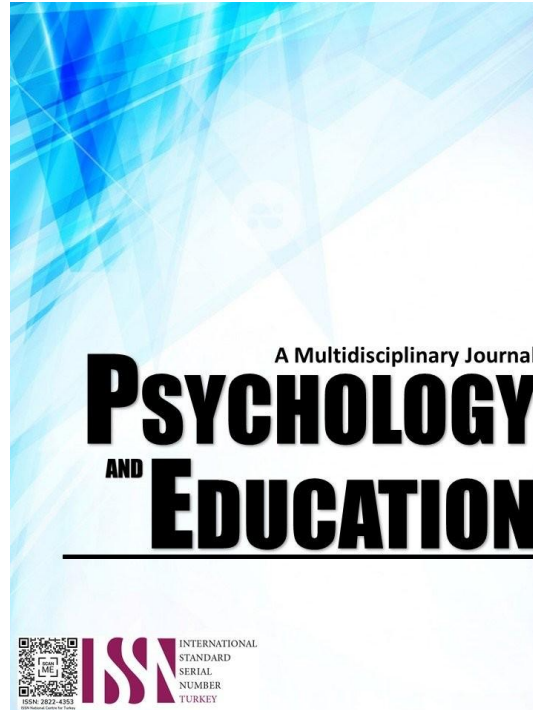


PERCEPTIONS ON PREPAREDNESS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC: AN INPUT TO FACE-TO-FACE CLASSES TRANSITION



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Perceptions on Preparedness During COVID-19 Pandemic: An Input to Face-to-Face Classes Transition

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Abstract

Schools have been closed for over two years, and students have been learning remotely, causing a significant impact on learning because of the pandemic. Due to this, schools attempt to conduct limited face-to-face classes safely, thus needing to assess their readiness to transition back to face-to-face classes as a part of the Basic Education – Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP). An Exploratory-descriptive method was used in the study. Vaccination data was analyzed, and ten teachers were engaged in an interview session regarding the school's perceived readiness. These respondents were selected randomly. Findings revealed that the school has an almost ideal vaccination status. In terms of the teachers' perceptions, it was found that the teachers were generally positive about the school's preparedness for the transition to a face-to-face modality. However, there were some concerns about the safety of students and school personnel, the condition of the school's facilities, and the feasibility of the school's plans. It was also found that the teachers have positive attitudes and subjective norms regarding safety, equipment and structures, partnerships and stakeholders, and confident behavioral intentions, which exhibit a likelihood of displaying positive behavior during the limited face-to-face classes. The findings of the study are positive and suggest that Morong National High School is well on its way to transitioning to face-to-face classes. However, there are some areas that need to be addressed to ensure the safety of students and staff.

Keywords: *perceptions, preparedness, face-to-face classes, school, COVID-19 pandemic*

Introduction

The Coronavirus Disease of 2019, also known as COVID-19, is a respiratory disease caused by a coronavirus named SARS-CoV-2. The disease was first identified in December 2019, which started the pandemic we experience today. The disease manifests flu-like symptoms together with loss of taste and smell and is transmitted through airborne respiratory particles, which makes it highly contagious, especially in enclosed and poorly ventilated places such as houses, hospitals, schools, and workplaces.

COVID-19 accounts for 528,286,310 confirmed cases as of July 23, 2022, and 6,400,978 deaths associated with the disease. Currently, the entire globe records 45,364,168 active cases, with 40,852 critical cases requiring ICU beds. With a highly transmissible virus dwelling among us, different restrictions and policies were implemented, such as curfews, quarantines, alternative working arrangements, and mandatory mask-wearing, all with the aim of stopping the virus from continuously spreading. These restrictions and policies forced schools and educational institutions to abandon in-person or face-to-face operations and adopt online and modular modalities. However, teachers, school administrators, and stakeholders believe that the current modalities are still far different and difficult to implement, thus encouraging a safe return to the face-to-face classroom setup regarding the status of schools in the Department of Education.

Thus, the study aimed to review and analyze the readiness of Morong National High School in implementing a possible face-to-face transition for the school year 2022-2023, with a focus on vaccination, school safety, equipment and structures, and partnerships and stakeholders. The result of this study was used in the revision of the school's current policies to enable a smooth and safe transition of modalities during the pandemic.

