EDLS 6507 Assignment 4 Mini Research Project Report

Investigating the Impact of COVID-19 on the Effective Delivery of Online Reading

Support: The Perspectives of Elementary School Reading Teachers

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to conduct research on reading teachers' perspectives on delivering online reading support during the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools have been forced to transition from face-to-face to remote learning, all over the world, and this transition was the same for schools in Anguilla. Teaching reading is a complex process that draws upon an extensive knowledge base and repertoire of strategies. Teachers must now deliver instruction remotely, supported by cognitive science, in online environments that they are still learning to navigate. Eighteen reading specialists were purposely and conveniently sampled to collect data, using interviews. Findings articulate that teachers adapted through different techniques, like employing existing learning technologies/platforms or undergoing training to improve technical skills. On the other hand, some teachers found the transition hectic and frustrating. With schools traditionally using face-to-face learning and now becoming vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that additional support is needed for reading teachers engaging in remote learning. This can include revising strategies and standards that govern the use of technology to ensure that the components for effective reading instruction are delivered in the online environment.

Keywords: Reading Support, Teachers' Perspective

Introduction

As the spread of the Novel Coronavirus escalated and became widespread, spewing into a global pandemic, tough yet necessary decisions had to be made for the safety and well-being of individuals in order to slow down and control this deadly plague. Education would no longer be offered in a facility, but a safe mode of educational delivery was introduced.

The Covid-19 pandemic thrust teachers, students and parents alike onto a mode that was old to some, but new to many, better known as online learning. Teachers had to quickly adapt to this new style of planning lessons and teaching while students had to adjust to receiving instruction within the comfort of their homes. Although this is now the "new normal", there is still a need to acknowledge the impact that online learning has on education. This impact is both positive and negative and people had to quickly adapt in order to keep up with the digital world. In Anguilla particularly, on one hand, some viewed this new phenomenon as an opportunity to enhance instruction, while others saw it as a challenge that needed to be overcome. Most teachers were pleased with the kind of responses they received from the government, parents and students, while scores of teachers tried to get a grip of the feeling of fear and anxiety of completing the curriculum while meeting the needs of each child.

Prior to the pandemic, countries in the region were already battling a learning crisis, as it relates to learning gaps, and are trying to improve literacy rates. Initiatives such as pajama nights, storytelling and literacy games were all implemented to bring awareness and stress the importance of literacy across the country. Fast forward to Covid-19, teachers must now use technology creatively, cater to all learning styles digitally, all while providing socio-emotional support and reaching those most at risk of falling behind (Walls, 2021). Although the use of technology allowed flexibility for teachers, the swift transition from in-person to online classes

highlighted the many challenges faced with literacy. These issues came from assorted areas such as inadequate infrastructure, poor quality learning materials, and inadequate digital skills which affected the quality of education. To add to these already dire issues, there was not only a huge gap in educational skills, but a gap was evident between the privileged and disadvantaged, which further affected student performance. As a result, governments quickly realized the need to invest in the world's educators. Initiatives such as professional development courses, online training and online resources were offered to assist teachers in digital literacy and blended learning.

Additionally, to pinpoint critical areas of concern, a Reading Is Fundamental (2021) survey was conducted in February 2021, with the focus being the following:

"Covid-19: Impact on Children's Literacy", with the respondents mainly being teachers (86%). The top three areas of concern for the teachers were: Having access to printed material (60.1%), new ways to motivate students while online (63.5%) and having access to wifi (29%). Educators were well aware of the vast number of digital books available online. However, they noted that younger children benefited greatly from holding books in their hands rather than reading from the screen (Reading Is Fundamental, 2021).

Evidently, we see how school closures have and continue to take a toll on student learning. The repercussions for every child as it relates to learning will be felt for years to come. Many researchers have explored and are continuing to explore the challenges and future of online education. So what is the impact of Covid 19 and the effective delivery of reading support? Lack of devices, poor internet connection, lack of communication, and the absence of parental support are just a few of the disadvantages online learning brought about. Teachers are not truly reflecting on students' actual work capabilities, so they are slipping through the cracks.

Although there were negative impacts, there were also positive impacts as well. Teachers got to sharpen their skills and unwrap their creativity, companies allowed their online apps to be free and accessible to all, and overall, learning became fun. We can all agree that this paradigm shift took us from our comfort zones and brought about new rules and meanings to everything in almost every capacity.

<div align="center">**Literature Review**</div>

Fairly recent, evidence on the impact of fully moving instruction to the online learning platform has not been well documented in Anguilla. Globally, researchers have started to investigate the impact that the pandemic has had on the educational industry. In a Canadian context, Dahwan (2020) recognized that e-learning supported use of customized teaching and learning methods and procedures (p. 13). Similarly, Alolaywi (2021) found that the online learning environment created room for innovative ways to deliver instruction (p. 2028). Perhaps, the abundance of methodologies and tools available in the online learning environment may empower teachers with new ways to meet learners' literacy needs. Conversely, scores of teachers have trouble selecting appropriate methods for the online context (Dahwan, 2020, p. 15). Here, teachers show the need to grow in their abilities to select modalities that are suited for their learner context.

Of note, Anguilla is one of the nations that have adopted the Reading Recovery programme and has therefore subscribed to its standards. The Reading Recovery programme helps underperforming Grade 1 students who meet participation criteria gain critical reading and writing skills (Reading Recovery Council of North America, 2018, p. 1). While the programme's overall standards are noteworthy, Dahwan (2020) found that there were inadequate standards regulating e-learning resources and content delivery during the 2020 phase of the global

pandemic (p. 16). This begs the question of whether or not the Reading Recovery and Remedial

Reading programmes, on Anguilla were packaged appropriately for struggling readers.

Furthermore, Munoz-Martin & Gonzalez-Moncada (2010) illustrated and posited that teaching

an online reading comprehension course requires English First Language teachers to embrace

and assume new roles (p. 82). Clearly, there is a need for teachers' adaptation of skills for the

online context.

Equally important, the impact of the pandemic on students was examined. Varying

student academic abilities, technical abilities, confidence levels, learning preferences and

distractions were among identified strengths, weaknesses and challenges to learning in an online

learning context (Dahwon, 2020, pp. 14-15). Additionally, Alowayi (2021) found that the

majority of teachers felt that many students did not understand lectures and struggled with online

learning (p. 2028). While these disparities in experience and learning performance surfaced,

there is more to learn about why they emerged.

Among the vast majority of students that grapple with reading and learning challenges,

children with autism are one of the known populations that are highly susceptible. Accordingly,

scores of empirical approaches have been employed to aid their learning reception. In like

manner, Grindle et al. (2020) used an online Computer Aided Instructional programme

intervention that facilitated improvements in autistic children's reading comprehension skills (p.

9). Here, it would seem that the online environment shows promise for the development of core

reading skills, even among cognitively challenged learners.

