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Confronting the Adverse Academic Repercussions Encountered by the Kindergartens Brought by the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This study focused on the pandemic stories of parents dealing with their children's challenging behaviors during the pandemic. Using a pure qualitative research design, an in-depth interview was conducted to generate qualitative data from the fifteen (15) parents who enrolled their children in Wesleyan University-Philippines Elementary Department, Cabanatuan East Central School (CECS), and Lazaro Francisco Integrated School, respectively. Thematic analysis was utilized in emerging the themes, namely: (1) adverse repercussions encountered: early exposure to gadgets and the use of online and modular learning, and (2) confronting the challenges which include self-made strategies of parents used in handling children's challenging behaviors during this time of the pandemic.

The findings of the study uncovered the changes that took place in the exhibited behaviors of young children before and during this time of the pandemic, its causes and effects, the adversities faced by parents in dealing with children's challenging behaviors, and the self-discovered ways and strategies utilized by parents in dealing with these behaviors as well. Based on the results, the researcher developed instructional reading material in the form of a brochure designed to guide children's behavior for a smooth transition back to face-to-face learning, which parents and teachers can use in handling children's behaviors, especially in the 'new normal.'

Introduction

Confinement at home, isolation from friends and classmates, disruption of routines, health concerns, and strict health protocols are some of the changes that young children are currently facing during this time of pandemic which leads to frequent and more intense emotional behaviors which found to be associated with fear related to pandemic and anxiety (Segal, 2021).

O'Keeffe & McNally (2022) [6], mentioned that trauma and bereavement are the shown effects that were observed in children who are victims of disasters, but little did the adults know, that this can affect not only how children perform at school but for the course of their lives. Moreover, there have been many studies regarding anxiety in adults especially staff in the medical fields as they are on the frontline in combating the virus there are only a few studies that focused on vulnerable groups including children.

Due to the lack of research regarding this topic, interventions and planning are elusive and people tend to overlook the situation. As a result, it does not receive enough attention as the country faces different problems aside from this matter. In line with the researcher's objectives and based on the results of excavating parents' experiences, an overview of how young children view the pandemic how they respond by going through their thoughts and feelings and how they continue living despite being held captive by an invisible enemy—COVID-19 emerged. In addition to the findings of the study, it also shed light on challenges parents have experienced not just in dealing with their children's behavior but dealing with many demanding chores and added responsibilities brought by having to take on new roles as a parent-teacher of their children, this all leads task overload and stress (Amirkhan, 2021) [1].

The narratives gathered underwent a careful analysis of the changes that took place in children's patterns of behaviors before the pandemic started as well as how parents perceived and viewed the changes and challenges that exist and how they managed

managed to survive every day. Based on the findings of this research, it served as a guide for intervention and planning of the schools as to what appropriate approaches to learning are appropriate to meet children's diverse needs, especially during this time of crisis, and an assessment for the readiness of both teachers and young children to the transitioning from online learning to face-to-face after two long years. It also strengthens the parent-child-teacher relationship for the well-being of all parties and to know what extent of help and support can be provided to both teachers and parents in providing for children's various needs. The main objective of this research is to determine behavioral manifestations among young children during this time of the pandemic and what are the coping strategies and mechanisms used by the parents/ guardians to regulate such behaviors of their children.

Methodology
This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design (Pilarska, 2021) [7], making use of the narratives derived from the interviews of the participants as the primary source of data and analysis (Subia, 2020) [10]. It was appropriate to use this design as the research encompassed the lived experiences of parents about determinants of behavioral changes among young children during this time of the pandemic. Hence, the data gathered was further used for analysis. The researcher went through careful analysis of data gathered using an interview. A thematic analysis was used to identify and analyze patterns and underwent different phases. These phases include (a) Familiarization with the data (b) Coding (c) Searching for themes (d) Reviewing themes (e) Defining and naming themes and (f) Writing up (Clarke & Braun, 2013) [3].

This research study was conducted at Wesleyan University Philippines' Elementary Department, Lazaro Francisco Integrated School, and Cabanatuan East Central School, respectively. The schools were considered as mega schools here in Cabanatuan City, Nueva Ecija. The participants of this study were chosen purposively (Subia, 2018) [11]. The researcher chose a total of fifteen (15) parents and considered the following criteria: (1) has enrolled his/her child in a kindergarten class before and during the pandemic; (2) has enrolled her child in Grade 2 level in any mega school and private school in Cabanatuan City at present; and (3) Full time/part-time parent at home. These criteria made it possible for the researcher to make sure that enough information was gathered and that the studied phenomenon was understood thoroughly and precisely.

