discuss in the subsequent synchronous session. It should be one subject per session only.
- Teachers should be trained on how to become an effective online teacher as it was observed that not all teachers can handle synchronous teaching. The same suggestion has been given by Trust and Whalen (2020).
- Finally, teachers and parents should work together and actively cooperate to create a good learning environment for students, promote the effective development of remote teaching and ensure the teaching effect.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Anbareen Jan: She is the main as well as the corresponding author of the work titled, “A phenomenological study of synchronous teaching
during COVID-19: A case of an international school in Malaysia.” The work has been solely done by the said author from, Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

The author whose name is mentioned below certify that she has NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers’ bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Appendix A

First cycle coding
Following nodes emerged during initial coding process:

1. Installation of Apps
2. Problem with some apps
3. Apps not “user-friendly”
4. Technical issues
5. “Moms must demand for payment for the holidays, we are doing most of the teacher’s task.”
6. Additional laptop, desktop or mobile
7. Effect on parents’ official duties
8. Fully charged devices
9. Extra work for working mothers
10. Continuous guidance and support
11. Multiple instructions at a time
12. Parents as coach
13. Juggling between home chores and online learning
14. Power consumption
15. Backup device
16. Weak signals
17. Internet fluctuations
18. Learners’ frustration due to unstable connection
19. Lagging behind the class
20. Problem with teacher’s connection
21. Sound disruption
22. Unavoidable noise
23. Social skills are neglected
24. Zero interaction with class-fellows and friends
25. No presentations
26. Non-interactive activities
27. No chatting with friends
28. Learners on mute
29. Specific duration for each lesson
30. Shorter online sessions as compared to face-to-face class
31. Time restriction
32. Only teacher is talking
33. Not everyone participates
34. More discussion in physical classes
35. Lack of concentration at home
36. TV as a distraction
37. Noise at home
38. Sound from surroundings
39. Paying attention to surroundings
40. Limited stationery at home
41. Difficult to buy materials during pandemic
42. Alternate means to teach
43. Difficulty finding teaching materials
44. A number of exercises
45. Several activities in a day
46. Learning pack
47. Too many assignments
48. Too much screen time
49. Imbalance between screen time and paper-based learning
50. Limited physical activities
51. No pen paper
52. Smart devices
53. No outdoor games
54. Glued to screen
55. Stress on eyes
56. Teachers were new to remote teaching
57. “Every time they are online with teacher, it turns into a massacre, they just keep talking altogether and teacher does not know how to handle.”
58. Limited interaction with subject teacher
59. Teacher’s control during online teaching
60. Students’ engagement in class
61. Discipline during online sessions
62. Managing young learners

References

Azahar, N. S. H. (15 June 2020). Distant learning a new normal in education, 14 April 2020. New Straits Times. https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/letters/2020/4/584165/dist

ant-learning-new-normal-education.

Cai, R., & Wang, Q. (2020). A six-step online teaching method based on protocol-guided learning during the COVID-19 epidemic: A case study of the first middle school teaching practice in changyuan City, Henan province, China. Best Evidence of Chinese Education, 4(2), 529–534. https://doi.org/10.15354/bbec.20.rp010

Chen, C. (2003). A constructivist approach to teaching: Implications in teaching computer networking. Information Technology, Learning, and Performance Journal, 23(2), 17–27.

Coleman, M., & Briggs, A. R. (2002). In M. Coleman, & A. R. Briggs (Eds.), Research methods in educational leadership and management. London: SAGE Publications.

Enkin, E., & Mejías Bikandi, E. (2017). The effectiveness of online teaching in an advanced Spanish language course. International Journal of Applied Linguistics, 27(1), 176–197. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijal.12112

Flewitt, R. (2005). Conducting research with young children: Some ethical considerations. Early Child Development and Care, 175(6), 553–565. https://doi.org/10.1080/0300443950113138

Jan, A., Stephen Samuel, M., & Ali, S. (2020). Pedagogical practices of languages other than English teachers: A case study of a Malaysian private university. Malaysian Journal of Learning & Instruction, 17(1), 77–99.

