Saudi Kindergarten Teachers' Distance Teaching Journey during the Pandemic (Phenomenological Research)

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Abstract

The unanticipated transition to distance teaching due to the unplanned change during the pandemic affected all parties in education. The current research used the phenomenological method to explore 12 Saudi public kindergarten teachers' experiences. The data were collected through interviews to discover teachers' feelings, implementation difficulties, and ways they overcame challenges during distance teaching. The interviews were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) method and revealed that the teachers experienced different feelings during the various phases of distance teaching. Findings showed that the teachers experienced negative feelings at the beginning; however, by the end, their feelings have been changed and became more positive and optimistic. Kindergarten teachers experienced difficulties related to educational implications, such as changing educational planning, assessment tools, and family communication. The results encompass the strategies and parties involved in improving the distance teaching process. Teachers are keen toward professional development and eager to enhance their teaching competencies. The findings assert that Ministry of Education support and active family involvement are essential to mitigate the effects of distance teaching.

Keywords: Teachers, Distance Teaching, Kindergarten, Professional Development, Pandemic.

Research showed the professional knowledge and teaching skills that teachers master leveraged the pedagogical process and outcome quality(Blazar & Kraft, 2017).Consequently, preservice early childhood educational programs and in-service professional development programs prepare teachers with the competencies needed to teach children in the face-to-face context. These programs strive to meet teacher professionalization requirements such as digital literacy.Van derSpoel et al.(2020) explained that teachers have experienced integrating technology into their teaching. However, they are not trained enough to teach children in the fully digital environment (distance teaching), which becomes obligatory in many places.

The World Health Organization announced in March 2020 that the spread of COVID-19 reached the pandemic level.Saudi Arabia enacted precautionary safety measures to prevent the rapid spread of the virus. The Ministry of Education (MoE) shifted the teaching system to distance teaching and kindergarten teachers became responsible for changing their educational plans. Due to unplanned forced changes, recent studies explored the challenges teachers faced with the new experience, for example, lack of internet access and limited technological skills (Gurung, 2021) and less student–teacher interaction (Foti, 2020).

Since the implementation of distance teaching during the pandemic, a large body of research aimed to explore the impact of this new experience on school-age children's achievements to assess the success of the process (e.g., Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2021; Zhanget al.,2021).In addition, the research started and finished in a short period of time and attempted to discover teachers' readiness to teach remotely and their challenges during distance teaching.However, this research documented the full journey of Saudi kindergarten teachers' experiences from the first day of their distance teaching until the day they returned to face-to-face-teaching, which covered four academic semesters.Researchers recommended investigating the effects of new technologies'implementationin education to address this issue based on teachers' experiences (Chapelle, 2007; Todd, 2020).Their experiences would add value to preparing teachers and professionalizing them for the digital world. Thus, this research aimed to answer the following questions:

What were kindergarten teachers' experiences during distance teaching?
How did kindergarten teachers overcome the challenges?

Distance Teaching in Kindergarten

Although distance teaching has become acceptable pedagogy, research has shown that the complexity of children's nature and multifaceted learning makes shifting to distance teaching challenging (Timmons et al, 2021). The main goal of kindergarten education is to promote learning and development in children, but this cannot be accomplished without an interactive environment. Children cultivate knowledge through exploration and physical interaction with rich play-based environments (NAEYC, 2020). Children's use of technology holds many benefits, such as literacy learning (Otterborn et al., 2019); however, educators criticize online-based education for children. Dong et al. (2020) argued that it prevents comprehensive development and increases social isolation. In addition, researchers have reported that this sort of teaching can lead to insufficient children's achievement assessments (Brako, 2020) because making authentic decisions regarding children's progress requires various face-to-face assessment practices, including, but not limited to, observation and documentation in natural contexts (NAEYC, 2020). Research has also found that teachers had little knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices for distance teaching and had low social interaction with the children (Ford et al., 2021; Kim, 2020), which led to obstacles in digital class management and numerous behavioral challenges (Alanazi, 2022). Kindergarten teaching has many different characteristics, meaning the teachers' lack of competencies to deliver lessons in a digital environment has led to multiple documented challenges, such as more time-consuming lesson preparation (Folkman et al., 2022), weak motivation for children to learn behind screens, and unsuitable home environments (Kim, 2020; Lassoued et al., 2020).