Based on the safety protocols of the Wesleyan University-Philippines College of Education regarding the safe conduct of research in the time of pandemic, the researcher conducted the data gathering using the online platform Zoom application which features a recording of virtual interviews, interactive messaging, and retrieval. The in-depth interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 1 hour to extract sufficient data from the participants. The researcher made sure to maintain active interaction with the participant through follow-up questioning to generate sufficient qualitative data. Afterwards, the Zoom recordings were used to produce verbatim transcripts.

Thematic Analysis of Braun and Clarke (2013) [3] was utilized by the researcher in analyzing data for the study. The analysis underwent 6 steps:
The researcher first listened and was familiarized with the

data recorded then transcribed it afterward. The second phase included the coding of data, the researcher organized and labelled the data to identify different themes and the relationships between them. When all data had been coded and sorted out, all the relevant data were drawn out into various themes. In the fourth phase, the themes were reviewed carefully. The researcher then reviewed the coded data for each theme and looked for whether the themes formed coherent patterns. Themes that were related to each other served as sub-themes and other themes were broken down separately. The researcher gave comprehensive names to each of the identified major themes and for each theme, clarifications were provided. Lastly, the researcher determined the characteristics of the data each theme embodies. Each theme was analyzed, and stories were comprehensively narrated in a concise and non-repetitive manner that eventually supported related studies. Ethical considerations were considered and the data were validated through credibility, dependability, conformability and confidentiality.

Results and Discussion
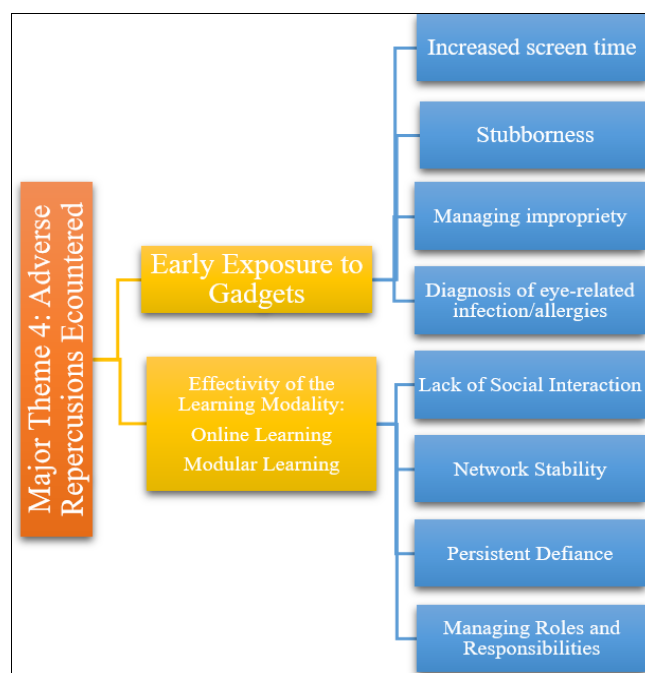## 1. Adverse Repercussions Encountered

Fig 1: Major Theme 1: Adverse Repercussions Encountered

This section elucidates the experiences of parents regarding the adverse challenges they are facing during this time of the pandemic, categorized into two: children's exposure to gadgets and the effectiveness of the learning modality.

Early Exposure to Gadgets
Increased Screen Time
Along with the school, closures are the wide use of gadgets for online learning. Nowadays, smartphones and social media are not just a source of entertainment but are also used as a medium of communication and delivery of instruction. This resulted in an increase in dependence on digital tools and an increase in the time the children are being exposed to monitors. Letting children use gadgets for a long period often leads to addiction which will eventually cause negative effects on children's emotional development

and will make them incapable of social adjustment because of a lack of interaction with their environment (Chapman & Pellicane, 2014) [2].

