



FOR A LIMITED PERIOD OF TIME: IMPLEMENTING EMERGENCY REMOTE TEACHING IN THIS PANDEMIC-LADEN TIMES

ROCKY NIÑO L. MANIRE

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0240-0596>

rockynino.manire.gs@ust.edu.ph

University of Santo Tomas

España Boulevard, Sampaloc 1015 Manila, Philippines

ABSTRACT

Since the outbreak of the virus, several countries including the Philippines was greatly affected, forcing the national government to implement various categories of quarantine protocols and drastic measures to ensure the containment of the disease. Among the greatly affected sectors of industry, educational system grieved immensely because of the suspension of classes and forcing several basic education schools as well as several colleges and universities to terminate the semester. As this global pandemic continue to threaten the basic education system in the Philippines, and with the unsecured and unsafe environment due to this health crisis, the possibility of resuming physical classes is very unlikely. Hence, the implementation of Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) plays a crucial role in the Philippine educational context during this crisis. As a supervisory intervention, ERT is a temporary solution of reinforcing the lack of face-to-face interaction of learning through various platforms – digital media, radio, television learning and the likes. This paper adapts literature-based methodology using literature review as its method of presenting the nature and characteristics of ERT and its implications to Philippine educational system through various literatures found in the digital. More so, it presents an overview of the challenges the Philippine education system faced upon its implementation. Further empirical researches on the impact of implementing ERT among Philippine public and private educational institutions in the basic and higher education program is recommended.

Keywords: Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT), COVID-19, Pandemic, Online Education, Online Learning, Philippine Educational System

INTRODUCTION

With the growing number of cases of COVID-19 across the globe, several countries including the Philippines activated different measures of containing the virus. The Philippines, with the creation of Inter Agency Task Force (IATF), found itself implementing the different stages of community quarantine protocols from the strictest Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) up to the somehow lenient Modified General Community Quarantine (MGCQ) category, affecting all sectors and businesses both public and private. The COVID-19 pandemic

brought in the “new normal” in the form of physical distancing and health and safety protocols. In order to lessen the risk of acquiring the virus, the Department of Health advised the people to frequent washing of hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and to always wear masks and other practice sneezing and coughing etiquette to reduce the risk of transmission (Department of Health, 2020).

Among the sectors affected by this global pandemic, the landscape of Philippine Education greatly suffered. During the first stages of virus transmission in the country, the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Commission on



Higher Education (CHED) advised school administrators and higher educational institutions to practice alternative ways of teaching and learning and take advantage of the use of Internet such as online learning activities and other e-learning sites to provide quality education to students following the immediate declaration of class suspensions in different parts of the Philippines (Commission on Higher Education, 2020; Department of Education, 2020a). However, the Philippine Educational System is not yet prepared to go online, since many of its students have slow access or even have no access to the internet. Despite the call of CHED to continue their discernment in establishing available flexible learning options and other alternative strategies in place of face-to-face learning modality, several student leaders and advocates “campaigned for the immediate termination of the semester and mass promotion of students due to concern on the unavailability of learning materials and resources because students were not able to bring these on their way back to their respective homes” (Servillos, 2020).

The National Union of Students of the Philippines emphasized that terminating the semester is the most practical solution for college students compared to other proposed options or to online learning being implemented in higher education institutions (San Juan, 2020). Weeks after the government urged Higher Educational Institutions to suspend classes, Ateneo de Manila University (Gonzales, 2020) and the Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila (PLM) (Mateo, 2020) heed the call of ending the term immediately, with guidelines of remapping the second semester while several other higher education institutions like the University of the Philippines (UP) and the University of Santo Tomas (UST) continue to implement alternative modes of learning to reach out to students.

After nine months of Enhanced Community Quarantine in the Philippines, the vaccine is still not yet available, and the virus is still lurking around every corner of the country, hitting Metro Manila directly, the Philippines’ business capital. While all the sectors of the economy make every end meet in time of crisis, the initiatives of the DepED, CHED and Technical

Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) with the help of various educational institutions both public and private to promote teaching and learning is greatly challenged day by day. While online platforms are readily available for education, several students and parents complain about the unjust and unfavorable requirements required by several teachers. This scenario also resulted from the abrupt transition of moving physical classes to online learning without a careful consideration of the situation of Philippine Education as regards internet connectivity and availability of technical and digital resources.

