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JOSE M. OCAMPO, JR., MAY YOONG-SOO &  
SHEILA MARIE P. DELA-PEÑA

## Lived Experiences of Instructors on Emergency Remote Teaching to Mainstreamed College Students with Visual Impairment in a Higher Education Institution

**ABSTRACT:** Due to the pandemic, universities persisted to provide higher education online through emergency remote teaching. The situation became challenging for teachers with students, who have special needs. Thus, using purposive sampling, five instructors in a higher education institution were interviewed to determine their lived experiences as teachers of college students with visual impairment during the implementation of emergency remote teaching. An open-ended interview questions were used to gather data that were analyzed using NVivo version-12. In the interviews, two themes were extracted such as their description of experiences on emergency remote teaching of students with visual impairment and their reflection derived from teaching the students with visual impairment. While teachers recognize the capacity of students with visual impairment to perform academically, they also perceive that teachers can provide support to ensure student learning in an online setting. It is recommended that more interactive and multimedia technologies be utilized for the progress of students with visual impairment as intuitive learners thru online activities. To create a good learning environment, disability awareness, faculty, and staff training, or even allowing more time to work among students with visual impairment need to be conducted.

**KEY WORDS:** Visual Impairment Students; Student-Teacher Relationship; Distance Learning; Emergency Remote Teaching; Mainstreaming.

### INTRODUCTION

Amidst the COVID-19 (Corona Virus Disease-2019) pandemic, and the closure of educational institutions around the world, the delivery of learning still prevailed. While schools and universities had to stop their

**About the Authors:** Jose M. Ocampo, Jr., Ph.D. is a Professor of Educational Management at the PNU (Philippine Normal University), Manila, Philippines; May Yoong-Soo, M.A. a Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Education UM (University of Malaya), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; and Sheila Marie P. Dela-Peña, M.A.Ed. is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences PNU in Manila, Philippines. Corresponding Author: [juno\\_6970@yahoo.com](mailto:juno_6970@yahoo.com)

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onsite operations to prevent the risk of transmission, teachers and students maximized the technology through technology. In the absence of classroom teaching, distance learning thru e-learning serves as a valuable alternative (Huang, Lin & Huang, 2012).

Known as “Emergency Remote Teaching”, this refers the alternative remote education organized in the context of the pandemic providing teaching solutions that were not originally intended to take place remotely, but were forced to be delivered in this modality (Seynhaeve, Deygers & Simon, 2022).

Educators worldwide had to change their mode of teaching to online modalities due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. This shift in modality was challenging to both teachers and students, due to many factors such as but not limited to problems with devices, lack of engagement, and lack of computer knowledge. These challenges are further amplified for visually impaired individuals. Difficulty in providing inclusive education can arise in cases, where a student does not have assistive devices such as softwares that will allow non-visual desktop access, can experience exclusion in the learning process (Moleke, 2021).

The student’s own digital skill is crucial in the learning process in order for them to maximize their use of technology, they need sufficient knowledge about digital literacy such as operating screen reader applications for proper use of online platforms (Said *et al.*, 2022). Unfortunately, in many cases, teachers are not equipped with proper training to handle and teach students with special needs (Amponsah & Bekeleh, 2022). A more practical example that exhibits struggles in accessible learning is presentation slides with graphs or images in online video conferencing platforms (Zoom) that cannot be read by their screen reader software, this would also be the case with PDF (Portable Document Format) files with images (Mahfuz, Sakib & Husain, 2022). According to M. Hersh, B. Leporini & M. Buzzi (2020), none of the most well-known video conferencing platforms (MS Teams & Zoom) is truly an accessible tool for the people with sight impairment (Hersh, Leporini & Buzzi, 2020).

A study by S. Saharudin *et al.* (2022) reported low levels of learning of students with visual impairment in online modality due to limited interaction between student and teacher. It is undeniable that students need further assistance, in such cases, their parents would help in the process. However, the participants of the study who are teachers, also reported that there is a lack of effective parental assistance due to various reasons such as being unresponsive, difficulties in conveying information to their child, lack of resources (devices and internet), and lack of

enthusiasm from the child. A well-known reading material for blind individuals is through braille, however, students have reported that it is inaccessible in lockdowns as it cannot be delivered due to its fragile nature and further innovations in accessible resources is necessary (*cf* Moleke, 2021; Saharudin *et al.*, 2022).

These circumstances also apply in the Philippine context. A.J. Dianito *et al.* (2021) found that most PWD (People With Disability) students encountered difficulties in terms of limited assistive technology and internet access, and feelings of exclusion in online learning, but were able to exhibit resiliency through a healthy support system (Dianito *et al.*, 2021).

Though great research efforts regarding flexible and online learning during the pandemic have been made, there remains a scarcity of available studies in higher education that accommodate students with SEND (Special Educational Needs or Disabilities). The bulk of literatures were seemingly focused about how regular students adjusted to online learning, but only a few about students with SEND, more so with students who have visual impairment.

Most of the research available about teaching during the pandemic were from the K-12 or the basic education teachers and less from professors in the tertiary level. Thus, the experiences of professors on how they facilitated ERT (Emergency Response Team) to mainstreamed college students with visual impairment in a higher education institution deserves a scientific investigation (Ocampo *et al.*, 2023).

