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The Impact of COVID-19 on Elementary School Students' Academic Achievement

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Abstract

COVID-19 is a virus that has caused a nationwide lockdown due to the rapid spread. Due to this, non-essential businesses and schools were closed. Many households were not getting enough food, behind on rent, unable to pay household bills. With schools closed, education was forced into online learning. This had negative effects on students' academic achievement, their mental, emotional, and social health, and caused more behavioral issues than before the pandemic. Through literature review, interviewing two fifth grade teachers and anonymous surveys of forty-eight students, the findings revealed that online learning had a negative impact on students' academic achievement and still has a lingering effect on students until today. It is recommended that high-dosage tutoring take place and that parents become more involved in their children to improve their academic achievement.

Introduction and Background

In 2020, the coronavirus began to rapidly spread around the United States, so the country went into lockdown. Due to this, non-essential businesses closed. Households with children and people of color were having difficult times because of money issues (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2022). Many were having to shorten their food intake as they could not afford to go grocery shopping often, many were behind on rent and were not able to afford usual household expenses since they lost their jobs and were having trouble finding a new one (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2022).

COVID-19 has affected students' academic achievement. The virus caused the country to go into lockdown, which meant schools had to close. Teachers and students had to do education through online platforms. Although many teachers did not receive adequate training for online instruction, they needed to be ready because they had to start teaching their students online (Marshal, et al., 2020). Due to COVID-19 forcing schools into online education, the education system did not want students to fall behind in their academics, so many school districts changed their grading policy, which meant no student would graduate with a failing grade (Marshal, et al., 2020). This caused a lot of students to be absent, since they knew they would still get A's even if they did not show up (Marshel, et al., 2020). The rate of absenteeism has been higher than ever during the pandemic (Jones, 2023). After schools opened again, teachers have noticed their students' are behind academically by up to a year (Contreras, et al., 2023). Disadvantage students and students of color have fallen behind more than others (Dorn, et al., 2021).

My primary question is: How has COVID-19 impacted the academic achievement of elementary school students? With school closures, education went to online learning. This

affected teaching and learning. Many teachers claimed that they did not receive adequate training and had a hard time keeping their students engaged because of changes to grading procedures. Then, there are the music, art, and physical education teachers who are having difficulties with online learning because of the lack of materials that students' do not have at home.

I chose this topic because when the United States went into lockdown and online education began, I was a student in Community College and it was hard for me, so I was interested in the research behind online learning in the elementary school system. I have a family member who was an educator during the pandemic and they told me their students were academically and emotionally behind, as well as now having social issues. Learning about the effects COVID has had on elementary school students' academic achievements will allow me to be prepared for becoming an elementary school teacher.

This research is valuable to parents, educators, future teachers, and anybody involved with the education system. As parents, this topic is good to know so that they have answers on why their children are behind and how they can support them in their academic lives. As educators and future teachers, this topic is good to know because these students will still be facing the effects of COVID-19 on their academic achievement and new educators going into teaching should be prepared to see these effects.

My related secondary questions include:

1. What is COVID-19? How has it impacted the U.S. overall?
2. To an extent, how has COVID-19 affected the teaching and learning of elementary school students in the U.S.?
3. What does research say about the impact of COVID-19 on the academic achievement of elementary school students?

4. How has COVID-19 impacted the elementary school students in the Salinas area schools with regards to their academic achievements according to teachers?
5. Given the impact of COVID-19, how has it changed the modality of teaching and learning for teachers?
6. To what extent, has it impacted the academic achievement of elementary school students according to teachers?
7. How has COVID-19 impacted the academic achievement of elementary school students when they return to face-to-face classes according to teachers?

Literature Review

COVID-19 has had many impacts on the United States and many effects on elementary school students' academic achievements. The year 2020 forced the U.S. onto lockdown and the education system into online learning. This caused many issues including: educators getting little training on online learning and having to adjust as the school year went on, students absent rate going up and behavioral issues, and students' academic scores dropping. After it was announced that school may resume in person, students came back behind in maturity levels, emotionally, and academically.