Saudi Kindergartens and Distance Teaching

The kindergarten level is for children aged 4–6 years, which means it is not included in the educational ladder and is not mandatory (prerequisite) for children to be accepted into first grade. However, the MoE (2015) provided public kindergartens free for all children and established the national kindergarten curriculum, called the*Self-Learning Curriculum*. It covers the developmental learning standards related to cognitive, social–emotional, physical, and linguistic development. The *Self-Learning Curriculum* is student centered and based on children's inquiries. Children are active and responsible and learn from their experiences with the environment around them. A teacher's role is to plan and arrange the experiences, respond to children's developmental needs, act as a role model, and guide the children as needed. The school day runs from 8 a.m. until 1 p.m., and the program blends activities that are quiet and active, single and group, and teacher guided and children guided (MoE, 2015).

For years, distance learning was exclusive to higher education in Saudi Arabia. Recently, the MoE launched virtual kindergarten for children who are unable to attend school physically, such as those who have medical conditions and must stay in medical care for long periods. Upon the announcement of the lockdown and transition to online education, the early childhood division of the MoE released guidelines for teachers and children's families called*The Guidance to Return to Kindergarten During Corona Pandemic* (MoE, 2020). It presented the roles of the teachers and families before and during distance learning classes.Additionally, the guidance described the digital platforms, online resources, and technical support teachers and families would need.The new digital school started at 3 p.m. and ended at 6 p.m., and the program included the following eight periods:(a) welcome meeting, (b) physical activity, (c) play to learn, (d) read and write (focus on emergent literacy practices), (e)count and arithmetic, (f)physical activity, (g) group reading, and (h) last meeting. The teachers are responsible for digitizing everything, such as lessons, communications, discussion, encouragement, and activities.For children who are not able to participate in online synchronized classes, virtual kindergarten is the best option. Children can find numerous asynchronous interactive educational lessons and exercises. Moreover,The MoE created a channel on YouTube called *Aen* (means an eye in Arabic)to present daily lessons to all grades, including kindergarten. National research found that children's academic achievement levels during distance-education were high(Abuabat, 2021) and that family involvement increased (Abuabat, 2020; Albaker & Alharbi, 2021). However, the teachers faced some obstacles related to lesson preparation and technology use (Alkinani, 2021).

Methodology

Phenomenological studies-described the shared meaning of people's experiences regarding a certain phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Moustakas (1994) stated, "Phenomenology is concerned with wholeness, with examining entities from many . . . perspectives until a unified vision of the essences of a phenomenon or experience is achieved" (pp. 58–59). The phenomenon in this research was the kindergarten teachers' distance teaching, and I investigated teachers' common experiences and shared meaning in the relevant phenomenon.

Study Participants

Twelve teachers were chosen from different kindergartens in Riyadh according to their educational supervisors' recommendations (snowballing technique). The criteria to recruit were(a) teachers had been through the same experience

(Creswell, 2013) and(b) all selected teachers had experienced face-to-face teaching before the pandemic and distance teaching from the beginning to the end of the pandemic (March 2020–January 2022). Table 1 shows the participants'characteristics.

Table 1
Participants' Characteristics

Teacher's identification	Years of experience	No. of students in class	No. of courses on technology integration in teaching
T1	5	15	2
T2	7	14	1
T3	10	16	1
T4	20	15	1
T5	3	17	0
T6	8	18	2
T7	11	16	4
T8	25	14	1
T9	7	14	6
T10	8	18	0
T11	8	17	1
T12	18	15	3

Data Collection

Prior to collecting data, I obtained approval from the Committee for the Ethics of Scientific Research at my University. Each participant received an online copy of the informed consent that they signed to indicate their approval, to participate voluntarily in an interview, and to give me permission to use their statements for research purposes. The semistructured interview focused on participants' teaching experiences during the pandemic. The open-ended questions concentrated on the teachers' feelings, practices, and challenges and how they coped with those issues.A pilot study was conducted prior to the actual study to ensure the credibility of the interview protocol and its readiness to be used. Both interviews revealed that the protocol questions were appropriate for this research, and these two interviews were not counted.The interviews were done via phone call during January and February 2022. Each interview took 30–40 min andI recorded and transcribed each interview.

