

Understanding the Post-Lockdown Behavior of Learners: A Basis for Crafting a Child Protection Action Plan

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Abstract. This study aims to understand post-lockdown learner misbehavior and its implications for child protection. Despite existing interventions, schools continue to report increasing cases of bullying, absenteeism, and disruptive behavior. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through face-to-face interviews with twenty selected informants, including school heads, teachers, parents, and learners. Findings revealed that while learners recognize their misbehavior, they lack awareness of its underlying causes, and parents struggle to explain it. Teachers play a crucial role in addressing these behavioral challenges, and school heads should develop intervention activities to help students cope with pandemic-related stress and anxiety. The study concludes that a structured child protection action plan is necessary to mitigate the long-term effects of post-pandemic stress on learner behavior.

Keywords: Post-lockdown; Learner misbehavior; Child protection; Bullying; Intervention activities.

1.0 Introduction

The global disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic irrevocably altered the educational landscape, forcing a rapid shift to remote learning. As the 2022-2023 school year marked the return to in-person classes, educators across the globe, particularly in the Philippines, confronted a surge in student misbehavior. This resurgence was not merely a return to pre-pandemic norms but a significant escalation, with reported cases of bullying, absenteeism, heightened independence, and even incidents of sexual assault and physical violence reaching unprecedented levels (Alsawalqa, 2021). This phenomenon reflects a broader societal impact, where prolonged isolation and altered social dynamics seemingly manifest in observable behavioral changes within the school environment. The urgency to address this shift is paramount, as it directly impacts the safety and well-being of learners.

This trend was acutely observed in Catacte Integrated School, where anecdotal evidence from class advisors and the guidance counselor revealed a consistent and concerning pattern. Throughout the first three quarters of the school year, an average of five misbehavior cases were reported per class, from Kindergarten to Grade 6, including those in the Special Science Elementary School (SSES) program, where exemplary conduct is typically expected. Alarming, some classes experienced over twenty reported incidents. This persistent pattern, which continued unabated into the fourth quarter, highlighted the inadequacy of existing interventions and underscored the need for a deeper understanding of the underlying causes. Despite the implementation of DepEd Memorandum No. 14 series 2020, which outlined guidelines for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), and the subsequent

psychological first aid training conducted throughout SDO Bulacan (Reproduction No. 96 s. 2022), many students struggled to reintegrate into the social dynamics of the classroom, exhibiting lingering signs of post-lockdown stress.

This situation reveals a critical gap in our understanding of the 'post-lockdown learner' experience. Having spent two formative years in the relative isolation of remote learning, these students face the daunting task of adapting to traditional classrooms' sensory overload, social complexities, and structured environment (Kewalramani, 2023). The sudden shift from the familiar digital space to the bustling school environment can induce confusion and anxiety, often manifesting as disruptive behaviors. As Tam (2017) suggests, this confusion can lead to 'make-up' behaviors, a coping mechanism for students struggling to interpret and navigate their new reality. These behaviors, ranging from verbal disruptions and chronic avoidance of work to more severe forms of aggression and harassment (Sun & Shek, 2012), not only disrupt the learning environment but also pose a threat to the emotional and physical well-being of both students and educators.

While extensive research exists on the impact of pandemic-related stress on children's socio-emotional development (Flaherty, 2020; healthychildren.org, 2020; Narvaez et al., 2023), a significant gap remains in our understanding of its specific influence on post-lockdown learning behavior within the unique context of Philippine elementary schools. The persistence of these behavioral challenges, even in countries where COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted (Prothero, 2023; Shen-Berro, 2023; United States Department of Education, 2022), underscores the universal nature of this issue and the urgent need for targeted interventions. This research is crucial because understanding the root causes of these behaviors is essential for effective child protection and for creating a supportive and conducive learning environment. By identifying patterns and triggers, educators can develop evidence-based programs that address the unique needs of post-lockdown learners, mitigating the long-term effects of pandemic-related stress.

Therefore, this study aims to bridge this critical gap by conducting an in-depth examination of the post-lockdown behavior of learners at Catacte Integrated School. By delving into the lived experiences of these students, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted factors contributing to their misbehavior. This knowledge will be a foundation for crafting a tailored Child Protection Action Plan, ensuring every learner's holistic safety, well-being, and academic success. Ultimately, this research underscores the imperative of prioritizing students' socio-emotional needs as they navigate the challenging transition back to traditional schooling, fostering a resilient and supportive educational environment.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study followed the qualitative method, which employed an in-depth and open-ended face-to-face narrative interview to gather data about the behavior exemplified by the post-lockdown learners. This research also sought answers to the parents' and teachers' questions about understanding the learners' behavior inside the school. In addition, this study also found ways that enabled the school principal to take further actions to fortify the child protection provisions of the school through an action plan that shall keep the learners safe, well-behaved, and well-mannered. To understand and explore the lived experiences and issues of the informants, the researcher employed the phenomenological approach as the research design of this study. The researcher made use of and adhered to the Phenomenological Research Design, as shown in Figure 1.

