

Anxiety of Teachers in Face-to-Face Reopening of Class During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract — After the state of emergency due to the pandemic was lifted, schools have reopened, and teachers are conducting face-to-face classes while maintaining safety precautions. This study aimed to assess the factors contributing to infection-related anxiety and educational anxiety among teachers conducting face-to-face classes during the COVID-19 pandemic after schools reopened. This questionnaire-based cross-sectional study was conducted with 30 elementary school teachers. The questionnaire assessed the factors contributing to infection-related anxiety and educational anxiety that arose from the pandemic. The levels of anxiety and the factors contributing to anxiety were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very anxious). In an analysis of the data of 30 participants excluding the missing data, many teachers reported feeling infection- and education-related anxiety. A stepwise multiple regression analysis identified six factors for infection-related anxiety as significant. Among these variables, the largest partial regression coefficient value was reported for the following reason: “I feel anxious because we cannot ensure the safety of teachers themselves or of their families.” For educational anxiety, four of six reasons were identified as significant. Among these, “anxiety about the students’ home situations” and “delay in education (students’ side)” had stronger associations with anxiety compared to the others. In-person education during the COVID-19 pandemic has caused teachers to experience anxiety. This report provides useful information by highlighting the reasons for infection-related anxiety and educational anxiety that teachers experience in face-to-face classes during a pandemic. Even if the coverage of a COVID-19 vaccine becomes widespread worldwide, we will still be combating COVID-19 infections for at least a few years. Given concerns regarding such infections, to ensure students’ right to education, it is essential to understand why teachers feel anxious and to determine appropriate measures to decrease such anxiety.

Keywords — **COVID-19, Teachers, Factors of Anxiety, Face-To-Face Classes, School Reopening**

I. Introduction

This study explores the teachers’ attitudes and motivation related to students’ return to school after the outbreak of COVID-19 and analyzes the reasons behind the change in teachers’ attitudes, so as to explore various factors affecting students’ learning and growth during COVID-19. Specifically, this study focuses on the anxieties felt by teachers, on the reopening of classes and face to face interaction with students amid the pandemic.

On the one hand, we deeply reflected on the problems of home-based learning during the epidemic period, especially the advantages and disadvantages of large-scale online teaching. On the other hand, we also explored the potential direction of school adjustment in the post-epidemic era. This will provide a powerful reference for countries where the epidemic situation is still severe and will help them to consider resuming classes in advance (Dong et al., 2020)

Accordingly, we conducted this study with teachers of an elementary school to understand the factors contributing to infection-related anxiety and educational anxiety surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. The results suggest various factors contribute to anxiety among elementary school teachers when resuming school. Moreover, these results can be widely applied as useful information for teachers conducting continuous face-to-face classes even with the ever-present risk of infection.

This study focuses on the elementary teachers of Balutakay Elementary School in Managa, Davao del Sur gathering their feelings of anxieties in the reopening of classes amid the existing pandemic. The researcher is concerned about the feeling of anxieties of these teachers after surmounting the hardships of teaching and other functions amid COVID-19.

Coronavirus infections are known to be less severe in children than in adults (Ludvigsson, 2020). Furthermore, children are unlikely to be virus super-spreaders (Munro, Faust, 2020). However, cases continue to spread throughout Japan, and there have been many outbreaks among primary and middle school students in club activities and classes where infection control was inadequate. Therefore, appropriate measures must be taken to prevent infection while conducting face-to-face classes. Furthermore, to continuously provide children with a fulfilling education, it is necessary to understand the psychological anxiety experienced by teachers holding classes for students during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the factors thereof.

There have been numerous reports on the psychological effects of COVID-19 (Vindegard, Benros, 2020; Wang, Hegde, Son, Keller, Smith, Sasangoha, 2020; Wang, Yang, Yang, Liu, Li, Zhang, 2020; Lu, Wang, Lin, Li, 2020; Verma, Mishra, 2020). In a recent study, factors such as age, sex, teaching level (primary, middle, high school, and university), and school location were related to teachers' COVID-19-related anxiety levels (Li Q, Miao Y, Zeng X, Tarimo CS, Wu C, Wu J., 2020). However, specific concerns contributing to anxiety levels were not reported. Another study assessed the relationship between mask-wearing and anxiety among teachers (Li Q, Tarimo CS, Miao Y, Zeng X, Wu C, Wu J., 2020). Meanwhile, another study examined the prevalence of anxiety disorders in teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic (Li Q, Miao Y, Zeng X, Tarimo CS, Wu C, Wu J., 2020). In any case, the specific reasons behind teachers' feelings of anxiety concerning COVID-19 have not been investigated. Identifying teachers' concerns about COVID-19 infection and education during the pandemic will allow us to address the root causes of COVID-19-related anxiety.