Researchers and educators have yet to explore multiple interventions that may improve

the abilities of struggling readers. Having roots in evidence-based literacy instruction, Internet

Guided Reading is a pedagogical best practice approach that employs guided reading, reciprocal

teaching and online reading comprehension instruction (Salyer, 2015, p. 35). Within a COVID-19 online learning context, the same may be facilitated through synchronous and asynchronous activities. Also, in their study, Krishan et al. (2020) found that students found free online learning materials integral for developing their English language competency as the same developed their grammar, reading and writing abilities (p. 9). Fundamental to these two online instructional strategies is the scaffolding technique which has been endorsed by psychologists Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner. Notably, Shaw (2019) encourages teachers delivering instruction online to integrate scaffolding into the design of the course as learners who may need the support may not solicit said support.

When comparing face-to-face instruction with online learning, both teachers and students may note apparent differences in their learning environment. For example, the quality and efficiency of teacher-to-learner interactions may be hampered when teaching online (Dahwan, 2020, p. 12). Time, physical and technical barriers may contribute to this finding. In a study, teachers reported that increased lesson preparation time and technical barriers were among perceived differences and disadvantages for teaching in the online learning environment (Alolaywi, 2021, p. 2037). Perhaps, teachers' experience and readers' outcomes may be linked to perceived differences between traditional and non-traditional learning environments.

Research Design and Methodology

Study Population and Sample

The study was conducted among government elementary school reading teacher specialists in Anguilla. Approximately 18 teachers between the ages of 18-60 years make up this population (personal communication, December 4 2021, Participant A). With a small population of reading specialists on the island, the sample selected included teachers who had technical

knowledge and expertise on the matter, had at least two years experience teaching reading and delivered reading instruction online during the COVID-19 pandemic. Here, seven female teachers, each working at a different elementary school, were selected conveniently to make up the study's sample. They were middle-class women prepared minimally at the Associate level and maximally at the Baccalaureate level. Four teachers were trained Reading Recovery teachers while three teachers were Remedial Reading teachers trained in Literacy Instruction. Each of these teachers had variable years of experience teaching reading while none of these teachers had any experience teaching online prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Perspective and Design

The study proposes to determine the impact of COVID-19 on the effective delivery of online reading support. Therefore, a descriptive qualitative approach was employed to capture the authentic experiences, views and concerns of the elementary reading teachers. Gay, Mills & Airasan (2008) explains that the qualitative researcher's primary objective is to capture the human meaning of social life as it is lived, experienced and understood by the research participants. Not only is a qualitative inquiry interpretive, experimental, situational and personalistic, the information retrieved provides details to the questions asked (Stake, 2010, p. 14). The study adds value to the growing body of literature by presenting the issue as comprehensively as possible.

Research Questions:

1. What effect did the COVID-19 Pandemic have on struggling readers?

2. What teacher and student factors supported or hindered the transition to teaching reading in the online environment?

3. What are the most effective online strategies to assist struggling learners/ readers during the pandemic?

4. What are the perceived main differences between face-to-face and digital social interactions in education?

5. Were reading recovery standards maintained online?

Instrument

The instrument which was used for the collection of data for this study were interviews. Interviews were chosen because of their ability to collect a rich source of information from a small number of people with room for probing, seeking clarification and asking additional information (McLeod, 2014). The interview schedule comprised three closed-ended questions assessing demographic data and **eight** open-ended questions assessing the thoughts, feelings and experiences of reading specialists teaching students reading online during the COVID-19 pandemic. The use of interviews allowed researchers to learn about how reading teachers were able to assist struggling readers in an online environment because they were able to share their instructional methods, stories and practices with the researchers.

Data Collection

Primary data was collected by carrying out telephone interviews with the sample's reading specialists who consented to participate given the study's terms and conditions (see Appendix B). Here, the researchers conducted interviews over a period of 5 days at a rate of 2 fifteen-minute interviews per day. Telephone responses for each participant were recorded, transcribed via voice-to-text technology and entered onto electronic Google Forms. Said form supported the organized upload of data captured. Preliminary data analysis codes were assigned to help subsequent interpretation and analysis.

Secondary data collection is supplementary to the above method. There was extant data review of:

- UNESCO Five Year Reading Development Plan for Anguilla
- Ministry and Department of Education Trained Reading Recovery Teacher Cohort List

Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity, several strategies were implemented, namely, triangulation, negative case analysis and transferability. In regards to triangulation, while engaging in this study, the team of researchers used different sources as evidenced in the literature review and structured interviews to present substantiating data. As the study advanced, the negative case analysis strategy was utilized whereby the research questions were developed and refined by the team. Furthermore, transferability was addressed by providing descriptions of reading specialists so that readers would have the opportunity to transfer information to other research settings or to determine whether or not they can be transferred.

Reliability was considered throughout the research. The given time span for the research and the availability of participants and researchers made it challenging to implement the test-retest reliability and the alternate forms reliability strategies. However, to ensure that responses were reliable and accurate, the researchers used the internal consistency strategy; this was done informally; participants' answers were compared to see if there was any correlation. This method was chosen due to the sample population size for the study. If the population size was bigger, Cronbach's Alpha would have been used.

The most appropriate method to validate the data was through a comparison of similar tests. Using construct validity, the analysis of data collected during primary and secondary research represents the variables the research intended to. The consistency demonstrates high similarities between comparable studies. Furthermore, responses were compared with the findings of similar studies.

Data Analysis Procedure

The researchers made use of Google Form Analytics to track Google Form submissions. Responses were accessed in the Forms and stored and organized using Google Sheets. However, no data that personally identified individuals in the study sample was stored.

The demographic data were subsequently categorized. Then, data analysis on respondents' data was conducted in the descriptive data analysis perspective to determine frequency distribution and percentage. This data was visually represented in charts and graphs as tables. Descriptive statistics provide basic information about variables in a dataset and highlight potential relationships (Lee et al., 1999).

Analysis of the eight interview questions was done using the grounded theory qualitative approach. This allowed researchers to develop codes to represent identified themes while examining the teacher perspective of delivering reading support remotely. The coded data was further narrowed into three or four themes to better apply frequencies. These themes were linked to the raw data collected as summary markers for later analysis. Thereafter, researchers examined the important findings that are also seen in literature. Thematic analyses allow for

greater reliability as more interpretation goes into defining the data items and maintains rigor

strategies for monitoring when working in teams with multiple analysts (Guest et al., 2011).

Evaluation of Findings

Analysis of Demographic Data

Table 1

Descriptive Data on Reading Teachers' Gender

Sex	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	0	0
Female	7	100
Prefer not to say	0	0

Table 2

Descriptive Data on Reading Teachers' Ages

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18 - 25	1	14.3
26 - 35	1	14.3
36 - 45	2	28.6
46 - 55	2	28.6
55 and above	1	14.3

Table 3

Descriptive Data on the Types of Learners Reading Teachers Teach

Types of Learners Taught	Frequency	Percentage (%)
English as 1st language	2	28.6
English as 2nd language	0	0
Both	5	71.4

Table 4

Descriptive Data on Reading Teachers' Employment Sector

Employment	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Public Institution (Government)	7	100
Private Institution (Private School)	0	0
Entrepreneur (example: Tutoring services)	0	0

The tables show the demographic data of participants: 7 (representing 100%) of the respondents were female; 1 of the respondents was between 18 - 25, 26 - 35 and 55 and over, respectively, and 2 of the respondents were between 36 - 45 and 46 - 55 per group. In addition, 5 (representing 71%) of the respondents teach English both as a first and second language while 2 (representing 28%) only teach English as a first language. Finally, all respondents were public school teachers.

