

The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Educators' Wellbeing and Pedagogical Practices

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Abstract

The shift from traditional, in-person instruction to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to understand its impact on teachers' mental health and the new skills required for successful online and blended learning in a post-pandemic world. As schools resumed on-campus learning, the challenge now lies in preserving the valuable insights gained during the rapid transition to online teaching. This article presents findings from a study that involved interviews with 187 teachers across 14 school districts in northeast Ohio, conducted over two years during the pandemic. A thematic analysis was used to explore teachers' experiences and feedback. Despite the disruptions, several key lessons emerged. Teachers adapted by utilizing a variety of digital tools to ensure continued content delivery and foster student engagement. They enhanced their skills in course design and assessment while also developing a greater understanding of their students' unique circumstances.

Keywords:

Online teaching, COVID-19 pandemic, Education, Curriculum design, Learning methods, Teaching

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about an unprecedented shift in education, forcing schools and educators to transition from traditional, classroom-based teaching to online and remote learning

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environments. This rapid and often challenging transition underscored the need for a deeper understanding of how this change has impacted teachers' mental health and how it has reshaped the core competencies required for effective online and blended learning, particularly in the post-pandemic era.

As schools have largely returned to face-to-face, on-campus instruction, the question remains: how can we retain and build upon the lessons learned from this period of forced innovation and adaptation? The rapid adoption of digital teaching tools and online methodologies not only changed the way educators approached teaching but also introduced new pedagogical frameworks that are likely to persist in some form in the future.

This article explores the findings of a two-year, interview-based study that sought to capture the experiences of teachers during the pandemic. A total of 187 teachers from 14 school districts across northeast Ohio participated in the study, sharing insights into how they navigated the abrupt shift to online learning. Using a hybrid thematic analysis, the study synthesized these educators' experiences and qualitative feedback to draw out key themes and trends. The findings reveal that while the pandemic posed significant challenges, it also provided valuable learning opportunities. Teachers quickly adapted to using an array of digital tools and platforms to maintain continuity in instruction and foster student interaction.

For many, this experience deepened their understanding of course design, instructional strategies, and assessment in a virtual setting. Moreover, the necessity of remote learning led educators to develop a greater sense of empathy and awareness of their students' diverse home environments and personal challenges.

In addition to these professional growth opportunities, teachers reported experiencing both positive and negative mental health effects as a result of the transition. While some found the flexibility of online teaching to be liberating, many others struggled with the lack of in-person interaction and the increased workload associated with mastering new technologies. These experiences highlight the importance of providing ongoing support for teachers as they continue to navigate the evolving educational landscape.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the lasting impact of the pandemic on education. It demonstrates that, despite the hurdles,

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teachers have emerged with new skills, a deeper understanding of student needs, and a greater capacity for empathy. As educational institutions move forward in the post-pandemic world, it will be crucial to integrate these lessons into future teaching models, ensuring that the progress made during this period is not lost but rather serves as a foundation for more resilient and adaptable education systems.

Literature Review

The conclusion of the emergency phase of the global COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of educator wellbeing in the classroom and underscored the ongoing challenges educators must navigate (Kupferschmidt & Wadman, 2023). The persistent effects of the pandemic on educators' wellbeing and pedagogical approaches necessitate further investigation through longitudinal studies. Current research has explored this issue from various angles, with a significant focus on primary-level educators and their experiences with anxiety during the pandemic. A search of relevant databases consistently yielded the keywords "teacher," "anxiety," and "pandemic," revealing a substantial body of literature focused on the demanding realities faced by educators amid an ever-changing pandemic landscape.

Many studies documented the struggles educators encountered while adapting to new technologies for information dissemination. These challenges are compounded by the need to understand how educators' perceptions during the pandemic can be leveraged to enhance teaching practices in a post-pandemic context. Prior research indicated that a significant majority of educators felt that online teaching was less effective, with over 75% expressing dissatisfaction with their jobs during the pandemic (Fauzi & Khusuma, 2020).

Research on the mental impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers revealed widespread psychological challenges, including heightened stress, anxiety, and burnout. Key findings from the literature include:

1. **Increased Stress and Anxiety:** Many teachers faced a sudden shift to online learning, which brought new responsibilities and uncertainty. The need to rapidly adopt new technologies, manage students remotely, and adapt to changing educational expectations significantly raised stress levels (Pressley, 2021).