Kaiser, K. (2009). Protecting Respondent Confidentiality in Qualitative Research. 19, 1632–1641. https://doi.org/10.1177/1447922009350879, 11.

Kanyakumari, D. “Home-based learning: Odds stacked against teachers in Malaysia’s primary schools, while private counterparts are more prepared.” 20 May 2020. CNA. 15 June 2020. <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/international>

Kayap, U. (2014). Measuring essay assessment: Intra-rater and inter-rater reliability. European Journal of Educational Research, 113–136. https://doi.org/10.14689/
ejr.2014.57.2

Lim, I. (2020). Covid-19: What are Malaysia’s public universities doing? Online classes and more. Malay Mail. https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/03/16/covid–19-what-are-malaysias-public-universities-doing-online-classes-and-mo/1847071, (Accessed 8 April 2020).

Merriam, S. B. (2009). Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation. United States of America: Jossey-Bass A Wiley Imprint, Moustakas, C. (1994). Phenomenological research methods. SAGE publications, Neubauer, B. E., Catherine, T. W., & Varp, L. (2019). How phenomenology can help us learn from the experiences of others. Perspectives on Medical Education, Pastor, C. K. L. (2020). Sentiment analysis on synchronous online delivery of instruction due to extreme community quarantine in the Philippines caused by covid-19 pandemic. Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies, 3, 1.

Ramadan, S. (2020). Covid-19: 9 universities are now conducting classes online. Hype. https://hype.my/2020/184628/covid-19-9-universities-are-now-conducting-classes–online. (Accessed 8 April 2020).

Sackett, T. A., & Fletcher, J. A. (2017). Perceptions of homeschooling: A qualitative study of the lives homeschool parents. In The research and scholarship symposium, Saldana, J. (2016). The coding manual for qualitative researchers (3rd). SAGE.

Schoonick, M., Kol, S., & Abarbanel, J. (2006). Constructivism in theory and in practice. English Teaching Forum, 44, 12–20. m6.

Stanley, G. (2017). Remote teaching: A case study teaching primary school children English via videoconferencing in Uruguay. In M. Carrier, R. M. Damerow, & K. M. Bail (Eds.), Digital language learning and teaching: Research, theory and practice. 1st. Routledge, Taylor & Francis.

Surmiak, A. D. (2018). Confidentiality in qualitative research involving vulnerable participants: Researchers’ perspectives. Forum for Qualitative Social Research, 19(3), 12. https://doi.org/10.17191/fq-19.3.3099

Thomas, N., & O’Kane, C. (1998). The ethics of participatory research with children. Children & Society, 12(5), 336–348. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1099–069.1998.tb00090.x

Trus, T., & Whalen, J. (2020). Should teachers be trained in emergency remote teaching? Lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. Journal of Technology and Teacher Education, 28(2), 189–199.

Wang, G., et al. (2020). Mitigate the effects of home confinement on children during the COVID-19 outbreak. The Lancet, 395(10228), 945–947. https://doi.org/10.1016/

9016-6736(20)3047.x

World Health Organization. (2020). Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) situation reports. https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/

20200411-sitrep-82-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=74a0d15_2, (Accessed 12 April 2020).

Xia, J. (2020a). Practical exploration of school-family cooperative education during the COVID-19 epidemic: A case study of zhenjiang experimental school in Jiangsu province, China. Best Evidence of Chinese Education, 4(2), 521–528. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3555023

Zhang, W., et al. (2020). Suspending ClassesWithout stopping learning: China’s education emergency management policy in the covid-19 breakout. Journal of Risk and Financial Management, 1–6. https://doi.org/10.3390/jrfm13030055

Zhou, L., et al. (2020). School’s out, but Class’s on, the largest online education in the world today: Taking China’s practical exploration during the COVID-19 epidemic prevention and control as an example. Best Evidence of Chinese Education, 4(2), 501–519. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3555520

Dr. Anbareen Jan is a graduate of Taylor’s University Malaysia. She has done her PhD in Education. Her topics of interest are Pedagogical practices, Teaching & Learning, Technology integrated teaching, Qualitative methods, and Narrative research.