MODULAR DISTANCE LEARNING CHALLENGES: BASIS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A HOME AND SCHOOL SUPPORT MECHANISM

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate challenges encountered by thirty-nine Grade 11 students during the implementation of modular distance learning. Specifically, it aimed to develop a program support mechanism for learners at home and in school. A qualitative approach was utilized, using document analysis, interviews and focus group discussion as the research instruments. The participants in this study were Grade 11 teachers with students who hardly comply with the school requirements under modular distance learning. Participants were informed about the objectives as well as the activities of the study. A triangulation was used to ensure the validity and reliability of the research data and findings.

Based on the results of the study, the common challenges encountered by the learners that explain their inability to comply with the school requirements during the implementation of modular distance learning were financial difficulties, personal concerns, technological concerns, peer pressures, health concerns and legal issues. Recommendations were made for the school administrators to come up with a support mechanism for learners to address these challenges at home and in school. School policies, programs, projects and activities regarding the implementation of modular distance learning under alternative delivery modes, alternative learning systems, and dropout reduction programs must be intensified and consider the results of this study. Further, the researcher developed a STAR Approach work plan addressing learners' difficulties related to finances, personal, technological, health and wellness, and legal.

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1. Introduction

In March 11, 2020, World Health Organization (WHO) declared Covid-19 as pandemic. In response to this international health emergency, many countries took various measures such as lockdown, work from home mechanism, suspension of transport operation, school closure, etc. In the Philippines, this situation lasted for more than two years before the government decided to slowly go back to its normal operation. As the government puts almost all the entire country, including the province of Laguna to Alert Level 1, numbers of Filipino families are still grappling with the economic and social impact of the pandemic due to Covid 19. The abrupt shift in teaching delivery modes, as well as the closure of businesses and small enterprises, had an impact on families and school communities. The transformation of teaching methodologies caused a lot of problems among teachers, parents, and students (Tarkar, 2020). This explains the data of high school students working just to help their parents sustain their daily needs and other student's issues and concerns related to the implementation of distance learning in the country.

Public school in the country was not exempted from the situation of Covid 19. In the midst of pandemic, number of learners were identified struggling with their school works due to migration, working, financial difficulties and others. In spite of some considerations given by their teachers to help them comply with the subject requirements through modular approach, they still hardly submit their outputs due to number of reasons. Studies were done about students' experiences during this time of world's health emergency crisis. One of these research looked at the students' pandemic learning experiences in the Philippines. Sarmortin, Corcuera, Alvarez, & Palmero's (2022) findings revealed issues with the implementation of the distance learning modalities. The digital technology divide, independent study, a sense of learning responsibility, and financial capabilities and resources are among the students' experiences. They said that there were underlying issues and concerns with regards to these experiences. For instance, students from urban and rural areas experienced internet connections differently. There were differences between the two places in terms of access to digital infrastructure, technological tools, and online resources. This experience was also unfavorable to the less fortunate students. On the other side, it was noted that by taking ownership of the learning tasks, some children were able to develop their independent learning skills. However, the students' learning engagement during this emergency remote learning had both positive and negative effects on it depending on their financial situation and resources.

Learners faced a variety of obstacles and challenges as they pursued their basic education, but COVID-19 situations made these even more difficult. Apart from the academic work, these caused the students stress, pressure, and even anxiety, which made it harder for them to focus on their studies and led to poor academic performance or sometimes dropping out of school. Financial hardships, peer influences, addiction to social media, health problems, teenage pregnancies, family-related issues, and other obstacles were a few of these concerns.