Data Analyses

The data analyses adhered to the steps set forth by Colaizzi (1978), as follows: (a) reading through all transcripts to understand each experience, (b) obtaining significant statements related to the phenomenon, (c) formulating interpretive meanings of relevant statements and filtering out the repeated ones, (d) clustering the meanings and statements to create themes, (e) reviewing the data again to validate the clusters and ensuring that they reflected the original meaning by sending them to the participants, (f) developing a textually exhaustive description to answer the research questions using shared meanings and statements and to describe the participants' experiences and their essence, and (g) combining the descriptions of the teachers' experiences into a fundamental statement of identification that presented the essence of the teachers' experiences, which integrated each teacher's experiences.

Establishing Credibility

In phenomenological research, member checking means returning the final meaning description—the fundamental statement of identification in this research—to each participant and requesting they clarify any missing, misunderstood, or emergent aspects (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59). Each participant read their written interview transcript and returned it to me with their approval.In addition, they approved the fundamental statement sent at the end of the data analysis process as being descriptive of their experiences. The second strategy I used, as Colaizzi (1978) and Creswell (2013) recommended, was epoche practice, meaning I put aside my perceptions about the phenomenon that might cause bias or influence the results.

I have worked in the field of early childhood education since 2003 and recently became an assistant professor at a university, teaching preservice students to be flexible and work with children in any circumstances. As an early childhood education department chair, I have guided the faculty to change some coursework to prepare future teachers in case they have to shift from traditional face-to-face teaching to distance teaching. During this process, many of the kindergarten teachers included and added their input according to their experiences with online teaching. To avoid any interference in this research,I did not know and had not previously worked with any teachers participating in the research.Furthermore,I bracketed previous expectations and reported the teachers' actual words from the interviews, which I never interrupted while they were talking unless I needed more interpretation.Using thick, rich description was my third strategy for ensuring credibility. The research setting was described in rich details in the Saudi Context section earlier in this research, and the participants' characteristics were presented in Table 1.

Results

By following the steps from Colaizzi (1978) , 410 statements related to the phenomenon were found. When formulating meaning, some repeated statement were excluded that had same meanings; thus,290 were statements used in the analysis.The statements were clustered into three themes according to the research questions.After I reviewed the data,I sent each transcript and the clustered themes individually to the teachers for validation purposes, to ensure the meaning reflected their actual experiences.Once all 12 teachers approved, I developed a textually exhaustive description according to the research questions, as follows:

Question 1: What were the kindergarten teachers' experiences during distance teaching?

The data analyses revealed two themes (teachers' feelings and implementation difficulties) in answer to the first question.Table2 presents examples of the statements and the formulated meanings of the first theme.

Theme1:Teachers' Feelings

Table 2

Examples ofSignificant Statements, and Their Formulated Meanings

Significant statement	**Formulated meaning**	**No. of teachers sharing same meanings**
"Rejection was the first reaction.It took 3 days to believe that I would not see my children." (T9)	The teachers denied to believe they would have to teach distantly.	11
"Teaching children online is a very annoying, uncomfortable idea." (T6)	The teachers were uncomfortable with the distance teaching idea.	11
"I was worried and nervous; when you go on an unknown adventure, you do not know what you will face." (T5)	The teachers felt anxious and nervous about the experience.	10
"I had fears of failure . . . dealing with technology and children at the same time is very difficult; what would my yearly evaluation be?" (T2)	The teachers were afraid of failure.	8
"At the beginning, I felt helpless and trapped. I have little technology knowledge." (T4)	Starting distance teaching was hard, and the teachers felt helpless.	9
"Preparing the materials put an extra burden on me and made me feel overwhelmed." (T3)	Distance teaching became a burden and made the teachers feel overwhelmed.	9
"By the time my skills were getting better . . . distance teaching became an enjoyable task." (T1)	Gradually, the teachers built skills and the experience turned enjoyable.	12
"I am satisfied with whatI have learned and done and so grateful for the help and support from the ministry, my colleagues, and the families." (T11)	The support from different parties boosted the teachers' skills and made them feel satisfied and relieved.	11