Research Questions

This study explored the perceptions of teachers on the preparedness of the school in transitioning to face-to-face classes, specifically to answer the following questions:

1. What is the status of the vaccination of school in:
 - 1.1 learners; and
 - 1.2 school personnel?
2. What are the perceptions of the teachers in the school's preparedness in the transitioning to face-to-face modality in terms of:
 - 2.1 safety;
 - 2.2 equipment and structures; and
 - 2.3 partnerships with stakeholders?

3. Is the school theoretically prepared for the limited face-to-face classes?

Literature Review

COVID-19 and Education

Being a seriously contagious and lethal disease, COVID-19 brought a significant disruption in the educational sector by forcing schools and other institutions to close. According to the World Bank (2021), 185 million students were affected when 45 countries in the region of Europe and Central Asia closed their schools during the height of the pandemic. Teachers and administrators were unprepared for this transition due to the sudden nature of the situation, so they were compelled to construct emergency remote learning systems quickly. Locally, the Philippines adopted and implemented the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) which consists of a package of interventions to respond well to the challenges brought by the pandemic (DepEd Order No. 012, series of 2020).

Distance Learning

To cope with the challenges posed by the pandemic towards education, countries shifted their attention to the use of different distance learning modalities. Distance learning aims to deliver instruction, frequently on an individual basis, to students who are not physically present in a traditional educational setting like a classroom, therefore focusing on teaching methods and technology (Özüdoğru, 2021). Thus, this learning modality has been described as a process to create and provide access to learning.

Within the BE-LCP's package, the Department of Education made use of different sub-modalities such as modular, online, and blended learning modalities. Modular distance learning (MDL) makes use of modules being distributed to students to be accomplished within a specific time, Online Distance Learning (ODL) makes use of online platforms and online applications that aid the learning process, and lastly, Blended Learning combines both modalities (Department of Education, 2020).

Effects of Distance Learning in the Philippines.

To prevent the coronavirus from spreading, distance learning has been implemented in the Philippines (COVID-19). With the implementation of distance learning in the Philippines, learning continuity is preserved; however, the effect of the pandemic still challenges the educational system. A survey conducted in 2021 revealed that 30% of Filipino respondents believed the current distance learning model to be between 20 and 50 percent effective. However, 14% of respondents said that this type of learning model is 80–100% effective (Statista, 2021). Furthermore, a study conducted by Agaton and Cueto (2021) stressed that the educational policies regarding distance learning—including the widespread school closings, the postponement of the start of classes, and the use of various instructional modalities—that were put in place to contain the pandemic were effective. However, parents, being the direct partners of teachers in terms of instruction, have faced a variety of difficulties, including the new virtual learning environment, instruction delivery, subpar learning outcomes, financial hardships while supporting the family during a lockdown, difficulty accessing and using technology, and individual issues with health, stress, and learning style.

Perception of Teachers in the Effect of Distance Learning

As the pandemic broke and spread out quickly, the entire globe was caught off-guard. This forced all countries to quickly adapt to minimize the risk, especially in the educational field. Teachers, students, and schools are still struggling with and adjusting to the distance learning curriculum despite the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines. Instead of being a novel teaching strategy, most of the teachers thought of distance learning as a technology-focused approach. According to Resceanu & Magnússon (2020), teachers' satisfaction was significantly influenced by student engagement. During remote learning classes, the instructors used standard teaching methods. Moreover, because of the poor quality of engagement and communication, distance learning was less successful for the teachers than traditional learning. With this, the Department of Education conducted a pilot limited face-to-face classes which provided important experiences and learnings that influenced the recommendations of DepEd regarding an expansion of face-to-face classes (Department of Education Press Release, 2020).

COVID-19 Policies in Face-to-Face

Prior to the conduct of limited face-to-face classes, schools were evaluated through their compliance to the policies identified in the School Safety Assessment Tool provided by the Department of Education itself. The policies followed the principles of minimum public health standards to control and prevent infection such as physical distancing, handwashing, wearing of face masks, and vaccination to reduce the risks to a controllable point (Center for Disease Prevention and Control 2021). Specifically, these principles were greatly

considered resulting in the creation of different policies focusing on school and community partnership; limiting the mobility and exposure of teachers among each other; classroom layout and structure to ensure that the physical distancing and ventilation within the classroom; and school contingency and responses.