This study aimed to gather information and understand the behavioral patterns of post-lockdown learners so that the school can protect them through a child protection action plan. Data were collected through in-person narrative interviews, allowing participants to share lived experiences relevant to post-lockdown behavior. As stated by Aderson and Kirkpatrick (2011), the conduct of narrative interviews places the informants at the heart of the study, which helps researchers understand their experiences and behaviors presented as good and rich data sources that reveal new awareness that will lead to flexibility and clarification of ideas.

Furthermore, "explicitation" is used in this study to highlight, stress, and extract from the investigation done to the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole. The exploitation process led this study

in obtaining and categorizing data, clustering information, organizing each into themes, and concluding them through a writing composite summary.

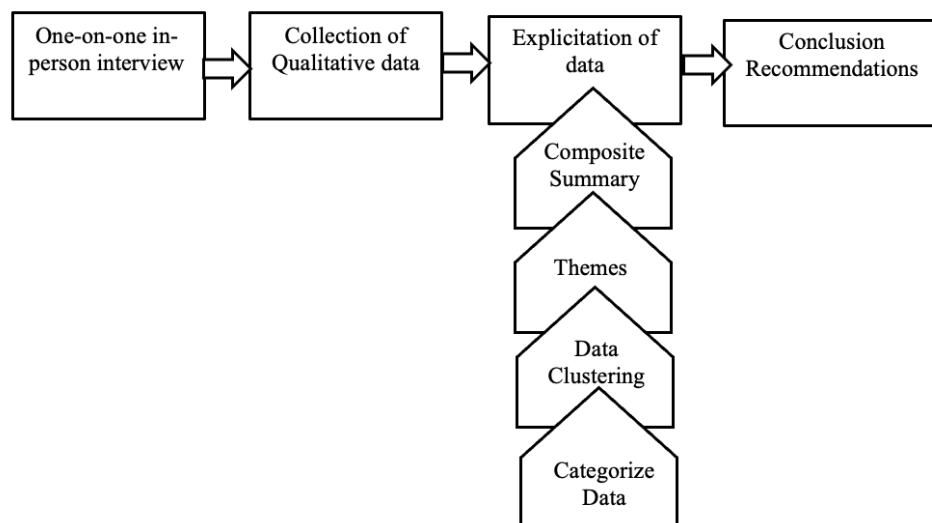


Figure 1. *Phenomenological research design*

The data gathered were categorized afterward. Moustakas (1994) highlighted that the meaning of each interview must be scrutinized and that redundant ideas should be eliminated. To do this, the researcher kept the literal content, the number or significance of times a meaning was shown, and how non-verbal or para-linguistic cues were stated. The importance of taking notes in acquiring the best interpretation and meaning of the spoken words of the informants was upheld as exact and accurate as possible. The common themes and differences were lifted, taken cared-off and written. Finally, after the conclusions were made, steps were taken to craft the child protection action plan properly, which addressed the issues and concerns of the subject informants and arrived at the most plausible and research-based solutions.

2.2 Research Locale

This research study focused on the behavioral patterns of post-lockdown learners, particularly the misbehavior learners exemplified in the conduct of S.Y. 2022 – 2023, which also marked the reopening of classes after COVID-induced quarantine periods. The study used narrative face-to-face interviews as the modality of data gathering from the informants. It encompassed the second half of the first quarter and the first half of the second quarter of the school year 2023-2024 (August 2023-November 2023), with another month committed to the review and revision of the manuscript. It involved two (2) informants from grade one learners, two (2) informants from grade two learners, two (2) informants from grade three learners three, two (2) informants from grade four learners, two (2) informants from grade five learners, two (2) informants from grade 6 learners, four (4) parents, three (3) teachers and one (1) school principal. The informants were selected using purposive sampling using the researcher's locally designed guidelines. This study was conducted in the Catacte Integrated School of Bustos District.

2.3 Research Informants

In implementing the study, the researchers involved informants in four (4) categories: the learners, the parents, the teachers, and the school principal. The points of view from these four sectors contribute much to understanding the behavioral patterns of post-lockdown learners. Specifically, the study was participated by two (2) informants from grade one learners, two (2) informants from grade two learners, two (2) informants from grade three learners three, two (2) informants from grade four learners, two (2) informants from grade five learners, two (2) informants from grade 6 learners, four (4) parents, three (3) teachers and one (1) school principal. An overall number of 20 informants were involved in the study, with consent and assent.