Thus, there is a need to characterize the nature of Emergency Remote Teaching as it is applied in the Philippines’ educational context to rectify the misconceptions of several stakeholders about the differences of this intervention to the already existing online learning curriculum. Accordingly, this paper aims to present the nature and characteristics of Emergency Remote Teaching as a response to the problem of abrupt termination of face-to-face classes. It also presents an overview of the challenges faced by the Philippine educational system upon the implementation of safety measures and pandemic-related protocols in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and how the Philippine education sector adapted to the new normal setting.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This paper is an attempt to characterize the nature and characteristics of Emergency Remote Teaching and how the Philippine Education sector responded to the call to implement adjustments in its curriculum. This paper sought answers to the following objectives: 1) To present the nature and characteristics of Emergency Remote Teaching; 2) To analyze the challenges faced by Philippine Educational system upon the implementation of safety measures and pandemic-related protocols amid COVID-19 pandemic; and 3) To evaluate the adjustments made by the Philippine education sector in adapting remote strategies in the new normal.



METHODOLOGY

Literature-based methodology is an effective instrument in coming up with description, summary and critical assessment from existing literatures as the sources of information (Ancheta & Acheta, 2020). This paper adapts literature review as its method of presenting the nature and characteristics of ERT and its implications to Philippine educational system through various literatures found in the digital library. Imploring literature review can also be an avenue for organizing and synthesizing previous researches to come up with new conclusions as regards the investigated phenomenon (Snyder, cited in Ancheta & Ancheta, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Emergency Remote Teaching: Nature and Characteristics

The Philippines is not the only country whose education system greatly suffered because of the pandemic. Due to this global pandemic brought about by COVID-19, UNESCO stated that more than 1 billion students and youth from several countries are affected by school and university closures (Affouneh, et al, 2020; Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). Because of the implementation of social and physical distancing and safety precautions for health reasons, school-based education or the traditional face-to-face method of learning is halted for several months across the world (Hodges, et al., 2020; Holotescu, et al., 2020). However, learning should not be hindered by the virus. "While people were shutting the doors to their homes and countries were closing their borders, the virtual realm was opening up" (Holotescu, et al., 2020). The abrupt closure and suspension of physical classes made the digital world busy. In order to deliver the rest of the course contents in the traditional face-to-face learning, emergency protocols and supervisory interventions were implemented, and going online becomes the best possible solution to finish the semester effectively. The sudden and abrupt move to online learning becomes a practical

solution. The availability of digital media become very beneficial in delivering the rest of intended learning outcomes. Digital tools and various communication platforms were utilized by several teachers. However, this abrupt transition from physical classes to online learning brought confusion to people (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Hodges, et al., 2020). Several teachers and educators wrongly attribute the ineffectiveness of online learning to the limitations posted by digital platforms. One can easily say that face-to-face learning is more effective than online learning because of poor internet connectivity, low number of online class attendees, and poor assessment results, thus making the latter a lower quality of delivering course contents. This unfair comparison of online learning to the traditional face-to-face learning is caused by misunderstanding the nature of online education.

Online Learning or e-Learning or Online Education is defined as "the use of the Internet to access learning materials; to interact with the content, instructor, and other learners; and to obtain support during the learning process, in order to acquire knowledge, to construct personal meaning, and to grow from the learning experience" (Ally, cited in Arinto, 2013). Moreover, Alday & Pascual (2012) defined it as "technologically-supported learning, which includes the use of electronic media such as the Internet, personal computers, phone bridging, audio and videotape, video teleconferencing, satellite broadcast, mobile phones, personal digital assistants, and other related technologies to enhance teaching and learning." It is a form of learning facilitated and supported through the utilization of available digital and technological tools. In addition, Online Education is "an innovative approach for delivering well designed, learner-centered, interactive, and facilitated learning environment to anyone, anyplace, anytime, by utilizing the attributes and resources of various digital technologies along with other forms of learning materials suited for open and distributed learning environment" (Khan, 2005). Online Education, therefore, is an upgraded curriculum which is distinctive in character from the traditional way of education. It is a meticulously-designed curriculum which is guided



by a systematic process to adapt to the learning process. This systematic model requires instructors to train extensively on how to make use of the available technologies and adapt their teaching strategies to the online distance learning environment (Valentine, as cited in Markova, et al., 2016).