Financial issues were the main source of stress for students, according to Essel and Owuson (2017). These resulted to ineffective study habits, poor academic achievement, and generally poor health. Salcedo-Relucio further argued that influences on students' study habits include things like family stress, the home environment, peer pressure, social media, increased unemployment, and financial instability. Cortes, Alcalde, & Camacho (2012) and Dizon-Luna (2013) also reported the factors that contribute to students' poor academic performance and school dropout. Cortes, Alcalde, and Camacho argued that playing computer games is one of the factors influencing students' academic achievement. They claimed that 39% of computer gamers are most likely to receive a failing grade. While, financial problems, health issues, peer pressure, teenage pregnancies, and family-related problems were stated by Dizon-Luna as the reasons why students dropped out of school before graduation. She also stressed that family and peers had a great impact on the lives of dropouts.

The Department of Education released various policies and programs to ensure that every child of school age was enrolled in school even during difficult situations. Initiatives were also done by the schools to carry out the mandate of the department. However, family problems including economic problems adds up to the learner's day-to-day concerns on top of their school activities. This scenario has been a challenge for school administrators and teachers for years, thus, need school policies as well as effective and appropriate school-initiated intervention programs to address the problem of school leavers. Moreover, consideration should be given to the context of the problem which calls for the cooperation of the concerned individual learners and their guardians. It is the responsibility of the parents with the full support and assistance of the state to provide every child with the quality education as stated in Article 14, Section 1 of the Philippine Constitution. Based on this article:

"The state shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible at all."

The same constitution protects the right of every children to basic necessities like food, shelter and clothing. For below average Filipino income earners, meeting physiological needs and provision of the basic education to their children at the same time is a big challenge. It is either they temporarily sacrifice basic needs for education or vice versa. A certain study was done to examine the relationship between poverty and child labor in the Philippines. Fernadez & Abocejo (2014) found enough evidence that due to poverty children were pushed to participate in the labor force to augment household income and to provide for the family. The same study established a strong association between poverty and the number of working children not attending school. This may also explains the inability of learners to comply with the school requirements including the accomplishment and submission of activities or outputs under modular program.

Guidelines and policies of DepEd ensure that learning continues in the midst of the national health emergency caused by Covid 19. Learning modalities other that face-to-face instructions were employed to keep learners from the threat of the virus. Sudden transition to distance learning modalities involved abrupt adjustments from teachers, learners and parents as well who give supervision at home. This includes facing common challenges like establishment of cognitive, social and teaching presence to support learning. Among them, social presence was a serious barrier for teachers to promote collaboration at a distance (Rannastu-Avalos & Siiman, 2020). With this, parents or any adult at home are expected to guide and supervise learners while doing their modules on a daily basis. The new learning delivery modes required family involvement to support student's learning at home. It also demanded parents to invest their time making it more difficult for those who are working at the same time (Ribeiro, Cunha, Silva, M. C. A., Carvalho, & Vital, 2021). Further, learners who are in difficult situations and under distance learning modalities at the same time have their own stories to tell. Hence, this study investigated the different challenges encountered by thirty-nine Grade 11 students during the implementation of modular distance learning amidst difficult situations. Specifically, this study investigated 1) the common challenges encountered by these learners based on the school documents or teachers' reports, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, and 2) the support system provided at home and in school in order to address the challenges encountered by the students.

2. Method

The study was conducted on the first quarter of school year 2022-2023 at Masapang Integrated National High School. A qualitative approach was utilized to investigate the challenges encountered by thirty-nine Grade 11 students who hardly comply with school requirements in school year 2021-2022. In-depth interview and focus group discussion validated data reflected from the school documents and teachers' reports. Results and findings were used as basis for policies and program related to alternative delivery modes, alternative learning system and dropout reduction initiatives of the school for school year 2022-2023.

2.1. Research Design

A qualitative research study was employed during the conduct of this study. This study utilized triangulations using school documents, interview and focus group discussion as the research instruments. A six-step thematic analysis was employed to analyze gathered data. Thematic analysis is commonly used and foundational method for qualitative data analysis. A six-phase guide to doing thematic analysis was provided by Braun & Clarke (2006). The six-phase framework was composed of 1) familiarizing with data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining themes; and 6) writing-up. Moreover,

the researcher data and findings underwent audit trail to establish trustworthiness of the results.