The pandemic has also caused serious abuse of human rights, including slander and discrimination (Devakumar D, Shannon G, Bhopal SS, Abubakara, 2020; He J, He L, Zhou W, Nie X, He M.,2020; Rzymiski P, Nowicki M., 2020). Thus, teachers may also be worried about discrimination if they become infected. Moreover, teachers have to educate many students every day. In such situations, teachers can be exposed to various psychological anxieties, such as anxiety about being infected with coronavirus and anxiety about an outbreak in the school. Psychological stress, such as anxiety factors, lead teachers to experience symptoms, such as burnout (Maslach C, Leiter, 2016; Chang M., 2009). Burnout is of particular concern in the teaching profession as it is associated with reduced quality of instruction and diminished ability to effectively engage and teach (Iancu AE, Rusu A, Măroiu C, Păcurar R, Maricutoiu LP, 2018) both of which can lead to potential student harm (Chesak S, Khalsa T, Bhagra A, Jenkins S, Bauer B, Sood, 2019). Moreover, it affects teacher turnover (Sutcher L, Darling-Hammond L, Carver-Thomas, 2019). Accordingly, understanding the reasons for the teacher's various anxieties under the COVID-19 pandemic situation and considering the countermeasures against them will ensure that the teacher's mental health is sound, while maintaining the quality of education for students.

There are some restrictions on school education to avoid COVID 19 infections. If students in their class become infected, the class must be temporarily closed, and students must take a leave of absence from school until they are completely cured (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology-Japan, 2020). Considering such situations, delay in students' education is also a matter of concern. For example, there are concerns regarding differences in terms of the learning progress between students who can take face-to-face classes and those who are absent and do their homework at home. Moreover, the study time of some students has reportedly decreased by more than five hours per week owing to the pandemic (Aucejo, French, Ugalde Araya, Zafar, 2020). Consequently, more research that focuses on the impact of the pandemic on mental health in the field of education is required (Mahase, 2020).

The Response of Teachers to the Pandemic

The pandemic has not only affected the mental state of students (Cachón-Zagalaz et al., 2020), since teachers have also accumulated a high level of stress since the beginning of the crisis. Recent studies have pointed out that during lockdown, teachers have suffered stress from having to adapt (in record time) in order to provide online classes (Besser et al., 2020). This stress has often been accompanied by symptoms of anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbance as a consequence of the increased workload resulting from home teaching. (Ng, 2020).

Not many studies conducted during the pandemic measure the symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression among teachers but the studies that have been carried out suggest that they have psychological symptoms and this reinforces the importance of reopening schools and universities. A recent Arab study has indicated that this crisis has caused teachers to suffer problems that are often related to a pandemic situation, such as anxiety, depression, domestic violence, and divorce, all of which restrict their ability to teach properly (Al Lily et al., 2020). A study carried out in three

cities in China during the pandemic assessed the prevalence of anxiety among teachers and found a prevalence of 13.67%, with women being more anxious than men and the older ones being more symptomatic (Li et al., 2020). Another study conducted in March also in China showed that the prevalence of stress symptoms in teachers was 9.1% and that it was important to support them psychologically (Zhou and Yao, 2020). In a study conducted in Spain at the beginning of the pandemic, teachers also reported having workloads, psychosomatic problems, and exhaustion (Prado-Gascó et al., 2020).

Moreover, previous studies have found that working from home using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can create feelings of tension, anxiety, exhaustion, and decreased job satisfaction (Cuervo et al., 2018), and in times of a pandemic these were the only tools that were available to teachers. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2020a) has already identified confusion and stress among teachers as being one of the adverse consequences of school closures, due to the abruptness of such measures, uncertainty about their duration, and a lack of familiarity with distance education. The unpleasant work-related emotions associated with the depletion of psychological resources has long been a topic of frequent discussion among education professionals, policy makers, and researchers (Kim & Asbury, 2020). This may occur because the long-term nature of the problem leads to exhaustion by creating less confidence in their ability to do their jobs and makes it more difficult to manage student behavior (Buric & Kim, 2020).

Another issue worthy of consideration is the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has not only created a health crisis but also an extremely significant global economic downturn, the effects of which have been particularly harsh in Spain (Torres & Fernández, 2020). In fact, the job instability of teachers was an issue that had already attracted attention before the pandemic (García & Martín, 2019) and COVID-19 has only served to exacerbate this problem with more layoffs and instability (Aunión & Romero, 2020; La Vanguardia., 2020). Several investigations analyzing the impact of job instability on teachers have shown that this can have significant psychological consequences (Leibovich & de Figueroa, 2019).