Theory of Reasoned Action

The theory of planned action (TRA) is a model that explains how people's attitudes and beliefs about a behavior can influence their intention to perform that behavior. According to Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) as cited by Kotahwala (2020), if people have a positive attitude toward a behavior and believe that others think they should perform that behavior, they are more likely to have an intention to perform the behavior.

This intention, in turn, is a strong predictor of actual behavior. However, this theory is not a perfect model to predict an outcome alone. Some studies have shown that behavioral intention does not always lead to actual behavior. This is because there are other factors that can influence behavior, such as environmental factors and personal constraints (Rahman, 2016). Even though, the study still used the theory to provide a one-way theoretical basis on the preparedness of the school during the pandemic to assess the attitudes, subjective norms, behavioral intention, and behavior of the teachers towards the transition to a limited face-to-face modality amidst the pandemic.

Methodology

Research Design

The exploratory-descriptive design is utilized in this study to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions and assess the school's preparedness for transitioning to face-to-face classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. The exploratory-descriptive research design, as an integration of exploratory and descriptive approach, allows researchers to combine the benefits of exploration and description in a single study (Mccallum et al., 2018). Through a combination of semi-structured interviews and document analysis, the study explored various aspects of preparedness, including safety, equipment and structures, partnerships with stakeholders, contingency plans, and school policies. The exploratory approach was done through semistructured interviews provided a platform to explore the teachers' perspectives, allowing open-ended discussions and rich qualitative data collection (Orina et al., 2015). Descriptive approach was employed through document analysis which enables the gathering of objective information about the school's status, such as vaccination records and safety assessment reports (Ngoatle et al., 2019). By employing this exploratory-descriptive design, the study provided a comprehensive and detailed account of the perceptions of teachers and the current readiness of the school. The findings derived from this design informed future planning, identified strengths and weaknesses, and support decision-making processes to facilitate a successful transition to face-to-face classes.

Participants

A total of ten (10) faculty members from Morong National High School participated. The selection of respondents was done randomly, ensuring representation from various subject areas. To collect data, in-depth interviews were conducted with the selected respondents. The respondents were systematically and purposively selected. To facilitate the interview process, the respondents were provided with interview questions in advance via messenger. All interviews were digitally recorded to enable transcription and coding at a later stage. The collected data, comprising the recorded interviews, was analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

Procedure

To ensure the credibility and validity of the research findings, a triangulation approach was adopted, utilizing both semi-structured interviews and documentary analyses. Conversational interviews were conducted with selected respondents via a virtual platform, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and facilitate a meaningful dialogue. Triangulation, a method employed during analysis, was utilized to provide a multidimensional perspective on the data and overcome biases inherent in using a single method. This involved combining theories, methods, and observers to ensure a comprehensive approach (Flick 2018). Triangulation was achieved by reviewing transcribed notes and themes from the interviews, examining relevant study documents, and coding different words and themes extracted from the interview transcripts. By employing triangulation, a balanced and fair explanation of the gathered data was attained, enhancing the credibility and reliability of the research findings.

To ensure the smooth data collection process, the study obtained approval from the school head and the Disasters Risk Reduction Management Coordinator. Considering the pandemic, virtual data collection was conducted via the Google Meet platform, adhering to safety protocols and minimum health standards. This approach aimed to foster a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon

under investigation and promote fruitful dialogues between the respondents and the researcher. Additionally, the researcher conducted document analysis by reviewing the vaccination data of teachers and students.

During the data collection phase, the gathered data was carefully examined, analyzed, and categorized to identify common ideas and themes. Noteworthy statements from the respondents were emphasized to identify similarities in their responses. By extracting meaningful insights from the respondents' substantial responses, themes were developed to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon. These themes were then compared with the school documents to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the school based on both the documents and the teachers' perceptions. This comprehensive analysis provided a holistic view of the research topic and informed the research findings.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the analyses and interpretation of data obtained from the respondents of the study. The information is presented in themes with interpretation and implication. The presentation is organized based on the order of the problems in the statement of the problem.