Analysis of Research Questions

Questions five, seven, nine and ten were based on the frequency of a theme being mentioned in the interviewees' responses. All other findings were themed based on the interviewees perspective.

Interview Question 5

Findings: Two interviewees indicated that both teachers and the Department of Education were responsible for selecting the online digital reading programmes. One interviewee indicated that the Head of Department is responsible, while most interviewees indicated that teachers were primarily responsible (see Table 5).

Table 5

Responses to Interview Question 5

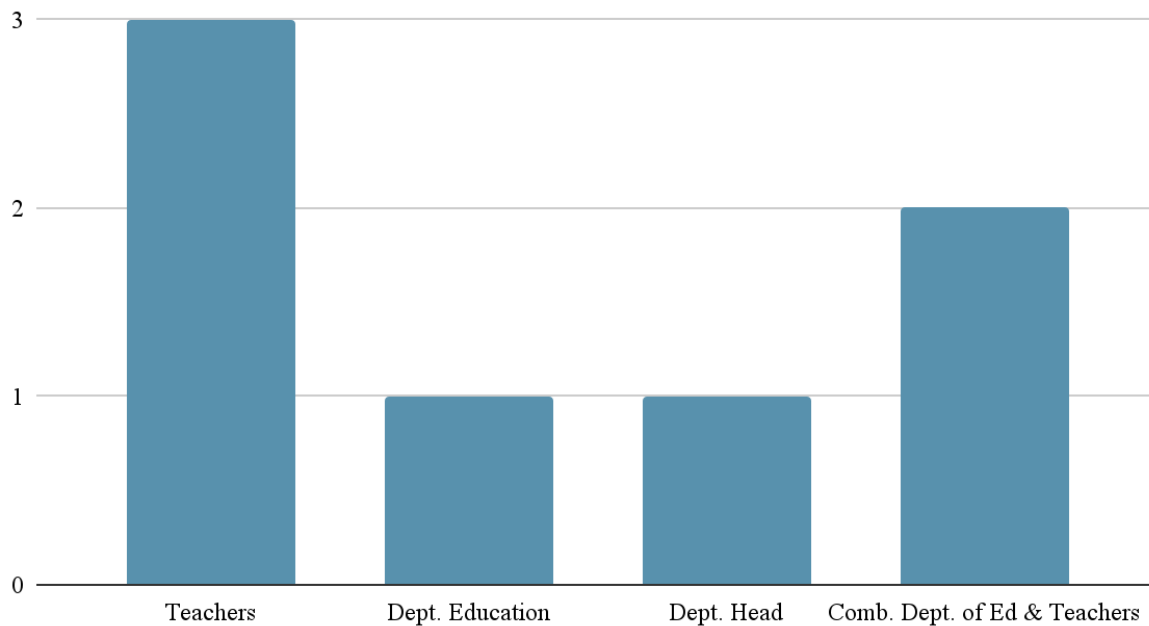| Question	Thematic - Coding	Frequency	Percentage %
Who selects the primary digital/online reading	Teachers	5	56

programmes and materials that teachers in your school use to teach students how to read during remote learning?			
	Examining Body or Department of Education	3	33
	School (Head of Department)	1	11

Analysis of findings: Elementary school teachers lead on the selection of online reading programmes and materials with the guidance of the Department of Education (see Figure 1). While teachers adhered to standards set by the Education Department and the Reading Recovery programme (for first-grade classes), it is unclear if e-learning standards were upheld. Adina (2007) illustrates that teaching content loses its usefulness provided it does not adhere to specific standards such as e-learning standards (p. 90). Clearly, there seems to be a link between the utility of online learning content and subscribing to e-learning conventions.

Figure 1

Teachers' Responses to who Selects Online Reading Materials and Programmes

Responses to who select online reading material

Interview Question 6

Findings: Two participants shared that they are still adapting to online reading support. Three indicated that they adapted with support, while the remaining two participants shared that they adapted with little difficulty (see Table 6).
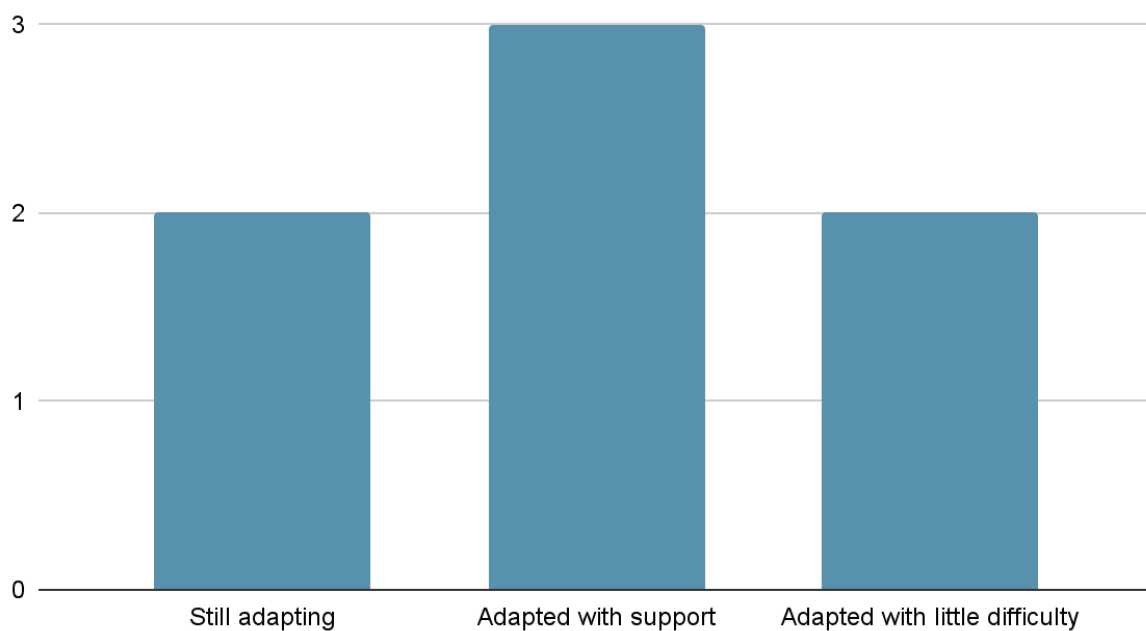
Table 6

Responses to Interview Question 6

Question	Thematic - Coding	Frequency	Percentage %
How did you adapt to providing reading support online?	Still adapting	2	28.6
	Adapted with support	3	42.9
	Adapted with little difficulty	2	28.6

Analysis of findings: Though many of the interviewees were new to online teaching, they adapted to providing online support with ease, with assistance and some are still adapting. Literature also supports this trend in other major institutions around the world (see Figure 2). Similarly, Alolaywi (2021) found that educators possessed the competence to adapt to using tools for online learning in their setting (p. 2038).