The majority of the parents conveyed their concerns regarding their children's early exposure to using technology to attend classes. For parents who enrolled their children in pure online modality, their child facilitates online classes for 5 days approximately 2-3 hours per class session. Due to busy schedules and attending to other responsibilities, some parents admitted to not imposing strict regulations and monitoring the usage of gadgets among their children. Furthermore, according to Chapman & Pellicane (2014) [2], screen time without a purpose tends to be a waste of time which usually has a negative influence. *"During the first grading, I wasn't able to monitor his time in using phones. He would spend a long time just watching different videos on YouTube. And since his father also has classes he wasn't able to regularly monitor our child's use of the phone."*

Stubbornness
Parents witnessed the adverse effects of using gadgets on children. Some parents are concerned about the excessive use of gadgets among their children even outside online class hours, they are facing some issues regarding the emotional and behavioral well-being of their children. Their children have shown disobedience ever since they were exposed for long hours using gadgets. "*He spends too much time using the gadgets, he becomes hard to talk to, stubborn and disobedient when I tell him to take a break when using gadgets."* Another concern discussed by one parent during the interview regarding the same issue is, *"There are times that it's really hard to prohibit him from using the gadgets too much, especially when he spends too much time, he's so stubborn, ma'am."* Furthermore, hyper tantrums, unstable emotions, do not care about having social problems, such as being alone, do not want to socialize, and always focusing on the gadget in his hand were found to be the changes in social behavior due to gadget addiction (Widodo & Wartoyo, 2020) [12].

Managing impropriety
Parents also noticed that their children exhibit bad habits like cursing, rudeness and shouting which they believed that children acquired from the games and shows they are watching on the television and the phone/iPad. One of the parents shared that upon coming home finally became a front liner for a long time which kept her away from his children. She was surprised by the behavior of her child, *"When I finally came home after a long time, a lot had changed in his behavior, he was very playful where he spent too much time playing on his iPad. It affected him much to the extent that he acquired a habit of shouting. Like, when he's excited, he will suddenly shout out of excitement, there are also times when he's playing on his iPad, he will make noises probably because of what he's watching or doing on his iPad."* According to Ferguson (2015) [4] growth of negative behaviors exhibited by children is due to exposure to violent games.

Diagnosis of eye-related infection/allergies
Other than behavioral concerns of parents among their children, some parents expressed eye health-related problems experienced by their children caused by too much screen time. Two of the parents shared that their children were diagnosed with eye allergies due to too much exposure to the screen. These children experienced the same symptoms as itchiness, redness, and swollen, and tired eyes, this prohibited their use of gadgets, or the doctors prescribed that they should only spend a maximum of 1 hour of screen time. *"The overusing of gadgets affected his eyes; we have taken him to the doctor to have his eyes checked that's where we found out that symptoms showed are related to long-time gadget exposure. The doctor told us to strictly limit his time of gadget use from 30 minutes to 1-hour maximum only and prescribed the use of eyeglasses for eye protection."* Both parents shared the same experience with their children, they witnessed how their children had a hard time dealing with their eye allergies. Since then, their children have learned their lesson, they got used to regulating their time whenever they use gadgets, the only time they would use them is during online classes, and after that exposure to screens is highly prohibited.

2. Effectivity of the Learning Modality: Online Learning and Modular Learning
The new learning modality both online and modular learning raises lots of concern from parents especially its effectiveness, given that it is far different from the regular face-to-face classes. Thus, screen time for children and adolescents has increased as they are confined to their homes. Challenges arise as the increasing demand for remote learning continues, and parents also share some limitations such as Lack of social interaction, internet stability, parental engagement, and accomplishing tasks as the barriers to effective schooling both online and modular. For parents, it was hard to effectively fulfill children's individual needs during online learning unlike during face-to-face.

Lack of Social Interaction
The majority of parents expressed their worry about their children's learning outcomes because holistic learning is being compromised. Online learning has less social interaction since, during online classes, sessions are done using applications available online, where children are only able to see each other virtually. Parents were able to witness the difference between their children's engagement in class during face-to-face and what they could see online. As one of the parents said, *"I can say he's more active during face-to-face classes because he can have physical interactions with his teacher and classmates, that's what he's missing now that we shifted to online."* There is also one parent who highlights the importance of social skills for children especially at their children's age during that time, which was only limited due to the absence of face-to-face interaction. *"She would tell me most of the time that she's feeling bored just by sitting and listening in the class. It was different from face-to-face class where physical interaction is present, during online class social skills is becoming hard to develop".*

