

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Addressing Educational Disparities in the Philippines: An Examination of the Impact of Alternative Delivery Modes (ADMs) on Achieving Inclusive and Quality Education

Teresa Gayle Ladines

Ateneo de Manila University

teresagayleladines@gmail.com

Abstract

The United Nations established seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, and nearly every country, including the Philippines, pledged to pursue them. Among these goals is SDG 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Recognized as a fundamental human right, the attainment of quality education extends beyond mere accessibility. Unfortunately, the Philippines continues to grapple with providing inclusive high-quality education to its populace. This study undertakes a thematic analysis of data gathered from previous studies and literary works to analyze the impacts of alternate delivery modalities (ADMs) in the Philippines' pursuit of inclusive and high-quality education. Specifically, the research explores the perspectives of parents, teachers, and students on various aspects of ADMs, seeking to shed light on their effectiveness in addressing educational disparities. The findings of the study bring to the forefront significant challenges associated with the integration of ADMs in the educational landscape. Among these obstacles are the inadequacy of essential resources, limited teacher communication, and an increased workload that places emotional strain on teachers. These difficulties have notable implications for student motivation, interest, and overall learning outcomes, particularly for students coming from low-income backgrounds. Addressing these urgent concerns and adhering to the SDG 4 targets for 2030, this research provides tangible recommendations and viable solutions. By acknowledging and actively tackling the challenges that ADMs face, the Philippines may

get closer to attaining its goal of delivering inclusive and high-quality education to all its residents.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), alternative delivery modes (ADMs), inclusive education, quality education, Philippines, COVID-19 pandemic, Filipino children

I. Introduction

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental right and a powerful catalyst for individual empowerment, societal progress, and sustainable development. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) specifically calls for the provision of inclusive and quality education for all, aiming to ensure that every child receives a fair chance to thrive and contribute to their communities. While significant progress has been made worldwide, challenges persist, particularly in developing countries such as the Philippines. Recognizing the crucial role of education in shaping the nation's future, the Philippine government has implemented various policies and initiatives to promote inclusive and quality education. However, despite these efforts, data show that the country remains midway through achieving the SDG 4 objectives (Baclig, 2023). Moreover, according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2020), the country's progress in achieving the SDGs was adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the progress on some goals, including SDG 4, being reversed.

The global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic had a dramatic impact on practically every facet of life, including education (Calimlim, 2020). In response to the health and safety concerns posed by the pandemic, schools around the world were forced to close their doors and transition to remote learning modalities. The Philippine Department of

Education (DepEd) implemented the Basic Education - Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) as a response to the pandemic's disruption of traditional classroom-based instruction (DepEd, 2020). It covers the essential education requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the use of alternative delivery modes (ADMs). ADMs include online distance learning, modular learning, and blended learning approaches. These modes are tried and tested within the formal system that enable schools to provide quality education to marginalized students and those at risk of dropping out (Llego, 2020), aiming to ensure that education reaches all students, regardless of their circumstance.

The implementation of ADMs in the Philippines has opportunities and challenges. On one hand, ADMs allowed the education to continue amidst the pandemic, providing flexibility and accessibility for students who may face barriers to traditional in-person learning. On the other hand, the delivery of ADMs encountered various problems, highlighting the need for further analysis and improvement. There have been concerns and challenges raised by stakeholders. Many children, particularly those in important developmental phases, have suffered in this setup, as it has forced them to enroll in distance-learning modalities, which may not adequately meet their educational and socio-emotional needs (UNICEF, 2021). Parents, students, and teachers have expressed difficulties associated with remote learning, such as rising expenses, mental health concerns, and high dropout rates (Joven, 2021). Despite other countries gradually reopening schools after a year of closure, the Philippines has remained one of the few countries that have not done so (Joven, 2021).

However, on November 15, 2021, the DepEd allowed a limited re-opening of 120

elementary and high schools in areas with low COVID-19 cases, marking a small step toward the resumption of face-to-face classes (Wui, 2022). Subsequently, on November 2, 2022, DepEd announced that all schools providing basic education should have transitioned to full face-to-face classes (Mingoy, 2022). Nevertheless, due to recent complaints about the extremely high heat index in the country, DepEd has granted principals and school heads the authority and responsibility to suspend in-person classes and switch to ADMs as needed (Reyes, 2023).