Amid this context of uncertainty, the 2020–2021 academic year has approached without any clear decision on how it will be played out (Zafra, 2020). In fact, since the end of August, families, students, teachers and educational centers have been expressing their concerns about the uncertainty surrounding the new academic year and the lack of clear guidelines from the government (Rioja, 2020).

On August 27, the Government and the Autonomous Communities at the Education Sector Conference agreed on the main measures that would be adopted for a return to the classroom (Sanchez, 2020). On August 28, the government's civil protection monitoring commission reported on the measures to be taken in the new 2020–2021 year (Government Health Department, 2020). However, the way in which these measures could be implemented with the resources

available to the schools emerged as a considerable challenge and source of concern only one week before the beginning of the school year on September 7 (Lucas, 2020).

Theories

According to Gestalt psychology, individuals' behavior is the final comprehensive product of their current environment and how individuals view it (Marrow, 1969). Based on this, Lewin (1939) set up a function to indicate an individual's life space by a collection of interdependent factors: $B = f(PE) = f(PS)$, where B represents behavior, f represents functional relationship, P represents person, E represents environment, and PS represents life space (Eysenck & Lewin, 1992). Life space is used to express the psychological power generated by the interaction between individuals and the environment, so as to explore the factors that affect people's behaviors (Back, 2000; Burnes, 2020). As a psychological analysis method, Field Theory emphasizes the construction of life space models. It believes that due to the continuous interaction of various elements in the field, the behavior system of people and groups is always fluctuating, while maintaining a relatively stable state, the "quasi-stationary equilibrium" state (Lewin, 1939).

The understanding and explanation of things are all for the purpose of finally taking effective action (Argyris, 1999). In the analysis of life space, the most important point is to understand the various forces that affect behavior, and to ultimately control and adjust these forces according to the purpose of the action. By the 1990s, force field analysis, a variant of Field Theory, was widely used as a tool for evaluating organizational change (Burnes & Cooke, 2019). Brager and Holloway (2018) pointed out that, when analyzing the psychological field, we can find that there are two different forces that psychologically influence behavior: one is driving force, which is composed of variables that change behavior and support the change of plan, and the other is restraining force, which is composed of variables that resist the change of action. Through the analysis of driving force and restraining force, we can realize the systematic analysis, prediction, and adjustment of behavior change.

The study seeks to find the answers to the following questions:

1. What are the causes of teachers' anxiety in the reopening of classes amid COVID-19 in terms of:
 - 1.1 infection-related anxiety
 - 1.2 education-related anxiety?
2. Are there factors of infection-related cause of teachers' anxiety in the reopening of classes?
3. Are there factors of education-related anxiety cause of teachers' anxiety in the reopening of classes?
4. What factors causes teachers' anxiety in the reopening of classes?

II. Methodology

The present study is quantitative-descriptive in approach with the use of survey technique. It follows the guidelines of the IATF where statement checklist of items that should be included in reports of researches or studies. Data collection was conducted within 20 days (February 1–20, 2023). The questionnaire was distributed to and collected from teachers of Balutakay Elementary School in the Managa area of Davao del Sur. The participants anonymously completed the questionnaires for the collection of demographic data and responses to questions about infection-related anxiety and educational anxiety with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the aforementioned survey, teachers at the current elementary school were asked what issues they were worried about concerning the school reopening. The infection-related anxiety factors included the lack of vaccines, personal and family security, and students contracting the infection. Education-related anxiety factors included education delays, student education, paucity of time to teach students, dealing with students' parents, etc. We used the results to create a survey to evaluate the relative strength of anxiety factors. The total population of teachers will be involved in the study (N=30).

The survey instrument is comprised of 20 close-ended questions and will take approximately 10 min to complete. The 20-item questionnaire was divided into two parts: participant characteristics (3 items: name (optional), sex, age), factors of anxiety related to infection (13 items/5-point Likert scale: 1 [not at all] to 5 [very anxious]), and factors of anxiety related to education (7 items/5-point Likert scale: 1 [not at all] to 5 [very anxious]). For the question items regarding infectious-related and education-related anxiety, the researcher downloaded and used the constructed questionnaire of Wakui et. al (2021).

The obtained data will be coded, validated, and analyzed using the statistical treatment of t-test. The questionnaire was completed by 30 teachers who answered all items used for the analysis. The participants' scores for the factors of their infection-related anxiety and educational anxiety were then calculated as follows: responses of "not at all" received 1 point, while responses of "very anxious" received 5 points each. Count data were expressed in terms of the frequency and percentage; measurement data were expressed as the mean \pm SD. A multiple regression analysis employing the stepwise method was used to investigate the factors of infection-related anxiety and education-related al anxiety. The stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed using infection-related anxiety and education-related anxiety as dependent variables, with the reasons for each item used as independent variables. P values of less than 0.05 were considered statistically significant.