"Proudly, I am confident and would like to document things I have passed. I am excited to convey the lessonsI learned to teachers." (T10)	The teachers learned lessons from distance teaching, and it enhanced their confidence and self-efficacy.	10

The research findings revealed that the teachers held some unpleasant memories about distance teaching. At the beginning, they refused to believe they would have to teach children distantly.T11 said,"It was hard to believe that my children would participate in class from home," and T5 said, "At first, I thought there was a mistake and kindergarten level was not included in distance teaching plan."In the next phase, the teachers felt inconvenienced about the unknown experience. They also felt annoyed, as T3 expressed: "I became upset." T4 explained, "When it became real, I felt annoyed." T11 explained she was uncomfortable because she did "not know how [she] would teach children without being with them in the same room."In addition, the teachers started developing worries about the new experience, which made some of them nervous, including T5, who did not know what she was going to face in this unknown adventure.In addition, T6 called it "a dark mysterious adventure; yet, I like adventures but not with children, so I am worried."Many of them were afraid of failure; some teachers were thinking about their yearly evaluations because their "digital skills were not adequate to hold online lessons" (T7) and they were not sure whether they could work "with technology and children at the same time" (T2).

When the actual journey started, the majority of the teachers felt the task was not easy and they were incapable of teaching online. T1 said, "I was not confident about my technological skills . . . for the first two weeks, I was really powerless."Moreover, they became overwhelmed by finding appropriate materials, and the teaching experience became a burden, for example, "looking for suitable materials became an extra burden" (T7). T2 indicated,"During the preparation time,I was overwhelmed.I live in a small apartment and [did not have] enough space to store anything; thus, I could not find materials to use when teaching lessons." T4 explained,"Distance teaching gave me a new, extra heavy task . . . for example, I had to teach parents how to help their children use technology appropriately"

After a few months, the teachers started to enjoy distance teaching. They enhanced their teaching competencies by"looking at resources, participating in workshops, and asking experts" (T8). The support from different parties boosted the teachers' skills and made them feel satisfied. T4 stated, "When I mastered using the platform, the teaching hours passed smoothly, and I enjoyed teaching time," and T5 added, "I started to be excited to meet my class once I learned how to prepare my lessons effectively." T12 said, "By the end of the semester, I felt more proficient. I received assistance from the Ministry."The support from different parties gave the teachers positive experiences in distance teaching, which boosted their confidence. T8 said, "My son taught me everything, and now I am proud of the progress I made."The MoE provided anIT support system, and the teachers counted it a considerably important source of their success. "It answered my inquiries all the time . . .this system is considered a significant success partner." (T1). T10 proudly indicated she"would like to document each thing I have passed. I am excited to convey the knowledge to teachers."

Theme2:Implementation Difficulties

Table 3 presents examples of the statements and formulated meanings associated with the second theme.

Table 3

Examples of the Second Theme (Implementation Difficulties)

Significant statement	**Formulated meaning**	**No. of teachers sharing same meanings**
"The time limit and other distance teaching conditions forced us to change lessons, concepts, [and] activities." (T5)	The teachers had to change their lessons to be appropriate in the digital environment and lockdown circumstances.	12
"The lack of resource and supplements was challenging at the beginning." (T1)	Providing needed materials was challenging.	12
"Redesigning activities was difficult. It took extra time to find activities meet teaching goals and [that were] based on childhood nature and attractive." (T9)	It was hard for the teachers to find online activities that met their teaching goals.	11
"[While] preparing my teaching plans, I spent a long time finding assessment tools to measure children's achievements." (T1)	They were aware of the need to have assessment tools suitable for distance teaching.	12