According to John Hopkins Medicine (2022), "Symptoms show up in people within two to 14 days of exposure. A person infected with the coronavirus is contagious to others for up to two days before symptoms appear, and they remain contagious to others for 10 to 20 days, depending upon their immune system and the severity of their illness" (para. 4). Some people who have become sick because of the coronavirus have reported that no symptoms arose to indicate they caught the virus. Meanwhile, others have had mild to severe symptoms and others have had to be hospitalized. The virus could feel like a minor cold to some people and to others it

could have bedridden them. “Some people infected with the coronavirus have mild COVID-19 illness, and others have no symptoms at all. In some cases, however, COVID-19 can lead to respiratory failure, lasting lung and heart muscle damage, nervous system problems, kidney failure or death” (John Hopkins Medicine, 2022, para. 5).

COVID-19 had a lot of negative effects associated with it. An example would be children's mental, social, and emotional health due to the lockdown. According to Dorn; et al (2022), “Roughly 80 percent of parents had some level of concern about their child's mental health or social and emotional health and development since the pandemic began. They [Parents] also report increases in behaviors such as social withdrawal, self-isolation, lethargy, and irrational fears” (para. 19). Students' behaviors when they have returned to in-person instruction has gotten worse since before the pandemic. National Center for Education Statistics (2022) states, “Respondents attributed increased incidents of classroom disruptions from student misconduct (56 percent), rowdiness outside of the classroom (48 percent), acts of disrespect towards teachers and staff (48 percent), and prohibited use of electronic devices (42 percent) to the COVID-19 pandemic and its lingering effects” (para. 2). During the pandemic, absenteeism with students, teachers, and substitutes were higher than ever. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022), “Compared to a typical school year prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, 72 percent of U.S. public schools reported an increase in teacher absences during the 2021–22 school year. Compared to last school year (2020–21), 49 percent of public schools reported that the rate of teacher absences had increased. Nearly all public schools (98 percent) reported not being able to always find substitute teachers when necessary. When substitutes cannot be found, public schools reported relying on administrators (73 percent), non-teaching staff (71 percent), and other teachers on their prep period (67 percent) to cover

classes. Additionally, 51 percent of public schools reported combining separate classes into one room when they cannot find a substitute” (para. 15 & 17).

“Teachers of music, art, and physical education faced special challenges. In some cases, they were asked not to assign any homework, so as “to let students focus on their ‘core’ classes”(English, math, science, and social studies” (Marshal, et al, 2020, para. 16). These subjects can be especially difficult to teach during distance learning because students may not have the instruments, art materials, or space available at home to do such activities. According to Marshal, et al (2020), “Teachers found it especially difficult to meet the needs of English language learners and students with special needs” (para. 17).

Methods and Procedures

After learning what the capstone research project should entail, I knew I wanted to conduct research on the effects COVID-19 had and still does on students' academic achievements. To achieve this, I researched peer-reviewed articles on the internet for my research questions and the first half of my secondary questions. I then interviewed two fifth grade teachers and I surveyed thirty-six fifth grade students for the last five secondary questions.

I created a printable survey for the students to write on (see Appendix 1 - Student Survey). These questions involved topics such as which environments they preferred, if they were engaged during online learning, if they noticed a positive or negative impact on their academic achievements due to COVID-19, and if those impacts still affect their academic achievements today.

I asked two teachers about their perceptions on how COVID-19 has affected their students' academic achievements by using the last five of my secondary questions (see Appendix 2 - Teacher A's Interview Questions and Teacher B's Interview Questions). The questions I asked

were: How has COVID-19 changed the modality of teaching and learning for teachers? How has COVID-19 impacted the elementary school students' academic achievements? How has COVID-19 impacted the academic achievement of your students when they returned to face-to-face classes?

To answer these research questions, I will gather information from articles online from different sources and perspectives on COVID-19 impact on teaching and learning and information on what COVID-19 is exactly and how it impacted the U.S. overall. I will survey students in two fifth grade classrooms in Salinas. I will ask two teachers if they saw the negative or positive effects COVID-19 had on their students' academic achievements and how it changed their modality of teaching. I will also ask them how the adjustment of switching to online learning was and then how switching back to in-person teaching was all in the span of one year.