2.4 Research Instrument

The researcher utilized unstructured questions, which allowed all the informants to talk openly. These open-ended questions aided the informants in answering in their own words and gestures, which helped the researcher connect with the learners regarding their experiences, issues, and concerns. Eight (8) unstructured questions were allocated for the learners, while five (5) questions were asked to the parents. These questions will be asked using the vernacular language. Three (3) questions were asked to the teachers, and two (2) questions were asked to the school head. These questions were asked using the English language.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

This phenomenological-qualitative study employed interviews as its primary tool in gathering data. The researchers used the in-person narrative interview, which gave the informants the freedom to answer. As mentioned in the previous segment, the interviews were video recorded. This enabled the researcher to capture their emotions through facial expressions, gestures, and utterances. The interview was also conducted while adhering to the minimum health and safety protocols set by the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF), and DepEd since limits were still posted during those times. The guidelines established by the Regional Office are rooted in the DepEd Regional Memorandum 228, s. 2020 were all strictly followed. The following protocols should be done for data collection, security, storage, transfer, and destruction procedures which the researcher fully applied: (1) all data were collected through a physical platform; (2) the researcher secured that nobody can access on the collected information and responses of the informants via physical interview than himself; (3) responses of the informants were coded securely; (4) ample and accurate practical analysis are employed in utilizing the Tesch method; (5) open and responsive actions were done for the reasonable requests of copy or terms on data handling, transfer and destruction by the informants when requested; and (6) collected data (voice or video recordings, pictures, and the like) were destroyed after the verbatim transcription was done.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The researcher strictly complied with Regional Memorandum No. 228 s—2020, which is known as the ethical guidelines for educational research. Before conducting the study, the researcher submitted a letter of request to the school principal where the study was conducted and the Public Schools District Supervisor of the district where the school is situated so that both could review the research before submitting it. After this, a letter of intent for the conduct of the study was written and addressed to the Schools Division Superintendent (SDS) with the manuscript of the research proposal for the Schools Division Research Committee for their review and endorsement of the conduct of the study.

Ethical considerations on the part of the informants were: (1) the researcher will make sure to have the consent and assent forms first before doing anything; (2) being an informant is entirely voluntary, and the informants have all the right to decline with the invitation of being included in the study; (3) guidelines will be set for the conduct of the interview; and (3) provisions of data storage for the information gathered. Furthermore, this study esteemed the right to privacy of the informants. The researcher protected their identity through anonymity. Moreover, the confidentiality of the information was strictly observed, and no data sharing was done and ensured. The interview recordings, in either voice or video, were only done with the permission of the informants, and they were entirely informed of their destruction by the time they served their purpose.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Misbehavior being Reflected

Being the focus of this research, the learners were heard to be able to understand their more profound thoughts, sentiments, and feelings about misbehavior. “*Opo*” (L1) (Yes) was the most common answer of the informants when asked about being scolded at home during the pandemic. However, certain verbal and nonverbal answers were also noted, such as “*Hindi po*” (L4) (No), “*Minsan po*” (L7) (Sometimes), and no response (L3). Most of the informants were scolded to varying degrees during the duration of the pandemic, while the others were not. This also showed that they were aware of misbehavior. According to Jennings (2020), scolding does not work, especially during a pandemic, because it adds to one's burden. Thus, it can have an adverse effect on one's affect, which directly influences behavior.

The Daily Life of Learners During the Pandemic

Rooting out the causes of this misbehavior and having a clear idea of the activities done by the informants during the pandemic can give hindsight for this study. *"Naglaro po ako."* (L8) (I played.) This was the answer most informants gave to this question. L2 said they help with household chores like washing the dishes and cleaning the house. L10 and L12 said they played online games like Call of Duty (COD), ML (Mobile Legends), and Roblox. L4, L5, and L8 said they are practicing to read, write, and compute. L1 did not answer this question. From the answers above, learners were seen to have something to do during lockdowns. Some of them were interactive, productive, and educational.

However, not all the aforementioned activities were beneficial among elementary learners. In a study conducted by Regis College (2023), young people who are regulated or prohibited from overusing gadgets are more likely to develop emotional and attention issues associated with misbehavior, such as irrationality, combativeness, obedience, and rebellion. Excessive play can also have the same consequences because playing too much contributes to both physical and mental health problems (Thurott, 2022).

Being Back: Learners' Perspective

The learners' experiences upon returning to the four corners of classrooms have been sought, including their experiences in conflicts with others. Surprisingly, all the 12 learner-informants similarly answered *"Masaya po pero nakakatakot na baka mahawa [magkaroon] ng COVID"* (Happy but worry to get COVID from others). As for their experiences in having conflicts with others, the learner-informants have varied answers. Many of them said they have not engaged in conflicts yet; the reports from their teachers say otherwise. L9, L10, and L11 admitted they caused trouble inside the classroom. L1 and L2 just scratched their heads upon hearing the question. L5 just laughed and said, *"Sila po nauuna lagi."* (They start trouble first).

