

Teachers' Challenges on Self-directed Modular Distance Learning (SML): Basis for Extension Program Development

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ABSTRACT

The covid-19 pandemic brought a remarkable impact on humanity. Like the economy, education suffers a tremendous trial in the system. The shift in the delivery of instruction to self-directed modular learning challenged both the students and teachers. Hence, the study aimed to determine the challenges that teachers and students faced in the self-directed modular learning modalities in secondary schools of the Municipality of Katipunan Zamboanga del Norte. The sequential explanatory mixed methods design and thematic analysis method were used in the investigation. The study revealed that teachers encountered challenges in dealing with the Self-directed Modular Learning Modality. However, the challenges met do not affect the student's academic performance. The study strongly recommends that the implementation of the Self-Modular Learning Modality will be reviewed carefully. Coping Strategies applied in overcoming the challenges will be examined thoroughly to devise constructive inputs to improve DepEd school's existing programs and guidelines. As a partner institution, JRMSU-Katipunan Campus, through the College of Education, with the collaboration of the Guidance office, will conduct intervention programs for students and teachers. Orientation for parents on home-based learning will be conducted. Budget allocation for internet connectivity, bending machines, and computer sets will be requested from the government through the barangay, and training programs in line with technological skills development for teachers will be implemented.

Keywords: *Self-directed Module, Challenges, Teaching-Learning, Paradigm Shift, Learning Modality*

1. Introduction

The transition of teaching and learning in schools to modular remote learning has made it more difficult for instructors and students to give primary quality education. Students would require greater motivation and self-control, more class time, and a lack of concrete

rewards from the school staff. In order to follow students, manage various modules, and carry out other school operations, teachers require additional administrative support. Accordingly, the main aim of this study is to determine the challenges teachers encountered in applying the self-directed modular learning modalities in the secondary schools of the Municipality of Katipunan Zamboanga del Norte. The result of this study may serve as a springboard for the future improvements of the DepEd's existing programs and guidelines on enacting modular distance learning. It will also help the teachers, parents, and students play significant roles in surviving the students learning despite the negative impacts of the covid-19 pandemic. Further, the result of this study will be the basis of Jose Rizal Memorial State University-Katipunan Campus to conduct extension programs, training, and orientation to assist the DepEd teachers and students in overcoming the challenges encountered in the new normal.

This study attempts to answer these specific objectives.

1. Determine the possible coping strategies applied by the teachers in dealing with the self-directed modular learning modality.
2. Determine the significant relationship between distance learning challenges and students' academic performance in the new normal teaching modality.

The covid-19 pandemic has dramatically affected education, with schools closing and quarantine procedures being ordered to deal with the situation. The government limits and prohibits face-to-face classes, ban large meetings, and restricts convergence to stop the spread of the virus. The global scale and speed of the current educational disruption are unparalleled and, if prolonged, could threaten the right to education (Vlachopoulos, D., (2020).

Castroverde (2021) said because of the emergence of COVID-19 in the Philippines, many changes have happened in the educational landscape; one of these is the mode of instruction that the Department of Education implements. Even in this situation, DepEd is optimistic that distance learning will work in the Philippines (Uy, 2020). Therefore, the Department of Education created distance learning, a mode of teaching that involves learning between the teacher and students who are physically separated during instruction, to maintain the continuity of the educational activity. Under their Learning Continuity Plan, distance learning will be considered the learning modality to ensure the continued delivery of education (Malipot, 2020). Due to the said situation, in basic education, the Department of Education (DepEd), a governing body that is assigned to supervise basic elementary and secondary education in the Philippines, suggested distance learning through different Learning Delivery Modalities to continue education amidst the health crisis. These Learning Delivery Modalities are (a) Modular Distance Learning, with two options, Printed Modular and Digital Modular, (b) Online Distance Learning with Synchronous and Asynchronous types of online classes, (c) Radio and TV-based Instruction, and (d) Blended learning which has the combination of two or more types of distance learning (Gatus et al., 2022).

According to Gatus et al. (2022), Modular Learning is the most popular type of Distance Learning among the different modalities. Modular learning is in two forms, Printed Modules and Digital Modules. The self-learning modules are already considered learning packages containing pre-test, discussions, and a series of evaluations/assessments. They are distributed to all learners with the modular learning class schedule Castroverde et al. (2021).

