

Readiness of the Public-School Administrators to Distance Learning in New Mexico, USA

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected the public schools in New Mexico; hence, this study intended to assess the readiness of the public school administrators in New Mexico, USA, to switch the traditional face-to-face to distance learning. There were, of course, many other respects of the evolved problem, such as defining all challenges and what were fundamental ways of dealing with them. However, this study concentrated only on diagnosing the readiness for overwhelming distance learning. The respective profiles of the school administrators were determined in this study to distinguish their capabilities and readiness for distance learning, considering the problems that occurred in the current implementation.

Keywords: COVID-19, Distance Learning, Public Schools

INTRODUCTION

With the health crisis brought about by COVID-19, the whole world had to switch over for an indefinite period to distance learning because the alternative to it was stopping any education, which, of course, was unacceptable. This situation revealed how realistic it was to switch to distance learning and what problems existed in this connection. Ministries of education worldwide tried to ensure learning continuity for children and youth through distance learning. In most cases, efforts involved using various digital platforms featuring educational content and a variety of educational technology (EdTech) solutions to keep communication and learning spaces as open and stimulating as possible. The success of the implementation depended on the school administrators' readiness.

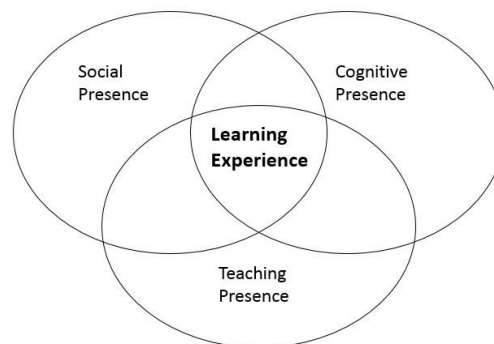
The pandemic affected as many as four in five New Mexico, USA, public school students who were failing at least one class in some school districts. Attanasio (2020), a legislative analyst, reported that state lawmakers consider the impact of school closures, educational challenges posed by remote learning, and learning losses attributed to much less in-person schooling because of the pandemic. The report said that school closures disproportionately impacted low-income students who were less likely to have access to the Internet to participate in online learning and more likely to live in districts with little or no in-person learning options.

The pandemic's toll on New Mexico's public education could be hard to measure because state and federal officials waived requirements for standardized tests. Many school districts still tested students to measure reading and math proficiency levels, but the legislative analysts concluded that those results were probably unreliable and incomparable to previous years. This had been under scrutiny among school administrators, especially in public schools where the budget they got was minimal. Hence, this study intended to assess

the readiness of the public-school administrators in New Mexico, USA, to switch the traditional face-to-face to distance learning.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Just as no single learning theory which emerged for instruction in general, the same was valid for online education. Several theories have evolved, most of which derived from the major learning theories such as Behaviorism by B.F. Skinner, Cognitivism by Piaget, and Social Constructivism of Vygotsky, this study is anchored on the specific models of the Community of Inquiry [COI] model (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000), Connectivism (Siemens, 2004), Online Collaborative Learning [OCL] (Harasim, 2012), and Online Learning Model or An Integrated Model (Anderson, 2011). These models were derived from the major learning theories mentioned earlier. For this study on distance learning, these models were specified learning theories. Above all, the implementation of distance learning was dependent on the management and Leadership skills of the school administrators, so in terms of management, the Mintzberg Theory was utilized.



On the other hand, connectivism, as proposed by George Siemens (2004), was one of the early Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) pioneers. It was a learning model that acknowledged major shifts in the way knowledge and information flow, grew, and changed because of vast data communications networks. Internet technology has moved from internal, individualistic activities to group, community, and even crowd activities. In developing the theory, Siemens acknowledged the work of Alberto Barabasi and the power of networks.