Figure 2

Teachers' Responses to their Ability to Adapt to Proving Online Support

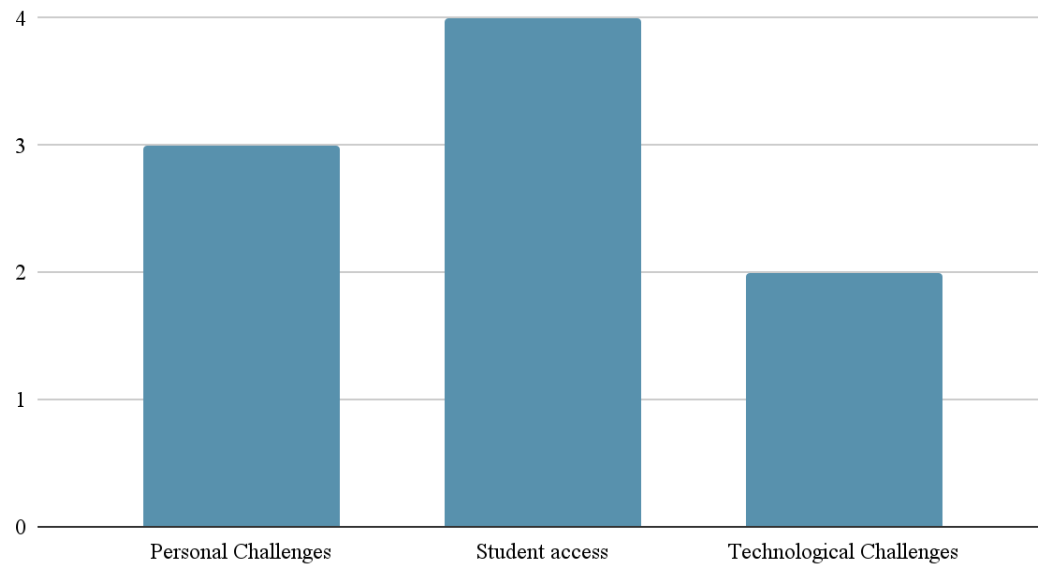How teachers adpated to providing online support

Interview Question 7

Findings: Six interviewees mentioned that engaging their learners was one of the most challenging tasks in the online environment. Reasons provided include a lack of devices, difficulty accessing the internet, parental support, and inability to provide physical support. In addition, two interviewees mentioned they had personal obstacles, especially in the beginning.

Table 7

Responses to Interview Question 7

Question	Thematic-Coding	Frequency	Percentage %
How did the COVID-19 mitigation measures impact your ability to function online?	Personal Challenges	3	33
	Student access	4	44
	Technological Challenges	2	22

Analysis of findings: Most interviewees were more concerned with their learners receiving the content. COVID-19 mitigation measures such as lockdowns, restriction of movement did not seem to affect them in the long run. They initially faced difficulty adjusting to the mitigation measures but seemed to have adjusted and shifted focus on getting required content to their learners in the best possible way. (see Figure 3)

Figure 3

Areas that Impact Reading Teachers

Impact of COVID-19 mitigation Measures

Interview Question 8

Findings: Two interviewees indicated that online reading standards were low, one stated that it was average, two stated that it was the same as online, and two shared that provisions were made for students (see Table 8).
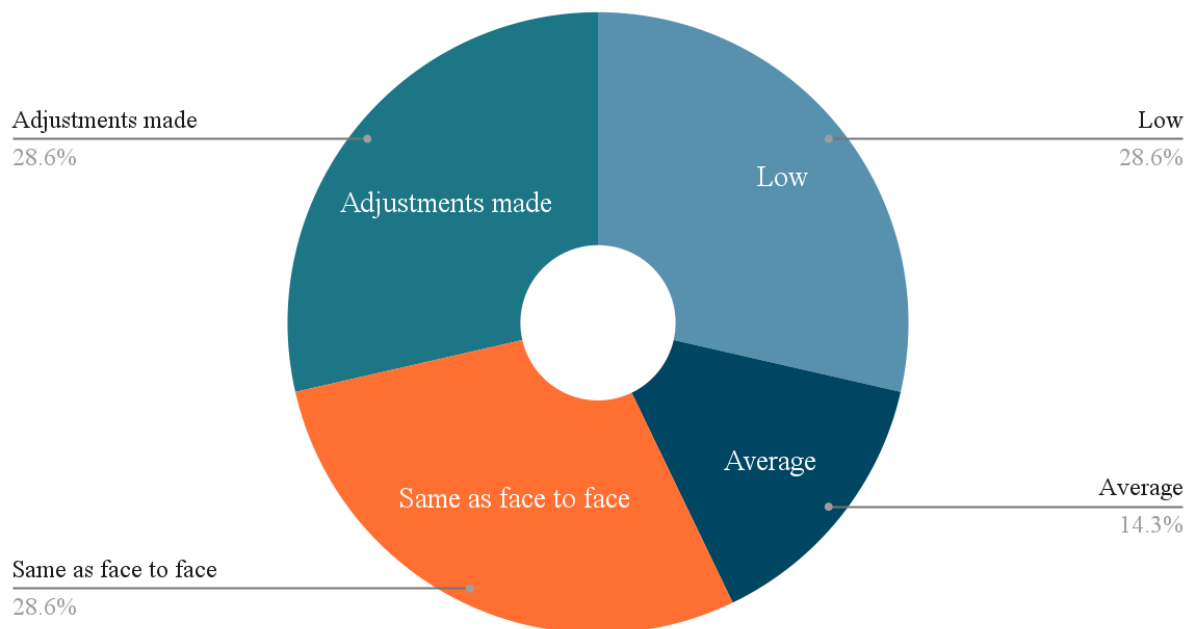
Table 8

Responses to Interview Question 8

Question	Thematic-Coding	Frequency	Percentage
	Low	2	29

What were the reading standards like online?			
	Average	1	14
	Same as face to face	2	29
	Adjustments made	2	29

Analysis of findings: Teachers shared different perspectives about online reading standards. Switching from physical to online classes required that teachers make appropriate provisions for students and conduct pre and post-tests to monitor standards. There is no way to confirm if the Department of Education standardized the adjustments. This is in tandem with the observations made by Dahwan (2020), who found that there were inadequate standards governing e-learning content (p. 16). (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Standards of Online Reading

Standards of Online reading

Interview Question 9

Findings: There were both benefits and drawbacks that all interviewees mentioned.In

relation to the benefits, three persons alluded to the number of available resources that can be

found online, one person spoke about the amount of tasks that can be completed, one person

highlighted the incorporation of the multiple intelligences and one person spoke to the comfort

levels of children while working at home. On the other hand, as it relates to the drawbacks, three

persons spoke about the lack of teacher/student interaction, four persons commented on the

frustration levels experienced by students, two persons highlighted inaccessibility to devices, two

persons said that lack of time for lessons/activities was an issue. Two persons said online work is

not a true reflection of what the child can do, seeing that the parents/guardians assist (see Table

9).