"Using an online platform caused new disruptive behaviors. I had to discover ways to manage my virtual class." (T4)	New behaviors appeared during distance teaching, and there was a need to find methods of guiding children's behaviors.	10
"Family contact became more frequent than ever; we became a part of their day, [and they]sometimes contacted me for nonacademic reasons"(T7)	Family communication changed in both nature and frequency.	10
"It was not easy for us and the children to find suitable places at home that were quiet and had good network [connections] . . . and kindergartners do not own devices"(T9)	Obstacles that hindered the effectiveness of distance teaching were the lack of hardware, network, quiet areas, and children and their families' seriousness toward learning.	12

The results showed seven formulated meanings. The teachers had to change their lessons to be appropriate in the digital environment. T7said, "Many of the topics required materials that I did not have at home . . . I had to think about new topics and search for materials." T12 added, "I had to find substitute ones at home or make some adjustments in the lessons."Thus, providing the needed materials was challenging, as T11 stated: "Because of the limited resources, we had to add or remove some concepts."That became challenging, and the teachers cared about the quality of their teaching.T2 explained, "We could not provide all the materials, and with virtual learning, displaying objects is not enough; children need to test objects in order to learn well." For this reasonT11 said,"I chose some concepts after I ensured that the children had the needed materials at home.For example, in science experiments, I substituted the evaporation experiment about chemical and physical changes in foods to a rotten apple experiment."

It was hard for the teachers to find attractive online activities that met both their teaching goals and the children's needs.T10 indicated, "The majority of the activities were based on active play. It was hard to replace them with other virtual ones that met the educational goals and motivated the children at the same time."Another issue that arose concerned finding appropriate content, asT3 explained: "The internet has plenty of educational videos, but the problem was that the free videos included ads that interrupted the display, and sometimes inappropriateadvertisements popped up during the display time." T1 added, "Blocking these ads requires a paid subscription and not all teachers can afford it."The teachers captured issues related to children's development and learning assessments. T4 said, "I did not know how to assess children's learning.Actually, I could not tell if they learned as I planned or not." For this reason, T1 indicated, "[While] preparing my teaching plans, I spent time finding assessment tools to measure children's achievement."In addition, some teachers made efforts to assess the children; T2 expressed her experience by saying,"I evaluated children's progress with family help," and T5 made "online activities after each lesson to evaluate children's learning . . . they were some of the math and science paperwork."

New behaviors appeared during distance teaching, and there was a need to find methods for managing virtual classes. T7 argued that in traditional classes, "we assign policies and consequences of not following them . . . in this new environment, I was not sure which rules we needed." Because the experience was new, "distributive behaviors emerged under exploration purposes, like children wanted to try the features in the platform such as talking through the microphone" (T9). T1 mentioned, "Not all children and their families had the same level of seriousness . . . some children turned on the camera and showed their house's privacy" T9 added, "We assigned strict polices to protect privacy and use technology in proper manners in each circumstance . . . [like] we ask for permission before turning on the camera."

Furthermore, family communication changed in both nature and frequency. Many of the teachers said they reached out to the children's mothers all day. T8 believed, "It was not an option; I had to contact the mothers frequently to help the children join the class."T7 explained that the teachers "became a part of the [family] day"; thus, T1 said, "We had to use different methods because some mothers do not use smartphones.We had to call them when needed, and in distance teaching, this happened daily."T2 expressed one of the reasons for such communications"We assigned appointments to discuss issues with mothers.For example, a mother needed help with her daughter who thought it was fine to play online games during the class time because she thought the teacher did not see her."T3 said,"Children missed the social life . . . I had to talk to them through FaceTime; they were disappointed."The teachers asserted that because of the precautionary safety, some children developed behavioral disorders: "[One family] requested my recommendations to assist with [their] son washing his hands repeatedly" (T4), and another mother "asked if we can help with her child who started having panic attacks in public places" (T6). T5 added,"The families trusted us, and for this reason, we searched and created a database that included specialists in children's disorders."