After talking with the teachers of these fifth grade classrooms, I was able to get a better insight into the impacts of COVID-19 on elementary school students' academic achievements. The answers to my questions were very insightful, as well as confirmed what the articles I found online were saying to be true. I believe that my research, survey questions, and teacher interviews all helped to answer my primary research question and secondary research questions.

Results and Discussion

Through my research, my results indicate that COVID-19 has had a major effect on elementary school students' academic achievement.

- 1. What is COVID-19? How has it impacted the U.S. overall? To an extent, how has COVID-19 affected the teaching and learning of elementary school students in the U.S.?*

According to John Hopkins Medicine (2022), "Coronavirus nineteen is a variant of the coronavirus and it is a virus that causes a respiratory illness. This virus is spread through the

fluids in the mouth which is a reason for the mandatory use of masks, washing and sanitizing hands, and social distancing of at least six feet” (para. 1 & 2). Although masks are not legally enforced any longer, they are still recommended as the virus has not disappeared and people can still get sick because of the virus. “The coronavirus is diagnosed by testing. These tests can be bought online to do at home, or a medical facility could administer them” (John Hopkins Medicine, 2022, para. 7). There are two types of tests according to Maragakis (2022) in that,

Viral tests can tell you if you are currently infected with the coronavirus. A swab is placed in your nose or mouth to gather samples. Laboratory coronavirus tests are given by healthcare professionals, and results may take a day or more to receive. Rapid antigen tests may be performed in pharmacies or healthcare facilities, or as self-tests at home. Rapid tests provide results in about 15 minutes. [The second type of test] Antibody test is a blood test that can show if you were previously exposed to or infected with the virus that causes COVID-19. . . . This test helps scientists gather data about how the immune system fights off COVID-19 in recovered patients (para. 1,2,4,5 & 6).

When the country went into lockdown, only essential businesses were open. Due to this, many Americans lost their jobs and fell into hardships. These hardships lasted all the way through the end of 2021. As claimed by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (2022), “. . . Near the end of 2021, with 20 million households reporting having too little to eat in the past seven days and 10 million households behind on rent” (para. 3).

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (2022), “Other/Multiracial (19%), Black (17%), Latino (16%), and households with children were more likely to report that their households were not getting enough to eat within the past 7 days” (figure 4). “Households of color who were renting during the pandemic, such as: Black (28%), Asian (20%), Latino (18%), other/multiracial (18%), and households with children were not able to keep up on their rent” (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2022, figure 6). Although the United States did try to help these households with stimulus checks and the Rescue Plan, “the slow rollout of emergency rental assistance and high pre-pandemic levels of housing hardship meant that millions still had difficulty paying rent late in 2021” (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities,

2022, para. 18). In addition, households of color including, “Black (44%), other/multiracial (42%), Latino (38%), and households with families had trouble with paying for usual household expenses” (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2022, figure 10).

These hardships were due to employees being laid off and people of color having a harder time with finding jobs. According to Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (2022), “Some 7.9 percent of Black workers and 5.9 percent of Latino workers were unemployed in October 2021, compared to 4.0 percent of white workers. Workers who were born outside the U.S. (this includes individuals who are now U.S. citizens) have experienced larger job losses than U.S.-born workers” (para. 31). The effect COVID-19 has had on the U.S. overall is quite negative, especially for households with children and people of color.

Marshal, et al (2020) compiled a survey which, “asked teachers which aspects of teaching were the most challenging during this time and how prepared they felt for delivering instruction remotely” (para. 9). According to the results, “92.4% of teachers indicated that they had never taught online before the emergency transition, and very few had received any meaningful training from their school or school district. Despite their inexperience and lack of formal training, however, 49% of teachers felt at least somewhat prepared to deliver instruction remotely” (Marshal, et al., 2020, para. 11).