Connectivism was particularly appropriate for courses with very high enrollments and where the learning goal or objective was to develop and create knowledge rather than to disseminate it. (1) Learning and knowledge rested in diversity of opinions; (2) Learning was a process of connecting specialized nodes or information sources; (3) Learning might reside in non-human appliances; (4) Capacity to know more was more critical than what was currently known; (5) Nurturing and maintaining connections was needed to facilitate continual learning; (6) Ability to see connections between fields, ideas, and concepts was a core skill; (7) Currency (accurate, up-to-date knowledge) was the intent of all connectivism's learning activities; and (8) Decision making was itself a learning process. Choosing what to learn and the meaning of incoming information was seen through the lens of a shifting reality. While there was a right answer now, it might be wrong tomorrow due to alterations in the information climate affecting the decision (Siemens, 2004).

DESIGN AND METHODS

This study utilized the descriptive–comparative and correlational design and data mining techniques with the questionnaire as the main tool in gathering the necessary data. This method was utilized since the study focused on the readiness of the public-school administrators to distance learning. Data mining techniques allowed the researcher to uncover hidden concepts and interrelationships of these concepts to provide a tentative explanation for the behavior and occurrence of the phenomenon. Thematic analysis was also used to analyze subjective responses which were made of a set of texts that closely examined the data to identify common themes such as topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter was divided into five (5) parts. **Part 1** included the profiles of the different groups of respondents who were involved in the study, namely: school principals, teachers, parents, alumni, and students. **Part 2** dealt with assessments on the extent of readiness of school administrators on distance learning in public schools in terms of quality of instruction, misuse of technology, cost-effectiveness, managerial responsibilities, and leadership functions. **Part 3** focused on the impact of factors affecting the extent of readiness of school administrators in public schools concerning distance learning. Meanwhile, **Part 4** determined the difference in assessments of all stakeholder points of view concerning the extent of readiness of school administrators in public schools on distance learning. Consequently, **Part 5** determined the best practices of the public school administrators in distance learning implementation.

Part 1

Profile of School Administrators as Stakeholders in Distance Learning

Part 1 determined the profile of the different groups of respondents involved in the study, namely: school principals, teachers, parents, alumni, and students.

Table 2 shows the profile of school administrators as respondents to the study.

Profile	Response Category	Frequency of Respondents	Percentage
Number of Years in the Present Position	0 – 5 years	1	33.33
	6 – 10 years	1	33.33
	11 – 15 years	1	33.33
	16 – 20 years	0	0
	21 – 25 years	0	0
	26 – 30 years	0	0
	31 years or more	0	0
Total		3	100.00
Number of Years in Education	0 – 5 years	1	33.33
	6 – 10 years	1	33.33
	11 – 15 years	1	33.33
	16 – 20 years	0	0
	21 – 25 years	0	0
	26 – 30 years	0	0
	31 years or more	0	0

Total		3	100.00
Number of Years as a Teacher	0 – 5 years	0	0
	6 – 10 years	2	66.67
	11 – 15 years	1	33.33
	16 – 20 years	0	0
	21 – 25 years	0	0
	26 – 30 years	0	0
	31 years or more	0	0
Total		3	100.00
Number of Years as Administrator	0 – 5 years	2	66.67
	6 – 10 years	0	0
	11 – 15 years	1	33.33
	16 – 20 years	0	0
	21 – 25 years	0	0
	26 – 30 years	0	0
	31 years or more	0	0
Total		3	100.00
Number of Years in Other Fields	0 – 5 years	2	66.67
	6 – 10 years	0	0
	11 – 15 years	1	33.33
	16 – 20 years	0	0
	21 – 25 years	0	0
	26 – 30 years	0	0
	31 years or more	0	0
Total		3	100.00
Number of Years as School Administrator in Distance Learning	0 – 5 years	2	66.67
	6 – 10 years	1	33.33
	11 – 15 years	0	0
	16 – 20 years	0	0
	21 – 25 years	0	0
	26 – 30 years	0	0
	31 years or more	0	0
Total		3	100.00
Bachelor's Degree	Education	3	100.00
	Business	0	0
	Engineering	0	0
	Arts and Literature	0	0
	Others	0	0
Total		3	100.00
Master's Degree	Education	3	100.00
	Business	0	0
	Engineering	0	0

	Arts and Literature	0	0
	Others	0	0
Total		3	100.00

Table 2 shows the profile of school administrators (principals) as respondents of the study in terms of the number of years in the present position, number of years in education, number of years as a teacher, number of years as an administrator, number of years in another field, number of years as a school administrator in distance learning, bachelor’s, and master’s degree obtained.