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2. **Burnout and Emotional Exhaustion:** The overlap of personal and professional responsibilities, such as working from home while caring for family members, contributed to feelings of burnout and exhaustion among teachers (Sokal et al., 2020). This led to higher rates of emotional fatigue and a decrease in job satisfaction.
3. **Work-Life Balance Disruption:** Teachers reported challenges in maintaining work-life boundaries, often working extended hours to meet the demands of online teaching. This erosion of boundaries contributed to increased stress and exhaustion (MacIntyre et al., 2020).
4. **Mental Health Challenges:** High levels of anxiety, depression, and emotional distress were prevalent during the pandemic. Many teachers reported feelings of isolation, frustration, and concern about their own health, as well as the well-being of their students (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021).
5. **Coping and Resilience:** Teachers employed various coping mechanisms, such as seeking social support from peers and using mindfulness techniques. However, access to mental health resources and professional support varied greatly across different regions and schools, impacting the effectiveness of these coping strategies (Kim & Asbury, 2020).
6. **Demographic and Regional Differences:** Research has shown that the mental health effects on teachers differed by region and demographics. Teachers in areas with higher COVID-19 rates or in underserved communities experienced more severe mental health impacts. Additionally, women and younger teachers reported higher levels of stress and anxiety compared to their male and older counterparts (Collie, 2021).

Despite these challenges outlined in existing research, some studies have also identified positive aspects of teaching during this global crisis. To contribute to the current ongoing research of pandemic-era effects on educators, a qualitative survey was conducted.

Research methodology

This study employed a qualitative thematic analysis, grounded in a pragmatic research approach. Pragmatic research is particularly

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well-suited for studies that aim to bridge theory and practice, as it prioritizes real-world experiences and practical outcomes. Unlike purely theoretical frameworks, pragmatism recognizes that reality is socially constructed and shaped by the interactions, contexts, and perceptions of individuals. It focuses on the understanding that knowledge emerges through engagement with actual situations rather than abstract theorization. The strength of a pragmatic approach lies in its emphasis on applicability and improvement. Rather than solely seeking to explain phenomena, this approach is concerned with generating actionable insights that can lead to tangible improvements in practice. By examining lived experiences and contextual realities, researchers aim to identify strategies that directly influence positive change and inform future actions. In this study, the pragmatic focus allowed for a nuanced exploration of teachers' experiences during the pandemic, highlighting not only the challenges faced but also the practical solutions they employed to overcome them. Ultimately, the goal of this approach is to produce knowledge that can be directly applied to real-world scenarios, improving both educational practice and policy. By embracing a pragmatic lens, this research aimed to move beyond theoretical findings and contribute meaningful, actionable recommendations that can enhance teaching methodologies, particularly in the context of online and blended learning environments (Goldkuhl, 2012; Morgan, 2014). The study involved a survey distributed during the pandemic to gather qualitative data from elementary teachers in 14 school districts in Northern Ohio including public, private and charter schools. Letters of support were collected from building administrators and surveys were sent to all school faculty once administration approved of the survey in which 187 teachers participated.

Within this study, key research variables were identified as themes that emerged from the qualitative data. These variables reflected the central aspects of teachers' experiences during the pandemic and how these experiences related to teaching practices, challenges, and strategies for adapting to the new learning environment.

The primary variables in this study include:

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Teacher experience: Individual and collective experiences of elementary teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly with respect to shifting to online and blended learning environments were considered. It encompassed the challenges teachers faced, their emotional responses, and the coping mechanisms they employed. Teachers' experiences were explored through open-ended survey questions, allowing for a rich, detailed understanding of the factors influencing their practice during this unprecedented period.

Adaptation strategies: A second key variable was the strategies that teachers employed to adapt to the rapidly changing educational context. These strategies included technological innovations, new pedagogical methods, or adjustments to classroom management and student engagement techniques. This variable is central to the pragmatic focus of the research, as it highlighted the practical solutions teachers implemented to address challenges.

Perceptions of online and blended learning: Teachers' perceptions of online and blended learning environments form another critical variable. This includes their attitudes toward the efficacy, accessibility, and challenges of teaching through digital platforms. Understanding teachers' perceptions helped contextualize the findings, offered insights into the success or failure of certain strategies and the ways in which perceptions shaped their adoption of new teaching methods.