2.2. Participants

Ten (10) Grade 11 teachers of Masapang Integrated National High School were the participants in this study. These teachers were the class advisers and the subject teachers of Grade 11 students during the implementation of the modular distance learning. They had the firsthand information about their students' experiences through constant communication, follow-ups and giving of remote instructions with the identified students facing different challenges and difficulties during the distance learning program. Most of these teachers were the pioneering senior high school teachers of the said school.

In addition, the researcher possessed twenty-five years of experience in the field of education both as classroom teacher and as school head. His teaching exposures included experiences in the private and public institutions. He was assigned as school head of Masapang Integrated National High School in 2019, three months before the declaration of the strict community quarantine in the Philippines due to Covid 19.

2.3. Sampling procedures

Purposive sampling technique was used in this study. Grade 11 teachers of students who hardly comply with the school requirements during the implementation of the modular distance learning were the participants in this study. Participants were informed about the objectives of the study including the activities related to the conduct of this research.

2.4 Data Collection

Data was collected through school documents, particularly teachers' reports about struggling learners, in-depth interview and focus group discussion. Specific place and other sensitive information were removed or coded to protect the identity of the learners. Triangulation and member checking were used to ensure the validity and reliability of data and research findings.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data gathered was analyzed using the six-step thematic analysis as proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006). The researcher read the school documents and the interview transcript several times to made himself familiarized with the data. After familiarization, initial and open coding of data was done, developed and modified. These coded data were organized and categorized to search for themes. For accuracy, themes were reviewed and defined before the

final write-ups. Research findings were presented to the participants to check if the results of the study were accurate based on their experiences and not the researcher's own preconceptions and biases. After member checking and audit trail, reports of the results and findings of the study were finalized.

3. Results and Discussion

Six major themes emerged from data analysis regarding the challenges encountered by participants during the implementation of modular distance learning. From data analysis, participants are dealing with 1) financial difficulties, 2) personal concerns, 3) technological concerns, 4) peer pressure, 5) health concerns, and 6) legal issues. Furthermore, the teachers reported that learners received little or no parental supervision at home across the six major challenges of the learner. Modular distance learning challenges due to financial difficulties

The primary challenge that learners face during modular distance learning is financial difficulty. Out of 40 learners, 23 of them, or 59% of the participants, are facing these challenges. They rarely meet school requirements because they either work, help their parents in their work, or relocate with their parents who must work away from home. Due to this phenomenon, the participants are having difficulties doing their modules and work at the same time. This finding supports the findings of Salcedo-(2019) Relucio's and Essel and Owusu's (2019) studies (2017). Financial difficulties were reported to be the most stressful for students, affecting their study habits and academic success. In addition, two sub-themes were generated from the learners' economic difficulties that contributed to challenges of modular distance learning. These are the work-imposed requirements and the self-imposed requirements. Work-imposed requirements are the demands of work from the participants, while the self-imposed requirements are the participant's demand to address financial difficulties. Among the work-imposed requirements are the workloads, transfer of place and the demand of time. On the other hand, the self-imposed requirements are the participants' pressing need to earn and prioritizing work over school. Due to the demand of work or work-imposed requirements, participants were having difficulties doing work and complying with the school requirements due to workloads. Some of the reports from the teachers said that,

Hindi makayang pagsabayin ang trabaho at pagsasagot sa module. (Can't keep up with work and answering the modules.)
Hindi nakakapagpasa ng written works at performance task dahil may trabaho. (Unable to submit written assignments and performance tasks due to work.)
Other teachers' reports revealed that the learner-participants needed to stay in or move to other places because it was demanded by their work.

Nasa ibang probinsya na po sila at hindi nasusubaysayan ng tatay nila ang pagkuha at pagsubmit ng modules dahil doon nagtatrabaho ang magulang. (They were already living in a nearby province and the father was not able to get and submit modules because they work there.

