Research Paper

Lived Experiences of Social Studies Teachers Conducting Hybrid Classes amidst COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This phenomenological qualitative research study aimed to investigate the lived experiences of social studies teachers in a hybrid learning class amidst COVID–19 pandemic. There were five participants who were purposive and selected. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and thematically analysed. Based on the findings, sixteen subthemes and four major themes emerged, and these are: Challenges in Hybrid Learning, Stability of Internet Connection, Necessary Support from Administration, and Coping Mechanisms of the Teachers. It was revealed that the teachers faced challenges in the delivery of hybrid learning classes, such as quality of equipment class, equipment, internet connectivity, preparation of instructional materials, and motivation techniques to be used in everyday classes. However, the school took action by providing basic computer equipment like speakers and headsets, internet providers and some materials they needed for teaching. In this new normal, flexibility, adaptability, adjustments, and considerations are needed based on how one understands, responds, and manages an ever-changing environment. It is recommended that the school administration intensify their assistance and provide high-quality equipment, complete materials and various trainings for their hybrid learning teachers. In online classes of hybrid learning, the teachers need to think of varied motivational techniques that will make the students active participants. Teachers may also need to attend webinars and training on the new strategies for conducting hybrid classes to enhance their skills in teaching online and face-to-face classes at the same time. Future researchers may conduct further studies using other research designs.

Keywords *Hybrid Learning Classes, Online Classes, Social Studies Teachers, Internet Connectivity, Technical Support, Technological Resources, Instructional Materials*

INTRODUCTION

Globally, the COVID-19 epidemic has spread and now affects almost all nations and territories. (Sintema, 2020). Schools have been forced to close as a result of COVID-19's global expansion. The ability of schools to handle a crisis that demands the utilisation of the latest technologies, such as software as well as hardware, in order to support successful online learning was put to the test by this. This shutdown has expedited the establishment of online learning environments, ensuring that education is not hampered. Finding the best strategies to engage students, deliver course material online, and administer assessments is of great interest to many educational institutions. Because of COVID-19, institutions now invest in online education. Online learning is reportedly the only realistic way to continue learning in beneficial ways throughout the quarantine restrictions. It should be emphasised that online learning is just one type of distance education.

The changes brought about by the new normal have a significant impact on the financial, political, health, family, religious, and educational sectors in the Philippines. In many ways, it alters people's way of life. Due to the development of vaccination to stop the transmission of the coronavirus, the COVID-19 sickness is slowly becoming less common as the months go by. The field

of education is one of several that are slowly returning to the way it was before the epidemic arrived following many unexpected things that transpired in our country.

Modular, online and blended learning were offered to students in basic education and higher education during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the virus calmed down, after a few years, the Department of Education decided to allow limited face-to-face classes to all public schools started last February 2022 in different provinces in the Philippines. According to the agency, it will help to start going back to normal in the education sector of our country. The Department of Education (DepEd) continues to believe that having in-person lessons will help students develop academically and generally improve their mental health and well-being as of October 2022. On October 17, 2022, DepEd published the updated version of DepEd Order 34. Beginning in 2022, private educational institutions will be allowed to offer their students fully face-to-face and blended learning choices.

The Department of Education knows of the current status of the private sector as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic's consequences. This includes the financial resources used to develop breakthroughs in online learning, the development and application of standards of excellence for collaborative education, and the regretful closure of private schools as a result of losses.

In addition to the previously described modes of instruction, new ones have also developed to adhere to certain health regulations imposed by the Department of Health as well as allay the concerns of some parents, educators, students, and school administrators regarding the full implementation of face-to-face instruction. Hybrid and hyflex learning were implemented by some private learning institutions.

Nebrida and Bangud (2022) claim that hybrid learning is the most effective way to combine the most beneficial aspects of both traditional and virtual education while also strengthening the knowledge and social skills necessary for success. It can be considered that the main objective is to support students' learning by making the best use of the educational environment created by combining classroom instruction with digitally assisted training. In the hybrid education approach, actual lessons are taught along with in-class activities since some duties and processes ought to go on outside of the classroom. For students to carry out these behaviors beyond the classroom in an appropriate manner, there is a need for an adjunct instrument that can manage the distance education process.