**Conceptual Framework.** In online modality, a visually impaired student has no choice but to adjust to the demands of online learning. With that being said, the responsibility of producing inclusive education relies on the teacher in order to achieve learning objectives. The circumstances of the pandemic led to a high reliance towards the use of technology, which resulted in a high demand of integrating technology in education. A.H. Talafha (2022) concluded that educators need to have essential technical skills to successfully engage with students in online learning, along with that, they also have to boost student attitude to ensure that students with visual impairment feel a sense of inclusion and develop confidence that can help in achieving learning (Talafha, 2022).

This is consistent with C.R. Rhoads, A.M. Silverman & L.P. Rosenblum (2022), who also concluded that the educators shall ensure that learning materials are accessible and that technology shall be made available for the educators to use. Therefore, in creating inclusive education, teachers also need the support of the institution and other governing bodies to be able to deliver accessible teaching instructions. Institutions can help them through providing special education training

and ready-made templates from embedded electronic support systems (*cf* Osman, 2020; Rhoads, Silverman & Rosenblum, 2022).

A study by S. Russ & F. Hamidi (2021) found that online course content and learning materials specifically made for blind and deaf students had significantly increased their learning output. Accessible use of technology in their learning materials includes audio descriptions, captions and sign languages (Russ & Hamidi, 2021).

O.L. Fatimah *et al.* (2022) found that the Flipped Classroom learning model had positive effects on the learning outcomes of students with visual impairment during the COVID-19 pandemic. They explained that the cause behind this is the flexibility of the model to provide students time to process the material that is given to them, where videos with audio are given to students that they can playback anytime. In addition to that, the model also includes activities inside and outside the classroom (Fatimah *et al.*, 2022).

It is evident that students with visual impairment can still benefit and thrive in online learning modality with the appropriate learning model and adequate resources. Despite the positive outcomes of online support towards visually impaired individuals, professionals still suggest that traditional or “face to face” modality is still indisputable when catering to the discussed disability (Battistin *et al.*, 2021).

Persons with disabilities will require additional care, due to their specific needs, and even with all of the efforts in creating inclusive education, it cannot replace the established rapport in the traditional learning environment (Zdravkova & Krasniqi, 2021).

Some scientific works on what happens inside the classroom specify that teacher-student interactions serve as a significant component that would advance learning and development among students (Pianta, 2015). Hence, in the context of ERT for mainstreamed students with visual impairment which is the focus of the present study, the atmosphere and dynamics of interaction or the amount of effort exerted by the professors to accommodate the learners with SEND greatly influence the crafting of educational policies in connection with the way teachers would eventually practice their profession. It provides insights to present trends and issues that in-service, as well as pre-service teachers who spend time for interaction, tend to develop their competencies as learners and teachers (Hurst, Wallace & Nixon, 2013).

Thus, considering the case of a university which accommodates SEND undergraduate clientele, it is of prime importance that the narratives of teachers be explored since they had first-hand experience in teaching students with visual impairment in an ERT modality. The lived experiences of professors would provide information about the

challenges to inclusive education and accessible learning and their insights can serve as input in anticipating and preventing barriers that might be experienced by students with visual impairment in an online learning environment. As a result, policies for improving the system of delivering higher education to students with SEND, specifically to students with visual impairment can be made.

**Statement of the Problem.** The study is guided by the question how do teachers describe and make sense out their experience of teaching a mainstreamed student with visual impairment during the implementation of emergency remote teaching?

As mentioned, the student and their parents have their own roles in the learning process, however, it must be emphasized that the majority of its projected success relies on the approach and pedagogy of the teacher. There is an abundance of studies exploring the needs and challenges experienced by students with visual impairment. On the other hand, there is a lack of research about the experiences of the teacher in their efforts in delivering inclusive education towards their students.

Acquiring information about their lived experiences can contribute to institutions in helping these teachers fulfill their learning objectives and produce inclusive education through review of policies, cross-sector planning, and overall coordination to improve academic service.

## **METHOD**

The purpose of this qualitative study, using a phenomenological approach, is to explore the lived experiences of college instructors employed in a university that mainstreams students with visual impairment with regular students as they taught during the implementation of emergency remote teaching at the height of the pandemic. Phenomenological research intends to gather data regarding the opinions, perspective, and thoughts of participants about the chosen phenomenon descriptive phenomenological data was used wherein the experience of the participant is thoroughly described and once the statements have been provided as part of the results was analyzed by the researchers (Giorgi, Giorgi & Morley, 2017).

Due to the pandemic and a lockdown in various communities, the University, which was the research locale, provided instructional materials for all students through courier and an exclusive learning management system. It should be noted that the distribution of storage devices and printed modules are provided in its University Memorandum 153 series of 2020. The students also had synchronous and asynchronous sessions with their instructors using different platforms (BOR Resolution No.U-3139, 2020; Kaway Aralan sa Bagong Kadawyan: PNU Flexible Learning, 2020).

Thru the purposive sampling technique, faculty members who received a teaching load and a class list including a student with visual impairment were sought. Honoring the ethical standard of research with human subjects, researchers sought informed consent and voluntary participation. As a result of the process, only five faculty members participated in the study.