Hindi nakakapagpasa ng written works at performance task dahil may trabaho. Ngayon ay sa katabing bayan na siya nakatira sa bahay ng kanyang Tita. (He was unable to complete written assignments and performance tasks due to work. He now lives with his aunt in a neighboring town.)

Hindi nakakapagpasa ng written works at performance task dahil nagtitinda ng dahon ng saging sa may kabilang bayan. (He was unable to submit written and performance tasks because he was selling banana leaves in another town.)

Nagtatrabaho na po sa katabing bayan ((He was) working in a nearby town)

Hindi rin nakakakuha ng module dahil stay in sa kanyang workplace.(He also couldn't get a module because he stayed at his workplace.)

Another work-imposed requirements was the time-requirement. Learner-participants were not even have the time to respond to teachers' communication due to the work's demand of time.

Hindi nakakapagpasa ng written works at performance task dahil may trabaho. Pinapapunta ang mga magulang upang makausap pero ni minsan hindi nakakapunta at busy daw po. (He was unable to complete written assignments and performance tasks due to work. The parents told him to talk to the teacher, but they never showed up, saying that they were too busy.)

Hindi nakakapagpasa ng written works at performance task,.. may tindahan na daw po. Hindi po nasagot sa mga tawag at chat. (Couldn't submit written works and performance tasks,.. she put up a store. She did not respond to calls and chats.)

Aside from the work-imposed requirements, some of the challenges in the modular distance learning faced by the learner-participants were self-imposed requirements. These are the pressing need to earn and prioritizing work over school. Unavoidably, learner-participants were forced to earn money to meet their daily needs. Some of the teachers reported that learners were forced to work to compensate for the family's financial difficulties.

Hindi nakakapagpasa ng written works at performance task dahil may trabaho, at kapos sa pera. (Due to work and a lack of funds, he was unable to submit written assignments and performance tasks.)

Hindi nakakapagpasa ng written works at performance task dahil may trabaho… at walang pambili ng yellow pad at ballpen. (Unable to submit written assignments and performance tasks due to work... and unable to buy a yellow pad and ballpen).

Modular distance learning challenges due to personal concerns

Personal concerns were the top two modular distance learning challenges experienced by the identified learner-participants, and nine (9) out of 35 participants, or 23 percent of them, were either pregnant, taking care of their own children, or decided to stop or refrain from communicating with teachers. This is consistent with the findings of Dizon-Luna (2013)'s study, which discovered that teenage pregnancy and family-related problems were among the numerous reasons why students dropped out before graduating. Based on the results of this study, teenage pregnancy was one of the personal concerns affecting learner's performance in the modular distance learning. Aside from the academic challenges of doing the modules, learners in this situation experienced difficulties brought by their pregnancy. These were the reasons why most of them cannot submit the required activities or even decided to stop school. The following were some of the reports from the teacher-participants.

Ayaw na mag-aral dahil nahihirapan at kasalukuyang buntis (She did nott want to study because she was experiencing difficulties and is currently pregnant.)

Hindi nakakapagpasa ng written works at performance task dahil kapapanganak lamang (She was unable to submit written work and performance tasks because she had recently given birth.)

Nagsabi din po ang bata na mag stop na muna dahil sya ay manganganak na … (She also said to stop school because she was about to give birth…)

Adolescent parents were among learners experiencing challenges in the modular distance learning because they are taking care of their own children. Based on reports, they spent their time with their children's needs while providing for their own needs were their last priority.

Hindi nakakapasa ng module dahil hindi na daw po kayang magsagot sa pag aasikaso ng kanyang mga anak. Nagsabi po ang learner na hindi muna mag aaral at magpo-focus

muna sa kanyang mga anak at naging sakitin. (She was unable to answer and submit modules because she was taking care of her kids. The kids became sickly.)