Seemingly, this characteristic of online education is captured in the abrupt transition from physical classes to online learning, which is currently happening because of COVID-19. But the circumstances that education is facing makes it totally different from the normal one. Going online in normal days is different from going online in time of COVID-19. It requires a lot of emergency measures in order to continue the learning process of students. This shift to online learning is a result of a supervisory intervention called Emergency Remote Teaching.

Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) is an emergency response to the current situation. It is a temporary supervisory intervention and an obligation to use other alternative strategies and teaching approaches such as: course content delivery, with different priorities (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020) while maintaining the flexibility and significance of the learning process. It is not planned from the very beginning, that is why, Bozkurt & Sharma (2020) emphasized that ERT must not be equated to online education per se, because ERT responds to the learning process in a very different manner from the other. As defined by several authors, ERT is a short-term fix of instructional delivery in response to an emergency which usually involves the use of alternative teaching strategies for education that would otherwise be delivered physically and that will return to usual instructional delivery once the crisis or emergency ceased to exist (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Hodges, et al., 2020; Holotescu, et al., 2020; McCartin, 2020).

In this sense, defining and characterizing the nature of ERT is necessary to rectify the misconceptions that ERT and online distance education are of the same equation. While online learning's goal is to be an alternative and flexible option to the traditional method of education, ERT's goal as a supervisory intervention is to reinforce learning to use different available

platforms, in this case, the digital media, while the traditional method of face-to-face learning is not yet accessible because of certain crisis concerns. While the online platform is the most accessible and readily available alternative to traditional learning, it is only one of the many options (Hodges, et al., 2020). Television education, radio, DVDs are some of the most used platforms in delivering learning contents while in ERT. In fact, Palestine, Syria, Afghanistan and South Africa have long been using other possible platforms of delivering course contents in lieu of emergency situations (Affouneh, et al., 2020). As a concrete example, Afghanistan implored remote teaching methods when education was "disrupted by conflict and violence because girls were trying to access education. In order to take children off the streets and keep them safe, radio education and DVDs were used to maintain and expand educational access and also were aimed at promoting education for girls." (Hodges, et al, 2020).

2. Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning as Applied to ERT

Applying synchronous and asynchronous learning to ERT is an idea imported from online distance education or online learning. Synchronous learning means a mode of educational communication wherein learners receive learning and instruction at the same time period but not essentially in person or in the same place (Sana et al., 2018). Asynchronous learning, on the other hand, is a mode of educational communication wherein students do not need to attend the designated class hours for learning and instructions, hence, doing their requirements on their own pacing. (Mukhopadhyay & Mukhopadhyay, 2020).

Subsequently the beginning of transition from face-to-face to online learning, several educational leaders have successfully integrated synchronous and asynchronous learning strategies to ERT. Most of those who use the online media platform made use of digital tools available in the Internet for synchronous learning such as Facebook Messenger, YouTube Live, Google Hangouts, Microsoft Teams and Zoom



Meetings to meet their students while staying safe at home. Others have pre-recorded their lessons and uploaded them through YouTube, Facebook and other social media platforms as a form of asynchronous learning. Holotescu et al., (2020) also noted that learners “participate in individual and group activities, creating projects and presentations, for which they send photos and multimedia content on the online platforms. There are situations in which, in order to be connected with pupils and parents, teachers use WhatsApp or Telegram groups, and sometimes only e-mail.” Sana, et al., (2018) provided a list of benefits of synchronous and asynchronous learning:

Table 1
Benefits of Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning Strategies