A factor that has affected both the educators teaching and the students learning involves the, “school systems change in grading procedures so that students could not earn a lower grade than they had before the pandemic” (Marshal, et al, 2020, para. 14). One teacher that Marshal, et al (2020) interviewed states, “I cannot hold students accountable for submitting their work. I cannot give grades...I cannot meet with students via video conferencing unless they request it...I cannot teach anything new” (para. 14). According to another teacher who was interviewed

by Marshal, et al (2020), “Only 9 of her 109 students attended her synchronous Zoom lessons, yet everyone would receive an A for the course” (para. 14). This is having a negative effect on students' academic achievement because they were given the opportunity to learn or to not learn due to the change in these grading procedures.

Jones (2023) in an article on absenteeism states, “Nearly a third of K-12 students statewide were chronically absent in 2020-21, more than three times the pre-pandemic rate. Some school officials fear that pattern will become the new normal” (In Summary). Jones (2023) also says, due to these high rates of absenteeism, “For students, they're more likely to fall behind academically, drop out and not graduate. For schools, lower attendance means less revenue from the state, which bases its funding on how many students show up every day. For teachers, poor attendance means half-empty classrooms, with some students who are weeks or months behind their peers” (p. 10).

The effects of COVID-19 have also had a negative impact on teaching and learning.

2. *What does research say about the impact of COVID-19 on the academic achievement of elementary school students?*

After the lockdown ended and teachers and students were allowed back to in-person classes, the teachers noticed the effect COVID-19 had on students' academic achievement. A fourth grade teacher, Boyea-Logan, who was interviewed by Contreras; et al (2023) states,

I teach reading, writing, and they tacked on social studies for me. And I find myself going back. We are going over the basics. What is a complete sentence? What's an action word? What's a noun? And these - some of them actually don't know. And as a fourth grade teacher, we're supposed to, you know, start being creative with their writing, how to expand, how to add ideas and get down their, you know, their details. And I'm having to start back from the beginning. I'm teaching them the basics. And, I mean, that's putting us more behind (para. 7).

Kuhfeld; et al (2022) has, “tracked changes in math and reading test scores across the first two years of the pandemic using data from 5.4 million U.S. students in grades 3-8” (para. 2).

The results found that, “average fall 2021 math test scores in grades 3-8 were 0.20-0.27 standard deviations (SDs) lower than fall 2019. Reading scores were 0.09-0.18 SDs lower” (Kuhfeld; et al, 2022, para. 3).

According to Dorn; et al (2021), “The impact on K-12 student learning was significant, leaving students on average five months behind in mathematics and four months behind in reading by the end of the school year. The pandemic widened pre existing opportunity and achievement gaps, hitting historically disadvantaged students hardest. In math, students in majority Black schools ended the year with six months of unfinished learning, students in low-income schools with seven” (para. 2). COVID-19 had a terrible impact on teaching during online learning and it has left negative effects on students' academic achievement, more so students of color's academic achievement.

I surveyed two fifth grade classrooms, where there were 36 students. The first question on the survey was: *Which environment for learning do you prefer?* Ninety-five percent (95%) of students said they preferred in-person instruction (See Appendix 1 - Student Survey, personal communication, November 16, 2023). There could be a multitude of reasons as to why students prefer in-person instruction, but a couple reasons could be that they missed their friends and they are more engaged in class, since seventy-eight percent (78%) of students said they were not engaged during online learning according to question two of the student survey: *Were you engaged during online learning?* (See Appendix 1 - Student Survey, personal communication, November 16, 2023). Question three asks: *During online learning, did you feel an effect on your academic achievements?* Seventy-eight percent (78%) said they did feel a negative impact on their academic achievement (See Appendix 1 - Student Survey, personal communication, November 16, 2023). The final question, question four was: *Do you feel like COVID-19 still has*

an effect on your academic achievements? Four percent (4%) of students say that they still feel the negative effects of COVID-19 on their academic achievement due to online learning.

I interviewed two teachers in the Salinas school district with regards to the effects COVID-19 has had on students' academic achievement.

3. *How has COVID-19 changed the modality of teaching and learning for teachers?*

Teacher A does not refer to their students' academic performance, but rather the effects of the lack of social interaction. "The biggest thing is that for those years we spent at home, these kids got no social interaction and weren't able to develop in that way. They are coming into our classes years behind (in maturity levels) which throws the teacher off because suddenly it feels like you are working with students who are years younger than what you are used to" (See Appendix 2 - Teacher A's Interview Questions, personal communication, November 16, 2023).