Hindi rin nakakakuha ng module dahil may mga anak na inaalagaan. (Was not able to get modules because she was taking care of her kids)

For unknown reasons, some learners decided to stop or refrain from communicating with teachers. They do not communicate with teachers, do not respond to call or messages, leave from group chats and decide to stop the school on their own.

Hindi nakakapagpasa ng written works at performance task… hindi nakikipag usap kung ano ang problema. (Failing to submit written work and performance tasks… not communicating what the problem is.)

Ayaw na mag-aral (He did not want to study anymore.)

Hindi nakakapagpasa ng written works at performance task. Hindi rin po sumasagot sa mga tawag at chat (Not being able to submit written works and performance tasks. He also did not respond to calls and chats)

Nag leave sa lahat ng GC at walang pasabi kung anong dahilan (She left the GC (group chat) without telling her reason.)

Modular distance learning challenges due to technological concerns

Aside from printed modules, electronic gadgets were used for communication between teachers and students as well as giving of instructions and monitoring. Some students have their own gadgets like computer and cellphones while that others do not have. For those students with available gadgets, it was a challenge for them to be caught in an online games that interfere with their activities in school. This was valuated through the reports of teachers. However, students who do not have any gadgets to use were having hard time connecting with teachers and other classmates for instructions and monitoring. Based on data, eight percent (8%) of the learners were affected by this concern. These findings demonstrated that gadgets, whether available or not, can interfere with students' learning when not properly supervised by adults. These findings confirmed Cortes, Alcalde, and Camacho's findings that playing computer games had a significant impact on students' performance and that the likelihood of a computer gamer failing was 39%.

Lagi lang daw nakatutok sa computer at cellphone at more on online gamings according sa kanyang tatay (According to the father, he was always in front of the computer and cellphone doing online games.

Nahihirapan ang bata sa pagmomodular at nawiwili sa paglalaro ng on-line games. Wala ang interest ng bata sa pag aaral. (He was having a hard time doing modules. His interest was in online games. He has no interest in studying.)

Hindi kumukuha ng module ang bata at hindi rin nagpapasa ng output dahil nawiwili sa paglalaro ng on-line games. (He was not getting his modules and not submitting outputs because he was playing online games.)

Sa simula pa lamang ay nagsabi ng hindi na magtutuloy ng pag aaral dahil nahihirapan daw sya at nanghihiram lang ng cellphone para makapagsagot ng module. (At the start, she expressed her plan to stop studying because she was having a hard time doing school work and just borrowing a cellphone to answer modules.)

Ang bata ay hindi nakakakuha ng module at wala ding gadget para tingnan ang soft copy ng module na isinesend ng mga subject teachers sa bawat GC. (He was unable to get modules and did not have any gadgets to check the soft copies of modules sent by the subject teachers through GC.)

Modular distance learning challenges due to peer pressure

Five percent (5%) of the learners were facing modular distance learning challenges due to peer pressure. Their inability to comply with school works was due to influence of their friends. This is because little or no supervision was given at home. One of the factors influencing students' inability to comply with school requirements during modular distance learning was discovered to be peer pressure. Dizon-Luna (2013) and Salcedo-Relocio (2019) both reported similar findings in their studies. Peer pressure, according to Dizon-Luna, has a significant impact on the lives of students, aside from family. Furthermore, Salcedo-Relocio reported that one of the factors influencing students' study habits, which resulted in poor school performance, was peer pressure.

Barkada ang isa sa mga malaking impluwensya (His barkada (friends) had a big influence on him.)

Hindi rin nagagabayan ng magulang dahil sa kamag anak nakatira at nawiwili sa pakikipag barkada. (His parents were not able to give him supervision because he was living with his relatives and always with his barkada (friends).)

Modular distance learning challenges due to health issue

Another challenge being faced by learners in the modular distance learning was due to health concern. This is attributed to the three percent of the learners under study. The learner was not able to do the activities in the module because she was experiencing pain. Further investigation revealed that the participant's physical pains were manifestations of some degree of stress caused by the current situation, as validated by the study of Pineda & Bueno (2019), which discovered that the difficulties and challenges encountered during this stage of life can tip the scales one way or the other.