Status of the school in terms of the Vaccination

The study analyzed the status of the school in terms of student vaccination. It can be seen on Table 1 that there is an overall vaccine compliance rate of 63.42%, which means that the mentioned percentage of students have received at least one dose of the vaccine or are fully vaccinated. This suggests that considering the local population protection of the learners inside the classroom makes it less likely to get infected with COVID-19 through herd immunity nearly 70% (World Health Organization, 2020).

Table 1. *Learner's Vaccination Record*

<i>Grade Level</i>	<i>Received 1st Dose ONLY</i>	<i>Fully Vaccinated</i>	<i>Unvaccinated</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Vaccine Compliance</i>
Grade 7	41	529	443	1013	56.27%
Grade 8	29	607	321	957	66.46%
Grade 9	16	681	401	1098	63.48%
Grade 10	39	647	328	1014	67.65%
Total	125	2464	1493	4082	63.42%

Specifically, there is an observed variation in vaccine compliance by grade level with Grade 10 learners has the highest vaccine compliance rate of 67.65% whereas Grade 7 has the lowest vaccine compliance rate, at 56.27%. This implies that older students are more likely to be vaccinated than younger students (Pingali et al. 2021). Furthermore, Matta et al. (2020) stressed that parents may be more involved in vaccination decisions for younger students, while older students may be more likely to make their own vaccination decisions.

Table 2. *School Personnel Vaccination Record*

<i>Grade Level</i>	<i>Fully Vaccinated</i>	<i>Unvaccinated</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Vaccine Compliance</i>
Teaching	141	0	141	100.00%
Non-Teaching	18	0	18	100.00%
Total	159	0	159	100.00%

Table 2 shows the vaccination status of school personnel in Morong National High School. The overall vaccine compliance rate on both teaching and non-teaching personnel is 100.00%, implying that all school personnel have a decreased risk in both acquiring and succumbing to COVID-19. It can also be implied that the school personnel are at the very least aware of the benefits of getting vaccinated to ensure shared protection through herd immunity. This resolves the problem identified in the study of Raymundo (2022) that teachers are hesitant to take the vaccine.

Perceptions of the teachers in the school's preparedness in the transition to face-to-face modality

Respondents shared their perceptions of the school's preparedness in transitioning to face-to-face classes. These perceptions were categorized into safety, equipment and structures, partnerships with stakeholders, and contingency plans and policies. Several of the

respondents expressed that the safety of both teachers and learners is the top priority, both physically and mentally.

Perceptions of the teachers in the school's preparedness in the transition to face-to-face modality in terms of Safety

Themes

Vaccination Rate

Plans for Social Distancing and Hygiene

Trust Towards the School

The vaccination rate was a major theme discussed by the teachers in terms of school safety. According to a respondent "I'm very impressed with the school's vaccination rate. I think this is a great way to protect students and staff, and I'm confident that the school will be able to keep everyone safe". This suggests that some teachers were confident that the high vaccination rate among learners (63.42%) and school personnel (100.00%) would be enough to keep everyone safe. On the other hand, a respondent shared that "I think the vaccination rate should be higher" indicating that there are others concerned that the vaccination was high enough since learners' vaccination is still below the 70% target. Thus, supporting the recommendation of UNICEF (2020) that vaccination is a fundamental key in preparing schools to conduct in-person or face-to-face interactions with learners to ensure that students are getting the best possible education during the pandemic time.

Another emerging theme was the plans for the implementation of policies regarding social distancing and hygiene. Some teachers were confident that the school's plans were adequate as can be derived from one of the responses "I feel that the school has done a good job of planning for safety in the transition to face-to-face modality. The high vaccination rate among students and staff is reassuring...", while others were worried that they may not be feasible, thus can be seen in the response "I'm a little concerned about the school's plans for social distancing and hygiene. I'm worried that it may be difficult to enforce social distancing in classrooms, and I'm not sure if the school has enough cleaning supplies".

The school's plans for social distancing and hygiene were an emerging theme in a study of teachers' perspectives on the implementation of these policies in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some teachers were confident that the school had done a good job of planning, while others were worried that the plans may not be realistic. UNESCO (2022) agrees that this is a valid concern, as social distancing and hygiene can be difficult to enforce in schools, especially in crowded classrooms. Additionally, schools may not have enough cleaning supplies or staff to adequately clean and disinfect surfaces.