Network stability
One of the biggest challenges in utilizing online classes is network issues. Most parents enrol their children in online classes; therefore, they are largely dependent on internet connectivity. There are parents that it was hard for them to maintain their children's focus throughout the session when the disruption in connection exists, which will result in

children not wanting to join the class anymore. "*There was one time, a few minutes before his class started, we were still experiencing network connection issues making it hard to connect in their Zoom meeting. He became anxious about not being able to join the meeting on time thinking he might miss half of the online class session. After trying a lot of times to enter, he does not want to attend his class anymore no matter how I encourage him to talk to the teacher and explain our situation, he still insists on not attending.*" Network issues experienced by families are a challenge as it is beyond the control of the parents or the school and waiting can sometimes be too tiring for children especially when it is taking too long. Network issues don't only happen before the class starts, they can happen any time of the day, some parents talked about having internet connection interruption in the middle of the class, where it becomes quite challenging for children to retrieve the lost momentum given that they cannot maintain their focus for long. "*There was one time when he was called by his teacher to answer something during the discussion, but he was not able to say his answer because he was still thinking when the disruption in the internet connection happened, he was disconnected in the session and when he got back, his teacher called for a different child to answer.*" This situation could also disrupt children's development of self-esteem, especially in answering in front of other people. Teachers aren't exempted from experiencing the same issue. It was shared by a parent how his child lost his excitement when the video being flashed on the screen is lagging as well as the teacher's movement. "*I hope internet connections will be addressed soon because it was disappointing for children to be so excited dancing and singing to the songs then after some time, the screen would stop as well as the teacher. Whenever that happens, my child does not want to participate because the supposed to be a motivation turns out to be not motivating at all.*" Transitioning from face-to-face classes to online turned network stability to be a necessity because disruption of classes due to internet connection issues is still a huge problem continuously affecting not just children's learning but emotional well-being as well.

Persistent Defiance
About various challenge parents are facing when it comes to their children's online and modular-online classes is their persistent defiance to finish their assignments and performance tasks. Children develop the 'I will do it later' behavior. These were shared by parents who experienced the same in encouraging their children to do homework. "*There was one performance task that required memorization, which is why I told her to read the text even though the deadline was 2 weeks away, but she was not listening to me, busy with other things like playing and watching the television. Until days passed, we were only less than a week away from the submission, it was hard for her to memorize the text, she would instead cry because of frustration causing her not to do what she needed to. In the end, we are just after finishing the task and to comply not the lesson she could get from it.*" There is also a parent who shared her experience when they are in the middle of doing modules her child would make a lot of excuses making them finish the module longer than it's supposed to. "*There are times when I am helping her in doing her modules, she would roam around the house, she's always distracted, that is why we often argue about it almost every day. In the end, we will*

take 1 hour or 2 to finish a single module. She will ask a lot of questions to distract me from teaching her rather than focusing on what she's doing.*" These kinds of behavior displayed by children tempt the parents to do the modules and homework by themselves to make it easier for both parties, which also avoids heated arguments. The same experiences were seen on the news, a lot of children would prefer to attend face-to-face classes than have their parents as their teachers at home making it hard for the parents to make their children finish their homework.

Managing Roles and Responsibilities
Pandemics also turned homes into classrooms and parents into teachers. It was, therefore, turned parental engagement is an essential factor to consider regardless of what modality of learning is used Partnership of parents and teachers in facilitating the learning of their children is a must to ensure that their needs are being met. It is very challenging for parents to be a teacher and parents at once have a balance of chores, work whether full-time/part-time or on-site/work from home, and support their children's online learning, therefore, find it hard to juggle everything every day at once. The parents conveyed their different concerns in attending to all these responsibilities. One parent shared that after office hours, she would come home at 8:00 pm, that's when the time she would assist her child in doing her modules because her child doesn't want other than her to help with her modules, and since it's late, it's hard for the child to finish everything which she needed to. "*Usually ma'am, when I reached home, it was already late, around 8:00 pm, that's the time that we would start doing her modules. She would wait for me because she doesn't want anyone to help her other than me, due to being worn out because of work, there are times when she will say how sleepy she is and doesn't finish her assignments that's the time that it will cause a dispute between me and her.*" There was one parent who shared how it is challenging for her to teach her child in his lessons and in doing performance tasks, at times she would bring her child to work just to make sure that she will be able to monitor how her child is doing during an online class. "*Since his dad is also going to work and no one will be left to guide him during online class, I would bring her to the office with me. It was difficult to become both a teacher and a parent at once, it was a challenge to learn their lessons so that I could explain them to him again because he wasn't able to absorb everything during the online discussion, his performance was also difficult especially when it's beginning to pile up.*" Another challenging experience was shared by a parent who after coming home from night duty still wanted to assist her child during online class, "*Upon coming home from night duty, I will get a mattress and place it beside my child then I will tell him to wake me up whenever there's a technical problem or whenever he does not know what to during online class. There were also times during his first weeks attending online classes, even when I was at work, she would still chat to me, 'Mommy, where's the link? What is my next subject?' Since then, I always remind him of his schedules, where he can get his books and notebooks when needed.*" These experiences realize how it is hard to be a teacher and a parent at once because both have their separate duties although both are done inside the home. The narrative discourses of the participants reveal how the pandemic created a lot of challenges and put a lot of pressure on