Given the complex landscape of education delivery in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a need to conduct a thorough analysis of the effectiveness and impact of ADMs on Filipino children. This study aims to conduct a thematic analysis of the use of ADMs in the Philippine education system, revealing the gaps in the conceptualization, implementation, monitoring, and assessment of these modes during the pandemic. This study also aims to shed light on the constraints that impede the attainment of SDG 4 targets and offer insights for successful policy interventions by examining the opportunities and obstacles presented by ADMs. The importance of this research stems from its potential to inform educational policymakers, administrators, and stakeholders about the strengths and drawbacks of ADMs, allowing them to make evidence-based decisions to improve the quality and inclusivity of education during crises and beyond. The findings are expected to contribute to a more thorough understanding of emergency instructional methods and provide significant insights for improving educational practices in similar circumstances around the world. Ultimately, this comprehensive study provides concrete recommendations that will help achieve SDG 4 and ensure that all Filipino children receive a quality education.

II. Methodology

Amidst the COVID-19 outbreak, this rapid review focuses on basic education in the Philippines, specifically examining the impact of ADMs on the academic achievements, psychosocial well-being, and future prospects of Filipino children. Additionally, the study explores the implications of these findings for the country's progress on SDG 4. Conducted with the aim of swiftly and effectively assessing the effectiveness of ADMs during the pandemic, the research incorporates diverse perspectives and findings to align with its objectives and enhance the analysis's rigor within the Philippine education system.

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timeframe. Texts published from March 8, 2020, up to the present. Geographic Focus. Texts specifically related to and explicitly discussing basic education in the Philippines. Relevance to ADMs. Texts that explore, evaluate, or discuss ADMs for basic education during the COVID-19 pandemic, including blended learning, distance learning, online platforms, printed modules, TV and radio programs, and other innovative approaches implemented during the outbreak. Relevance to COVID-19. Texts that directly address or discuss the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on basic education and the adoption of ADMs as a response to the pandemic. Document Types. Peer-reviewed research studies, government publications, news articles and reports from reputable organizations, and official documents. Methodologically Rigor. Texts that follow the four criteria of Oketch et al. (2014): Focus, Transparency, Appropriateness, Validity & Reliability of Conclusions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Irrelevant Topics. Texts that mention but do not directly address ADMs for basic education in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak in the Philippines. Duplicate or Repetitive Studies. Texts reporting similar findings from the same research project or data source, prioritizing the most recent or comprehensive version. Non-English and Filipino Languages. Texts published in languages other than English and Filipino. Incomplete, Not Reputable, or Non-Peer-Reviewed Sources. Texts that do not meet the standard academic quality or rigor.

Tab. 1. Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Source: Author

Notes: It provides an overview of the Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria used to determine which texts are relevant and meet the requirements for inclusion in the study.

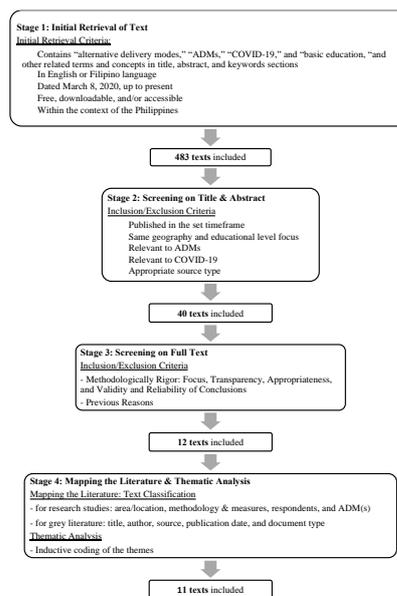


Fig. 1. Flow diagram of the systematic review process

Source: Author (adapted from Sakata et al., 2022)

Notes: It illustrates the process of retrieving, screening, and analyzing the texts in this study.

a. Stage 1: Literature Retrieval

The rapid review was initially conducted using a dual approach. The first step was to use the EPPI-Reviewer, a widely used tool for conducting reviews. However, the database had limitations in terms of relevant literature for this study. To guarantee diversity and relevance, a manual review was conducted to include a broader range of literature sources, such as studies, and grey literature such as policy documents, reports, and articles. This combined method made it possible to get a more diverse and thorough assortment of texts.