Synchronous Learning	Asynchronous Learning
Learners can raise questions in real-time	Learners have more time to reproduce on what they learned
Learners experience a greater sense of community and correlation to their peers when they all learn together	Learners can progress through the learning when they want, where they want, at the pace they want, in the order they want
Learners become motivated and eagerly engaged in their learning	Shy learners may experience more comfortable interacting with their teacher facilitators or peers when they have time to write thought emails or in the blog or voice thread rather than feeling stressed to speak up in a live symposium
Learners practice a stronger feeling of collaboration	Learners can participate in the same activities regardless of time zone

Source: (Sana, et al., 2018 p. 36)

Mukhopadhyay & Mukhopadhyay (2020) suggested four practical guidelines when using pre-recorded lessons as a tool of asynchronous learning:

1. Clarify the learning outcomes and structure your lecture content early on.
2. Break down the lecture into shorter segments, students might snooze off if you go on for too long (you may not have that appeal on a screen after all, or even worse if the internet connection is sloppy).
3. Try to make the learning experience ‘inductive’ rather than entirely didactic by throwing in some ‘questions to reflect on’ for the learners on the slides.
4. Use humor, a personal story when necessary while taking to the students (speak to them and not the camera!)

In using Zoom as a tool for synchronous learning, Mukhopadhyay & Mukhopadhyay (2020) also suggested nine practical guidelines in order to effectively deliver the course content: 1) simplifying presentation slides; 2) making use of features on Zoom like ‘Chat’ and “Raise Hand”; 3) scanning the virtual room as if delivering lesson in person to address unmuted students and ‘free riders’; 4) creating a forum for discussions; 5) encourage community learning through ‘gallery view’; 6) making use of ‘Chat for cold calls and warm calls; 7) making use of ‘Raise Hands’ to open up conversations; 8) consider giving students more time to formulate ideas through Zoom’s ‘Breakout Rooms’; and 9) using Slack or Twitch as chat platforms for smaller buzz groups.

Since ERT includes flexibility and consideration, students are not necessarily required to attend synchronous classes, especially those who find it hard to connect on the Internet. It is more advantageous and beneficial to all students if educational leaders will implore asynchronous learning most of the time and synchronous learning from time to time.



3. ERT as a Supervisory Intervention

Understanding the nature of ERT may help educational leaders to better deliver their course contents in a more effective manner. The key to a successful implementation of Emergency Remote Teaching is learner-centeredness. Teachers and educators have to bear in mind that educational technologies and digital tools that will be implored during this COVID-19 pandemic will play a crucial role in the perception of risk and vulnerability among students (Coeckelbergh, 2020), be it mentally, socially, or emotionally. Hence, it is important to carefully choose teaching medium.

Educational leaders have to keep in mind that students and parents will not prioritize education during this time of crisis; health and safety will be their utmost priority. Despite this, learning should never stop. In preparing ERT as an emergency solution, educational leaders must consider the most essential skill or knowledge they need to assess, the most critical content the students need right now, and the thing that needs to be accomplished at the end of the semester. Moving online means tedious adjustments to be done in the current curriculum to accommodate remote teaching. Nevertheless, moving online is not downgrading the quality of learning that is supposed to be delivered face-to-face, rather, making it simpler and more practical so that students will absorb the most essential lessons of the course. Accepting the reality of this situation, McCartin (2020) noted that teachers will not be building an online class and that they should not bear any expectations from the students to be fully ready to learn online, thus, considering the cognitive load of the course content will be beneficial both to teachers and students.

Bozkurt & Sharma (2020) also suggested that in implementing ERT, educational leaders must always put an emphasis to students' psychological and emotional dimension. When things go back to normal, what students will remember are not the course contents or the learning outcomes present in the adjusted curriculum, but the emotions they have felt while doing their requirements, and the support and help they experienced from their teachers during

the time of crisis. The need for empathy must also be highlighted when dealing with the adjustment of ERT curriculum. In addition, ERT should be implemented with flexibility and consideration. The flexibility of curriculum in ERT "provides students with more opportunities to regulate their learning process and the learning environment" (Jonker, et al., 2020).