Support and resources: The availability of support—both in terms of technological resources and institutional backing—was another variable explored in the study. Teachers' access to adequate training, professional development, and administrative support directly impacted their ability to implement and adapt new teaching practices. This variable also reflected how teachers navigated challenges related to resource limitations, which varied across districts.

Student engagement and learning outcomes: Although the focus of the study was on teachers, their perceptions of student engagement and learning outcomes under online and blended learning conditions were also considered. This variable was important as it reflected the

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broader educational impact of teachers' strategies and perceptions. Teachers' observations on how students engaged with digital platforms and whether they perceived learning outcomes to be affected provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the adaptation strategies. By investigating these variables through a qualitative thematic analysis, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive view of the challenges and solutions identified by educators, as well as the broader implications for educational practice and policy.

Demographic data

The majority of teachers, 54%, have over 15 years of experience, while smaller percentages are distributed across shorter periods of teaching experience. The distribution of professional experience as an educator included analyzing teachers in the following categories:

1-3 years:	4%
4-6 years:	8%
7-9 years:	13%
10-12 years:	11%
12-15 years:	10%
15+ years:	54%

Of the 187 respondents to the survey, the grades taught were distributed across the grade school spectrum. The largest category of teachers came from high school grades, 30 percent of respondents, while the lowest percentage of respondents taught in the earliest school years:

Pk-2: 47	20%
3-5: 59	28%
6-8: 51	22%
9-12: 65	30%

Analysis and interpretation of the research data

The survey results regarding the transition to online learning reveal that a significant portion of respondents found the experience stressful. Specifically, 25% of participants strongly agreed that the transition was stressful, while 40% agreed with this sentiment. Conversely, 10% remained neutral on the issue, indicating ambivalence about their experiences. A small minority, 3%, disagreed that the transition was stressful, and only 1% strongly disagreed. Notably, 21% of respondents indicated that this question was not

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applicable to their situation. Overall, these results suggest a predominant feeling of stress among the majority of educators during the transition to online learning.

1.1 Challenges within the classroom brought on by the Covid pandemic

As teachers transitioned their understandings and ways of teaching from being face-to-face in the classroom to instantly being online during the global pandemic shut down, teachers faced challenges that they had never dealt with during their professional careers. They instantly had new challenges that they quickly had to find answers and solutions to ensure the continued learning of their K-12 students. Ranging from students having limited to no internet access or no devices in the home environment; some of the issues were easy fixes while other issues it took time and effort to find resolutions by a myriad of individuals.

The study found that 32% of teachers surveyed identified the largest challenge as access to the internet or not having the appropriate technology and/or knowledge about technology in the home environment to be able to complete the live sessions or required assignments. School districts with more affluent funds sent home devices to assist families with their online learning, while other less funded school districts relied on the families to find means for connecting their students from home. Once the technology devices were secured, issues surfaced with training the teachers how to use online platforms and then passing along the knowledge to their K-12 students. This presented a plethora of issues with the younger grade levels as it was difficult to instruct kindergarten and first grade students on how to use the online platforms while being on the platforms in a remote environment. Teachers quickly adapted to using strategies such as making visuals to show their students what the features looked like to recording videos on how to use the features. Qualitative responses from teachers during the survey displayed their frustration and quick ability to adapt during these monumental challenges due to the pandemic:

“Having kindergarten students be required to do google classroom solely...it doesn't work for 5-6 year olds. It's not effective teaching and learning.”

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"Taking 32 years of teaching and modifying it to virtual. I was an old dog learning new tricks."

"The biggest challenge was training the students to use different platforms with technology that they were not familiar with."

"Lack of training for online education...Google Classroom? Zoom? Admin just told us to "figure it out"