The instrument for this study consisted of 8 open-ended interview questions. The questions were prepared, and the researchers carefully went through each of them to ensure that they could serve the purpose of addressing the topic at hand. The questions were developed based on a literature review on the topic under investigation such as special education, emergency remote teaching, and distance learning. The questions were reviewed by experts in the field of psychology and special education in terms of its content vis-à-vis the research question. The questions were revised and the reliability of the responses/evaluation of the experts was established using Cohen's Kappa coefficient (Cohen, 1960). With the computed Kappa coefficient = 1, it reveals that there is perfect agreement between the raters on their evaluation of the items on the questionnaire.

In addition, reliability was established in terms of achieving dependability and trustworthiness (Houghton *et al.*, 2013). The confirmability which is using qualitative software is also part of reliability. To further establish validity, dependability, credibility, and transferability can be done in qualitative studies (Simon & Goes, 2013). Dependability and confirmability can be strengthened also through member checking and academic review of findings (Richards & Morse, 2013). When consistent results are obtained using the same instruments, it helps to establish reliability (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2011).

All five instructors were interviewed using a mobile phone. The same set of questions was asked in the entire process of data collection. The participants exhibited their knowledge in answering the questions and cooperated very well.

The interviews were electronically recorded to secure actual accounts that transpired. Then the interview proceedings were transcribed. In this study, dependability was established by asking the participants to make corrections to any responses in the transcript. The process of member checks by which the transcripts and analysis were shared with the participants ensured trustworthiness. For confirmability, the textual and thematic analysis of interview data was made using NVivo version 12. To ensure credibility, the researchers asked for another meeting with the participants to check the abovementioned results based on what transpired during their first meeting. As regards transferability, it is

assumed that the results found in this study may be revealed in other studies if the same methodology, set of respondents, and the like would be utilized.

The researchers also used some documents like university-issued resolutions and memoranda which were considered relevant to support the discussions that transpired in interviews.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Results.** Responses were reviewed, clustered, and coded to generate themes describing the lived experience of emergency remote teaching of students with visual impairments as shown in the succeeding table 1.

Some teachers reported that during their synchronous virtual classes, they treat their students with visual impairments similar to how they treat students without special needs because they are mainstreamed, and that they appeared competent in their classes. Teachers screen shared their lessons, discussed, and asked questions to check for comprehension while the students, including the student with visual impairment, listened and recited as expected. Since the classes were held online, professors invited them to use the chat box to share ideas or ask questions. In one instance, the teacher was unaware that for a term, he had a student with visual impairment because the student was performing like others. On the other hand, some teachers believe that since they chose to be mainstreamed, they have to perform like regular students, while others don't want the students with visual impairment to feel that they are different from others or to pity themselves that is why they don't consider giving them special treatments though they admitted that they also made some adjustments to their teaching approaches.

Meanwhile, other teachers showed sensitivity to the students' condition and identified how their special needs can be attended. Their primary concern is to how to help the student comprehend the lessons. One allowed a parent or a guardian to act as a shadow teacher to further assist or simplify instructions or lesson given to the student. The other repeated his instructions and portion of lessons as per request of the student with visual impairment.

Nonetheless, most of the teachers utilized number of ways to increase their effectiveness as a teacher of students with visual impairment. They attended online trainings and seminars to determine age-appropriate and condition-appropriate teaching strategies can be used. Some even sought the advice of teachers who had prior experience in teaching students with visual impairment. One professor administered a formative assessment at the start of the class to gauge what the students already know about the subject and what topics require detailed and elaborate explanation. In

**Table 1:**  
Theme, Subthemes, and Major Codes that Describe Experiences on Emergency Remote Teaching of Students with Visual Impairment

Theme	Subtheme	Major Code	Illustrative Text
Teacher Experiences on Emergency Remote Teaching of Students with Visual Impairment.	Different Ways on how Teachers Treat their Students with Visual Impairment in Virtual Class.	Conventional treatment.	I am simply professional towards the blind student. I just treat her like any other student. I think I do not have to since the blind student is in mainstream education and should be treated as with such. –Oliver
		Giving of special treatment.	<i>Pag nalaman kong may student na may concern sa eyesight nila, for this term na merong pandemic [...] tinatanong ko lang yung bata pasintabi na “Sir, may kasama ka ba dyan? Para lang ma-assist ka kasi baka di mo makita yung slide ko”.</i> (When I find out there is a student who has concerns with their eyesight, for the term with the pandemic [...] I ask them “Sir, do you have someone there with you? just to assist you in case you cannot see my slides”). – Christian.  <i>Almost every session, meron siya pinapaulit. Ang maganda sa kanya kasi very vocal siya and open siya. Sinabi ko sakanya, kung di mo maintindihan or di ka makasunod sabihin mo lang because I’m willing to repeat that.</i> (Almost every session, they ask to reiterate something. The good thing about them is they are very vocal and open. I told them, if they do not understand or they have trouble following, just tell me because I am willing to repeat that). – William.
	Teachers Prepare on Becoming a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairment.	Attended online trainings and seminars.	<i>I think sir meron naman kasi tayong trainings din. Pero hindi ko masasabing ganun ka intensive kasi dapat talaga yung preparation for that dapat marunong din tayo magbasa ng braille, yung ganung level for us to really help them pero siyempre hindi siya ganun ka feasible sa set up so ang ginagawa ko yung pag-attend ng training at tsaka yung sa Youtube minsan tumitingin ako kung how to handle.</i> (I think there is, sir because we had training.