The researcher conducted a study regarding the lived experiences of hybrid learning teachers amidst COVID –19 pandemic in a private school in Sta. Rosa City, Laguna, offers a hybrid learning modality in the school year 2022-2023 for basic education. This study was initiated in one private school in the Sta. Rosa City, Laguna specifically in Colegio de Sta. Rosa de Lima, Inc., for they are the only basic education institution that offers hybrid learning modality this school year in the area. The objective of this study was to look at the lived experiences of hybrid learning teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to the ongoing pandemic, the school decided not to implement full face-to-face classes but instead offer hybrid learning, and it is indicated in their learning recovery plan mandated by the Department of Education to make this school year contain the learning modality of the school. Private learning institutions have the right to choose what mode of learning they will offer.

The researcher was highly motivated to perform a study regarding the lived experiences of hybrid learning teachers amidst COVID–19 pandemic. Exploring and understanding their viewpoints, methods for delivering instruction utilising online platforms, challenges, and adjustments to teaching. The study attempted to define and capture the lived experiences of social studies hybrid learning teachers amidst COVID–19 pandemic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A hybrid learning model combines and mixes different types of learning environments, such as online learning and traditional classroom training (Nasution et al., 2022), where the learners and teachers meet and converse with each other in one area or physically without utilising any online technology. Distance learning is also described by Moore and Kearsley as planned learning that typically occurs in a distant place from teaching, necessitating particular organisational setting and instruction approaches, connection through various systems, and special administrative and organisational structures (Kadirhan & Korkmaz, 2020). However, a hybrid learning environment allows students to explore and comprehend real-world problems through real-world learning opportunities that are enabled inside an online classroom. Online and in-person learning are combined in hybrid learning, also known as blended learning. By mixing delivery modes, hybrid learning aims to give the most effective and efficient education experience (Hagemeijer and Dolfing, 2022).

The flexibility and effectiveness of media technology are combined with the social aspects of conventional didactical approaches, particularly face-to-face communication, to support higher education. Although these combinations offer a number of advantages for offering hybrid education, there are also a number of important disadvantages and difficulties brought about by mixing these elements (Ayub, 2022).

By describing blended learning or dual-mode learning using the word hybrid learning, educators can cause confusion because the concept is not precisely defined (Heriot-Watt Learning Teaching Academy, 2022). According to Linder (2017), hybrid learning is the intentional use of technology to replace rescheduled class time in order to create a learning environment. On the other hand, Saichaie (2020) characterised hybrid learning more closely to differentiated instruction or flip education, where the objective is to replace one class time for digital tasks in a learning medium that can either be completed independently or in collaboration with peers. The release of learners from the constraint of a physical area into the virtual world to offer opportunities in class scheduling was informed by the hybrid education implementation from prior research (Ayub et al., 2022).

In the study in 2022, Kazu and Yalcin (2022) drew the conclusion that combining face-to-face instruction with online learning in the future. The need to study the research results based on the impact of hybrid education on academic achievements is made necessary by this circumstance. The goal of the current study is to meta-analyse these studies. These results are highly encouraging and offer guidance for future hybrid learning adoption. In the research of Cruz (2020), students were more involved in online activities that were put in the system for learning management. The hybrid classroom environment was used, and students were asked for a general statement on their experience, utilisation, and feedback. The study's findings showed that students' involvement in a composite classroom environment was inspired by digital influence, and the encouragement was obtained from their knowledge level in using technology to deal with coursework. The results showed that appropriate technological skills and confidence are basic requirements for youngsters to achieve a satisfactory learning experience.

It is difficult to generate equal chances that benefit both online and offline students, even when communication, relationships, and participation in learning activities are enabled and encouraged in a hybrid educational environment. According to Hayes and Tucker (2021), this can lead to disparities among digital and onsite students in a hybrid situation because engaging in live active learning may be more conducive to fostering deeper levels of learning.

Hagemeijer and Dolfing's (2022) study notes that after going through hybrid learning experiences, those who used a hybrid learning model reported that it was more challenging to serve both online and in-person students, maintain student engagement, track student learning, and give

useful feedback. The majority of participants expressed doubts about teachers' capacity to successfully implement a hybrid paradigm. They noted that a different methodology is required for hybrid learning, which calls for proficiency with appropriate digital tools and technology platforms. This is hardly surprising considering the lack of professional development, support, or training opportunities for many teachers. A more systematic, standardised strategy for digital and technological tools throughout the school is needed for smooth teaching and learning, according to those who have embraced hybrid learning.

RESEARCH METHOD

The researcher employed a qualitative approach. In order to better comprehend social life by focusing on specific persons or locations, it gathers and employs non-numerical data while making an effort to infer meaning from the data.