Table 3 depicts the profile of teachers as respondents to the study.

Table 3: Profile of School Teachers as Respondents of the Study

Profile	Response Category	Frequency of Respondents	Percentage
Number of Years in the Present Position	0 – 5 years	6	16.22
	6 – 10 years	19	51.35
	11 – 15 years	12	32.43
	16 – 20 years	0	0
	21 – 25 years	0	0
	26 – 30 years	0	0
	31 years or more	0	0
Total		37	100.00
Number of Years in Education	0 – 5 years	3	8.11
	6 – 10 years	4	10.81
	11 – 15 years	17	45.95
	16 – 20 years	12	32.43
	21 – 25 years	1	2.70
	26 – 30 years	0	0
	31 years or more	0	0
Total		37	100.00
Number of Years as a Teacher	0 – 5 years	2	5.41
	6 – 10 years	4	10.81
	11 – 15 years	17	45.95
	16 – 20 years	12	32.43
	21 – 25 years	2	5.41
	26 – 30 years	0	0
	31 years or more	0	0
Total		37	100.00
Number of Years as Administrator	0 – 5 years	6	16.22
	6 – 10 years	19	51.35
	11 – 15 years	12	32.43
	16 – 20 years	0	0
	21 – 25 years	0	0
	26 – 30 years	0	0

	31 years or more	0	0
Total		37	100.00
Number of Years in Other Fields	0 – 5 years	37	100.00
	6 – 10 years	0	0
	11 – 15 years	0	0
	16 – 20 years	0	0
	21 – 25 years	0	0
	26 – 30 years	0	0
	31 years or more	0	0
Total		37	100.00
Number of Years as School Administrator in Distance Learning	0 – 5 years	37	100.00
	6 – 10 years	0	0
	11 – 15 years	0	0
	16 – 20 years	0	0
	21 – 25 years	0	0
	26 – 30 years	0	0
	31 years or more	0	0
Total		37	100.00
Bachelor’s Degree	Education	37	100.00
	Business	0	0
	Engineering	0	0
	Arts and Literature	0	0
	Others	0	0
Total		37	100.00
Master’s Degree	Education	37	100.00
	Business	0	0
	Engineering	0	0
	Arts and Literature	0	0
	Others	0	0
Total		37	100.00

Table 3 revealed the profile of school teachers as respondents of the study in the aspect of several years in the present position, number of years in education, number of years as a teacher, number of years as an administrator, number of years in another field, number of years as a school administrator in distance learning, Bachelor’s and Master’s degree obtained.

Table 4 determined the profile of parents as respondents of the study.

Table 4: Profile of Parents as Respondents of the Study

Profile	Response Category	Frequency of Respondents	Percentage
Number of Children Enrolled	1	47	78.33
	2	12	20.00
	3	1	1.67

	4	0	0
	5 or more	0	0
Total		60	100.00
Grade Levels of Children	With Elem Grade Children	45	75.00
	Without Elem Grade Children	15	25.00
	Total	60	100.00
	With Middle School Children	24	40.00
	Without Middle School Children	36	60.00
	Total	60	100.00
	With Junior High School Children	1	1.67
	Without Junior High School Children	59	98.33
Total	60	100.00	

Table 4 depicted the profile of parents as respondents of the study in terms of several children enrolled, and grade levels of children. Results showed that the majority of parents had one (1) child enrolled (47 out of 60 or 78.33%) in school through distance learning, while few parents had 2 children (12 out of 60 or 20%) enrolled in distance learning. Most children of parents were in elementary grade, (45 out 60 or 75%) while 24 out 60 or 40% of parents had children enrolled in middle school.