Teachers' roles have shifted from the old to a flexible way, for it is no longer suitable in the new normal. Instead of tracking students' progress in the classroom, it will never be the same. It will be through email and other online channels. Likewise, learners may also contact teachers via email, phone, text message, or instant messaging, among other methods, because classes are no longer held face-to-face. Castroverde et al. (2021) further said that the shift in delivery of school teaching-learning to modular distant learning made delivering fundamental quality education more difficult for school workers. That is why DepEd leaders are constantly finding avenues to solve the problems and capacitating their teachers and school heads to become more effective in modular distance learning (Bagoood, 2020).

Based on the study conducted by Ambayon (2020), modular instruction is more operative in the teaching-learning method as equated to usual teaching approaches because, in this modular approach, the students learn in their stride. It is unrestricted self-learning panache in which instantaneous reinforcement, a comment, is provided to practice exercise, stimulating the students and building curiosity (Castroverde et al. (2021). They further conceded that modular learning modality increases the student-centered approach to learning. On the one hand, parents as home facilitators play a crucial role. In modular learning, their primary function is to link with the child and direct them (FlipScience, 2020). Parents are responsible for collecting and sending printed Self-Learning Modules (SLMs) from and to schools or barangay halls at the start and end of each week, as decided by the parents and the school (Dangle et al., 2020). They also said that parents must review their child's schedule or workweek plan, and because of the vast number of subjects or tasks to be performed, they must ensure that all protocols are followed to prevent cramming or delays in the application could adversely impact the child's results. Other advantages of modular instruction include more choice and self-pacing for students; more variety and flexibility for teachers and staff; and increased adaptability of instructional materials (Dangle et al., 2020).

However, Malipot (2020) stressed that teachers also air their problems with modular distance learning. Bagoood (2020) highlighted that as front liners in the educational system, they had undergone various training and seminars to be more equipped to deliver better education amid the COVID-19 pandemic, as it is a norm of the department to train teachers not just for professional growth but to become ready for unexpected circumstances.

Thus, this study needs to be conducted to determine the challenges teachers met in the operation of the self-directed modular learning in basic education of Katipunan, Zamboanga del Norte, and to help them overcome those challenges. Yet, many studies mentioned the challenges that impacted educational operations.

2. Methodology

The sequential explanatory mixed methods design and theme analysis method was used in the investigation. The sequential explanatory design is a two-phase design where the quantitative data were collected first, followed by the qualitative data collection (Creswell, 2003). The questions that produced alarming percentages answers will be the focus of a qualitative interview after the quantitative data were collected using a descriptive survey research technique. This will be done to give more authenticity to the data that will be collected.

This study utilized the adopted instrument from School Education Gateway 2016. The respondents will rate all the questions accordingly using a scale of 1 to 4. Four to a very large

extent and 1 to a very small extent that the respondents encountered challenges in the modular learning modality. Below are the scaling, parameter, verbal interpretation, and qualitative description used in the quantitative data analysis.

Scale	Parameter	Verbal Interpretation (VI)	Qualitative Description (QD)
4	3.25 – 4.00	To a very large extent	Highly Challenged (HC)
3	2.50 – 3.24	To a large extent	Moderately Challenged (MC)
2	1.75 – 2.49	To a small extent	Less Challenged (LC)
1	1.00 – 1.74	To a very small extent	Not Challenged (NC)

The second part of the instrument is a structured written interview made by the researcher based on the alarming answers of the respondents in the questionnaire. The researcher has to tally the responses from the surveys floated. The items that had more answers are assessed further in-depth to understand the nature and root causes of the challenges met by the participants in dealing with the modular delivery learning modality and to solicit the possible interventions made by the respondents in overcoming it. Another thing, the general weighted average of the students in one quarter, specifically; the second quarter of the SY 2021-2022, was collected from their respective advisers to determine the significant relationship between the challenges of distance learning and the student's performance in the new normal teaching modality. Hence, statistical tools such as frequency count, percent, and Spearman's rank Correlation coefficient test were used in the analysis. The transcription was performed based on the qualitative data generated and recorded through the interview.

Selected teachers in each secondary school under the Municipality of Katipunan Zamboanga del Norte were the respondents to this undertaking. Stratified sampling was used in selecting the sample size of the respondents. Qualitative data were gathered through written interviews using convenient sampling. Online platforms, such as emails, google forms, and social media, were the channels for distributing questionnaires and retrieving data. Face-to-face distribution of questionnaires was also applied following the proper IATF protocol. Before the conduct of the study, the researcher sought permission from the Research Ethics Committee of JRMSU to conduct the study. After permission from the JRMSU REC was sought, the researcher sought permission from the authorities and the people concerned. Letters were sent to all authorities involved in this study, such as; DepEd Administrators, Municipal officials, and other involved persons.