Hindi makapagsagot ng module dahil palagi daw may sumasakit, kaya 1st quarter pa lamang ay nagsabi na ang bata na di muna daw mag aaral at sa susunod na pasukan na lang daw mag aaral. (She couldn't answer modules because she was in pain. That is why, during the first quarter, she stated that she would leave school and return the following school year.)

Modular distance learning challenges due to legal issue

Aside from their work, another reported challenge that students encountered was a legal issue, which explains their inability to comply with school requirements. This finding was considered an isolated case but required special attention, which explained the scarcity of research done on this student's issue.

Nahihirapang magmodule dahil nagtatrabaho at ngayon sya ay may kasong hinaharap ... (He was having difficulties doing the modules because of work and was involved in a legal case…)

Based on the findings of this study, schools should consider addressing the associated challenges when implementing modular distance learning, whether for alternative delivery modes, alternative learning systems, or other purposes. To develop contingency plans, school policies must include an orientation program and an evaluation of learners' status prior to engaging in modular distance learning. School administrators should create a support system that can be used both at home and at school during the implementation period. Financial, personal, technological, peer pressure, health, and legal challenges should be addressed by home and school program support mechanisms. Furthermore, the school must intensify its drop-out reduction program, which includes projects, programs, and activities related to financial management, livelihood program, guidance and counseling, reproductive health, parenting health and wellness, and proper use of technology. Specifically, a STAR approach is recommended as a support mechanism for students at home and school. STAR stands for secure health and wellness, teach proper use of technology, address personal and parental concerns, and reinforce livelihood and financial literacy. Below is the action plan showing activities using STAR approach.

Table 1. Sample Home and School Support Action Plan

STAR Approach	Objectives	Date and Duration (Beginning and Ending Dates	Human Resources Needed	Financial Resources Needed	Material and Other Resources Needed	Indicators of Success
Secure health and wellness	Increase level of health and wellness practices through provision of training program.	November 2022 to October 2023	School head, Class advisers, Health Coordinator	Php 6,000.00	Checklist, Slides presentation, Monitoring and Evaluation Tool	90% increase on the level of health and wellness practices
Teach proper use of technology	Increase awareness on the proper and effective use of technology through a capacity building.	November 2022 to October 2023	School head, Class advisers, ICT Coordinator	Php 6,000.00	Checklist, Slides presentation, Monitoring and Evaluation Tool	90% increase on the effective and proper use of technology
Address personal and parental concerns	Provide guidance and counseling session to address personal and parental concerns through a support group system.	November 2022 to October 2023	School head, Class advisers, Guidance Coordinator	Php 6,000.00	Checklist, Monitoring and Evaluation Tool	Conducted at least five guidance and counseling and follow up sessions
Reinforce livelihood and	Conduct livelihood and	November 2022 to October	School head, Class advisers,	Php 6,000.00	Checklist, Slides presentation,	Conducted at least five livelihood

financial literacy	financial literacy training through the senior high school technical-vocational program.	2023	Senior High School Coordinator		Project Proposal, Monitoring and Evaluation Tool	and financial literacy training for parents and learners

3. Conclusions

The research findings revealed six major themes and two sub-themes regarding the common challenges encountered by learners, which explained learners' inability to comply with school requirements during modular distance learning. Learners' modular distance learning challenges were cited as a result of financial difficulties, personal concerns, technological concerns, peer pressures, health concerns, and legal issues. Furthermore, financial difficulties were either work-related or self-imposed. These problems had an impact on their academic performance during the pre-pandemic face-to-face instructions and persist even in trying times. Students experienced these things with much greater intensity under more difficult circumstances, particularly during modular distance learning. As a result, better and more effective school programs addressing these issues must be carefully planned in cases where learning delivery methods other than face-to-face are appropriate for students under difficult situations.

Acknowledgements

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