parents while working from home, taking care of their children, as well as supporting their children's education during homeschooling.

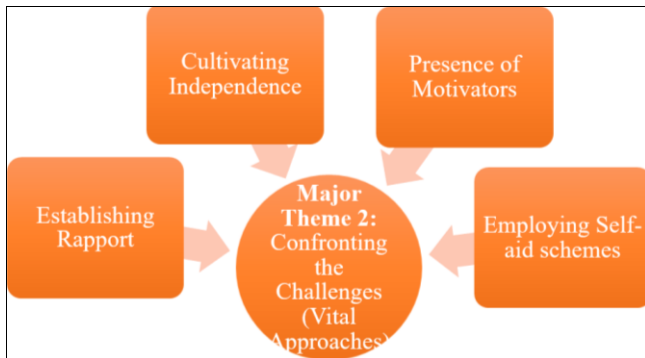## 2. Confronting the Challenges (Vital Approaches)

Fig 2: Major Theme 2: Confronting the Challenges (Vital Approaches)

This part presents the vital strategies of parents in managing the challenges brought by the pandemic. The analysis covered distinct strategies of parents relating to establishing a good rapport with children, cultivating independence, and intrinsic motivation, and employing self-aid schemes which contain personal approaches of parents in dealing with the responsibilities for managing families' everyday lives and routines.

Establishing Rapport
Proper dissemination of information is crucial in these times of uncertainty, strengthening the relevance of effective communication (Redy & Gupta, 2020) [8], especially for children, it is important that they know about the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, establishing a good rapport with children through explaining things in the best possible way, engaging in a healthy conversation with the child, and spending more quality time together initiated by parents was seen to be effective in dealing with challenges. One of the key strategies parents highlighted in dealing with children's curiosity is to provide them with age-appropriate information related to the lockdown and the virus. These parents ensure to respond to children's questions in the best possible way without instilling fear in them, one of the parents' responses is, *"When it comes to explanation, it should not be fearful, because it would create anxiety in the child, so, it was explained to her the best possible way we could."* There is also another parent who exposed her child to media channels like the news making sure that proper guidance is provided, *"Whenever we watch the news, he would ask why, so, we explain it to him well and simply, not making it complicated."* To protect their children, especially from false, frightening, or simply too much negative information parents make sure to support and facilitate correct and information whenever it is needed by their child.

Cultivating Independence
Another challenge observed by parents in their children during the lockdown was the increased level of dependence the children showed especially during an online class. The approach parents use to cultivate an independent sense of responsibility among children is to reduce their parental involvement during online classes and let their children do

activities by themselves. *"My husband told me to minimize my involvement whenever our child is having his online class. He told me to let him do things like getting materials he needs t and should let him do it alone."* This way, children will learn and practice again the idea of independence. Another parent used a different approach to provide opportunities to practice independence in terms of encouraging the child in participating household chores, *"I involved my child in household chores by asking a little help when doing the laundry, washing the dishes, and sweeping the floor, and eventually I let him do it alone but with little guidance."* Parents love to see their children as days go by to do simple things on their own. One parent also shares how she encouraged her child to help care for her younger sibling which soon developed into a habit and also fosters not just independence but the sense of responsibility as an elder sibling as well, *"He was very caring to her baby sister, he would keep quiet when he's sister is sleeping, he would take care of her while I am taking bath or doing other chores at home, he was someone I relied on during those times."*