The teachers' trust towards the school also emerged as an essential theme of the study. It was found that they wanted to feel confident that the school was taking the necessary precautions to protect their safety, and they were eager to receive clear and transparent communication from the school's leadership. This can be observed based on a respondent's perception "I'm hoping that the school will be transparent about its plans and that it will be willing to listen to feedback from teachers".

The findings support the statement of Weinstein (2022) that teachers who had a high level of trust in the school were more likely to feel confident in the school's ability to protect their safety and the safety of their students. They were also more likely to be satisfied with the school's communication about COVID-19 safety.

Perceptions of the teachers in the school's preparedness in the transition to face-to-face modality in terms of Equipment and Structure

Themes

Safety of Students

Confidence

In the analysis of the interview with the respondents, the safety of students and school personnel emerged as a major concern. As quoted in a respondent's response "I'm a little concerned about the condition of the school's facilities. The classrooms are a bit cramped, and the bathrooms are not very well-maintained" Based on their responses, the condition of the school's facilities are not conducive to learning based on the needs of a learning environment as described by Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2021) as a classroom promoting physical distancing of 2 to 3 feet, well-ventilated, promotes good hygiene.

Confidence also emerged as another theme during the interviews. The teachers who were confident in the school's preparedness were impressed with the school's investment in equipment such as masks, sanitizers, and other supplies. They were also confident in the school's plans to renovate the classrooms. One teacher said, "I feel that the school has done a good job of preparing for the transition to face-to-face modality in terms of equipment and structures. The school has invested in technology such as air purifiers, and sanitizing stations, and the classrooms have been renovated to make them more spacious and well-ventilated. I'm confident that these measures will help to keep students and staff safe." This confidence reflects the teachers' belief that the school's leadership is committed to doing whatever it takes to ensure safety. Furthermore, Capp (2018) stated that schools can build confidence in their COVID-19 safety plans by investing in equipment and making changes to their facilities. They can also build confidence by being transparent and communicative with teachers and parents, and by being prepared for the unexpected.

Perceptions of the teachers in the school's preparedness in the transition to face-to-face modality in terms of Partnerships and Stakeholders

Theme Collaboration

In the analysis of the interview on the respondents regarding the school's Partnerships and Stakeholders, the only theme that emerged was collaboration.

According to the respondents, "The school collaborates with other stakeholders. They've been working with the local government and the RHU to develop safety plans, and they've been keeping parents informed about the latest developments" teachers were positive about the school's partnerships with other stakeholders, such as the local government, RHU, and parents. They felt that these partnerships were essential to ensuring the safety of students and staff during the transition to face-to-face modality. By collaborating with other stakeholders, the school can tap into a wider range of expertise and resources. This helps to ensure that the safety plans are comprehensive and effective. It also helps to build trust with parents and the community (Balane et al. 2020).

Theoretical Preparedness of the School for the Limited Face-to-Face Classes

Based on the data gathered in terms of vaccination rate and perceptions of teachers in the school's preparedness in the transition to face-to-face modality, the study suggests that Morong National High School shows preparedness to participate in the limited face-to-face learning. Vaccination helps make schools and workplaces safer by reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19. When people are vaccinated, they are less likely to get sick and less likely to spread the virus to others. This can help to protect students, teachers, staff, and coworkers from getting sick (United States Joint Economic Committee, 2021). Also, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022) discussed that vaccination reduces the risk of transmission and provides a sense of safety and protection, leading to more favorable attitudes towards individuals within an area or workplace, thus in school setting, teachers toward in-person learning.

In addition, the school has plans and policies for social distancing and hygiene such as mask-wearing, social distancing, and frequent handwashing, which can shape stakeholders' attitudes (Ansah, 2018). Knowing that safety measures are in place can foster positive perceptions of the school's preparedness, creating a supportive attitude towards limited face-to-face classes.

In the context of the Theory of Reasoned Action, the teachers' attitudes, subjective norms, behavioral intentions, and behavior all align positively with regard to Safety. It is that their positive attitude towards safety measures, evident from their favorable outlook on vaccination rates, social distancing plans, and hygiene protocols, serves as a valuable predictor of their willingness to embrace safety initiatives. Moreover, the teachers' perception of positive subjective norms, driven by their belief in the school leadership's commitment to safety and the supportive stance of parents, reinforces the importance of safety compliance within the social context. Consequently, their confident behavioral intentions demonstrate a strong determination to adhere to the prescribed safety measures, as they express high levels of assurance in their efficacy. Such intentions are assumed to be reflected on is that they will display responsible and cautious conduct in following safety guidelines consistently.