Theme	Subtheme	Major Code	Illustrative Text
			However, I would not say it is as intensive because the preparations should include being able to read braille, that should be the level for us to really help them, but I acknowledge that it is not that feasible in the set-up so what I do is attend the training and sometime I look up in Youtube on how to handle). – Luisa.
		Consulted experienced teachers.	<i>Series of consultation dun sa faculty na nakapag-handle na ng students with visual impairment [...] kina-capacitate ko din yung sarili ko.</i> (Series of consultation with other faculties who have handled students with visual impairment [...] before, I capacitate myself as well). – Christian.
		Administered assessment tests.	I try to assess; I try to ask questions on how I can adjust. – Arnold.
		Did not do any capacity-building.	I did not do any capacity-building for the blind student. – Oliver.
	Identified Barriers to Effective Delivery of Learning During Emergency Remote Teaching.	Internet Connectivity Problem.	There's no disruption aside from technical difficulties. – Arnold.  <i>Sa online ang problem talaga is yung internet connections. If ever there are problems with connections like for example, nade-dalay or choppy, I instruct them to tell me at ginagawa naman nila.</i> (In an online setting the problem really is the internet connection. If ever there are problems with the connection like for example, delays or choppy, I instruct them to tell me and they follow). – William.
		Unfamiliarity with Assistive Learning Applications.	There was an activity in CTD/FSTeM on how to be an effective teacher of the blind. While the information was really relevant, learning the technology that goes with it is really challenging for me. Using those app for the blind will take time before fully acquainted with the features. I have no time to explore apps

Theme	Subtheme	Major Code	Illustrative Text
			beyond what is needed to execute flexible learning of mainstream students.—Oliver.
		Noise Disruptions.	<i>I called the attention of the student [...] disruptive kasi na-cut yung discussion namin, kinuha yung ilang minuto ng klase ko, so that for me, is disruptive kasi hindi naging continuous yung discussion namin. (I called the attention of the student [...] because it was disruptive as it cuts the discussion, it took minutes of my class, so that for me, is disruptive because the discussion is not continuous).— Christian.</i>
		Preparation of Assessment Activities.	<i>Ang nakita ko kasing kakulangan sa akin, hindi ko alam kung paano iba-validate yung mga gawa niya. Kasi bagaman na authentic performance-based, paano ko malalaman na siya ang nagsulat? (What I found lacking within myself is that I did not know how to validate their work. Because even though it is authentic performance-based, how would I know that they were the one who wrote it?)— Christian.</i>
		Unresponsive Student.	<i>Meron akong naging concern, di na din siya nagre-reply, ang nagre-reply na kasi yung magulang. So wala akong matandaan na naging paraan para makausap yung estudyante. Hindi ko siya makausap ng personal. (I had a concern and they were not replying, the one who was replying was their parent. I was not able to recall a way to speak to the student. I was not able to speak with them in personal) .— Christian.</i>
	Ways to Ensure Proper Accommodation to Address Special Education Needs.	Monitoring Students' Progress.	<i>I talk to the student [...] ang naging agreement namin is meron kaming separate session. (I talk to the student [...] we agreed that there would be a separate session).— Luisa.</i>
		Adjusting Teaching Approach.	<i>The clarity in explaining and the way you talk/deliver. I see to it na the way I talk is klaro sa kanila para kahit na</i>

Theme	Subtheme	Major Code	Illustrative Text
			<i>hindi nila nakikita yung sinusulat ko sa board naiintindihan nila. (The clarity in explaining and the way you talk/deliver. I see to it that the way I talk is clear to them so that even though they cannot see what I am writing in the board, they can still understand it). – William.</i>
	Being responsive to student requests.		Students are able to ask me in three avenues: synchronous, group chat, and through their class representative. I entertain questions if there are. – Oliver.  <i>If it did arise na kailangan na special or additional na instructions or guidance, I could have done that. (If it did arise that they needed special or additional instructions or guidance, I could have done that). – Arnold.</i>
	Adjustment in Preparation of Instructional Materials.		<i>Madami talaga silang readings so ang ginawa ko sina-summarize ko yung pdf files at kino-convert ko siya sa word file [...] kapag na-download, may feature kasi ang word na mag “read aloud” so ang ginawa ko naka-instruct sa nanay or guardian na ito yung ida-download na file tapos nakalagay doonna sa word na pwedeng i-read aloud yun sa kanya kasabay ng pag-aaral niya. (They really do have a lot of readings so what I do is I summarize the pdf files and convert it to word file [...] when downloaded, the word has a feature to “read aloud” so what I do is I instruct the mother or the guardian that this is the file that they need to download then it is there in the word [software] they can make it read it aloud to the student while studying). – Christian.</i>
	Establishing Partnership with Parent/Guardian.		<i>[...] kinakausap ko din po yung parents. Ang maganda dito cooperative naman po yung parents. ([...] I also spoke to the parents. The nice thing about this is the parents are cooperative). – Luisa.</i>