A variety of strategies are used in qualitative research, which approaches its subject in an interpretive, phenomenological manner. This suggests that qualitative researchers study occurrences in their natural settings while striving to interpret happenings through the lens of the meanings that people give to them. In order to explore frequent and troubling occurrences and implications in people's lives, qualitative research uses a wide range of scientific materials, which includes case reports, private incidents, reflective narratives of life, interviews, observational in nature, historical in nature, dynamic, and visual texts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

This investigation will employ phenomenology. It is a technique for qualitative research that highlights the commonalities among those with comparable experiences. Determining the expression of the given phenomenon's essence is the main goal of the strategy (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology is a form of qualitative study that is particularly well adapted to support this examination. Phenomenology is a useful research strategy for analysing difficult problems. Interviews are often conducted with an organisation of individuals who may provide first-hand knowledge of a specific event, situation, or experience. This method can help the researcher arrive at a deeper understanding of the phenomenon by helping them to build the incident, situation, or experience's universal meaning.

Determining the lived experiences through a phenomenological approach of hybrid learning teachers at Colegio de Sta. Rosa de Lima, Inc. at Santa Rosa City, Province of Laguna, Philippines as they make decisions about content, activities, and assessment in the midst of the COVID-19/Coronavirus pandemic.

Data Analysis & Triangulation

In order to gather in-depth information regarding how secondary school teachers approached hybrid learning classes, the researcher conducted interviews with the participants. The researcher coded the data gathered to pinpoint the themes developed by the individuals. The results of the interview were assisted, translated into written and conceptual analysis, and then analysed to uncover the recurring themes among secondary school teachers' collective experiences with hybrid learning classrooms. The research used triangulation. According to the principle of triangulation, different viewpoints can be used to analyse a single piece of data. Contrary to investigator triangulation, this approach often involved working with experts from unrelated fields of research. Getting experts from many fields together is one common strategy. Individuals from the same discipline may be used, though, provided that they are in disparate status positions.

The data analysis framework for this study, which used transcendental phenomenology to examine the everyday lives of social science hybrid learning teachers, is shown in Figure 1. In this case, transcendence involves tackling this occurrence with an open mind and a new viewpoint that

draws new conclusions from the substance of experiences. In order to reflect on and suspend personal emotions and experiences during the study process, the researcher used epoché. Transcendental-phenomenological reduction, which compiles perceptions and ideas about the phenomenon, was used to define the essence of the phenomena.
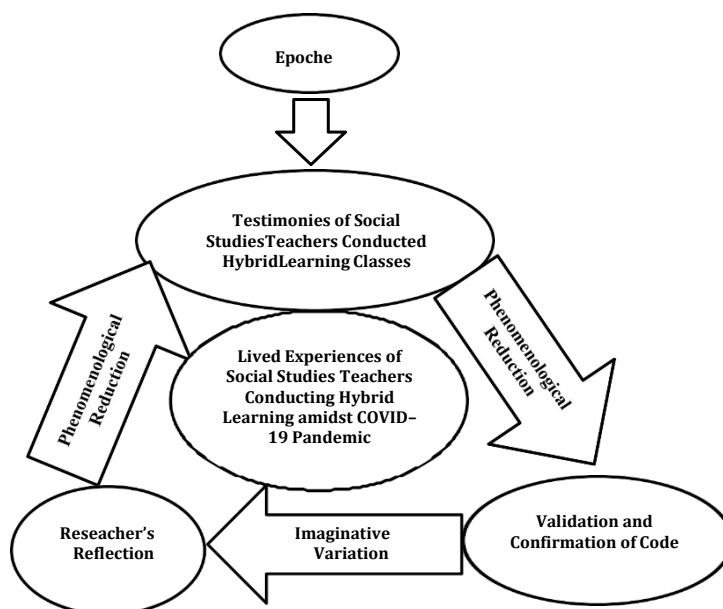

Figure 1. Data Analysis Framework

Data-Gathering Procedure

The researcher gathered the data online. To begin with, a letter to conduct a study was sent to the school principal of Colegio de Sta. Rosa de Lima, Inc., the institution that decided to offer a hybrid learning modality of learning. Also, letters were sent to prospective participants' email addresses. They are the five social studies teachers who experienced teaching in hybrid learning classes.