Table 9

Responses to Interview Question 9

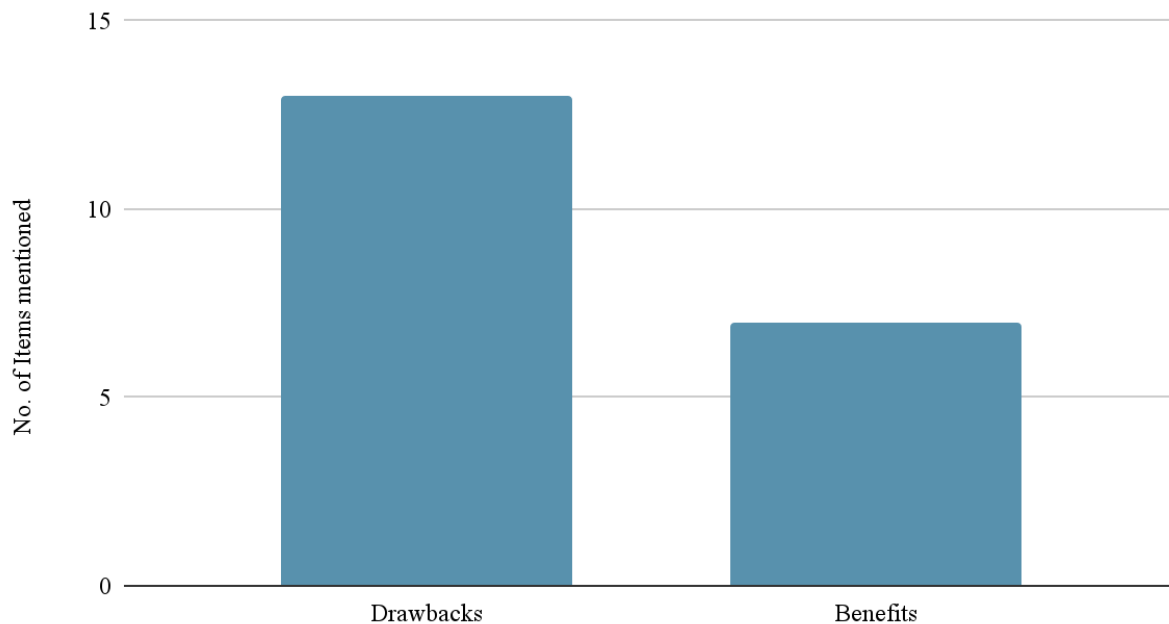| Question	Thematic-Coding	Frequency	Percentage
What do you consider as benefits and drawbacks of supporting struggling readers in the online environment?	Benefits		
	Resources	3	49
	More time for reading	1	17
	Learning styles	1	17
	Comfort	1	17
	Drawback		
	Teacher /Student Interaction	3	24
	Frustration	4	31
	Inaccessibility to devices/internet	2	15

	Not enough time	2	15
	Not a true reflection of the child's work	2	15

Analysis of findings: As with most teaching methods, online learning has its own set of positive and negative outcomes. While teachers are still grappling with the many challenges faced, they are still simultaneously achieving intended learning outcomes. However, the negative responses seem to outweigh the responses as it relates to the effects of online learning (see Figure 5). In like manner, Alolaywi (2021) found that most teachers observed a positive change in students' achievement when teaching online (p. 2035).

Figure 5

Drawback vs Benefits Mentioned by Interviewees

Drawbacks Vs. Benefits

Interview Question 10

Findings: Based on the data given, when asked to state differences, although there were a few positives, the differences mostly spoke to online learning in a negative view. About three persons spoke to the fact that the results yielded in students' work cannot be proven to be the child's actual work, so the grades may not be a true reflection of what the child can do. Two persons spoke to teacher/student interaction and communication is limited. One person spoke about technological issues, and only one spoke on a positive standpoint stating that online learning allows fun learning by using the various online apps (see Table 10).

Table 10

Responses to Interview Question 10

Question	Thematic-Code	Frequency	Percentage
How do you perceive the main differences between face to face and online learning?	Face to Face		
	Accuracy in grades	3	50
	Physical contact/Interaction	2	33
	Valid Assessments	1	17
	Online		
	Social Lack	2	33
	Availability of apps	1	17
	Technical issues	1	17
	Limited communication	2	33

Analysis of findings: While online instruction is becoming increasingly popular, many people still prefer in-person instruction. There is no right or wrong mode because what suits one person may not suit the other. However, as it relates to education, the differences were positive but mostly negative. Face-to-face instruction seems to add more meaning and value than online learning could but it can still add some value for effective lessons.

Interview Question 11

Findings: There were two mentions that online and traditional education will work well together and that online should not/will not be the successor. Other interviewees were in favor of online becoming the successor due to the global shift. However, two persons disagreed with online becoming the successor and believed children are struggling academically and socially online (see Table 11).
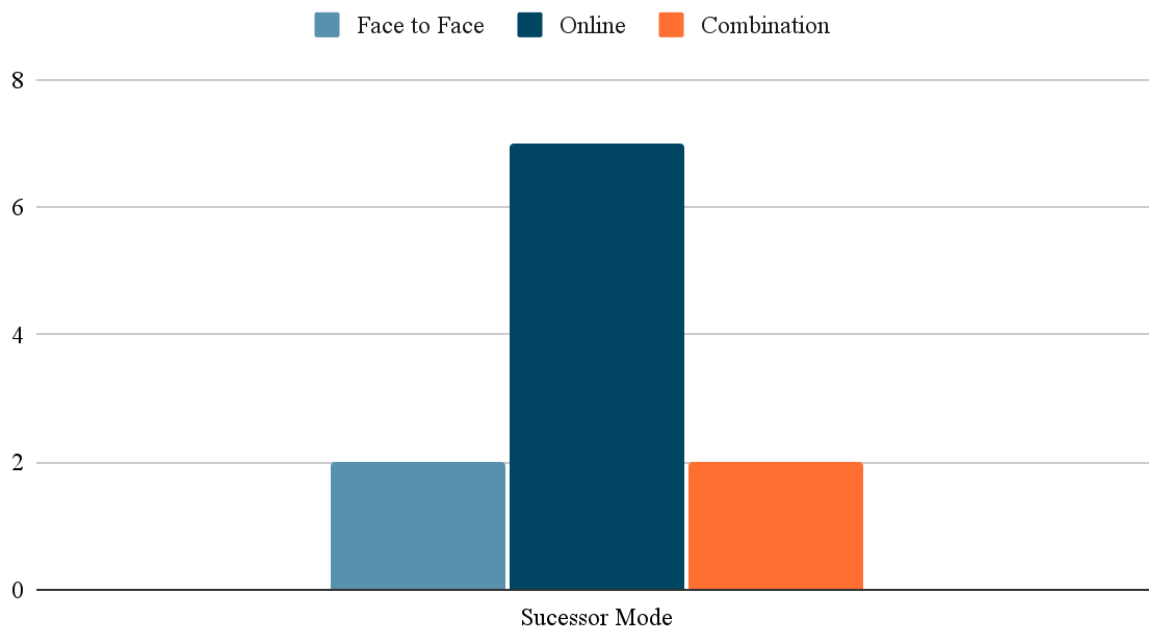
Table 11