For research studies, the following credible databases were used: ResearchGate, ScienceDirect, PubMed Central, EBSCOhost, ProQuest, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis, and Google Scholar. Google Chrome was employed for accessing grey literature. The inclusion of grey literature from reputable sources sought to improve the validity and dependability of

the research findings by providing a solid foundation based on reputable and up-to-date material.

The researcher searched for terms related to the topic such as “alternative delivery modes,” “ADMs,” “basic education,” “COVID-19,” and “Filipino education” and used Boolean operators to increase the combined multiple search terms and input the year scope for the overall efficacy of the search range. For a source to be included, it must be written in English or Filipino language and written/published from March 8, 2020, when Former President Rodrigo Duterte declared a state of public health emergency due to COVID-19 (Cabico, 2023) up to the present. It should contain the related terms and concepts in the title, abstract, and/or keywords section. It also must be free, downloadable, and/or accessible—with or without institutional access provided by the Ateneo de Manila University. It should also be centered on basic education and ADMs during the COVID-19 outbreak and is within the context of the Philippines. All the downloaded texts were saved into a Google Drive folder labeled ‘Stage 1,’ while grey literature sources were bookmarked instead.

b. Stage 2: Text Screening

In Stage 2, the inclusion/exclusion criteria were applied during the screening process to select the most relevant texts for the rapid review. The criteria were based on the research's focus and objectives, ensuring that the selected texts pertained to basic education and ADMs during the COVID-19 outbreak in the Philippines. To be included, a source had to be written in English or Filipino and written/published from March 8, 2020, when Former President Rodrigo Duterte declared a state of public health emergency due to COVID-19 (Cabico, 2023) up to the present. The related terms and concepts had

to be present in the title, abstract, and/or keywords section. Additionally, the texts had to be freely downloadable and/or accessible, with or without institutional access provided by the Ateneo de Manila University. All relevant texts meeting these criteria were saved and bookmarked into a Google Drive folder and Chrome labeled ‘Stage 2.’

c. Stage 3: Text Evaluation

In this stage, the main body of each text was carefully read to determine if it met the methodological rigor criteria, including Focus, Transparency, Appropriateness, and Validity & Reliability of Conclusions, as outlined by Oketch et al. (2014). The researcher also considered any reasons for inclusion that may have been missed in Stages 1 and 2. The texts meeting the methodological rigor criteria were saved or bookmarked in another folder named "Stage 3" in Google Drive and Chrome.

d. Stage 4: Text Categorization and Analysis

Stage 4 involved thoroughly reading each of the selected texts, divided into two phases. The initial phase was dedicated to categorizing the texts based on key criteria. For research studies, the categories included area/location, methodology & measure, respondents, and ADMs. For grey literature, the categories comprised title, author, source, publication date, and document type. This categorization process allowed the researcher to provide a basic summary of the important characteristics of the texts that were included in the review, thereby mapping the literature (see Tables 2&3).

	Area/Location	Methodology & Measure	Respondents	ADM(s)
Constantino et al., 2020	Cabanatuan City	Quantitative; Survey	Parents	Online Distance Learning, Modular Distance Learning, and Blended Learning
Kintanar et al., 2021	Sibonga Cebu	Quantitative; Survey	Parents	Modular Distance Learning
Tan et al., 2022	Northern Samar (San Isidro), Samar (Marabut & Basey), and Leyte (Tacloban City)	Qualitative; Interview	Parents	Modular Distance Learning
Collado et al., 2021	not specified	Quantitative; Survey	Parents	Modular Distance Learning
Talimodao & Madrigal, 2021	highly urbanized city in Central Philippines	Quantitative; Survey	Teachers	Modular Distance Learning
Dilna et al., 2022	Datu Odin Sinsuat South District in Maguindanao II Division	Quantitative; Survey	Teachers	Modular Distance Learning
Guiamalón et al., 2021	Buluan, Division of Maguindanao I	Quantitative; Survey	Teachers	Modular Distance Learning
Toquero, 2021	Mindanao	Qualitative; Interview	Teachers	Online Distance Learning, Modular Distance Learning, Blended Learning, and TV/Radio-based Instruction

Tab. 2. Mapping the Literature: Text Classification for Research Studies
Source: Author

Notes: The table is presented to give the reader a basic picture of the sorts of pieces of literature that have been undertaken. It illustrates some of the key characteristics of the texts examined in this study.