Theme	Subtheme	Major Code	Illustrative Text
			<p><i>Meron kaming consistent communication dunsang guardian. Hiningi ko talaga yung consent ni mother na every week, ko kontakin kosiya or ko kontakin niya ko tungkol sa karanasan ng anak niya sa pag-aaral ng kurso ko [...] So every Wednesday sir, siguro mga 10-15 mins lang or minsan 5 mins nga lang, tinatanong ko kung meron bang concern yung anak niya para magkaron ako ng idea at mabigyan ko din ng response kung sakalimang may concern siya sa klase. (We have consistent communication with the guardian. I always ask for the consent of the mother that every week, I will contact her or she will contact me about the experiences of her child in studying my course [...] so every Wednesday sir, maybe about 10-15 minutes or sometimes 5 minutes only, I ask if her child has concerns so I have an idea and I can respond if they have concerns in the class). – Christian.</i></p>
		Extended time for discussions.	<p><i>Actually [...] talagang you should explain the lesson, nag-i-slow down ako para sa kanya pero syempre sinasama ko na din yung medyo may kahinaan sa klase. Hindi ako nagdadagdag kasi talagang mabilis siya. Pero pag hindi [...] siguro mga 25% ng isang oras yung madadagdag. (Actually [...] you should really explain the lesson, I slow down for them but of course, I include those who have troubles in the class as well. I do not add up because the mainstreamed student is a fast learner. But if not, maybe around 25% of 1 hour would be added). – William.</i></p>
	Ways to create Positive Student-Teacher Relationship	Creating a non-threatening atmosphere.	<p><i>I ask them hindi lang sa academics but, also on their personal life. I ask them “how they feel?” [...] I ask them kung comfortable sa kanila. Tapos kinakausap ko din po yung student before mag-start yung term. (I ask them not only about academics but also in their personal life. I ask them “how they feel?” [...] I ask them if they are comfortable. Then I also talk to the student before the term starts). – Luisa.</i></p>

Theme	Subtheme	Major Code	Illustrative Text
		Established a Sense of Belongingness.	<i>In-Involve ko yung lahat ng officers kung sino man yung pwede mag-contact [...] na hindi lang siya kamustahin tungkol sa academics [...] na pwedeng pag-usapan nila anything under the sun [...] para malaman kung may iba pang issues or concern na hindi lang academic-related para ma-address natin yun [...] maganda lang na meron siyang someone to talk to. (I involve all the officers if any one of them may contact [...] the student, not only to ask how they are doing in terms of academic [...] but also anything under the sun [...] so that we will know if they have other issues or concern not only related to academic so we can address it [...] it is nice that they had someone to talk to). – Christian.</i>
		Being Accessible.	<i>I'm open to them anytime they can contact me or they can just post their message through messenger para if may time ako pwede ko silang sagutin and it works. (I'm open to them, anytime they can contact me or they can just post their message through messenger so that when I have the time, I can answer them and it works). – William.</i>
		Encouraging Students to Ask Questions.	<i>Sinasabi ko sa kanila in mathematics, your confusion might also be the confusion of your classmates so if you want to be clarified for that topic you open it to the class. Do not ask me privately or outside the classroom, because if I answer the question everyone will benefit if you raise the question during the class. (I tell them that in mathematics, their confusion might also be the confusion of your classmates so if you want to be clarified for that topic you open it to the class. Do not ask me privately or outside the classroom, because if I answer the question everyone will benefit if you raise the question during the class). – William.</i>

contrast, one professor disclosed that he did not do any capacity-building with the belief that students with visual impairment must perform on par with the regular students as if providing special treatment would defeat the purpose of them being mainstreamed.

Despite their efforts, the teachers identified some barriers to their effective delivery of learning during emergency remote teaching. There were some barriers identified that affected the whole class. Generally, the unstable and intermittent internet connection affects both the teacher and students causing technical interference and class disruption. Teachers had lesser opportunities to monitor the student with visual impairment, because they had to turn their videos off to keep their connection from the virtual synchronous class. Noise disruptions also occurred when students forgot to mute their microphones and the conversations in their homes could be overheard by the whole class.

One professor recalled a time when a shadow teacher was whispering the answer to the mainstreamed student during recitation and the regular students seemed distracted with what happened. Meanwhile, there were some barriers that were specific to students with visual impairment only. Due to the abrupt transition to online modalities, teachers had to quickly familiarize themselves about the applications used for online teaching such as Zoom, Google Meet and University Learning Management System that they could hardly find time to learn about how to use Assistive Learning Applications for students who have blindness or virtual impairment.

Thus, in preparation of instructional materials, they just do what they thought would help the mainstreamed student. Perhaps due to their visual impairment, some students became irresponsive to the message of their teachers and the professors had no way of communicating directly with the student and had to course his messages through the parent. Professors were also challenged on how they can design an authentic assessment and a mechanism to check whether the student really accomplished the requirement.