Responses to Interview Question 11

Question	Thematic Code	Frequency	Percentage
In what way would you imagine online learning as the successor to traditional education	Online	6	60
	Traditional	2	20
	Both	2	20

Analysis of findings: The majority of the interviewees felt that using advanced reading contextualized online programmes, sites and software would improve their standards of delivering online reading support. This is reflected in Dahwan (2020) discussion, which recognizes the varied support which e-learning can provide to traditional face-to-face strategies. Additionally, interviewers recognized the need to make teaching sessions more interactive and engaging. While interviewees acknowledged that creating engaging lessons supported that appropriate reading pedagogy is essential, they admitted that instruction should also be more student-focused and that reading teacher would benefit from additional online training and development. (see Figure 6)

Figure 6

Success Prediction of Online Learning

Sucess prediction of online learning

Interview Question 12

Findings: There were three mentions of using interactive sites and programmes to deliver reading support. Additionally, two interviewees mentioned that there would be more engagement during synchronous sessions. Two respondents mentioned a need for a more student-focused approach and personal support. Finally, four respondents listed reading support programmes and sites to enhance teaching and learning. Some examples of programmes and sites were: The Leading Digital Reading Library for Kids, Epic, Seesaw, Reading Theory and Readworks.

Table 12

Responses to Interview Question 12

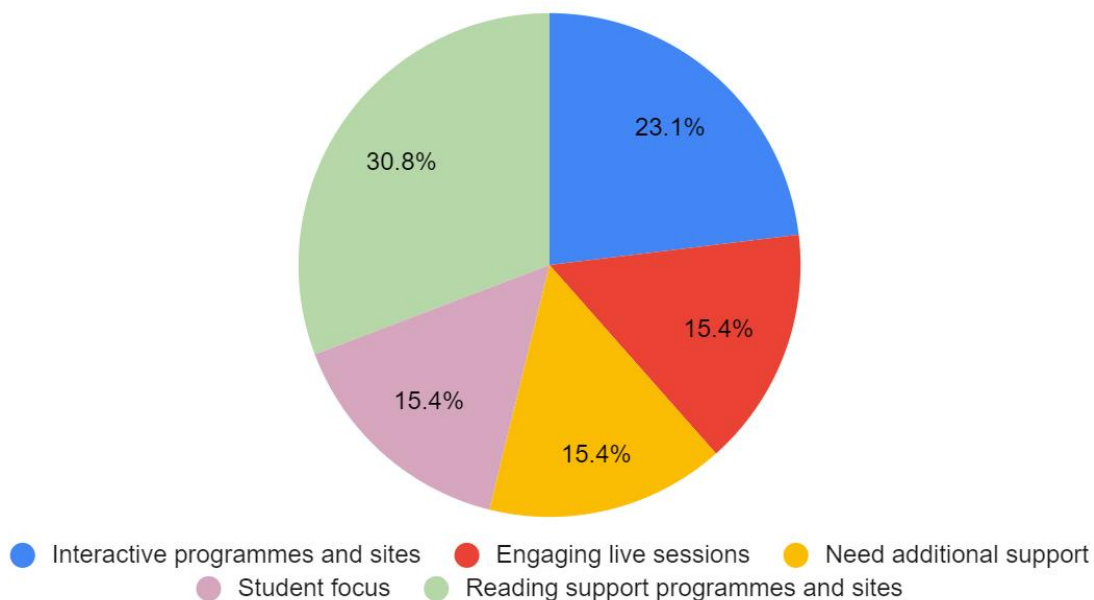| Question	Thematic - Coding	Frequency	Percentage %
We may be continuing formal education online for a while, what would you use/do to improve reading instruction for your struggling readers in the online environment?	Interactive programmes and sites	3	23
	Engaging live sessions	2	15
	Need additional support	2	15
	Student focus	2	15
	Reading support programmes and sites	4	31

Analysis of findings: Most of the interviewees felt that using advanced reading 'contextualized' online programmes, sites, and software will improve their standards of delivering online reading support. The need to make the teaching session more interactive and engaging

came out strongly in the results. A couple mentions of being more student-focused and the need

for additional online training and development was also presented in the findings (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Recommendations to Improve the Delivery of Remote Reading Instructions by Interviewees

Recommendations to Improve Delivery of Remote Reading
Instruction

- ● Interactive programmes and sites ● Engaging live sessions ● Need additional support
- ● Student focus ● Reading support programmes and sites

Pie chart values: 23.1%, 15.4%, 15.4%, 15.4%, 30.8%

Conclusion and Recommendations

A thorough evaluation of the study's findings shows that Anguillian reading teachers

have had positive and negative experiences teaching reading in the online environment.

Literature and experience demonstrate that a person's life quality can be enhanced significantly

by his literacy level. To facilitate the transition from face-to-face to online learning while

allowing reading recovery and remedial reading teachers to deliver effective reading instruction still, the following recommendations can be considered:

- Professional development training for teachers in the use of digital tools. Teachers can also team-teach by partnering with colleagues to practice and advance knowledge and comfort with new forms for digital instruction. This includes collaboration in planning and implementing selected lessons.

- Teachers can take advantage of new technologies which have already demonstrated usefulness for supporting students with learning difficulties.

- Careful examination of pitfalls of rapid change in the ways of remote learning and teaching students with difficulties may help develop new effective teaching methods at school.

- Psychosocial support groups for teachers. Employers offer support for the well-being of the teacher as needed. Teachers' expectations for gains in learning by students in the most vulnerable economic and social circumstances are naturally influenced by "normal" face-to-face expectations. The inability to achieve those gains as accustomed may result in feelings of inadequacy. Support groups can help teachers share information about their lives through personal narratives.

The study is not without its limitations. For example, the study's participants were not homogenous in terms of years of teaching experience, technological expertise and grade levels taught. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to other contexts. Nevertheless, findings of this study are noteworthy for the planning and development of an effective reading programme in an online learning environment.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics in research is important, and ensures that the study is conducted appropriately (Babbie & Mouton, 2000). According to Bryman & Bell (2007), there are ten principles of ethical considerations which must be adhered to because ethics are important to research. Without it, research may be doomed to fail. Therefore, the researchers vow to uphold these principles by incorporating the following ethical guidelines when conducting our research.

Researchers sought permission from the teachers to conduct the study. There will be voluntary participation of respondents. All participants provided verbal consent that they were willing to participate in the study and selected yes on the interview form. Next, the use of offensive, discriminatory, or other unacceptable language was avoided in the formulation of interview questions. Privacy and anonymity of respondents were kept. Additionally, researchers acknowledged the works of other authors used in any part of the research project using the APA referencing system. Furthermore, researchers maintained the highest level of objectivity in discussions and analyses made throughout the research.

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Appendix A

Investigating the Impact of COVID-19 on the Effective Delivery of Online Reading Support: The Perspectives of Elementary School Reading Teachers

Consent to Take Part in Research

- I……………………………………… voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.

- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

- I understand that participation involves *sharing your opinion and experiences on providing reading support for students online during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.

- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted *in the research project paper in fulfillment of the researchers' EDLS6507 course at the U.W.I Open Campus.*

- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.

- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained *with the researchers* until the research project *has been graded*.

- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for *one month.*

- I understand that under freedom of information legalization I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Signature of research participant

--   ---------------

Signature of participant   Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

--   ----------------------

Signature of researcher   Date

Appendix B

Interview

Survey Cover Letter

November 29, 2021

Dear Participant

We are a group of graduate students at University of the West Indies Open Campus. As part of our EDLS6507 Research Methods course requirements, we are investigating the impact of COVID-19 on the Effective Delivery of Online Reading Support: The Perspective of Elementary Reading Teachers. Since you are an elementary reading teacher/specialist, we are inviting you to participate in this research study by completing the attached survey.

The following questionnaire will require approximately 15 minutes to complete. There is no compensation for responding nor is there any known risk. You are assured that responses will remain confidential and anonymous. Besides the researcher, no one will know your individual responses. Copies of the final project will be provided to my U.W.I instructor. If you choose to participate in this project, please answer all questions as honestly as possible.

Participation is strictly voluntary and you may refuse to participate at any time. Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my educational endeavors as the data collected will provide useful information. Completion and submission will indicate your willingness to participate in this

study. If you require additional information or have questions, please contact me at the number listed below.

For any questions or additional information, feel free to contact me at the information details listed below. If for any reason that you are not pleased with the manner in which this interview is conducted, feel free to contact our Course Instructor, Dr. Pamela Dottin, at the information provided below.

We express sincere gratitude for your participation and time in completing this survey towards our educational endeavours.

Sincerely

The researchers

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Participant Consent (see Appendix A)

[ ] I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

[ ] No I do not wish to participate

Interview Questions

Complete this interview by responding to the attached questions posed. This interview has a total of 12 questions.

 1. Age

[ ] 18 – 25   [ ] 26 – 35   [ ] 36 – 45   [ ] 46 – 55   [ ] 56 and above

2. Sex

[ ] Male   [ ] Female   [ ] I prefer not to say   [ ] Other

3. Type of learners you teach

Select ALL that applies to you

[ ] English as first language

[ ] English as second language

4. Where do you work?

Select ALL that applies to you

[ ] Public institution (Government)

[ ] Private institution (Private School)

[ ] Entrepreneur (example: Tutoring services)

5. Who selects the primary digital/online reading programs and materials that teachers in your

school use to teach students how to read during remote learning?

6. How did you adapt to providing reading support online?

7. How did the COVID-19 mitigation measures impact your ability to function online?

8. What were the reading standards like online?

9. What do you consider as benefits and drawbacks of supporting struggling readers in the online

environment?

10. How do you perceive the main differences between face-to-face and digital social

interactions in education?

11. In what way would you imagine online learning as the successor to traditional education?

12. We may be continuing formal education online for a while, what would you use/do to

improve reading instruction for your struggling readers in the online environment?

Online link to questionnaire:

https://forms.gle/URhedAZ7y1NsMN5F9

Appendix C

Interview Question Responses

1. Who selects the primary digital/online reading programs and materials that teachers in your school use to teach students how to read during remote learning?

- Individual teachers, based on the level at which students may be found. However, those materials would still be in line with the standard from the education department and curriculum faculty (101)

- The class teachers would use online reading programs that are research-based and grade-appropriate. (102)

- Combination of Department and Teachers (103)

- Department of Education (104)

- The Teacher selects the Primary Digital/Online reading programs and materials. (105)

- At our school, there are no set reading platforms. Teachers are free to use any platform they choose. However, as a part-time reading recovery teacher, we selected a platform called literacy footprints that is paid for and used by the students we teach. (106)

- Our Reading Recovery leader chose the platform that we use (107)

2. How did you adapt to providing reading support online?

- I am still currently in the phase of adopting as there are times when the situation gets frustrating. (101)

- By using the Coping, Adapting and Transferring (CAT) framework realizing that online is our new normal. So it was easy for me. Additionally, I had to educate and encourage my students and parents to do the same. (102)

- A bit hectic at first but with constant research it adapted smoothly. (103)

- I found suitable reading programs online to suit the needs of my students/set clear expectations/created a schedule that accommodated my time and students' time. (104)

- I adapted fine, though challenging at times. (105)

- This process is still ongoing in terms of adapting. There are pros and cons. Due to the strategies we use as reading recovery teachers the online teaching is quite difficult in helping students achieve these strategies. (106)

- I did a training to learn the features of the platform first (107)

3. How did the COVID-19 mitigation measures impact your ability to function online?

- Covid- 19 has caused a lot of changes for me. For one example, being on the lookout for another lockdown hence having to teach using blended learning which can be quite hectic. (101)

- It was challenging at first. Especially having to deal with the situation of some students not having devices and internet access. Also, it was frustrating for parents who are working during the day to ensure that their child was attending their online reading class. (102)

- It was challenging to function online because some students did not have access to devices and internet congestion caused the flow of remote learning to move slowly or not at all. (103)

- Remote teaching impedes my ability to teach and to give valid assessments of my students' reading development. It was also a stressful experience having to navigate the online platform with limited technological skills. Additionally, there was poor student attendance due to a lack of devices and internet service. (104)

- I had many concerns mainly regarding students who were unable to access the platform due to several challenges. Also, it posed a lot of pressure on Special Needs students who need more face-to-face interactions, rather than online. (105)

- Teaching remotely has posed some major difficulties but it has also called for teachers to be creative in administering the content. While I am familiar with the various platforms, keeping the students' interest and attention daily can be quite a task. If you aren't tech savvy this will be a difficult teaching and learning process. (106)

- At first it was not easy. It's much better now even though I don't feel accomplished at the end of my reading sessions (107)

4. What were the reading recovery standards like online?

- Due to the nature of being online, standards were dropped to a lower state. (101)

- It was the same as face-to-face learning. It's just that in order to assess students, it was necessary to have one-on-one reading sessions using the same standardized assessment tools/instruments for reading.   (102)

- The standards aimed at "no child left behind" by conducting pretests and post-tests to determine students' weaknesses and strengths and engage in activities that will aid in developing their overall reading abilities. (103)

- Not much engagement; however, teachers did make provisions for students who required the basic support in reading. (104)

- Students were given Google Classroom platform and Zoom meetings. The students had assignments which they did online and returned online to be graded.. (105)

- The students that came in for the new year were very low in terms of their actual ages and reading ages. They dealt with COVID-19 in the previous grade and as a result this 0impacted the wealth of knowledge students at that age would normally enter with. (106)

- They were average (107)

5. What do you consider as benefits and drawbacks of supporting struggling readers in the online environment?

- I must say the struggles outweighed the benefits mainly because we were never created to learn in remote areas, especially for children whose brains have not yet fully developed. They need that physical contact to learn. The online environment creates more frustration for younger children who are already struggling to read. Hence, the reason why even though we are in remote learning we still try to find ways to connect with students who are frustrated at home. (101)

- In my opinion benefits include 1. Setting one-on-one time that works for the student and their parents. 2. Using online apps makes it faster and more accurate. 3. Students are more comfortable reading at home with their parents rather than being with peers who may make fun of them. 4. Get more reading tasks done online.

