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Recommended Citation

Morgan, Monica, "Impact Teacher Perceptions of Distance Education as a Strategy for Formal Education During the Covid-19 Pandemic" (2022). *Student Research Poster Presentations 2022*. 24.
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TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION AS A STRATEGY FOR FORMAL EDUCATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Introduction

Due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, many schools in the United States and worldwide were forced to close. As of April 1st 2020, nearly 1.6 billion or 91% of students were affected by school closures worldwide (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2021). The closure required educators to transition rapidly to remote learning or distance education to continue educating students. This rapid transition forced teachers to change how they delivered instruction with virtually no warning or time to prepare for the new instructional techniques required to teach remotely (Kraft et al., 2020).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify teacher perceptions of distance education as a strategy for formal education during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is vital to understand teacher perceptions of distance education to identify strategies to assist students in their education while working from home. A survey will be conducted to identify teacher perceptions of distance education in a low-income district. The data will provide information on everyday issues, including lack of connectivity and access to the required technology, inadequate home learning environments, and restricted human interaction, and how educators can be more effective in the remote classroom.

Methods

- Qualitative research design
- Educator's perceptions of the effectiveness of distance education.
- Survey with open-ended and fixed option questions.
 - Answered anonymously and in their own time
- Participants: Elementary educators who worked at an urban private religious elementary school grades Pre-K to 8 in Northeastern Pennsylvania

Data

Distance education is an educational support, but not a long-term solution for formal education.

- Mean 2.83
- Median 3
- Frequency 3

During the COVID-19 pandemic, distance education was used to keep in touch with students

- Mean 3
- Median 3
- Frequency 3

I believe students learn more effectively within the physical classroom.

- Mean 3
- Median 3
- Frequency 3

Results and Implications

Teacher perceptions must be understood to make the process of distance education more effective (Dooley & Murphy, 2000).

1. Educators feel distance education is an educational support but not a long-term solution.
2. Educators do not feel they can fully assess student learning and engage learners remotely.
3. Students must have the required technology and access to the internet, as well as an adequate home learning environment to be successful when learning remotely

Dooley and Murphy (2000) identify that faculty support and training are vital for distance education to be an effective, quality strategy for learners.

Next steps:

1. Teachers may consider receiving additional training in assessing student understanding and strategies to increase student engagement through remote learning
2. Schools must work with families to provide the required technology so all students can be successful.
3. Parents must support educators while students are learning remotely to ensure that distance learning is effective. Parents must find a quiet space free from distractions to assist students in engaging with each lesson. Parents and educators must be a team to guarantee student learning occurs just as it would in the classroom.

Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the way students and teachers interacted. Distance learning was a way to continue student learning when schools were forced to close due to the coronavirus. This required educators to completely change how they approached teaching, moving all content to the online classroom with only a moment's notice. Without missing a beat, educators made the switch the best way they knew. Although distance learning may not currently be the most effective strategy for formal education, it taught many great lessons about the perseverance of teachers and students and what may need to be changed for the future of distance education. Assessing student understanding was seen by educators as the most challenging aspect of teaching remotely, but future studies of current trends and strategies may enhance remote instruction and student learning in the future.

Reference

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Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to my instructor, Dr Tiffany Mulally, who guided me throughout this project. I would also like to thank my family and friends who supported me throughout this journey. Finally, I would like to extend my special thanks to the HFA faculty who offered deep insight into the study.