The teachers reported obstacles that hindered the effectiveness of their teaching; for example, "not all children have their own devices, which limited children's access to online classes" (T1),and T4 believed, "The family gave the computer to the children in higher grades because they think kindergarten is not as important as the higher grades."Another obstacleT2 mentioned was that "many teachers and children live in small apartments, and finding a quiet place was impossible." T3 said, "Kindergarten level is not included in the primary school. If a child enrolled in the class and did not participate, nothing would happen.That is why the family did not take the education in kindergarten seriously." T12 added, "Some mothers indicated that they enrolled their children in kindergarten because of the social skills, and in the distance teaching, the social skills were very limited."

Question 2: How did the kindergarten teachers overcome the challenges?

Data analyses revealed the theme (coping with the challenges) that documented the methods the teachers used to overcome the challenges. In addition, the teachers mentioned other parties contributed to their distance teaching experiences and made efforts to enrich them positively.

Table 4
Examples of the Theme (Coping With the Challenges)

Significant statement	**Formulated meaning**	**No. of teachers sharing same meanings**
"I sought help, and I learned exercises to reduce stress [and]adapt to new situations and other negative feelings." (T4)	The teachers asked for help and learned some strategies to reduce stress and other negative feelings.	9
"Some online resources helped me to learn more about technology uses in teaching . . . I read a lot and joined courses." (T8)	The teachers enrolled in classes to increase their distance teaching competencies.	11
"Online groups like WhatsApp and Telegram allowed teachers to share and exchanged useful information." (T2)	The teachers improved their skills by sharing knowledge among colleagues.	9
"The MoE provided organizational guidance to the teachers and parents . . . and the Aen channel on YouTube improved the teaching." (T1)	Higher authorities provided support to enhance teachers' educational practices.	12
"The children got used to the online environment, and I encouraged their families to participate by conducting fun activities." (T11)	Family engagement enhanced the distance teaching experience.	10

There search found the teachers devoted their attention to overcoming challenges and enhancing the quality of their teaching. On the personal level, the teachers made efforts to get through their negative feelings that had arisen during distance teaching.For example, T5 indicated she sought "consultations to cope with the anxiety and stress about the unknown experience . . . I become more optimistic."Some teachers found that group therapy was beneficial for controlling their fears(T3, T4, T7, T11, and T12).Another teacher invited her colleagues to join group therapy with "help from a therapeutic consultant . . . she guided us to cope our worries and trained us to manage any negative feelings and look at positive sides."

The majority of the teachers were eager to enroll in courses to increase their competencies in distance teaching. To enhance her knowledge, T1 said, "The discussion board is about the children's behaviors during the safety precautionary . . . The class included mothers, too,. . . we learned tips to work effectively with children in the digital environment." Even teachers' attitudes toward distance teaching improved. T12 said, "Participating in online courses boosted my attitude toward distance teaching." Furthermore, T4 indicated that after these courses, she"started to advocate distance teaching."

Sharing knowledge among colleagues improved the teachers' skills.For instance,"group discussion allowed me to learn more about technology" (T3).Some teachers indicated they exchanged ideas related to best practices in online class management, distributive behaviors, family engagement, and pedagogical content (T2,T4,T5,T7, and T11).MoE support

increased the quality of the teachers' experiences. T5 said, "The ministry issued guidelines for teachers and families also, there is daily lesson[on the] AEN channel on YouTube to help us organize our teaching."Moreover, "kindergarten staff were responsive and offered their help when needed . . . to the teachers, children, and their families" (T11). In addition, T10 expressed,"The MoE provided IT support for internet issues; the families could reach them anytime, too."