In terms of Equipment and Facilities, a positive attitude towards utilizing the resources responsibly, evident from a favorable response on the benefits and importance of using equipment and facilities appropriately, serves as a strong motivational factor. Moreover, positive subjective norms further reinforce the perception of social acceptance for such behavior as driven by the belief that others also endorse responsible use. Consequently, the confident behavioral intentions showcase a strong determination to engage in safe practices when using equipment and facilities. Thus, it can be assumed that the behavior of the teachers would be a responsible and cautious approach, ensuring the appropriate and safe utilization of the available resources.

A positive attitude towards Partnerships and Stakeholders serves as a motivational driver for active involvement as exemplified by the responses of the teachers on its importance and potential benefits. Moreover, positive subjective norms such as the belief that others also endorse collaborations, reinforce the perception of social approval for supporting partnerships with stakeholders. In addition, individuals' confident behavioral intentions demonstrate a strong determination to actively engage in cooperative endeavors with other stakeholders. Therefore, it is assumed that the school's actions can foster a climate of support and participation, encouraging individuals to proactively embrace and contribute to partnerships with stakeholders, thus strengthening and enriching the shared objectives and outcomes of collaborative initiatives.

Conclusion

The findings revealed that the vaccination status of students and school personnel in Morong National High School (MNHS). The study found that the overall vaccine compliance rate for students is 63.42%, while the overall vaccine compliance rate for school personnel is

100.00%.

The findings revealed that the vaccination status of students and school personnel in Morong National High School (MNHS). The study found that the overall vaccine compliance rate for students is 63.42%, while the overall vaccine compliance rate for school personnel is 100.00%.

The emerging themes on the perceptions of teachers in terms of Safety were revealed as Vaccination Rate, Plans for Social Distancing and Hygiene, and Trust Towards the School. In terms of Equipment and Structure, Safety of Students and Confidence were revealed as the emerging theme. Lastly, the only emerging theme revealed in Partnerships and Stakeholders was Collaboration. Lastly, it was found that Morong National High School is theoretically prepared based on the Theory of Reasoned Action, suggesting that teacher had positive attitudes and subjective norms, confident behavioral intentions, and likelihood to follow and support Safety, Equipment and Structures, and Partnerships and Stakeholders.

Based on the findings, the study therefore concludes that the school has made significant progress in terms of vaccination, however room for improvement in terms of student vaccination rates is still visible. Furthermore, can also be concluded that the teachers in the study had mixed perceptions about the school's preparedness for face-to-face learning. Although teachers were confident in the school's plans, others were still concerned about the safety of students and staff. Moreover, it was revealed that the school has made some progress in its preparations, but there are still some areas that need to be addressed. The school should also continue to work on improving the safety of its facilities and its plans for social distancing and hygiene. Lastly, it was found that the school should be transparent and communicative with teachers and parents about its plans.

In summary, despite the concerns, it can still be assumed that Morong National High School is prepared to participate on the limited face-to-face classes pilot testing given that the teachers had positive attitudes and subjective norms which leads to their confidence in the behavioral intentions towards the school's preparedness. These all lead to an assumption that the school is likely to support and reinforce the Safety, Equipment and Structures, and Partnerships and Stakeholders during the limited face-to-face classes.

Recommendations

It is recommended based on the conclusions that the school should continue to provide information about the benefits of vaccination and work with parents to encourage their children to get vaccinated. Furthermore, since the schools is a large school, it should offer itself as one of the vaccination stations on campus.

It is also recommended to keep establish policies in accordance with the perceptions of teachers since the teachers are the frontliners of the school for the conduct of the limited face-face classes. Policies and Contingencies should be strictly communicated and implemented to ensure proper actions during operations and intervention on incidents.

Lastly, it is recommended to conduct a follow-up study greatly considering the profile of the respondents and other influencing factors utilizing the Theory of Planned Behavior as a framework.

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