Table 5. The Readiness Level of School Administrators in Distance Learning in Terms of Quality of Instruction as Perceived by the Respondents

Indicators	Principals ($n_1 = 3$)		Teachers ($n_2 = 37$)		Parents ($n_3 = 60$)		Weighted Mean	Interpretation
	(\bar{x}_1)	SD	(\bar{x}_2)	SD	(\bar{x}_3)	SD		
1. Develops and maintains rigorous quality assurance programs.	4.00	0.00	3.54	0.51	3.77	0.43	3.75	<i>Adequately Ready</i>
2. Engages in research and planning for institutional effectiveness (research that focuses on service	3.33	0.58	3.57	0.50	3.83	0.38	3.65	<i>Adequately Ready</i>

quality, instructional quality, students' perceptions of services, etc.).								
3. Develop up-to-date and comparable curricula and programs through benchmarking (emulate the best practices and market drivers in the distance education industry).	4.00	0.00	3.57	0.50	3.93	0.25	3.78	<i>Adequately Ready</i>
4. Seeks, obtains, and maintains approval by private or governmental quality assurance agencies – accreditation and appropriate professional and state licensure for your institution and its programs.	3.33	0.58	3.59	0.50	3.83	0.38	3.66	<i>Adequately Ready</i>
5. Become part of professional and academic bodies and agencies in program and industry fields, for example, DETC, USDLA, and DLA, among others.	3.33	0.58	3.68	0.47	3.48	0.50	3.53	<i>Adequately Ready</i>
6. Trains and empowers faculty and staff to effectively use technology and apply the highest	3.67	0.58	3.62	0.49	3.35	0.48	3.61	<i>Adequately Ready</i>

service protocols in responding to and assisting students.								
7. Applies the SERVQUAL indices (Service Quality indices - RATER (Reliability, Assurance, Tangibles)	4.0 0	0.0 0	3.5 4	0.5 1	3.2 7	0.4 5	3.61	<i>Adequately Ready</i>
8. Shows empathy and responsiveness (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry 1990) to measure and improve service effectiveness across the board.	3.6 7	0.5 8	3.5 4	0.5 1	3.7 0	0.4 6	3.68	<i>Adequately Ready</i>
9. Leads to build competitive advantage by focusing on what your institution or distance learning department does best rather than seeking to outdo competitors – foster development of core and distinct competencies.	3.3 3	0.5 8	3.4 3	0.5 0	3.7 0	0.4 6	3.56	<i>Adequately Ready</i>
Overall Mean (\bar{x}), Standard Deviation (SD)	3.6 3 (A R)	0.3 1	3.5 6 (A R)	0.0 7	3.6 5 (A R)	0.2 3	3.65	<i>Adequately Ready</i>

Reliability: Cronbach’s alpha =0.5697

Legend: 4.20 - 5.00 Exemplary Ready (ER); 3.40 - 4.19 Adequately Ready (AR); 2.60 - 3.39; Somewhat Ready (SR); 1.80 - 2.59 Minimally Ready (MR); 1.00 - 1.79 Not Ready (NR)

Table 5 depicted below shows the extent of readiness of school administrators in distance learning in public schools in terms of quality of instruction as perceived by the respondents.

CONCLUSION

The public school administrators in New Mexico, USA were adequately ready for distance learning which emphasized that the provisions and conditions on quality of instruction, misuse of technology, cost effectiveness, managerial responsibilities, and leadership functions were highly predominant factors for an increased readiness of schools in Disruptive Education. The results of the study further emphasized that the position of principal remained an essential feature of schools but it was facing several challenges, especially in this time of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was an expectation that schools especially the school administrators had to be flexible in new forms of school leadership that best fit to the needs of the times whether in current or future educational environments. As the roles and responsibilities of principals evolved, the terms and conditions of service also needed revisions. Today's principals needed to learn to adapt to new forms of more distributed leadership, specifically on using new learning platforms as digital technology was the primary tool in distance learning. Therefore, depending on the school contexts in which the school administrators worked, they face very different sets of challenges, so approaches to school leadership policy needed to be based on careful consideration of the context in which schools operated and their particular challenges. To successfully sustain the quality of learning of our students in this current and difficult learning setup, the stakeholders must pay high regard to shared responsibility in the context of teaching and learning processes.

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