Title	Author	Source	Publication Date	Document Type	ADM(s)
Remote learning isn't working for Filipino families	Julienne Joven	CNN Philippines	September 8, 2021	news article	Online Distance Learning, Modular Distance Learning, and Blended Learning
Fourth Quarter 2020 Social Weather Survey on Learning Delivery Modalities (Part 2): 58% of enrolled school-age Filipinos use devices for distance learning	Jose Miguel Alberto M. Carlos, Leo S. Laroza, and Asherel Joy D. Zaide	Social Weather Stations	March 1, 2021	research report	Online Distance Learning, Modular Distance Learning, Blended Learning, and TV/Radio-based Instruction
The Philippines Still Hasn't Fully Reopened Its Schools Because of COVID-19. What Is This Doing to Children?	Chad De Guzman	TIME	December 1, 2021	news article	Online Distance Learning and Modular Distance Learning

Tab. 3. Mapping the Literature: Text Classification for Grey Literature

Source: Author

Notes: The table is presented to give the reader a basic picture of the sorts of pieces of literature that have been undertaken. It illustrates some of the key characteristics of the texts examined in this study.

In the second phase of Stage 4, the primary objective was to discern and elucidate the prevailing themes arising from the extant textual materials. This process involved iterative and meticulous efforts to systematically organize the identified categories and sub-categories, culminating in the establishment of a cohesive analytical framework. The researcher adopted an inductive thematic analysis approach to carry out this investigation, aligning with the broader method of qualitative synthesis as expounded by Bearman and Dawson (2013, as cited in Bremner et al., 2023). Under this method, an exhaustive examination of the texts was undertaken, whereby themes naturally surfaced during the scrutiny. Following this, each text was methodically coded and grouped according to its corresponding themes. Subsequently, the researcher meticulously reviewed the coded contents within each theme on multiple occasions, synthesizing the information derived from them.

By following this comprehensive methodology, the rapid review aimed to provide valuable insights into the effectiveness and impact of ADMs in the Philippine education system during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings will be instrumental in informing educational policymakers, administrators, and stakeholders about the strengths and weaknesses of ADMs, enabling evidence-based decisions to enhance the quality and inclusivity of education during crises and beyond. Furthermore, this research contributes to the broader understanding of

education in emergencies and offers valuable lessons for improving educational practices in similar contexts worldwide, ultimately advancing the achievement of SDG 4 and ensuring quality education for all Filipino children.

III. Results and Discussion

This section presents the synthesized findings of the review. The methodology described in the Materials and Methods section was followed, which involved conducting an inductive thematic analysis of the themes that emerged from the 11 included texts.

a. Education during the Pandemic

Parents applaud the DepEd efforts to establish online distance learning, modular learning, and blended learning, as these initiatives have allowed their children to continue their education. Educators, on the other hand, are concerned about the prolonged closure of schools and the negative influence on children's capacity to learn. This, in turn, has an impact on their future prospects, especially given the country's reliance on a youthful and well-educated population to restore pre-pandemic economic growth.

b. Digital Divide in Education

The utilization of desktops or laptops for online learning emerged as an indispensable necessity in the realm of education, particularly in response to the exigencies of the pandemic. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge the existence of a pronounced digital divide in this context (Collado et al., 2021).

As of the last quarter of 2020, the extent of device usage for distance learning among Filipinos aged 5 to 20 displayed considerable variability, with nearly half of this demographic lacking access to such devices (Carlos et al., 2021). It was observed that device adoption rates were higher in Metro Manila and urban areas, and this trend seemed to be correlated with the educational attainment level of the household head (Calimlim et al., 2021). In rural areas, there was a more pronounced inclination towards acquiring smartphones, while desktops or laptops were more commonly procured in urban settings, especially among individuals with college degrees (Carlos et al., 2021). Notably, families residing in rural areas faced the challenge of expending a significant portion of their average monthly income in the Philippines to secure smartphones for their children who were engaged in distance learning (Collado et al., 2021). This financial burden was particularly consequential for low-income families, adversely impacting students' ability to fulfill their homework assignments (Calimlim et al., 2021).