On the other hand, the professors continued to ensure that they provide accommodation to address their perceived special education needs of the mainstreamed students. By monitoring students' progress, they get to know whether the mainstreamed students could still cope and comprehend the lessons. They also manifested sensitivity to the condition of students with visual impairment that they adjusted their teaching approach, especially when they slide share, instead of just pointing at the figure and saying "this", the professor would describe the whole figure so the student with visual impairment will not be left behind and can relate to what was being shown to the class.

Professors showed willingness to respond to student questions and need for assistance should the student express it to them. In their preparation of instructional materials, the professor saved it in a file format that can also be read aloud by the computer to assist the student with visual impairment. To prevent eyestrain for those who have blurred vision and for those who were totally blind, an instructional material in audio format is really helpful. Professors also maintained partnership with parent/ guardian and involved them in their child's education.

Since there were complex requirements of discussions, the parents/ guardians who also acted as shadow teacher could simplify it for them. If the professor found that they were having hard time comprehending, they would extend time for discussions. Even after their regular class hours, the professors provided time to discuss, repeat, and explain the lesson to the student. In one instance, when a mainstreamed student could only connect their small phone to the video conferencing app while taking the test, the student could not see the questions because of how small the screen was. The student shared this concern to their teacher, and the teacher read the test questions for them. The professor spent more than an hour just to allow him finish the test. The anecdote clearly reflected the professor's commitment and dedication to assist the student with visual impairment.

Aside from focusing on the academic progress of mainstreamed students, professors strived to establish positive student-teacher relationship with them. They create a non-threatening atmosphere by showing interest in the student's welfare and they are seen not just as a student but as a human being who also have other concerns aside from academics. In connection, professors also involved the regular students in providing support to the mainstreamed students by making them feel a sense of belongingness in the class that they are a part of. The professors included the mainstreamed students in group activities so they can engage in a teamwork that would allow them to contribute their ideas and strengths in the accomplishment of complex tasks. The professor assigned regular students, usually the class officers, to provide assistance and make the mainstreamed student feel at ease by providing a space where they can talk not just about academics but on other things as well.

The professors showed that they were accessible to mainstreamed students by giving their email addresses, reaching them out through Facebook messenger, or by having a group leader who would relay to the professor if there were concerns that needed attention. In a way, the mainstreamed students were assured that their professors are just one message away for support. Furthermore, the professors also encouraged the mainstreamed students to become confident in expressing their thoughts and ask questions. See table 2.

**Table 2:**  
 Theme, Subthemes, and Major Codes on Reflections Derived from Teaching  
 the Students with Visual Impairment

Theme	Subtheme	Major Code	Illustrative Text
Reflections Derived from Teaching the Students with Visual Impairment.	Perceived Attitude Towards Teaching Students with Visual Impairment.	Accepting.	<i>Syempre very accommodating [...] personal level akoeh kahit naman sa kahit sinong estudyante pero sa kanila yung mas kasi alam naman nating mas need nila.</i> (Of course very accommodating [...] I do it at the personal level even with any student but with them I do more, because we know they need it more). – Luisa.
		Ambivalent.	<i>Nung una, medyo hindi ko matanggap na meron akong estudyante na blind. pero eventually, tinanggap ko yung sitwasyon [...] na awa ako doon sa estudyante at sa nanay kasi nakita ko yung perseverance ng nanay [...].</i> (At first, I had a hard time accepting that I have a blind student, but eventually, I accepted the situation [...] I feel sorry for the student and the mother because I can see the mother's perseverance [...]). – Christian.
	Perceived Skills that Needed to be Enhanced by Teachers of Students with Visual Impairment.	Skills in Using Assistive Technologies for People with Visual Impairment.	<i>Yung preparation of materials lalo na sa technology.</i> (The preparation of the materials, especially with the technology). – Luisa.  The ability to use Braille system will be very helpful. This would eliminate the need for an assistant during examination. – Oliver.
		Skills in Capacitating Parents as Shadow Teachers.	<i>Siguro on how to capacitate din yung mga magulang kasi nagiging shadow teacher ko sila eh kasi nga yung nakakausap ko yung magulang hindi siya.</i> (Probably on how to capacitate the parents as well because the parent becomes my shadow teacher

Theme	Subtheme	Major Code	Illustrative Text
			since its the parent that I speak to, not the student). – Christian.
		Tapping Regular Students to Provide Support.	<p><i>Sa online [...] ginawa ko na lang dyan, in-involve ko yung lahat ng officers, sinabi ko na “as a president, kinakailangan na matulungan natin siya”. At gumawa din kami ng gc para ma-inform ako kung kamusta na siya. (In online [...] what I did there was to involve all the officers, I told them “as a president, we have to help them”. We made a gc for them to inform me how they [blind student] are doing). – Christian.</i></p>
		Human Relationship Skills.	<p><i>Siguro extra patience sa kanila lalo na online na di agad nakakapag-respond. Kasi dalawa yung iniintindi nila eh, meron silang technology na nina-navigate at meron din silang environment na nina-navigate [...] skill din on how to appropriately communicate yung choice of words and phrases na gagamitin mo, being sensitive. (Probably extra patience for them especially in online settings where there is no immediate response. Because they have to understand two things at once, they have the technology and environment that they have to navigate [...] also skill on how to appropriately communicate with the choice of words and phrases that one has to use, being sensitive). – Christian.</i></p>
	Perceived Helpful Behaviors of Students with Visual Impairment that Promote Academic Success.	Being Open to Express their Special Need.	<p><i>Kung may kailangan siyang software na gamitin or meron siyang method of better learning na nag-work sa kanya dati, it would be very helpful in my part. (If there is a software that they have to use or they have other methods for better learning that worked for them before, it would be very helpful in my part). – Arnold.</i></p>