Even with the endless hours of adapting and surviving, once the technology was in place and students learned how to use the features, teachers continued to report ongoing challenges with online learning. Twenty percent of teachers specifically mentioned how parents were the largest challenge and did not support the learning in the home environment. While it was that parents were trying to survive with their adjustments working full-time from home with kids in the environment or the lack of knowledge on how to help their children succeed in the online environment, teachers were noticing that parents/family members were struggling as well with the new normality of life. Teachers once again stepped up to the challenge and adapted to meet the needs of the students and families by emotionally supporting parents/family members with advice and words of encouragement to sending home support resources. A few teachers in the survey even reported driving to each home of their students and leaving items of encouragement and support resources in mailboxes that the students and family members could use. It is apparent that teachers continued to be an efficacious role model for students and family members even when they felt many of their own struggles. Teachers additionally reported in the survey concerning the challenges of completing assignments and assessments. Teachers commented how parents/family members would intervene during the assessments and provide the K-12 students with answers or complete the assignments themselves with the students being involved. Some parents allowed students to sleep during the online sessions or act unruly while teachers were trying to teach. Teachers reported on the challenges of completing lessons when many students were tuned out. Many students, in addition, were exposed to other students' living arrangements that may not have been a part of their personal experiences such as family members drinking alcohol or parents having verbal altercations in the backgrounds of the live streaming

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when students shared their screens. Teachers quickly had to adapt to learn how handle these challenges, address the situations, and prevent the issues from occurring in the future. Teachers quickly had to learn new roles in their already large repertoire of responsibilities.

“We had a LOT of parental interference (telling answers, changing answers, allowing kids to eat during our meets) Conversely, there was also a lack of parent involvement which resulted in kiddos standing on tables, walking away from the computer, taking the computer around the house and under the bed. First graders did not know how to get to their emails, or our classroom page, and they cannot tell time. We depended on minimal parental involvement to ensure success for these kiddos.”

“The biggest challenge for me would be that I can't assess students' individual work while working from home since I can't tell whether the students are completing the work or parents are completing the work with them or for them. This is also difficult while doing live sessions when students are on mute and you can clearly see them look for parent assistance when asking them to answer questions. It is also hard from this stand point that the students are very dependent on adult assistance and lack independence and confidence in themselves to attempt things on their own.”

Even with the reported challenges thus far, there was one common theme that was consisted in most teachers during the survey. The overwhelming response concerning the challenge of the lack of motivation, communication, and engagement was cited by most teachers. Teachers reported that most students were not engaged, appeared to not what to be involved, did not respond during discussions, and appeared to have apathy for all lessons. Teachers could see the self-esteem and self-confidence disappearing in students as time progressed. It was difficult to build classroom communities and have social interactions when starring through a screen. Teachers once again tried to rise to the challenge of creating more opportunities for involvement and social interactions, but this challenge was reported to be the most difficult to overcome.

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“Motivating students to keep going in every aspect of life, not just their academics was a challenge. Many students aren't intrinsically motivated to do their work for many differing reasons. Not to mention how hard it is to retain information or to focus on learning when traumatic experiences are occurring. With all the stress in their lives already plus a pandemic, I see many students struggling to find the motivation. I have felt that same struggle with finding the motivation, too.”

“NOT being in person with my students was EXTREMELY difficult for me. I did prerecorded videos and live meets with my class online but I knew they were not having all of their needs: social, emotional, academic. I also felt like I was ALWAYS felt like the day "school day" never ended because I was always "on call" because my students and/or parents would need support.”

1.2 Preparation and organizational effectiveness

As teachers transition during the summer, the survey explored preparation and organization in terms of effectiveness; How did teachers prepare themselves to be more effective for the upcoming schoolyear? Was this even possible due to the uncertainties of the pandemic? Seventeen percent of teachers declared that it was not manageable to be prepared or organized for the upcoming school year after the summer break due to the constant global changes with the pandemic. With limited knowledge they were uncertain how to plan for face-to-face, hybrid, or online and the task at hand seemed overwhelming and incomprehensible.

“Hard to prepare when our district refused to make a decision. They waited until school started to decide they wanted to go hybrid.”

“Prayed”

“Hmm, this is a super question. Honestly, it was difficult to plan anything. We didn't know what our school plan was until a few weeks before school started. As well, staff didn't want to make purchases on materials without knowing what was going to transpire in Ohio.”

“I did not, as we had no idea what the school year was going to look like (if we were going to be in-person, remote, or hybrid.”

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"I honestly didn't prepare because we didn't get info to prepare for. That isn't a slight on my school, it's just how quickly information was changing for us all. So, my only real preparation was only to mentally be prepared for anything and everything."

In contrast, 76% of K-12 teachers surveyed stated that they completed professional developments and gained knowledge during their non-contract time with their own money to be able to be prepared to teach hybrid and/or online in the fall. Teachers felt that the more prepared they were with information concerning technology they could relieve some of the stress and be prepared and organized to overcome more of the challenges in order to help their students succeed.