It was clear that learners were happy learning inside the classroom. However, all of them fear contagion. Ironically, the fear did not translate into being away from others. Instead, they pulled themselves nearer to them by playing, teasing, and doing things that little did they know caused trouble and misbehavior. According to EducationWeek's Research Center, as cited in Williams (2023), learner misbehavior spiked in 2021 and has not shown any improvement until 2023. The following factors were attributed to this: (1) children's marination with technology; (2) children's access and reliance on screens; (3) smartphone usage; (4) social media; and (5) youth mental health.

Others, such as My Mirror

Oftentimes, we see ourselves through how others see us. Despite the reported misbehavior, the learner-informants were asked about what they think other people think about them, and they answered: L8 and L9 said, *"Makulit daw po [ako]"* (I am naughty) while grinning. L10, L11, and L12 mentioned *"Pasaway"* (Stubborn) in different manners and explanations. L1, L2, L3, and L4 remained silent as if they would cry. L5, L6, and L7 just laughed while shaking their heads. From this, learners said they were stubborn and naughty, and even though many of them did not verbally answer, their reaction suggests they also are. Furthermore, even a hint helped the learner-informants know what others think of them. In this sense, we can also deduce that their behavior is pointed out in one way or another.

Learners' Feelings: Unveiled

To fully grasp how the learner-informants feel about their misbehavior, they were asked what they feel when confronted about their misbehavior. The most common answer among them is *"Nalulungkot po [ako]."* (I am sad). *"Nahihiya po [ako]"* (I am shy) (L11 & L12). L1 just grinned, gave no answer, and scratched his head after some follow-up questions. For themselves, learners answered that they were sad, shy, or embarrassed every time they heard negative comments from others about their behavior. This suggests again that learners are aware of this misbehavior and feel embarrassed when they do it, as suggested by their verbal and nonverbal answers (Zivi et al., 2023).

Self Confronting Himself

In this part, the learners were asked how they felt about themselves and why their attention needed to be called. *"Kasi po sobra na yung kakulitan ko sa room"* (Because I am too naughty in the room) (L12). *"Para po maging mabait"*

(To be nice) (L3, L4, & L6). *"Para di na po magalit si Mam"* (So that our teacher will not get angry anymore) (L10 & L11). *"Para matuto po ako [sa mga mali kong nagawa]."* (To learn from my mistakes.) (L5) L7 just grinned after hearing the question and did not answer. L1 and L2 did not answer, but their eyes seemed tearier sometime after the question was raised.

The learner informants gave varied responses for this part, which included stopping naughtiness, being nice, and learning from mistakes. Also, non-verbal cues were seen showing admission that something needs to be addressed. Sremba (2023) suggested that learners are just made to misbehave differently (in an emotional, violent, and disorderly manner) because of the heightened anxiety and emotional issues brought on by the pandemic. Their confession and remorse in this interaction suggest they do not want to be this way. It is just that they "need" to be this way because their emotions suggest being so. According to the American Psychological Association (2024), this is called acting out, which is a behavioral expression of what somebody feels so that they can relieve the tension they feel or to communicate them in disguise, translated into the world as arguing, fighting, stealing, threatening, and throwing tantrums.

Lifeline Comes In

After listening to the previous statements, the researcher asked the learners if they thought it would help. Almost everybody said *"Opo"* (Yes) while L1 and L2 just shook their heads. This study phase confirmed that our learner informants do not want to be this way. The pandemic stress they had had its compelling force on them, which affected our learner informants to behave this particular way so they can vent out what they feel (Mari, 2023; Sremba, 2023; & American Psychological Association, 2024).

Time to Ask for Somebody's Help

Having all these narratives, the researcher asked the learner informants whom they think can help them overcome their misbehavior. *"Si Mam/Sir [ko] po."* (My teacher.) This is the most common response. (L1, L2, L4, L8, L11 & L12) *"Si Nanay [ko] po."* (My mother.) (L5, L6, L7, & L10) *"Si Daddy [ko] po."* (My father.) (L3). *"Kayo po, Sir."* (The researcher) (L9). This part certainly revealed that our learner informants need help, and they know whom they will turn their heads to. The teachers were the ones to whom our learner-informants entrust themselves. The others have answered their mother and father. One said the researcher, which was a delightful feeling since the trust was established quickly. These reactions also hint at forming programs and projects that involve teachers and parents to protect the effect of our learners and help them improve themselves so they can realize their full potential.