Teacher B responds with their own personal experience on being trained for online learning. "When the pandemic forced us into online learning, it was a rough adjustment. I only got a week or two of training for Zoom and then we had to start teaching. I had to find new ways to try and keep my students engaged, which was hard because they (the students) were also having to adjust," (See Appendix 2 - Teacher B's Interview Questions, personal communication, November 16, 2023). Teacher B's answer supports the answers from question two of the student survey: *Were you engaged during online learning?* Seventy-eight percent (78%) of students said they were not engaged during online learning (See Appendix 1 - Student Survey, personal communication, November 16, 2023). This means that although the teachers were trying to engage their students, so that they could receive the best education possible with the difficulties of online learning in the way, these students still were not focused or a part of the learning.

4. *How has COVID-19 impacted the elementary school students in the Salinas area schools with regards to their academic achievements according to teachers? (To an extent, how has COVID-19 impacted the elementary school students' academic achievements?)*

Teacher A mentions the need to slow down lesson's because their students are behind. "One thing to note is that we work at a much slower pace now than we did before. Attention spans are shorter from the amount of time spent in non-demanding environments during the pandemic, so students are struggling while at school doing classwork and when they are at home completing homework. Behavior is also a huge issue which stunts our ability to create an environment where all students can learn" (See Appendix 2 - Teacher A's Interview Questions, personal communication, November 16, 2023).

Teacher B also regards how the students' struggles with their current lessons. "Due to online learning, the students have fallen behind academically. They are having trouble with getting their classwork done and struggling with homework at home. A lot more students have behavioral issues now. They weren't socializing for about 2 years and were able to get away with a lot during online learning, so they have brought those behavioral problems into the classroom. It can get disruptive, which then halts the lessons sometimes and can end up putting us more behind" (See Appendix 2 - Teacher B's Interview Questions, personal communication, November 16, 2023). Ninety-five percent (95%) of students answered the survey, saying they like to be back to in-person instruction (See Appendix 1 - Student Survey, personal communication, November 16, 2023). This could be because they are able to have the social interactions that they were missing during online learning.

5. *How has COVID-19 impacted the academic achievement of your students when they returned to face-to-face classes?*

Teacher A notices how far behind their students are academically, “All the students in class are behind, so the students don’t even realize that they are not where they need to be because everyone is in the same boat” (See Appendix 2 - Teacher A’s Interview Questions, personal communication, November 16, 2023). Teacher A’s answer calls into question the results from the student survey. The fourth question the students answered was: *Do you feel like COVID-19 still has an effect on your academic achievements?* Only four percent (4%) of students said they still feel the effect of COVID-19 on their academic achievement (See Appendix 1 - Student Survey, personal communication, November 16, 2023). This means ninety-six (96%) of students do not feel the effects of COVID-19.

Teacher B’s answer is somewhat similar, “I have to teach my students their 5th grade level curriculum at a slower pace because I have to also go over 3rd to 4th grade level curriculum to get them to their 5th grade level. It puts their academic success behind and in turn, their test scores are showing that” (See Appendix 2 - Teacher A’s Interview Questions, personal communication, November 16, 2023). Teacher B’s answer supports the answers of question three, from the student survey. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of students said that during online learning, they did feel an effect on their academic achievement (See Appendix 1 - Student Survey, personal communication, November 16, 2023).

Problems and Limitations

I originally tried to contact five teachers, but I had only gotten a response from two. I thought this would be an issue, but the two teachers had a lot to say on the subject and I got some good responses from them as well as their students. There were about three missing survey papers, but the ones I have collected have given me some valuable information to use in my research paper.

Recommendation

A way to help improve students' academic achievements is a method called "high-dosage tutoring." According to Evaristo (2023), high-dosage tutoring "is defined as intensive learning in small groups" (para. 26). Since, there have been a lot of school closures, which in turn is giving teachers more students than they have had before, it has limited the amount of one-on-one time a teacher can give to their students individually. Tutoring gives students the opportunity to have one-on-one discussions with an educator to help improve their academic achievement, or in the case of high-dosage tutoring, they are placed into small groups with one tutor, which is still a better opportunity for the educator to understand which areas students need more time with since it is such a small group.