Efforts were made by government agencies to provide support in mitigating this divide, including the donation of confiscated phones and gadgets to the education department. However, despite these endeavors, the digital divide remains a formidable obstacle that necessitates further attention and intervention (Carlos et al., 2021).

c. Internet in Education

Internet access has the potential to increase educational quality, particularly when face-to-face instruction is not possible. However, access to the internet continues to be a serious barrier, particularly in rural areas with unstable connectivity (Carlos et al., 2021). Additionally, the internet in the Philippines is among the least stable and slowest, while also

being the most expensive when compared to other countries (Baclig, 2023). This limits teachers' ability to conduct lectures using video conferencing services or Facebook Live (Carlos et al., 2021). The high cost and instability of internet services impede the efficient introduction of other modalities of delivery (Baclig, 2023).

d. Parents as Collaborators, Teachers, Students, and Administrators in Education

Parents have become collaborators in their children's education since it is no longer confined to the classroom. They are attempting to co-teach alongside teachers, with some finding it rewarding and others viewing it as a chore (Constantino et al., 2020). Balancing work, family, and teaching responsibilities presents challenges for parents (Toquero, 2020). Due to school closures, many parents were obliged to work remotely or forego jobs in order to care for their children and support them with their education (De Guzman, 2021). Parents face challenges when teaching disciplines they are unfamiliar with, like mathematics, and frequently struggle with time management and financial constraints (Constantino et al., 2020). To overcome these obstacles, they seek assistance from teachers as well as internet tools (Toquero, 2021). Additionally, parents have taken on administrative responsibilities such as class scheduling, module pick-ups, and setting up a classroom environment at home, adding to their workload and time management challenges (Kintanar et al., 2021). In some cases, parents even answer modules on behalf of their children to expedite completion (Constantino et al., 2020).

e. Lack of Motivation

One significant challenge pointed out by parents is the lack of learner motivation. Students' ability to complete modules is sometimes hampered by laziness and

distractions (Tan et al., 2022). To solve this difficulty, some parents turn to paying rewards or allowing breaks (Constantino et al., 2020). Maintaining a consistent weekly schedule is critical in teaching students the value of time management, scheduling, and meeting deadlines (Tan et al., 2022). However, due to school closures and the perception of a break from traditional schooling, many children refuse to follow a typical school routine and instead engage in hobbies like gaming or watching movies (Tan et al., 2022).

f. Loss of Student Interest

The shift to ADMs has resulted in a loss of interest among students. Disengagement is exacerbated by factors such as poor internet connections, a lack of teacher feedback on take-home modules, and the blurring of the lines between home and school life (Cabico, 2023). The overwhelming quantity of activities and limited social relationships reduce students' enjoyment of learning even further (Joven, 2021). Identifying and addressing these issues is critical to maintaining student interest and active participation in alternative learning modalities.

g. Lack of Essential Resources

Low-income households have limited access to essential resources like gadgets, computers, and internet connections, which makes effective participation in ADMs difficult (Llego, 2020). Children from low-income households are at a disadvantage since they cannot afford these devices or dependable internet connectivity (Collado et al., 2021). These students may struggle to stay up with the curriculum and access educational materials if they do not have the essential tools and technologies, potentially perpetuating a cycle of poverty (Llego, 2020).

h. Increased Workload and Emotional Strain on Teachers

Due to the change to ADMs, teachers experience heavier workloads and emotional strain (Dilna et al., 2022). Long hours and stress are exacerbated by additional administrative tasks, such as modifying teaching materials, assessing student work, and meeting deadlines (Dilna et al., 2022). Additionally, teachers face difficulties in meeting the educational needs of students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) (Sakata et al., 2022). Teachers' well-being suffers as a result of the additional burden, which causes stress, weariness, and emotional suffering (Dilna et al., 2022). Despite the challenges, teachers stay committed to providing the best education possible, frequently at the expense of their personal time and well-being (Dilna et al., 2022).