Looking under the Lens of Parents and Guardians

Parents were viewed and considered to be the most crucial factors in learners' development during the pandemic. They should know how their children behave inside the house. The researcher asked them how they perceived their children's behavior in school. P1 answered, *"Pasaway po talaga [siya] kahit sa bahay."* (He is truly a stubborn one even at home). *"Wala naman po e, tahimik lang naman po yata yun e [then laughs]. Alam naman po ni [class adviser] yun e."* (It's nothing, I guess it's just quiet [then laughs]. [class adviser] knows that). P3 and P4 said they have no idea.

Two parents said they knew, and the other two did not. One is positive, however, that her child misbehaves in class. For others, however, the teachers have anecdotes of the incidences involving their children; thus, we can say they either have no idea or lie about it. The way they answered poses denial, a defense mechanism where negative thoughts, feelings, wishes, and events are excluded from the conscious mind, taking in forms such as refusal to answer or ignoring reality (American Psychological Association, 2024). However, their tone and manner indicate that they think about their children well. They show signs of being concerned and mindful of their children's behavior.

Parents: The Ultimate Guide of their Children

When asked about what support they give to their children about their misbehavior, they answered: P1 and P2 answered, *"Napapagalitan ko po"* (I scolded him). *"Napapagalitan at napapalo po kapag sobrang kulit"* (He gets scolded and beaten when you are too naughty) (P3 & P4). Scolding and beating are the answers given. The aforementioned answers show that a sense of discipline is instilled among the learners in their homes. Also, no overdiscipline seems to be evident in the parents' narratives. This showed that learners apply the traditional way of fostering

discipline, which Carague (n.d.) points out as using tsinelas or any other hard object coupled with "sermon" to discipline children and mold them into morally straight members of society.

The Hurting Truth Explained

Initially, the parent-informants were asked what they felt when being summoned from school due to their children's misbehavior. However, they said the teachers did not call them. Instead, the researcher reframed the question to reflect how they feel whenever the teacher or other people notify them of their children's misbehavior. For P1 and P2, the researcher needed to reframe the questions multiple times, including giving an example of himself to come up with an answer: "*Nagagalit po [ako].*" (I become angry.) P3 and P4 directly gave the same response. All the informants answered that they become angry whenever somebody or the teacher tells them about their child's misbehavior. This is logical when we consider the previous answers. However, watching the parents answer gave the researcher a hint that discipline is indeed not lacking in their household. This led to the conclusion that pandemic stress affecting emotional and mental health cannot be intervened by imposing discipline alone.

Parents: Beacon of Children Discipline

The parent-informants were also asked about the way they foster discipline among learners. Unanimously, all the parent-informants answered, "*Napapagalitan at napapalo po kapag sobrang kulit.*" (He gets scolded and beaten when you are too naughty). "Spare the rod and spoil the child," says an adage. The parent-informants were vocal about the disciplinary practices they fostered in their children. As said before, it was evident that the parents followed traditional Filipino discipline.

The Concerns of the Parents: Exposed

Parents were asked if they think the pandemic affects their children's behavior. Again, a unanimous "Yes" was the answer. The researcher followed up by asking why. "*Kasi po wala silang pasok sa eskwelahan.*" (Because they don't go to school.). (P1&P4) "*Kasi puro sila gadget noong pandemic* (Because they were just playing with gadgets during the pandemic) (P2). "*Mas kumulit po sila noong lockdown.*" (He was naughtier during the lockdown.) (P3) The parents unanimously agreed that the pandemic changed something among their children. Digging deeper, they can pinpoint the reason whom they think affected such.

Teachers: Dealing with Misbehavior

Being asked how they deal with misbehavior, teachers imparted the following: "*Magagalit pero hindi sa paraan na sisigawan...kakausapin [ko sila] at ipaintindi kung ano 'yong mali* (Be angry but not in a way that you shout at them... I will talk to them and let them understand what is wrong.) (T1) T1 added, "*Kapag pinapagalitan dapat in general pero kakausapin mo ng personal ung bata [pagkatapos].*" (When I scold anyone, it should be at first addressed generally but afterward, you personally talk with the learner). "*I deal with them [by] first, I catch their attention.* (T2). Furthermore, T2 implied "*Ipapaliwanag [ko] na sila ay pinapupunta ng magulang sa school para mag-aral.*" (I explain that learners are at school to study). "*Constant reminding of their misbehavior*" (T3). T4 mentioned "*I ask the learner to stay after class and talk about what he/she did.*"

Teachers were viewed and considered among the best problem-solvers because they could handle various issues with a perspective that superseded the situation. Moreover, teachers, especially those under DepEd, were seen to be very well-equipped with psychosocial intervention in dealing with learners who show symptoms of pandemic stress, anxiety, and emotional and mental health problems. The teacher-informants showed various ways of handling misbehavior, which also reflects their teaching philosophy. Some of them call the attention of learners abruptly right after the misbehavior is exemplified. Some scold in private. But the common denominator among them is the attempt to explain what went wrong. Thus, teachers focus on the affective domain of learners when intervening in their issues.