III. Results and Discussion

In an analysis of the data of 30 participants excluding the missing data, many teachers reported feeling infection- and education-related anxiety. A majority of the participants were women ($n = 152$, 64.1%), and the mean age of the participants was 39.8 ± 11.3 years. A stepwise multiple regression analysis identified six factors for infection-related anxiety as significant ($R^2 = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$). Among these variables, the largest partial regression coefficient value was reported for the following reason: “I feel anxious because we cannot ensure the safety of teachers themselves or of their families” ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < 0.001$). For educational anxiety, four of six reasons were identified as significant ($R^2 = 0.64$, $p < 0.001$). Among these, “anxiety about the students’ home situations” ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$) and “delay in education (students’ side)” ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$) had stronger associations with anxiety compared to the others.

In-person education during the COVID-19 pandemic has caused teachers to experience anxiety. This report provides useful information by highlighting the reasons for infection-related anxiety and educational anxiety that teachers experience in face-to-face classes during a pandemic. Even if the coverage of a COVID-19 vaccine becomes widespread worldwide, we will still be combating COVID-19 infections for at least a few years. Given concerns regarding such infections, to ensure students’ right to education, it is essential to understand why teachers feel anxious and to determine appropriate measures to decrease such anxiety.

IV. Conclusion

Learners’ effective learning requires not only the self-consciousness and the efforts of the learners themselves, but also the joint efforts of schools, families, and society. However, during the COVID-19 epidemic, or other special periods such as natural disasters or emergency situations, the effective links among school, family, and society were blocked. Then, students could only obtain support from one main aspect rather than all three, which might be the essential reason leading to the education crisis. For example, when students study at home during the epidemic, the responsibility of the family is highlighted, while the function of schools is shut down, which results in students having learning difficulties. Therefore, in order to ensure students’ learning effectiveness during the educational emergency period, the key point is to overcome the problem brought by the interruption caused by emergencies, and strengthen the links among school, family, and society. If one of these three was weakened because of the emergency, the advantages of the other one should be reinforced and it should take responsibility for the missing party, so as to make up for the deficiency. It is also expected that the external power should step in and support the responsible parties to realize the educational function to the greatest extent. The missing party should also try its best to transform and optimize its own function by using suitable technical means.

The class resumption issue investigated in this study is actually a typical example of the joint effect of school - family, and society. After the COVID-19 outbreak, the family became the main place for students to learn during school closure. Therefore, home-based education should fully stimulate its own potential to support students' learning processes, and undertake part of the responsibility of school education. In this situation, parents' supervision and supports, and the relationship between parents and children are important (Xiao & Song, 2020). In a survey conducted in China, more than half of the teachers believed that "parents' participation in online teaching is limited or very poor" (Limbers, 2021). As the main companions of students during the epidemic, parents should not only take the responsibility of "parents," but also play the role of "teachers" and "friends." Therefore, parents' workload also includes setting clear schedules for children, organizing home exercise activities, setting themselves as examples for children, educating children with care and patience, and helping children to monitor and manage themselves effectively. Collaborating with the community and social environment, parents can also hold face-to-face mutual assistance activities in order to create a learning atmosphere similar to schools.

As a major place for education, schools normally take major responsibility for students' learning. However, the school closure during the COVID-19 outbreak blocked the direct link between schools and students, which led to schools losing part of their functions. At this time, schools should take advantage of the Internet to offer online courses, online learning communities, and the other channels to actively provide students with learning supports and a learning atmosphere. If students choose to resume class after the outbreak, schools must take responsibility for strengthening the prevention of the epidemic. For example, teachers and students are organized to go to school and have lunch according to different schedules to reduce public gatherings, school equipment should be cleaned and disinfected frequently, and body temperature detection and identity verification should be routinely performed. In addition, schools should pay attention to various needs (e.g., online learning needs, psychological counseling needs, the desire for peer communication, etc.), and provide sufficient supports accordingly. Many parents felt frustrated when assisting children's learning at home; therefore, schools should also take action to form a good home-school communication and provide suitable guidance for parents either to assist students studying at home or to get used to the new school life.

With respect to the society, every citizen should take responsibility for reducing the risk and help to prevent and control the spread of the epidemic. Public efforts would help to control the epidemic and build up social confidence. Especially in the areas with insufficient government control, the society plays an important role in protecting the children's/youth's mental health status (Kim, 2020). For example, it would be beneficial to call on the public to wear masks consciously, avoid public gatherings, wash hands frequently, and so forth. In addition, it is also suggested to put forward some inclusive measures in education, community health, and social protection settings to support young people's healthy development (Arnové, 2020) and reduce the psychological and emotional harm caused by the epidemic.

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