Theme	Subtheme	Major Code	Illustrative Text
		Manifest Commitment to Learn.	<i>Ang nakakalungkot paeh yung tanong kong pwedeng opinyon ang sagot, yung nanay din ang sumasagot. So naisip ko [...] kung nag-iisip ba yung bata sa tanong na kailangan sagutin [...] alarming yun para sa content-based na kurso [...] hindi siya katanggap-tanggap at dinadaya natin yung program [...] mamaya tayo po yung mapulaan dito na nagadvocate nga tayo ng inclusive education pero ano naman yung kalidad ng pina-graduate natin? (The sad thing about it is when I had a question where the answer could be their own opinion, it was the mother who was answering. So I [...] was wondering by myself, if the student is thinking on their own about the question they have to answer [...] it is alarming for a content based course [...] it is unacceptable and it is deceit towards the program [...] later on we might be criticized since we are advocating for inclusive education, however what about the quality of our graduates?). – Christian.</i>
	Perceived Support Needed from School Administrators.	Informing the Teacher about the Mainstreamed Student being part of their Class.	<i>Hindi naman kasi kami ini-inform ahead of time eh. Sana po meron para po makapag-prepare ahead of time. (We were not informed ahead of time. I wish we were informed so we can prepare ahead of time). – Luisa.</i>
		Capacity Building Resources for Teachers.	<i>Yung sa library sana. Sana merong section po dun where we can borrow materials and sana may training din dun sa mga ginagamit na softwares ngayon. (I wish that the library has a section where we can borrow materials and I hope we have training on using the softwares). – Luisa.</i>

Theme	Subtheme	Major Code	Illustrative Text
		Establishing Network with Other Institutions Specializing in Special Education to Students with Visual Impairment.	<i>Na realize ko din kasi na dapat mayskill din tayo to identify or look for other institutions or to collaborate with other institutions para maibigay natin yung appropriate service or appropriate teaching strategies doon sa visually- challenged student lalo na naka- remote learning tayo. (I have also realized that we should have the skill to identify or look for other institutions or to collaborate with other institutions so we can provide the appropriate service or appropriate teaching strategies to the visually- challenged student especially in remote learning).</i> – Christian.

Teachers revealed different attitudes at the initial thought of teaching visually-challenged students. Some teachers have been accommodating from the very beginning and acknowledge the need to give more attention towards students with visual impairment. While others have felt unaccepting of their situation, but eventually committed themselves to the learning of the student. They have expressed the need for various skills that the teacher has to enhance in order to deliver inclusive education to visually challenged students. One of these is having knowledge in the utilization of various assistive technology software.

However, even if technology support was highlighted in their University Memorandum No.178, the foregoing technologies were left unincluded. Parents are to be further involved in the learning of the student, where teachers shall capacitate the parents as shadow teachers as they are the one who is by the side of the student most of the time. Additionally, support of the regular students would also be of help to the teachers in gauging how the blind student is doing not only in academics but in other areas of their lives as well. Lastly, human relationship skills are needed to be able to be sensitive and understanding of the student's difficulties and responding to their needs accordingly.

It is especially helpful for the teacher, when students show behavior that also leads to their own success. One of the most helpful ways to improve their learning is when they communicate and express their special needs to the teacher. Moreover, when they are committed to learning through active participation.

With all that being said, the learning of students with visual impairment not only relies on the commitment of the teacher and their students. Further support from school administrators is needed to provide inclusive education. Teachers urge that the school must inform them ahead of time regarding a student with special needs in order for them to prepare ahead of time. They would also like to have more resources easily available to them in order to initiate their own capacity building. Lastly, networking with other institutions with specialization on the special education to students with visual impairment shall be available to arrange in order to provide the appropriate strategies that the students need.

**Discussion.** Several findings from this research replicate those found in various literature, including the role of teachers in the academic progress of students with visual impairment.

Results indicate that professors who participated in the study felt that the professors are accessible online specifically if they know their students have special needs. This finding converges with the study of [A. Al-Ghamdi, A. Samarji & A. Watt \(2016\)](#), who introduced the nomenclature, “e-immediacy”, which describes the immediacy behaviors among instructors in online learning set up. Aside from lectures and discussions during synchronous sessions, nonverbal cues which the whole body can be seen focusing on facial expressions, movements, and graphic information, the participants of the study saw the importance of audiobooks and other files that become could utilize text to speech applications. Other than usability, it provides students with visual impairment more access to these materials during their personal study. Hence, thru correspondences, similar to the consultations that usually takes place during face-to-face modality, immediacy attracts student participation which reflects better student learning experience, communication satisfaction, and favorable changes in the cognition and affects domains (*cf* [Kucuk, 2009; Baker, 2010; Al-Ghamdi, Samarji & Watt, 2016](#)).