Teachers: Taking Steps to Address Misbehavior

Post-lockdown, teachers knew this would come. Thus, everyone was equipped with the capacities that would enable them to address the learners' misbehavior. "*May punishment pero hindi corporal punishment. Halimbawa, kung maingay ka o nalistang pinaka maingay, maglilinis ka.*" (I give punishment but not the corporal ones. For example, somebody is listed as the noisiest, he will clean) (T1). More to this, T1 added giving them additional workload,

such as reporting on a subject or requiring a learner to submit additional outputs so that her learners will avoid misbehaving again. For T2 and T3, *"Lagi ko silang binibigyan ng activity para wala silang chance na [magmisbehave] para 'yung atensyon nila e doon mafocus."* (I always give them activities so they will not have a chance to misbehave, so their attention will be laser-focused on the activity.) T4 suggested, *"First offense, I give them a warning. Second offense: I call their attention and ask them to be quiet. Third offense: I call the learner outside the room and talk to him privately. If this persists, I will notify the parent via phone via Messenger."*

The teacher-informants came up with varied responses. The provision of presentation punishment was evident, and removal punishment was evident. Also, keeping learners busy to handle their attention was given. This interaction shows that the teacher-informants believe that strong classroom management is a good determinant of learner discipline. However, this phase also showed that a pre-lockdown approach to discipline seemed insufficient in addressing post-lockdown behavioral problems among learners. The learners still misbehaved in class despite these practices being enforced. Given this, the school must conduct activities that guarantee classroom management and rehabilitate discipline among learners.

Teachers: Feelings of Resentment Surfaces

As with the previous informants, the teachers were also asked about their feelings when a learner misbehaves in class. *"E sa'kin, pag nagmimisbehave, iniintindi ko kasi Grade 3 lang sila."* (For me, I try to understand them because they are only in Grade 3) (T1). In addition T1 one mentioned *"Dahil parte ng pagkabata ang makulit, maharot, at maingay"* (Being stubborn, unruly, and noisy is part of being a child). *"A little bit syempre nakakalungkot kasi iyon yung nakagisnan nila at hindi iyon yung ine-expect natin."* (A little bit disappointing of course since that is what they experienced and this is not we expect at all) (T2). *"Feeling ineffective and that makes me sad"* (T3). T4 said in a sad tone, *"Nalulungkot po ako kasi po tinatanong ko yung sarili ko baka kulang ang ginagawa ko para sa kanila kaya sila nagmimisbehave, kaya di ko nakukuha ang kanilang atensyon, kaya nila hindi gustong matutuo, [at] kaya nila hindi gustong makinig."* (I feel sad because I am asking myself that maybe, they misbehave because what I do for them is lacking, I do not get their attention, they do not want to learn, and they do not want to listen.)

All teacher informants except T1 felt sadness. However, understanding their misbehavior incurred a little bit of frustration, especially when you come to understand how different learners were before than they are now in terms of discipline and behavior. Some of them even felt ineffective. As said, the department was able to train DepEd teachers in dealing with emotionally and mentally anxious learners. However, as they say, there is always a surprise when theory meets practice. One school year after the learners came to experience the four corners of the classroom, the preconceived latent pandemic effects surfaced. This time, some teachers were caught off-guard. Nevertheless, this issue should not be underestimated or ignored because we may not know what other adverse effects this will bring up.