"I took online classes to understand how Google Classroom worked and Everyday Math, the online portion. My school district also provided PD for online platforms too"

"I spent time over the summer learning how to navigate my way through google classroom and learned how to zoom and share my screen during a zoom lesson."

"Waited for our district to provide training, but they did not. So, I talked to other teachers and watched more experts on YouTube channels speaking on how to incorporate technology in the classroom. I also did webinars on my own, to learn how to use a variety of learning platforms."

"Lots of professional development! Created virtual classroom, wrote and obtained grant for home materials."

"I collaborated with other teachers to determine which activities we thought would be best suited for online learning, how to adapt in-person to virtual lessons, and determine creative ways to engage and motivate students. (Unfortunately, it was difficult to prepare for online learning when we truly did not know what to expect.)"

1.3 Teachers' perceptions of noticeable absences of connections, conversations, and emotions

During the transition to online learning, teachers moved from seeing the children in the classroom each day to being behind a computer screen. Whereas in the classroom, teachers were able to build deep connections with each student academically and

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emotionally. Teachers could read body language and have one-on-one conversations with students to ensure that students were being cared for, loved, and treated as individuals by all peers and family members. Teachers act as social workers in many regards to help students succeed academically. However, when the face-to-face environment was removed from the equation it is only possible to view a student through a computer screen, teachers were unable to have one-on-one conversations, unable to observe their emotional well-being, and unable to develop the in-depth connections where students felt they could trust their teachers with all information. During the pandemic, reported cases of abuse and neglect significantly dropped due to the understanding that teachers could not effectively gather evidence concerning the students in the face-to-face environments. In the survey, it was documented by 76% of educators that the face-to-face interactions, the in-depth connections, the conversations, the display of emotions was non-existent in the online environment. Many teachers discussed how they missed this side of teaching and it made for an apathetic learning experience, which is especially difficult for the younger grades who thrive on making associations in learning through emotions and social interactions.

"The interactions and relationships are much stronger in person. I miss being able to build those relationships with my students."

"Just the daily interactions with students and staff members. When we've been remote or even hybrid, it's harder to build and maintain those relationships that are extremely important to the educational process."

"I miss the interactions with students. My online students are complete strangers to me. Our district policy is that we can't force them to turn on their cameras, so I've never seen most of them. I have a handful who don't even have microphones, so I can't even hear their voices."

"I miss the HUGS!!! Smiles!!!"

"Being able to work with a struggling child, being able to see a child's strengths and challenge them. Seeing children engage with one another in group work and helping one another/learning from one another. Giving hugs."

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"Not just lessons but socialization. Students need positive socialization."

1.4 Positive implications of online learning

The challenges and negative impacts of online learning during the pandemic certainly were numerous; however, many teachers during the survey reported some positive outcomes during this difficult time. Forty-nine percent of educators discussed the advantages of working from home and being able to commit more time to their own family's needs. Many teachers enjoyed working from their own home environment and being able to keep themselves and their family safe during the pandemic. Teachers adapted an area in their homes to set up a working office where they could live stream lessons to their students.

"It was a more relaxed atmosphere."

"I enjoyed working from home, I felt less micro-managed."

"It allowed some more flexibility in the schedule and forced me to learn different modalities to teach with."

"Being able to stay home with my baby while I taught was convenient."

"Missed out on a lot of classroom management issues. I would teach and let students leave to do their independent work if they chose. This allowed for more one on one time with students who needed it because I didn't have to be concerned about whether a student was/wasn't on task. I also think many of our higher achieving students enjoyed the freedom to work at their own pace."

"I had more "down time" to prepare lessons, which was needed since it requires so much more. My students have really learned so much as far as tech-based education through it all as well."

"Being able to work one on one with my students without having to worry about other distractions. For some of my students being in the home setting was a lot less stressful for them than being at school."

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"I did not have to wake up as early to get ready and commute to work by 7AM. I was able to add an additional 1.5 hours of sleep to my day."

"Being home with my family was enjoyable while teaching."

Beyond the flexibility and comfort of teaching in their home environments, 18% of teachers reported how they enjoyed learning the new technology and ways to teach. It enabled them to be a more efficacious teacher. With less time spent on commuting, prepping face-to-face materials, and handling behavior management situations, teachers spent this extra time developing their skills and technological knowledge. Teachers reported they enjoyed the time to learn new information and to be able to invest in their own educational foundations.