On the other hand, aside from word file presentations provided by instructors which students with visual impairment usually convert to audio files professors recognized that students with visual impairment need well-planned assessments and thorough consultations. This is consistent with the findings of [E.Y. Huang, S.W. Lin & T.K. Huang \(2012\)](#) such that 30% of students are intuitive learners who may not simply adapt to the present e-learning environment, thus, may require additional assistance. Thus, the instructors may administer learning style tests to assess the student preference, readiness and special needs when taking courses online in order to determine how they can best be helped ([Huang, Lin & Huang, 2012](#)).

Another alternative is to utilize more interactive and multimedia technologies for the progress of students with visual impairment as intuitive learners thru online activities. This supports the study of [D. Zhang et al. \(2004\)](#) that e-learning is beneficial for being student-oriented, flexible, continuous access, use, and sharing of information. This would however require more preparation time for professors who are still unfamiliar with online learning platforms and have to learn assistive technologies for the mainstreamed students ([Zhang et al., 2004](#)).

The professors acknowledge the competence of the students based on what do in their online classes. As instructor Luisa said, they need more support and attention. Congruent with the literature written by [Z.K. Tufan \(2021\)](#), there remain a stigma and shame attached to a disability that is commonly found in those who have not established their adult identity. Thus, their feelings of inadequacy towards a disabled identity become a barrier to the support they probably need. The encouragement of professors, provision of group activities and tapping regular students to be part of a support system for mainstreamed students are quite beneficial ([Tufan, 2021](#)).

Since students know what they need, it is pertinent to take their views to assist in making reasonable adjustments ([Sawyer & Keith, 2014](#)). An accommodating teacher and more than willing to provide help students can confidently cultivate relationships ([Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013](#)). Based on a meta-analysis of studies, some characteristics strengthen young individuals' connection with the school, so that they would achieve academically. These are high academic standards in combination with strong teacher support, a school environment that reinforces positive emotion, and respectful and inspiring student-teacher relationships ([Blum, 2005](#)).

Whether face-to-face or online, professors recognized that students with visual impairment rely on shadow teacher not only as a source of their assistance but of security. If deprived it can incite the strong need for threat-connected apprehension, alertness, and being reactive; hence, to be alone may cause pain, harm, or injury. These threats to health whether physical or psychological may lead to academic underachievement ([Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2012](#); [Coan, Beckes & Allen, 2013](#)).

Therefore, shadow teachers are recommended to sit next to the blind student to assist in using technology and facilitate the engagement, especially during synchronous sessions, considering that virtual classrooms are designed for regular students ([Tamez-Robledo, 2020](#)). Yet, when shadow teachers do not establish boundaries, they might overhelp the student with visual impairment which would defeat purpose

of assessments designed by professors to measure student learning. Professor Christian also recalled that the constant presence of shadow teachers can be distracting and may make the quality of learning transmitted to and assessed on students with visual impairment especially on content-based courses as questionable.

Aside from occasional extended meetings of the class or separate meetings with students with visual impairment, the instructors' presentations are supported with comprehensive descriptions, clear voice, and kind words. This is consistent with the findings of T. Hall *et al.* (2020) that the instructional/learning materials and activities during face-to-face were used as a format for online migration during ERT (Emergency Response Team). Notably, for purposes of nurturing social and emotional support, there is a necessity that teachers continue to become sensitive with the words they use during online class discussions and take time to relate with their students. Even with a very limited time, the quantity and quality of these relationships can bring tremendous effect to students' interest for further education as well as to teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practices (*cf* Hall *et al.*, 2020; Zimny, 2020).

Hence, measures like disability awareness, training to use assistive learning applications and for personality development, and having more time for preparation to work on assessment activities and lesson plans among students with special educational needs serve as requisites to create a good learning environment.

## CONCLUSION

Professors have different ways of preparing for and ensuring that they accommodate to the learning needs of students with visual impairment. There were technical and pedagogical barriers that affect the delivery of learning, but they compensate it with being accessible to the mainstreamed students. Professors recognize that students with visual impairment should also reach out if they need help, and express commitment to learning. Students with visual impairment also need a shadow teacher or peer buddy as sources of their assistance and security but should not overly rely on them for academic progress.

Despite apparent emergency remote teaching, professors only did what they could to help the mainstreamed student, considering their available resources including their time and energy. While the professors focused on lectures during synchronous online classes, they also seek out opportunities to ask the mainstreamed students and their parents/shadow teachers on how they cope and what support is further needed. They identified that there remain some areas for improvement on how they engage with and teach students with visual impairment in an online learning environment.

Thus, to create a good learning environment, disability awareness, faculty, and staff training, or even allowing more time to work among students with visual impairment need to be conducted. Establishing a linkage and network with other similar higher educational institutions that attend to students with visual impairment and bench marking on how they assist their students who have special needs can also be helpful in improving the teaching strategies and approaches as well as student services available for them.

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### **Instructors and Students in a Higher Education Institution in the Philippines in the Era of COVID-19**

Instructors showed willingness to respond to student questions and need for assistance should the student express it to them. In their preparation of instructional materials, the instructors saved it in a file format that can also be read aloud by the computer to assist the student with visual impairment.