Teachers: Relating Pandemic and Misbehavior

Being with the learners five days a week in the post-lockdown era, teachers have a full knowledge on how pandemic affected their learners' behavior. According to T1, *"Oo kasi nakatutok lang sila sa cellphone, laptop,[o] gadgets."* (Yes, because there only use their time in cellphone, laptop, or gadgets.) Moreover, T1 added *"Syempre, ang focus [regard] nila sa pag-aaral ay affected talaga"*. (Of course, their regard towards learning will definitely be affected). T2 said, *"Apektado silang mabuti [ng pandemic] dahil 'yong two years silang na-stock sa bahay. Dahil diyan, hindi gumagana ng ganoon kainam ang kanilang isipan."* (They are muchly affected by the pandemic because in a span of two years, they are stuck in their houses. Because of that, their minds did not function that well.) T2 also mentioned *"Nang bumalik dito ang mga bata sa school, nakita natin na napakababa ng kanilang reading, saka writing at comprehension ng mga bata. So, iyon ang naging resulta na malaking epekto sa mga bata."* (When they returned to school, we witnessed their deterioration in reading, writing, at comprehension. That is the biggest effect among the children). On the other hand, T3 answered, *"Opo. Dahil 'yong social aspect (socialization skills) nila ay hindi naiapply during the two-year pandemic."* (Yes. It is because their socialization skills are not applied during the two-year pandemic.) Furthermore, T3 also shared, *"So ngayon na kumbaga, lumabas na sila [ng tahanan], doon na nila nabubuos 'yong negative and positive misbehavior."* (So now, after they went out of their homes, that is the time when they poured their negative and positive misbehavior). *"Para sa akin, siguro noong panahon na 'yon nung may lockdown at nasa bahay ang bata [ang naapektuhan ay] yung pagiging independent ng bata sa kanilang mga magulang. Katulad noong nagmodule sila, nakaasa sila sa kanilang magulang para tulungan sila sa pagtapos ng module."* (For me, when the learners

are stuck at home during lockdowns, what was affected was their independency from their parents. Like when they are answering their modules, they over rely on their parents' help in accomplishing them) (T4).

The aforementioned statements clearly indicate that teachers are convinced that the pandemic affected the learners' behavior. The teachers believe it affects various aspects of life crucial to studies, such as focus, academics, social skills, and self-reliance or independence. The most recent research points out that these are the possible latent effects of the pandemic among post-pandemic learners. For one, Micor (2023) denoted that higher stress and mental issues are seen among learners after the pandemic. These issues translate to various forms of misbehavior, such as being rebellious, disobedient, lazy, and misbehaving. Moreover, Watts and Pattnaik (2022) supported the idea that the pandemic caused learners to over-reliance due to a lack of friendships, absence of peer learning and peer communication, loss of playtime, and lack of socialization impacted their children's socialization skills, higher-order thinking development, mental health, and activity levels. This may have contributed to learning confusion, which later made learners irate and bored, thus shifting from being a passive into an active classroom component but not in a positive way.

The Captain of the Ship Talks

The school head was asked to define the connection between the school culture and the misbehavior of learners. *"As a school head, I cannot see a direct connection between our school culture and the misbehavior of learners. However, I can see the school culture as a lifeline that should be thrown to rescue the learners who fell as victims of the pandemic. Given all these, this issue becomes an issue of child protection since if we fail on this, a lot worse can happen to these children later on." "We all know that nobody wanted that ordeal brought by the pandemic. However, being able to push stubborn learners to graduate, non-readers to comprehend, and non-numerates to compute in four operations before, I believe that misbehavior, despite not communicating the school culture, must be intervened through the culture of excellence we imply in our day-to-day teaching practice. That is why doing this right is tantamount to protecting our learners. We should protect their learning so that we can protect their future. We should protect their mental and socio-emotional health because it can make or break them in the years to come.*

The school head believed in the nullity of the connection between the high number of cases or instances of misbehaving learners and the school's culture. Uleanya, as cited in Rossouw and Frick (2022), defines this culture as the "hidden curriculum" because it involves norms, values, and beliefs which are not documented to be part or a fragment of official teaching. However, it is possible to fix things through the learners' understanding of this hidden curriculum, as mentioned by the school head. If the teacher makes the learning fun and engaging enough to hook the learner from misbehaving to being attentive, the occurrence of misbehavior fades, diminishes, and settles down. As soon as it happens, learners will be able to have a new mindset about education and forget the past, including the stigma of the pandemic in his or her learning. Furthermore, this issue of child protection must be immediately decided upon so that we can reach out to the concerned learners as soon as possible.

The School Head as the Master Planner

To lead the way for teachers to intervene in cases of misbehavior effectively, the school head suggested: *"Based on the training I attended before the opening of classes, three things need to be considered for learners who have emotional and mental health problems: the psychosocial needs of the learner, their gradual rehabilitation, and the enjoyment while doing it. First of all, the Reproduction 250 s. 2022 of the Schools Division of Bulacan shows a compendium of research-based and learner-friendly psychosocial activities for post-pandemic learners. What we shall do is regularly let the identified learners experience these interventions to address their needs. The school guidance focal person will facilitate this activity with the help of each classroom adviser. Secondly, to help the identified learners gradually overcome the pandemic stress, a learner circle will be formed. This circle will meet after class to discuss how their day went, what they accomplished, and their day's thoughts. This will be the primary support group of the identified learners. Also, various activities such as games and the like will be introduced each week over one full year. This will also be facilitated by the school guidance focal person with the aid of all class advisers.*

Lastly, to make the identified learners feel they belong in the school, we shall add school events that the entire school will participate in. Aside from the usual Intramurals, Field Day, and Scouting, we shall have a Family Day, where learners can have fun with their parents; United Nations Day, where learners can learn and share their knowledge about other cultures, customs, and traditions, Quarterly Class Party, which can be done every after-recognition day, and many others days we shall include in the school calendar. Periodically, I will call the Child Protection Committee to monitor the learners' progress

in their activities and, more importantly, in the classroom. They shall denote and compare before-and-after situations and denote the significant change they observe. At the end of the school year, we will evaluate the learners' monitoring and the significant milestones they achieve in psychosocial development. The State of School Address (SOSA) will consolidate and communicate these results.