Students' families were a considerably important aspect of the success of distance education.The teachers reached out families to work with them hand in hand. T1 created weekly activities with the mothers, such as "requesting the mothers help their children in conducting research about scientific concepts and creating posters . . . in class, each child presented the findings." T6 said, "Pressure on families was very heavy. Some families have more than one child and the control was tough . . . I helped who [ever] asked me . . . by the time I realized, all the children had participated very well and the families were happy."T3 met mothers individually and in groups to discuss issues related to their children and said these meetings "let mothers devote attention to their children's education."

Fundamental Statement of Identification. The teachers' experiences described exhaustively above was reduced to highlight its fundamental structure, and a few amendments were made to show the link between the clusters and their themes.This statement encompasses the essence of the public kindergarten teachers' experiences with distance teaching:

In my experience as a public kindergarten teacher, I went through different stages of feelings. At the beginning, I had negative reactions such as shock and denial.Starting the actual teaching, when everything was new and vague, I felt discomfort, anxiety, fears of failure, and helplessness.Meeting the teaching requirements and preparing the lesson plans were overwhelming. By the end, my distance teaching competencies had been enhanced.The journey had become enjoyable, making me satisfied with and confident about my teaching skills.

Nevertheless, some limitations impeded the effectiveness of my teaching. I was not qualified to shift lessons to the digital environment, which required plans and teaching skills. Another challenge was finding appropriate materials and content that matched the actual teaching goals, were suitable to children's nature, and attracted them. The assessment tools I applied before the pandemic were designed to be used in traditional classes; I tried different methods to assess the children's achievements in online classes.The digital environment also brought about new, unexpected behaviors in the children. As a teacher, I had to work carefully and establish new class management rules. The families' collaboration was essential to the journey. Theirinvolvementincreased in frequency and covered different pedagogical topics extensively.

Overcoming the challenges was done through personal efforts. Understanding my feelings and using negative emotional relief strategies helped me move forward. Knowledge gained from courses, resources, and colleagues boosted my teaching competencies. The continued support from the MoE organized the work and facilitated the pedagogical process. Finally, the children's families were significant partners in the success of distance teaching.

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate kindergarten teachers' experiences during distance teaching. The data analyses revealed three themes. First, the teachers' feelings theme showed how the teachers experience demotions that transformed from very negative to quite positive. At the beginning, they felt shock and denial; a group of them were nervous then felt burdened and had fears of failure. Previous research had noted the unfavorable consequences of teachers' negative feelings, such as less job satisfaction, caused by their work environments (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015).However, none of the teachers in this study gave up; they overcame their negative feelings using different methods. The support gained from different parties motivated the teachers and increased their readiness to shift their practices from in-class to remote teaching.This result goes along with previous findings (e.g.,Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015)linking positive support from the surrounding community to teachers' high efficacy and abilities to cope with stress and other negative feelings. Carrillo and Flores (2020) found the strong social interaction in the educational environment was associated with greater job satisfaction and confidence. This research documented that distance teaching competencies were enhanced after the teachers began the actual experience. Fears and worries are a person's enemy and prevent them from moving forward and achieving goals.Going through the experience gave the teachers more confidence and self-efficacy, which made them feel proud of themselves and eager to share their experiences. This finding corroborated previous research demonstrating teachers' higher self-efficacy derived from their long online teaching experiences (Hung, 2016).

This research highlighted implementationdifficulties, the second theme, on many fronts in the teachers' experiences.The teachers agreed that digitalizing content was an obstacle. Their previous experiences and even professional preparations in their school shad concentrated on in-person teaching. This limited exposure to distance teaching and the lack of appropriate experiences weakened the quality of their teaching. Other researchers shown this is a global issue and the pandemic spotlighted the urgent need to integrate online teaching in teachers' professional development programs

(Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021; Van derSpoel et al., 2020).The teachers in this research had a hard time adjusting their lessons and finding similar ones that aligned with their face-to-face teaching plans.Additionally, they were challenged by finding online assessments to judge the children's achievements. Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021) found online assessments during the pandemic lacked certainty and teachers made many mistakes trying to evaluate children's learning.IndrianiandPrasanti (2021) emphasized that kindergarten teachers are required to providecreativeactivities to motivate children joining online lessons. These results demonstrate the need to digitalize the kindergartencurriculumfor use in these situations. Even now that the children have returned to the face-to-face system, the need for distance teaching is still there (e.g., for kindergarten closures on bad weather days).Instead of missing one or more days of learning, shifting to distance teaching becomes a more acceptable option.Children's disruptive behaviors and class management difficulties also are reported in this research. The teachers gave many explanations for those issues, such as children needing to explore, social distancing preventing children from practicing their normal activities, and children not understanding the seriousness of learning. Alanazi (2022) believed studying at home was critical and caused some children to develop challenging behaviors. Consequently, the researcher recommended practices for kindergarten teachers to use in managing online classes and motivating children.

The third theme the findings showed was that the teachers sought help to overcome obstacles. They started from inside and learned to control their emotions using several practices(e.g., exercising, joining group therapy, and looking for consultations).Researchers linked negative feelings caused by the work environment to job burnout (Mojsa-Kaja et al., 2015). That leads to attrition and then job dropout (Geiger &Pivovarova, 2018).The enhancement of the teachers' competencies played a fundamental role in their positive distance teaching experiences. Their knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward distance teaching improved.Self-learning, exchanges of knowledge, and training were the most notable practices used during the experience and drove the teacher to become proficient in distance teaching. Due to the rapid changes in the educational field, Gallego and Caingcoy (2020)encouraged kindergarten teachers to engage continually in professional development activities. The results of this research proved higher authorities are fundamental and thoughtful partners in increasing teachers' professional efficacy.

Providing teachers with needed support paved the way for them to deliver high-quality teaching.In addition to IT support, the Saudi MoE offered assistance such as issuing teachers and families distance teaching guidelines, a YouTube channel (AEN), and virtual kindergarten.This supportsYıldırım's (2021) finding that distance teaching efficacy needs higher organizational-level initiatives such as digital content, educational video channels, and family–school guidelines. The results show families play indispensable roles in their children's learning. Distance teaching would not be achievable without parental involvement. To encourage parents, the teachers used plenty of practices and different media to engage them in their children's learning. Research conducted during the pandemic (e.g.,Wilinski et al., 2022) discovered new ways to engage families. Teachers and parents needed to work side by side during this unanticipated rapid transition period.

Conclusion

The results of this study help describe kindergarten teachers' experiences during distance teaching. The teachers' emotions about the circumstances passed through different phases. Given the importance of the teachers' feelings toward their teaching experiences, one can infer how the different feelings influenced their attitudes and willingness to teach.Unfavorable emotions such as anxiety, fear, and incompetence decrease teachers' ambitions and degrade their performances. These findings show positive feelings push teachers forward to construct knowledge and enhance their teaching competencies.The teachers' feelings improved through personal and organizational efforts. This research documents that the teachers were aware of their negative feelings and worked to get over them. They sought help, educated them selves, had positive social relations with colleagues, and shared recommended practices. Having favorable feelings leads to job satisfaction that reflects positively on teachers' experiences. The MoE and children's families were significant in facilitating the distance teaching experience. The teachers indicated theMoE provided all needed support to enhance their distance teaching competencies and the families' cooperation with the teachers made the experience better.In light of distance teaching requirements, the teachers experienced many challenges, for example, the availability of digital content and materials, children's nature and emergent behaviors, and the lack of technological competencies. However, the experience prepared teachers with practices to use in future implementations of digital education.They put extra efforts into enhancing their professional development and working with children behind the scenes.

Limitation and future research

This research is limited to kindergarten teachers' experiences with distance teaching. It focused on teachers' feelings, implementation difficulties and challenges, and ways of coping with obstacles. Discovering the points of view of children's families regarding their experiences would add value to the results of this research. Even though the teachers believe they overcame many challenges, this research did not examine children's development and learning

achievements. Potential studies to investigate the effects of distance teaching on children's developmental domains are recommended, especially because the distance teaching experience was tried for only a short period.Further, content analysis research might explore the effectiveness of the digital content offered in the official channels and platforms and improve its implementations.

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