When a participant accepted the invitation, the researcher and participants discussed the best time for an online interview through an online video conferencing application, which is Google Meet. The researcher also sent a consent form to the participants to formally ask for their permission through a document that they agree to participate in this study honestly and voluntarily. With the participants' permission, recorders were utilised during the online interview to facilitate transcription. The interviews were then transcribed and structured using a tabular presentation created and approved by the instrument validator. The research found similar emerging themes from each participant based on their answers in the said in-depth interview. The researcher made a thematic framework that represents the emerging themes of this qualitative study.

The participants were interviewed through video and voice recording. All of them will be given the information needed and the researcher will ask questions from the questionnaire given before the interview starts. This was done in order for them to prepare their answers in advance for each question.

Ethical Consideration

Due to the study's utilisation of other research articles, quotations were used to avoid plagiarism. The researcher guaranteed that the consent was informed by the data that had been

collected. Prior to the participants' responding to the questions, a confirmation letter was issued to them to solicit their acceptance or rejection of the interview. Those who agreed to the given terms and conditions were subsequently interviewed. When dealing with the respondents' answers and, more specifically, their personal information, privacy and anonymity will be given a lot of attention.

Participants of the Study

The research was done in Colegio de Sta. Rosa de Lima, Inc. at Santa Rosa City, Laguna. The High school department is composed of twenty-two (22) secondary school teachers. They were all conducting hybrid learning classes from grades 7-12 during the school year 2022-2023.

The selection of participants is a crucial stage in determining the scope of the study. Therefore, purposive sampling was used to select the participants for this investigation. According to Arikunto (2010), purposive sampling is the method of choosing a sample or participants by taking a subject that is taken depending on the specific objective rather than the level or region. In deliberate sampling, a sample is chosen based on the requirements of the study. The objective of the sample guided the selection of the participants. When selecting volunteers, the needs of the study are taken into consideration. The researcher limits the participants to social studies teachers conducting hybrid classes. Based on the criteria, five social studies teachers from the high school department were the selected participants of the study, for there are only five social studies teachers teaching using a hybrid learning form of modality.

The participants of the study were five social studies secondary private school teachers from different year levels (Grades 7-10) conducting hybrid learning classes. The researcher questioned the chosen participants to learn about their firsthand experiences teaching hybrid learning classes during the COVID-19 outbreak in order to collect qualitative data.

Table 1. Participants of the Study

Participants Code	Age	Number of Years in Teaching
Teacher A	23	1 year
Teacher B	24	4 years
Teacher C	24	3 years
Teacher D	25	2 years
Teacher E	27	4 years

The participants are summarised in Table 1, and each participant was identified via coding. The researcher also includes their age and years of teaching. The table shows that teacher A was the youngest and teacher E was the oldest. Also, teacher A has the least number of years in the teaching profession, and teachers B and E have the most number of years in teaching.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study produced a synthesis of information which served as a guidefor teachers in understanding those hybrid learning teachers in terms of their experiences. The resulting analysis and interpretation provide a description of major themes that developed regarding how they shared their learnings, as well as motivation and strategies that are effective for hybrid learning.

The transcription statements on the teacher's significant experiences as a social studies teacher in conducting hybrid classes during the individual interview revealed that the teachers

faced challenges in the delivery of hybrid learning classes, such challenges in quality of equipment class, equipment, internet connectivity, preparation of instructional materials and motivation technique to be used in everyday classes. The teachers faced challenges in conducting hybrid classes. These are emphasised by Teacher A, Teacher C and Teacher D.

> *"Unlike now that the children's class in the school I attended is a hybrid set up, as in total, do you adjust to the other children who are online, not sure if they really listen to you, but the ones who are face to face, of course, you feel it. Listening to you, one of the things I will never forget is the challenge you had as a teacher on how to adjust yourself to the children who are online and face to face, sir." – Teacher A*

> *"It's challenging on the part of the teachers. He is also okay; somehow, our teaching skills have also improved on how to teach children lessons. In different ways, the experience I will never forget is losing the internet, losing half of the class, on the spot thinking of what to do in face-to-face classes, then when the internet comes back, you repeat what you said in the face-to-face classes for those in online classes." – Teacher C*

> *"The thought of motivation is really a challenge. In today's hybrid classes, two things need to be prepared: motivation suitable for online classes and motivation suitable for face-to-face classes. In other words, this hybrid is more difficult because we need two icons to consider." – Teacher D*

The transcription statements on the issues or challenges of hybrid classes describe the struggles with the internet connection that, unfortunately, sometimes lead to disruption of classes. Participants emphasised the strong connectivity of school provided for teachers was a significant concern. They also experienced difficulties in preparing instructional materials and motivating the students in everyday hybrid learning classes. Teachers experienced a problem with an unstable internet connection. There were times when both the students and teachers got disconnected from the discussion. Ms. Tan and Ms. Villar revealed that,