The school head was eager to address learners' misbehavior so that they could be protected in various aspects of life, especially their future. The provision under the aforementioned issuances and circulars lifted the learners to move forward from their harsh experiences during the pandemic and live their lives with new hope and initiative.

Discussion

The pandemic was written throughout history as one of the darkest days for education and will be classified as a dark tale to be passed from one generation to another. It indeed puts the learners' emotional and mental health at a disadvantage. The researcher felt so much accomplished, having heard the informants share their pieces of this atrocious history and having them compiled in this study. In this way, these children's futures can be protected by eliminating the latent effects of the pandemic on their behavior, which can potentially harm them in the future. Learners' perceptions of their behavior are evident. They even called themselves *makulit* (naughty) and *pasaway* (stubborn). They are aware of their misbehavior when they are in school and what people around them think. Most of all, unhappiness and shyness surfaced when asked about it.

When asked about their perspective on the cause of their behavior, it was also clear that the learner-informants do not know its cause despite knowing their misbehavior. They were blind to the pandemic stress, anxiety, emotional and mental health issues, and the like. They feel it without knowing how to deal with it. However, they know they need help from others whom they trust. Learning this is a positive note that the misbehavior exemplified by the learner-informants in this study is still reversible.

As for the parent-informants, they performed the task of being a disciplinarian so that their children could grow with desirable behavior. They admitted adhering to the traditional Filipino discipline in giving emotional lessons to their children. They also function as guides who give parental advice to their children when they get into trouble. As to understanding their child's behavior, they appeared to have a full grasp of the situation but were in denial of its occurrence. They also attributed their children's misbehavior to the pandemic. As for their response to their children's behavior, they felt angry whenever they heard their children's misbehavior from other people. It was also evident that nobody spoils them, and in reality, they have them feel the consequence of their action, be it in the form of heart-to-heart talk (scolding) or when, if they did too much, a little beating.

As for the teachers, the series of seminars and workshops in which the DepEd invested benefited them because they gave nonviolent, fair, and constructive approaches to dealing with misbehaving learners. All the teacher-informants employed the art of questioning, pointing out the misbehavior and not the child as a failure. They also considered giving additional workloads, which can surely make learners busy to the point that they forget to misbehave anymore. Nonviolent presentation and removal punishments were also evident to make the learners inhibit the undesirable behavior.

Lastly, the school head's regard for the use of the school culture or the hidden curriculum of the school to address misbehavior and the provision of various activities can bring positive change to the entire academic atmosphere of the school. By doing that, it can be ensured: (1) learners will have fun; (2) learners will not be discriminated against; (3) learners will have a mental paradigm shift about their view in education; and (4) learners will be ready to face the future with no stress and trauma from their pandemic self.

4.0 Conclusion

The learner-informants were aware of misbehaving, including how others think about them. They continued this behavior even though they knew it was bad for anybody. Thus, they had an idea of what they were doing. Despite knowing the effect, the learner-informants do not know the cause. They do not have an idea about pandemic stress, anxiety, emotional and mental health issues, and other determinants of misbehavior. To adjust, the learner-informants were optimistic about receiving help from the people they found trustworthy to guide them.

The parent-informants took the disciplinarian role, using traditional Filipino discipline to shape their children to desirable behavior. In doing this, they fully grasped their children's behavior but were in denial when asked about it. The parent-informants felt anger when confronted with their children's misbehavior, yet they always let their children know the consequences of their actions through various disciplinary actions.

Teacher informants were seen to master nonviolent ways of inculcating discipline among misbehaving learners, which included proper questioning, giving reasonable workloads, talking with the misbehaving learner, and using nonviolent presentation and removal punishments. The school head, on the other hand, played a crucial role in intervening with misbehaving learners.

5.0 Contributions of the Author

The researcher was responsible for all study aspects, including conceptualization, methodology, data collection, interpretation, and analysis, as well as writing the final manuscript. It was also reviewed by some experts in the fields, presented to a research festival, and approved by the research evaluation committee of the Schools Division of Bulacan.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

The researcher declares no conflict of interest about the publication of this paper.

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