The experience of using digital and online platform will be different depending on the availability of resources, thus, flexibility and consideration to the student's needs and ability to participate in online activities should be taken with compassion. Educational leaders must also consider that ERT should focus on how to share, collaborate, and support. This will enable a more formative and more inductive way of learning in terms of assessments. Another characteristic that should be present in designing ERT curriculum is the ethics of care. Learning Process should be directed towards therapy, empathy, and care (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). Everyone is dealing with the stress caused by this pandemic, and bombarding learner with a lot of requirements will just add to their stress.

As mentioned before, online and digital media is only one among the many options of delivering course contents, but because of its wide range and practicality, online digital technologies seemed to be the most appropriate platform in this situation. In order to lower the risk of perceived vulnerability among learners, careful utilization of this medium must be strictly observed (Coeckelbergh, 2020). To guide teachers and educational leaders, Khan (2005) developed an e-Learning framework that "provides the educational technology community with the best guidelines and practices for the development of e-Learning systems" (Affouneh, et al., 2020). This framework can also be applied in the development of ERT curriculum.

One question arises from this investigation: How does the Philippine Education fared so far in implementing ERT as a temporary solution to deliver quality education? Ensuring the continuity of education while protecting students from the global health crisis is the primary responsibility of the implementation of ERT. To address this



concern, temporary solutions to education were implemented in the Philippine Educational context. Since the beginning of Enhanced Community Quarantine, The Philippine Government, through the Department of Education and the Commission on Higher Education, advanced initiatives, and guidelines to continue delivering learning contents with its versions of Emergency Remote Teaching strategies.

Table 2
Eight Dimensions of e-Learning Framework

8 Dimensions of e-Learning Framework	
Dimensions	Description
Institutional	The institutional dimension is concerned with issues of administrative affairs, academic affairs and student services related to e-learning.
Management	The management of e-learning refers to the maintenance of learning environment and distribution of information.
Technological	The technological dimension of e-learning examines issues of technology infrastructure in e-learning environments. This includes infrastructure planning, hardware and software.
Pedagogical	The pedagogical dimension of e-learning refers to teaching and learning. This dimension addresses issues concerning content analysis, audience analysis, goal analysis, medium analysis, design approach, organization, and learning strategies.
Ethical	The ethical considerations of e-learning relate to social and political influence, cultural diversity, bias, geographical diversity, learner diversity, digital divide, etiquette, and the legal issues.
Interface Design	The interface design refers to the overall look and feel of e-learning programs. Interface design dimension encompasses page and site design, content design, navigation, accessibility and usability testing.
Resource Report	The resource support dimension of the e-learning examines the online support and resources required to foster meaningful learning.
Evaluation	The evaluation for e-learning includes both assessment of learners and evaluation of the instruction and learning environment.

Source: (Khan, 2005 p. 46)

One notable emergency remote teaching strategy that the Department of Education

introduced is the DepED Commons which was launched several days after the National Government declared an Enhanced Community Quarantine to most parts of the country. DepED Commons is “an online platform for public school teachers to support distance learning modalities in order to continue the delivery of basic education to learners. It is designed as a direct solution to give access to online review materials and Open Educational Resources (OERs) during class suspensions and other similar circumstances” (Pascua, 2020). UNESCO describes OER as “teaching, learning and research materials in any medium – digital or otherwise – that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions” (UNESCO, 2019).

To further advance this initiative, the Department of Education expanded DepED Commons’ features to cater to private school students (Department of Education, 2020b) as well as students enrolled in the Alternative Learning System (ALS) curriculum (Department of Education, 2020c) to make this online learning delivery more inclusive. Moreover, the implementation of the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan also advances the goal of DepEd to continue the learning process among basic education students. The Commission on Higher Education, on the other hand, published guidelines in view of continuing classes in the tertiary level using remote teaching strategies. To date, CHED released seven advisories for the prevention, control and mitigation of the spread of COVID-19 in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines. Prospero De Vera III, chairman of the Commission on Higher Education, wrote in the sixth published advisory that during the period of extended ECQ, Higher Educational Institutions “shall continue to exercise their judgment in the deployment of available flexible learning and other alternative modes of delivery in lieu of in-campus learning if they have the resources to do so” (De Vera III, 2020). Moreover, students who cannot access the internet must be given the option of fulfilling class requirements ones the imposed quarantine is lifted. He puts an emphasis that class requirements and learning activities should



be reasonable, transparent, and outcomes-based (De Vera III, 2020).