> *"The biggest issue that I and my co-teachers have experienced is the materials that are used in hybrid learning. First of all, the audio quality of the speakers. There are rooms where the headset mic is not good."*

> "*Let me start with the internet, the inconsistency of the internet in the Philippines is really a struggle. What we are talking about in this case is hybrid learning, so it needs to be done properly. When those who are online disappear, you will be forced to teach because if those who are not face to face, they will just make noise.*"

The challenge in this case is that there is an infrastructural issue with communications firms, which is an inevitable concern. Teachers frequently use the internet; therefore, they are familiar with this difficulty. One of a teacher's abilities is to adjust in the midst of difficulties. Particularly during this difficult time, teachers are still adjusting to the new normal as numerous challenges arise. The main indicator of success in online teaching is the reliability of the internet connection.

The transcription statements on the actions taken by school administration to assist teachers in conducting hybrid classes, as the testimonies of participants, described that the school made actions in providing basic computers, equipment like speakers and headsets, internet

providers and some materials they needed in teaching. Also, the school made a seminar about mental health and some orientation on how to use their learning management system. However, there is no seminar and training on how to deliver hybrid learning properly.

> *"At the same time we did the training, we were taught how to set up a computer to be used, how to join the LMS used by the school, we were taught how to interact with students in the hybrid class, we were taught how to check the outputs to be forwarded. In terms of the seminars about hybrid learning, the school did not give us total attention." – Teacher A*

> *"So far, they have been able to provide PCs that are a bit upgraded, but not very high quality. The wide-lens camera that is usually used in live-streaming events was also provided. There is a speaker, but not all rooms have it. In the training, we didn't really get anything because back then, no one knew much about hybrid learning even the public didn't do hybrid learning. It was not been explored yet. We don't have real seminars or training for hybrid learning." – Teacher B*

Also, Teacher D said that it was unfair to the school they provided the basic materials and equipment for hybrid learning, and she stated that,

> *"In the beginning, before the class started, there were orientations and meetings when there were no children, we had a meeting about how the system would be, and we provided gadgets. As far as I can remember, we also had a talk about mental health, and we also had a general orientation; at least there is a way to survive this school year." – Teacher D*

The success of student achievement and effective teaching in hybrid learning depends on the quality of the equipment and the training provided by the school to its teachers. Participants also shared how the school helped them. More specifically, the need for strategic planning and ongoing communication between the administration and the teachers had been highly regarded in order to prevent such issues in the future.

The transcription statements on the impact of facilitating hybrid classes that may help other teachers in teaching hybrid classes that may help teachers in future teaching and learning with or without the pandemic. Flexibility, adaptation, changes, and considerations are required in this new normal based on how one perceives, reacts to, and manages a constantly changing world. This is supported by Teacher A, Teacher C, and Teacher E,

> *"As a teacher, we are living in the 21st century. So, we also need to learn that when something unexpected happens, we really need to embrace this kind of set-up. I also learned as a teacher to appreciate modern teaching methods."*

> *"Ahhmm, being really flexible. There are two cases that you should always understand: those that are online and those that are in face-to-face classes. You will be challenged because there is a lot to understand. Let's just give the children a chance to speak because that's where they can express themselves."*

> *"We must always be prepared. Mentally and emotionally, especially this pandemic. So it is necessary, if it happens again, we should not be ready. We should always study, prepare, research and be really prepared in all aspects."*

Furthermore, Teacher B emphasised that the integration of technology is important in 21st century teaching. She said that,

> *"First, you will learn a lot that can be integrated into your class. Nowadays, kids want technology integration. Even back to normal, PPTs, videos and apps can and will be used. Even the simple name picker makes the children very happy. Second, as a teacher, your ability to multitask is a real test. Lastly, learn to explore other things that children can do in hybrid classes." – Teacher B*