i. Limited Teacher Communication

With ADMs, effective communication between teachers and learners is hampered (Sakata et al., 2022). In traditional classrooms, students can directly ask their teachers questions or seek explanations. This direct channel of contact, however, is disrupted in ADMs, impeding the learning process (Sakata et al., 2022). Difficulties in obtaining prompt responses to questions can hamper comprehension and engagement with the lessons (Sakata et al., 2022). Real-time interactions allow teachers to assess students' comprehension and provide timely interventions or further support as needed (Sakata et al., 2022).

Education has experienced substantial alterations during the pandemic, focusing on new modalities such as blended learning and modular modes for facilitating continuous learning. These initiatives have enabled students to complete their studies while also exposing serious limitations. There is a

significant digital divide, with many students missing access to essential gadgets and reliable internet connectivity. Low-income households, particularly those in rural areas, suffer disproportionately, making effective participation in distance learning difficult. Furthermore, when they adapt to new educational modalities, teachers confront increasing workloads and emotional strain. In these exceptional times, efforts to address these difficulties are crucial for ensuring equitable high-quality education.

IV. Conclusion & Recommendations

The research findings shed light on the profound challenges and wide-ranging impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the country's education system. Recognizing education as a fundamental right, it becomes crucial to explore and implement alternative approaches that ensure continuous learning instead of abrupt disruptions. The concerns raised by educators about the extended closure of schools and its negative effects on students' learning abilities are not only pertinent to the Philippines but also resonate globally, underscoring the urgency to address these issues.

The commendable parental support for the Department of Education's efforts in facilitating online distance learning coexists with legitimate concerns expressed by educators regarding the prolonged school closures and their potential impact on student's academic development and future prospects. The significant digital divide poses a serious barrier, disproportionately affecting students from low-income households in rural areas who struggle with limited access to essential devices and reliable internet connections.

Additionally, the study highlights the critical role of internet access in effectively adopting ADMs. However, high expenses and unstable services create obstacles to the seamless integration of online programs, presenting instructional challenges for educators. Simultaneously, parents have become active partners in their children's education, assuming various roles to enhance the learning process, but they encounter difficulties in effectively motivating and engaging students. The research also notes the increased effort and emotional strain experienced by teachers during the transition to alternative learning methods. The lack of real-time communication with students reduces educational efficacy. Addressing these multifaceted issues is crucial to achieving equitable access to quality education while supporting the well-being of children, parents, and educators.

Proactive initiatives by policymakers, educational institutions, and stakeholders are fundamental in eliminating the digital divide, improving internet access, and providing comprehensive assistance to both educators and students. A more robust and inclusive educational system capable of prospering in adverse situations can be established by accepting evidence-based solutions and promoting a collaborative approach. Future studies should delve deeper into innovative strategies and interventions to maximize the effectiveness of ADMs and foster a thriving educational environment for all.

To enhance the Philippines education system and promote inclusive, high quality education, despite pandemic-related challenges and potential future disruptions, the researcher suggests the following approach that aligns with global discussions on education resilience. Firstly, there is the need to enhance internet connectivity, particularly

in rural areas, and establish open communication channels between parents and teachers. Secondly, adequate funding for quality learning materials and continuous support and training for teachers in adapting to ADMs will further enrich the educational experience. Thirdly, it is important to emphasise inclusive policies for individuals with disabilities and promote collaboration among educators, parents, and disability support services to create a nurturing learning environment. It is also important to note that regular assessments of ADM efficacy and feedback will aid in the refining of strategies and policies.

Future researchers are encouraged to prioritize longitudinal studies, mixed-methods approach, intervention evaluations, stakeholder engagement, and the exploration of innovative practices in remote and inclusive education. These evidence-based recommendations align with the international discourse on education resilience and can serve as a framework that may be adapted and applied in other countries confronting similar challenges. By embracing these recommendations, the education system can adeptly navigate challenges and strive towards achieving quality education for all learners while fostering inclusivity and resilience amid uncertainties.

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