Various Private Educational Institutions and Private Higher Educational Institutions also launched their initiatives to continue their learning programs. Teachers' dedication to teach also played an important role in addressing the education problems. Online and digital platforms such as Zoom, YouTube, Moodle, Teams were utilized in order to conduct classes and ensure the continuation of learning, although it is a reality that for some students, this platform is not that effective and is not properly utilized. Like any other third world countries, internet connectivity continues to be one of the major problems of implementing online remote teaching strategies in the Philippines. To address this, the DepED and CHED allowed educational institutions, both public and private, to have the initiative to implement alternative teaching and learning strategies depending on the risks posted in their localities (De Vera III, 2020; Hernando-Malipot, 2020). It is also a notable suggestion to study the possibility of delivering classes through television and radio to effectively deliver the supposed face-to-face lessons to remote teaching strategies (Arcilla, 2020). This suggestion strengthens the idea that online learning is not the sole remote teaching strategy that can be utilized in the Philippines. Several private institutions have already started to map out a long-term curriculum plan for the implementation of Blended learning, Online Distance Education, and Homeschooling as part of their preparations for the upcoming school years.

CONCLUSIONS

In a nutshell, Emergency Remote Teaching is a temporary solution to the abrupt migration of face-to-face classes to other platforms of instructional and learning methodologies caused by an unprecedented situation. Opportunely, everyone is doing their best effort in utilizing the limited resources in order to provide learners with quality education amidst the crisis brought about by COVID-19. Educational institutions, both public and private,

are encouraged to implement Emergency Remote Teaching as an emergency supervisory intervention to address the problems caused by this global pandemic. In doing so, learner-centeredness, consideration to students' emotional and mental needs, and emphasis on the careful utilization of online and digital tools must be kept in mind. In using online platforms, adjustments in the curriculum must be guided and well thought of in order to tailor-fit them to the learners' capabilities in time of crisis. Taking advantage of synchronous and asynchronous learning method in ERT response may help learners understand better the learning outcomes in their own pacing. Utilizing other platforms of remote teaching such as radio, television, DVDs and pre-recorded videos will also be a great opportunity for other students and teachers who have poor internet access in their places.

Indeed, Emergency Remote Teaching is just a temporary fix to the problem of how the Philippine Education System can continue amidst the challenges posted by this global pandemic, but this temporary solution gave way to the development of various Learning Continuity Plans of public and private educational institutions. Hence, despite the risks brought by this trying time, people are still able to look for ways to promote opportunities for learning. As ERT is a temporary response to an emergency situation, COVID-19 is just a temporary phenomenon. The initiatives of various organizations will soon bear fruit in order to fight this virus. Hopefully, when everything goes back to its proper place, education will no longer go back to normal, rather, the quality of education will be better and more inclusive for everyone.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic gave researchers ample trends to research on especially in the field of education. As a recommendation, further empirical study on the same topic is needed to fully understand the impact of Emergency Remote Teaching to Philippine Educational System. It is also suggested to visit and discuss the possible implications of Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan of the Department of Education to



public and private basic education program. In addition, empirical investigation on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic to continuity of the learning process among Philippine Higher Educational Institutions both public and private can be further looked into.

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AUTHOR'S PROFILE:

Rocky Niño L. Manire, OP, is a solemnly professed student-brother of the Dominican Province of the Philippines. He is currently taking his Master's Degree in Education major in Educational Management



and Leadership at the University of Santo Tomas, Graduate School, Thomas Aquinas Research Complex, Dapitan St. España, Manila.

No known conflict of interest to disclose. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Rocky Niño L. Manire, OP of the University of Santo Tomas Graduate School, Thomas Aquinas Research Complex, Dapitan St. Manila.

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