The thematic framework for supporting hybrid learning in the social sciences is depicted in the picture below. It is based on the participants' testimonies and developing themes. It displays the dominant themes that arose from the participants' voluminous answers to each interview topic.
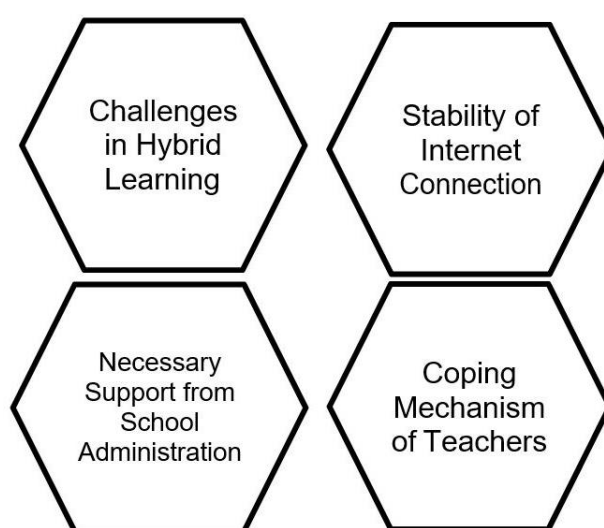

Figure 2. Thematic Framework

Based on participants' testimonies in their experiences as social studies teachers who conducted hybrid learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. They experienced various challenges in delivering hybrid learning as their mode of teaching and learning. Those challenges pertain to equipment, internet connectivity, preparation of instructional materials, and motivation techniques to be used in everyday classes.

The second theme that emerged is the stability of internet connectivity. It is the same answers that they gave, and it is their main issue and challenge experienced in delivering a hybrid learning modality. Aside from that, they also experienced difficulties in preparing instructional materials and motivating the students in everyday hybrid learning classes.

In the third interview question, the participants said that the school administration helped them in delivering hybrid learning. The school took action to provide basic computers, equipment like speakers and headsets, internet providers and some materials they needed for teaching. Also, the school made a seminar about mental health and some orientation on how to use their learning management system. However, there is no seminar and training on how to deliver hybrid learning properly.

The last theme that emerged is the coping mechanisms of teachers who handled hybrid learning classes. They learned to adapt to the new learning modality, which is hybrid learning.

According to the participants, they learned adaptability, flexibility, patience and exploring new teaching strategies in motivating the learners of hybrid learning.

CONCLUSIONS

In hybrid learning classes, the challenges are more in online classes since, during hybrid classes, it is taskier to handle virtual classes while having onsite classes. However, teachers must devise strategies on how to overcome these problems. In order to provide students with the greatest learning possible, the difficulties and problems that arise in hybrid classes should be thoroughly addressed so that the administration's and even their colleagues' support is necessary for hybrid learning to be successful. Above all this hardship, the teachers could ponder their career and whether it is still worthwhile despite the challenges. They chose to teach in this challenging situation even though it was difficult due to the pandemic.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Hybrid learning is an option as a modality during this pandemic. Since Colegio de Sta. Rosa de Lima, Inc. chose this modality for the school year 2022-2023. They need to provide intensive assistance, high-quality equipment, complete materials and various trainings for their hybrid learning teachers. Despite the epidemic, instructors and students could still have a successful educational system with the help of this assistance or subsidy.
2. The administration of the school may think about fully assisting teachers in their chosen mode. In spite of the challenges of proximity and communication, teachers would be more invested in instructing their students in this fashion. This will support the development and upkeep of positive relationships that encourage tenacity, relevance, and positivity in the atmosphere of education.
3. In online classes of hybrid learning, the teachers need to think of varied motivational techniques that will make the students active participants. This could facilitate good communication, understanding, and the development of a relationship.
4. The principal and other administrators may keep providing coaching, mentoring, and oversight to the teachers in charge of hybrid classes. To stay current with the latest trends and improve their ability to teach both online and in-person classes at once, educators might additionally want to participate in seminars and receive instruction on the new tactics for delivering hybrid classes.
5. Future researchers may conduct further studies using other research designs.

LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

This study centred on the lived experiences of social studies teachers who conducted hybrid learning classes amidst COVID –19 pandemic. Due to the limited number of teachers who handle hybrid learning classes, consolidating the data with a sufficient number of participants was difficult. The participants of the study were five secondary teachers from different year levels (Grades 7-12) handling hybrid classes in social studies.

This study investigated teachers' challenges and struggles as well as the things to consider to better deliver the success of learning outcomes in this new normal. This was determined by means of an interview using recording devices, as much as possible, and video recording upon participants' approval.

The outcome was utilised to acquire a better understanding of teachers' existing problems when it comes to hybrid learning classes and what they believe would be future programs that would help them improve their current condition.

The result of the study can used as a basis if the researcher encounters the same situations

in the future in relationship with hybrid learning classes. Future researchers may conduct further studies using other research designs, and they may increase the number of participants.

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