"I learned a lot about resources that are available to teachers and I enjoyed creating new ideas that can be used in the classroom later on."

"I have learned some new reliable online programs that I otherwise may not have learned."

"Learning about new resources/technology that can be used for both in person and online instruction."

"Our grade level team became more connected and better at planning together. Also, I learned SO MUCH. Hands on learning at its finest!"

"I enjoyed that it allowed me to find new ways to teach my curriculum. I was able to find resources that I will continue to use after the pandemic, just because I really enjoyed them."

Even with 67% of educators finding a silver lining to the pandemic and found positive aspects concerning the pandemic and online learning, 20% of teachers reported that they did not enjoy one single thing about teaching online. They stated the negative contributions were too numerous to even allow one positive contribution to be considered.

"Not a single thing! It is the worst thing to ever happen to an academic environment."

1.5 Discussion and suggestions from teachers for future successful online learning

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While the pandemic may be over globally, there are still remnants of online learning that are still present as teachers move into the future. Across the United States, all school districts are back in session through face-to-face instruction; however, many communications with students and parents still take place through online platforms. Parental/family meetings and one-to-one remedial instruction is still being implemented through online platforms by many teachers across the country as a preferred method due to it being flexible and convenient for difficult work schedules. A parent has the option of meeting with their child's teacher during their lunch break from work in the lunchroom rather than needing to take a half day off from work to discuss their child's progress. An IEP meeting with the school psychologist, the teacher, and family can take place after a school day with each party being in a different location. The flexibility of being able to meet anytime, anyplace has allowed schools and families to build a deeper connection to help ensure the success of all children.

As the world moves further away from the pandemic, teachers reported what can be learned from the pandemic and what knowledge we can use to help future teachers to be successful if presented in another similar situation. Teachers reported the largest factor that allowed them to be successful during the pandemic with online learning was having a solid connection with peers and colleagues; without the support and encouragement of other teachers, 39% felt it would not have been possible for them to keep moving forward with peer support. Teachers advised future generations of teachers to develop strong bonds with peers and colleagues to allow the best form of teaching to occur. By having a strong emotional support system, teachers are better able to stay mentally and emotionally stable, which in return, helps them to better support the mental and emotional well-being of their students.

"Working closely with my peers helped tremendously. We shared resources and what we learned and found online to make learning more interesting for the students."

"My colleagues are always there for me; we have worked tirelessly together to overcome any obstacles"

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"It greatly helped having my teacher friends. We worked together and supported one another".

"My first-grade team and I worked like a dream! The teamwork was natural and exceptional. I feel like it wasn't even planned. We just fell into what we had to do and working together which made the transition much more doable and reduced anxiety by a lot. I was very fortunate!"

"Talking to colleagues to remind myself the struggles I was experiencing were not unique. At the end, I am doing the best I can."

Beyond creating a strong emotional support system, 32% of teachers stated future teachers must take the time to gain knowledge and research technology to be successful. Knowledge is power and teaching does not stop at the end of the four-year degree. Teachers are life-long students continuously seeking more knowledge to better teach future students.

1.6 Advice from pandemic teachers for future teachers

While hopefully another pandemic is not in the future plans for teachers, the lessons learned from educators during the pandemic can still bring many valuable opportunities to enhance and further the successes of students in the all types of learning environments. Thirty-six percent of teachers indicated that the most important life lesson that can be learned from the pandemic is to stay flexible, positive, open-minded, and to go with the flow. The future cannot be controlled or determined. The best advice is to always be prepared for the ever-changing learning environments through the power of knowledge which will allow individuals to more easily be adaptable.

"Prepare for anything--be flexible-and know that education is always changing."

"Be flexible. Things change quickly, life happens inside and outside of the classroom and technology does not always work, so always have something in your back pocket that you can whip out at any time that will be fun for the students and a stress reliever for you."

"Be prepared to be flexible and adjust to all and every change as quickly as possible! Expect the unexpected and practice patience. Take one day at a time."

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"Even in the best of times, teachers need to be flexible, always be willing to learn new things, and shouldn't feel bad if they don't have all the answers. We need to be willing to collaborate with other teachers, therapists and school staff, to support each other and share ideas."

"Take it one day at a time and know that the lesson won't probably go the way you imagined it would but that's okay. It is okay if you just talk to your students and survive the day."