  Drawbacks - 1. Less teacher-to-student interaction. 2. Parents may complete the task for the students instead of allowing them to do it themselves. 3. Students get frustrated when

the internet is not working . 4. Instruction period is cut short because some students may

not have the endurance to stay online for the allotted time. (102)

- Benefits included the vast number of links, videos and activities to support reading

  objectives or outcomes. Drawbacks included students not having access to devices, or the

  internet. Lack of parental guidance to monitor online discipline and internet congestion

  that caused slow or poor connections. (103)

- Benefits- resources are more accessible and retrievable to support reading/exposure to a

  wider range of reading materials on the online platform to cater to the various learners/it

  has the potential to be more engaging and interactive for the students.

  Drawbacks- inaccessibility to devices and internet service/ it does not reflect students true

  reading abilities since majority receive support from adults/ some do not take the e-learning

  platform seriously. (104)"

- The benefits online classes provide are: flexibility to incorporate multiple learning styles

  that benefit integrated learning. Also students have more flexibility to learn at their own

  pace. Students are able to better use their computer skills while learning. They are able to

  build self-confidence, self-knowledge and become more responsible for their own learning.

  The drawbacks, however, are: students can become discouraged due to low self motivation

  and easily fall behind. They can encounter internet connection challenges which can pose

  problems, making the learning process difficult. Students may feel alone at times missing

  their peers and teachers and become discouraged. Home distractions are major problems

  faced by students during online classes. Lack of verbal communication with their teachers

  can become very challenging for students. (105)"

- Major benefits of supporting struggling readers:

  -They are actively and constantly engaged so the reading is becoming more fluent and accuracy is increasing.

  -Ongoing support where they aren't being left alone to struggle further.

  -Needs are being catered to in some form.

  Drawbacks

  -The online support is not ideal as some students learn through different ways...visual, audiovisual, kinesthetic etc.

  -Access to devices

  -Access to internet (106)

- The drawbacks are that the beginners in reading who need to manipulate letters don't get that opportunity. The advantage is that the readers get a variety of multiple book levels and genres (107)

6. How do you perceive the main differences between face-to-face and digital social interactions in education?

- The difference between the two is quite visible as with face-to-face referring to physical contact with each other and being close which helps to mould children and give teachers a sense of purpose. As with digital interaction, more effort is being exerted to ensure that meaningful, worthwhile, connections are made and maintained. (101)

- Apart from the regular social interaction, I do not see online learning/interaction so different. Teachers can use digital programmes and apps etc to motivate, teach and make learning fun (102)

- The main differences between the two are:

  1. Challenges regarding students' motivation & discipline.

  2. Real-time interaction Vs asynchronous learning.

  3. Online learning is easier with interactive platforms.

  4. Online students depend heavily on guidance and communication. One of the biggest challenges of online learning is, unfortunately, the common lack of guidance, communication, and support from the tutors. The physical classroom allows you to interact with your students before and after class and answer any questions they might have, but online your students can feel like they are unable to reach you outside of the digital classroom. (103)

- With face-to-face modality of learning, one gets to see the students true reading level and there is more direct structured time spent on engaging students in reading activities. Also, face-to-face provides a more valid assessment of the students' reading development. Whereas, digital interactions in education students are basically left on their own with minimal supervision due to time being a limiting factor. Also, spending quality time with the students can be a challenge in the online setting. (104)

- With face-to-face, the students have the ability to interact with their teachers and their peers. They are able to share context and better express themselves in the physical environment.

With digital interaction, there is limited time to interact with teachers and their peers. There is also limited access to one-on-one communication. Technical issues can be very challenging. Relationship building is also very limited. (105)

- The main differences for me between these two would be:

    -Teachers' understanding of students vs. teachers' assumptions of students. What you see face-to-face has more accuracy vs what you see online can only be an assumption.

    The reason for my statement above is due to the ongoing level of accuracy students produce during online interactions when answering questions and producing work. This is sometimes done by the parents and submitted. Whereas, face-to-face gives the teacher a clear understanding of who the child is as they see their strengths and weaknesses first hand without support from parents. (106)

- The socializing part is lacking in online teaching. Moreover the teacher cannot always tell if everyone grasped the concepts taught because he/she doesn't see the facial expressions of the students. (107)

7. In what way would you imagine online learning as the successor to traditional education?

- Only when both are used simultaneously and not apart from each other. Online learning will never truly be a successor to traditional education mainly because we are human and they are not. We were created to socialize and the power of touch has a great impact on us being how we are together. (101)

- Online learning to me is innovative and getting up to date with technology and the 21st century. Even after COVID-19, I think schools/ teachers should continue with digital support. This will ensure that our students are equipped to function globally. (102)

- As technology improves, online lessons may well replace traditional schooling one day. The advantage of online learning is the efficiency of allowing students to save time and money on traveling. Hence, they can focus more on extra-curricular activities. (103)

- When every child and teacher is trained in using the digital platform, when every child and teacher has access to a device and internet service and when our curriculum is adjusted to accommodate e-learning. Creating a greater public awareness of the significance of the importance of e-learning in this era. (104)

- Due to global warming and change in weather patterns, hurricanes and pandemics it is likely that online learning can become a successor to traditional education due to lockdowns and strict protocols as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, I do not feel it should become a successor to traditional education. Instead, both can be integrated. (105)

- This question actually made me laugh as in my mind it seems almost impossible. Students are struggling to master concepts using online mediums.

   If it was done, the technology used would have to be a bit more advanced and teachers would have to undergo serious training to perform the teaching tasks to the best of their ability. (106)"

   We were forced to teach online because of the pandemic. Online learning can be the successor of traditional education only if we don't have any other choice, especially at the

elementary level. However, online learning is successful at the university level because the

learners are more disciplined and mature enough to cope with it. (107)

8. We may be continuing formal education online for a while, what would you use/do to improve

reading instruction for your struggling readers in the online environment?

- Use more interactive sites instead of trying to do direct instruction. (101)

- Research based programs and websites such as Epic-the leading digital reading library for kids, Seesaw, Reading Theory and Readworks org. (102)

- We need to intentionally adapt the tools we use in our classrooms to online learning. For example, make vocabulary, meanings, decoding/segmenting or syllabication activities accessible. Include digital bulletin boards, online white boards, PowerPoint, online games and even Google Read & Write. Most importantly, we need to activate students' prior knowledge, model or display success and effectively monitor students progress online. (103)

- Improve and use more e-software to support reading. Example, use of videos, interactive white boards and other platforms to give valid reading assessment. (104)

- As a teacher I would make sure that I engage my struggling readers in zoom meetings. video conferences, provide them with apps that will Aid them with reading. Assure that the digital books are appropriate for their age level. I will also become better equipped with the necessary skills needed to benefit my struggling readers to reach their full academic potential. (105)

- Explore more technological software and sites that can enhance the teaching and learning process. This will make it engaging and not allow the teacher to feel as though she is the only one giving information. (106)

- I will need more training in order to improve my teaching (107)