Presence of Motivators
Making use of motivators is another strategy employed by the parents to help address their concern about regaining their children's motivation when attending online classes and doing their modules. Verbal encouragement alone is not enough to motivate children to study, that is why, parents make use of intrinsic motivation in the form of rewards like toys, food, and conditions given by children. One of the parents shared how her child loves to go back to her old school to study which is why she used it as a motivation for her child to finish her modules. *"Since she wanted to go back and study in her old school, I told her that if she will finish all her modules in time without giving me a hard time, I will surely grant her wish."* Every time she reminds her child of this condition, it motivates her child to do what she needs to. Reward systems through toys were also used by parents to motivate their children, *"Every time I go home, I will make sure to buy him a toy, but those that will not cost much, in return for his good performance in class and for doing all his tasks."*
There are also times when parents would use the gadget as a reward for having to accomplish assignments and modules on time where the parents will allow the child to use the gadget in return, *"I made it clear to my children, no modules, no gadgets, that is why, they will finish all their modules so that when the weekends come, they will be able to use their gadgets."* The eagerness to use the gadgets was used as a motivation for children to accomplish their tasks. In a study made by Mak (2021) [5] in India, since children become less motivated to learn during the pandemic due to multiple factors, increased TV time, words of encouragement, and additional play/game time are the most frequently used motivators of parents to their children to study.

Employing Self-Aid Schemes
Parents felt the need for self-improvement as another weapon to protect themselves from the challenges brought by the pandemic. Parents shared how they coped with the unending challenges in their personal lives, family, and responsibilities in such ways as having forbearance, employing time management, and balancing responsibilities.

They dauntlessly shared their experiences regarding this.

Being a mother is a very challenging role, there was no training or manual provided for playing the role of a mother. It becomes more difficult as we are amid a pandemic. According to the parents, this whole new experience was a test of patience. One of the parents shared her experience regarding this, *"Lots of patience is needed during this time, especially in dealing with children and their behaviors."* This parent jokingly added that she never wished to be a teacher but, in the end, she did not expect that she would turn into one for 2 years which tested her patience. *"Patience is very important since there are a lot of things to do, and responsibilities were added since the pandemic started, all needed to be done at once where you will feel exhausted."* Dealing with a lot of things is not just physically tiring but emotionally draining as well, yet these parents remained still attending to their responsibilities. Even though there are times when they feel like their emotions are bursting out due to stress and being worn out, they still respond with self-control and show tolerance in dealing with the struggles every day. Evidence shows that parents are overburdened and stressed in the light of added responsibilities brought on by the pandemic (lockdown, online classes, working from home) it gives them an overwhelming feeling with everything they need to do simultaneously. They highlighted the importance of patience in dealing with their child's behavior when doing different tasks at home, at school tasks, and when regulating the child's use of gadgets.

Conclusions

Children's adverse responses to changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic such as school closures, disruption of routines, and longer lockdown/confinement at home were found to have a substantial effect on their behaviors which were exhibited during the pandemic. These caused emotional difficulties to children such as loneliness, fear, worry, and disappointment, this engulfed young children and eventually led to the occurrence of misbehaviors. Containment measures like school closures and disruption of other related activities for long periods exposed children to enervating effects on learning as they developed compulsive use of gadgets, became demotivated and portrayed persistent defiance to comply with schoolwork. On the other hand, parents' concerns about children's learning outcomes and educational disadvantages were raised in response to the rapid shift in the use of learning modalities. Moreover, it revealed how the COVID-19 crisis affected parents' need to deal with an enormous range of challenges. Hence, this called for the development of diverse strategies established by parents to face these challenges. Therefore, 2 localized brochure guides were made based on the findings of the study intended to provide parents and teachers with tips and ideas for handling children's behaviors both in school and at home. The brochure also includes tips to prepare children for the back-to-school classes.

Localized Brochure Guide

The implementation of face-to-face classes is another shift children will undergo; this experience may bring an overwhelming feeling to children, parents, and teachers as well. Based on the findings of the study, 2 localized brochures were made to help parents and teachers in preparation for the transition from blended learning to full face-to-face classes. For teachers' brochure, includes tips on how to modify behaviors of young children inside the classroom which includes creating a conducive classroom environment, use of rewards and praises, and communication. For parents' brochure, it includes behavioral modification tips at home which include routines, open communication, family time, and rewards and consequences. Included also are the back-to-school tips for necessary preparations before school starts.

Pictures of the Brochure

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