On top of high-dosage tutoring, parents also need to be more active in their children's academic lives. They need to listen to teachers when they say their child is falling behind in school, so that the parents can take action at home. A lot of teachers have parents' phone numbers and email addresses, as well as sending home notes. Teachers are in communication with parents, but the parents have to want to help their children by having proof they did their homework or helping them study. There are many ways teachers and parents can work together to help their students improve their academic achievement.

Conclusion

This senior capstone research project examined the impact of COVID-19 on elementary students' academic achievement. The research findings indicated that COVID-19 has negatively affected students' academic achievement due to online learning. As Teacher B states, "Due to online learning, the students have fallen behind academically. They are having trouble with getting their classwork done and struggling with homework at home. A lot more students have

behavioral issues now. They weren't socializing for about 2 years and were able to get away with a lot during online learning, so they have brought those behavioral problems into the classroom. It can get disruptive, which then halts the lessons sometimes and can end up putting us more behind" (See Appendix 2 - Teacher B's Interview Questions, personal communication, November 16, 2023).

The research obtained is from multiple cities around the United States. The majority of the households in the U.S. suffered from the lockdown, along with their children's academic achievements. A lot of educators were not prepared to teach online and a lot of students were not engaged and did not want to attend classes online. The elementary school students' in Salinas prefer in-person instruction and have reported that they were not engaged and were not doing well academically. These students feel as though they have been succeeding academically after coming back to face-to-face classes, but the teachers say they do not realize how far behind they are. Research says that "high-dosage tutoring" has significantly improved students' academic achievements.

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Appendix 1

Student Survey

1. Which environment for learning do you prefer?

Online In-person (95% said in-person)

2. Were you engaged during online learning?

Yes No (78% said no)

3. During online learning, did you feel an effect on your academic achievements?

Yes No (78% said yes)

4. Do you feel like COVID-19 still has an effect on your academic achievements?

Yes No (4% said yes)

Appendix 2
Teacher A's Interview Questions

1. How has COVID-19 changed the modality of teaching and learning for teachers?

The biggest thing is that for those years we spent at home, these kids got no social interaction and weren't able to develop in that way. They are coming into our classes years behind (in maturity levels) which throws the teacher off because suddenly it feels like you are working with students who are years younger than what you are used to.

2. How has COVID-19 impacted the elementary school students' academic achievements?

One thing to note is that we work at a much slower pace now than we did before. Attention spans are shorter from the amount of time spent in non-demanding environments during the pandemic, so students are struggling while at school doing classwork and when they are at home completing homework. Behavior is also a huge issue which stunts our ability to create an environment where all students can learn.

3. How has COVID-19 impacted the academic achievement of your students when they returned to face-to-face classes?

All the students in class are behind, so the students don't even realize that they are not where they need to be because everyone is in the same boat.

Teacher B's Interview Questions

1. How has COVID-19 changed the modality of teaching and learning for teachers?

When the pandemic forced us into online learning, it was a rough adjustment. I only got a week or two of training for Zoom and then we had to start teaching. I had to find new ways to try and keep my students engaged, which was hard because they (the students) were also having to adjust.

2. How has COVID-19 impacted the elementary school students' academic achievements?

Due to online learning, the students have fallen behind academically. They are having trouble with getting their classwork done and struggling with homework at home. A lot more students have behavioral issues now. They weren't socializing for about 2 years and were able to get away with a lot during online learning, so they have brought those behavioral problems into the classroom. It can get disruptive, which then halts the lessons sometimes and can end up putting us more behind.

3. How has COVID-19 impacted the academic achievement of your students when they returned to face-to-face classes?

I have to teach my students their 5th grade level curriculum at a slower pace because I have to also go over 3rd to 4th grade level curriculum to get them to their 5th grade level. It puts their academic success behind and in turn, their test scores are showing that.