"Be flexible. That is necessary pandemic or not. Not every student will love your subject as much as you do, but they can sense your love for it. Be interested in their achievements in activities other than your class".

"Always be flexible and be positive. The children are resilient but also feed off of our emotions. If we show positivity, it will create a more positive environment and happier more willing learners."

In addition to being flexible and staying positive, educators also concluded that it is important to keep the passion for teaching. Most teachers enter the field of education because they initially had a desire and wantonness to help students thrive and succeed. Twenty-four percent of people surveyed indicated that teachers need to constantly recall the reasons why they entered teaching and continue to renew their passion for the field.

"Teaching is still a wonderful profession. I like to think these changes have just made us stronger teachers."

"Follow your passion and remember you are here for the students because you care about them."

"It will get better. Remember your "why" during these trying times. These kids are going through an unprecedented event, be patient with them, let them vent to you, and listen to their concerns. Some things are more important than maintaining your pace of curriculum!"

"If you love teaching, as I do, you will find ways to make this work."

"Never let yourself get overwhelmed. Be a light for your students, always."

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"Remember that you are doing a great job given the circumstances. Don't be too hard on yourself. You will adapt. Don't stress out. You do make a difference in the lives of many kids". "Remember why you decided to become a teacher. It is not for the glory or money. It is to help kids learn and hopefully find their passion in life."

Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic compelled schools to shift dramatically from traditional, in-person instruction to online and remote learning environments. This unprecedented transition highlighted a critical need for a deeper understanding of teachers' mental health and the essential skills required for effective online and blended education in a post-pandemic context (Dawson & Hiltz, 2020). The abrupt change in teaching methods posed significant challenges, but it also opened the door to valuable insights about resilience, adaptability, and the ongoing professional development necessary for educators.

This study involved 187 teachers across 14 school districts in northeast Ohio and sought to capture the experiences of educators during this tumultuous period. The findings revealed that despite the numerous disruptions caused by the pandemic, several key lessons emerged that could inform future educational practices.

Teachers quickly adapted to the new reality by leveraging various digital tools and platforms. These technologies allowed them to maintain content delivery and engage students in meaningful ways, even in remote settings. Many educators reported that their proficiency in course design and assessment improved significantly as they navigated the challenges of online. This adaptability was crucial for fostering student engagement and ensuring that learning continued despite the obstacles.

Moreover, the pandemic deepened teachers' understanding of their students' unique circumstances. As many students faced challenges related to mental health, socioeconomic status, and access to resources, teachers learned to be more empathetic and responsive to these individual needs. This heightened awareness not only enriched the learning experience but also strengthened the relationships between educators and students.

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However, the transition to remote learning was not without its difficulties. Some teachers reported experiencing both positive and negative effects on their mental health. The isolation of remote teaching, coupled with the pressures of adapting to new technologies and methods, created stress and uncertainty for many (Ellen et al., 2021). This underscores the importance of providing ongoing support for educators as they navigate an ever-evolving educational landscape. Mental health resources, professional development opportunities, and a strong support network are essential for helping teachers thrive (Miller & Smith, 2021).

While the pandemic may have officially ended, the lessons learned and strategies developed during this time remain relevant. Educators can draw upon the insights gained from their experiences to better prepare for future challenges. Key recommendations emerged from the study and align with other research findings to support teachers in any difficult situation. Emphasizing the importance of professional development, teachers should seek out opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge. Staying informed about new educational technologies and teaching methodologies will enable educators to adapt more effectively to future changes (Thompson, 2020).

The ability to pivot and adjust teaching strategies in response to unforeseen circumstances is crucial. Educators should cultivate a mindset of flexibility, embracing change as an opportunity for growth rather than a setback (Roberts, 2021). In the face of ongoing challenges, self-care is vital. Teachers should be encouraged to prioritize their mental and emotional health by seeking support when needed, engaging in stress-reducing activities, and maintaining a healthy work-life balance (Anderson, 2022).

The pandemic was undoubtedly a challenging chapter in history, but it also showcased the resilience and dedication of teachers. Their unwavering commitment to supporting student success, regardless of the circumstances, speaks volumes about the passion and tenacity that educators bring to their profession. By applying the lessons learned during this time, highlighted in this study's findings and explored in future research, teachers can continue to adapt and thrive in an ever-changing educational landscape.

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