Moreover, the letter was sent to the teacher-respondents to ensure that there would be a mutual agreement before the study commences. The researcher upheld the rights and confidentiality of the respondents' data through Republic Act No. 10173, the Data Privacy Act. The researcher ensured the subjects that the data gathered in the research be kept confidential and be used for analysis only. Further, the data were stored in the researcher's google drive account and were stored and eliminated six (6) months after the study's publication or first paper presentation.

3. Result and Discussion

Table 1

Teachers' Challenges on Self-directed Modular Learning Modality in the New Normal

Items	Mean	SD	Description	Interpretation
1. Teachers' access to technology (computers, printers, software, stable internet connection, etc.)	3.32	.81	To a very large extent	Highly Challenged
2. Collecting and checking students' output	3.35	.73	To a very large extent	Highly Challenged
3. Communicating with students	3.12	.72	To a large extent	Moderately Challenged
4. Communicating with parents/guardians	3.17	.74	To a large extent	Moderately Challenged
5. Teachers' modular instruction competence	3.02	.95	To a large extent	Moderately Challenged
6. Distribution and delivery of modules	3.05	1.02	To a large extent	Moderately Challenged
7. Students' assessment feedback	2.85	.94	To a large extent	Highly Challenged
8. Students' accessibility to modules	2.80	1.10	To a large extent	Highly Challenged
9. Involving disaffected students	2.87	.98	To a large extent	Highly Challenged
10. Involving students from socially disadvantaged homes	2.85	.97	To a large extent	Highly Challenged
11. Keeping all students motivated and engaged	3.22	.87	To a large extent	Moderately Challenged
12. Supporting students with special needs or disability	3.18	.77	To a large extent	Moderately Challenged
13. Converting activities and content into the distance learning	3.03	.90	To a large extent	Moderately Challenged
14. Assessing students' progress	3.18	.98	To a large extent	Moderately Challenged
15. Preparing content/module for distance learning	3.12	.98	To a large extent	Moderately Challenged
16. Direction/support given by the school	3.15	.90	To a large extent	Moderately Challenged
17. Workload and stress working from home and school	3.17	.96	To a large extent	Moderately Challenged
18. Time management and organization	3.20	.90	To a large extent	Moderately Challenged
19. The school has switched to all learning modalities designed by DepEd	3.17	.78	To a large extent	Moderately Challenged
20. Support extended by the external stakeholders	3.02	.83	To a large extent	Moderately Challenged
Grand Mean	3.09	.50	To a large extent	Moderately Challenged

The table reveals that statement 2 states that "Collecting and checking students' output" has the highest mean of 3.35 with a description of "To a very large extent." On the other hand, statement 9 states that "Students' accessibility to modules" has the lowest mean of 2.80 with a verbal description of "To a large extent". It can be glimpsed in the table that the grand mean is 3.09, with a verbal description of "To a large extent". Looking forward, "teacher's access to technology", has obtained a verbal description of "To a very large extent" with a mean of 3.32. The remaining items, such as numbers 3,4,5,6,7,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19, and 20, got a verbal description of "To a large extent". This implies that the self-directed modular learning modality moderately challenged the DepEd teachers.

The result is supported by the study of Dangle et al. (2020), which revealed that the main challenges that emerged were a lack of school funding in the production and delivery of modules, student's struggle with self-studying, and parents' lack of knowledge to academically guide their child/children. The distance learning modality is designed to ensure the safety of both the students and the teachers. However, with the rushed adaptation and/or development of curricula and materials for this modality, gaps and even risks (especially for the physical materials to be passed on) are unavoidable.

The teacher-respondents were interviewed on how they overcame the challenges encountered in dealing with the Self-directed Modular Learning Modality, and the consolidated answers are presented as follows:

Teachers have already received resources and support from the Department of Education, such as sim cards, laptops, and loads. However, most of them said the provisions were insufficient. They bought their gadgets and sought substitute materials to still facilitate the continuation of school operations despite the pandemic. In addition, the teachers conceded that the distribution, collection, checking of students' outputs/modules, communication with parents/guardians and students, the assessment, monitoring, and feedback were very challenging. Some students need special treatment, especially students with a disability which adds to their burdens. Teachers also commented that parts of the modules needed to be changed to fit into the new learning modality. The preparation, collection, and distribution of the module workloads were too much for them to handle. The support given by the school and external stakeholders was insufficient to help them run the school operations and caused them to suffer too much stress in the working station. Most of the teachers commented that the activities in the modules were created as to the needs of this time of the pandemic; everything will be performed and recorded as audio or videos by the use of the technology. However, parts of the module needed to be reviewed for clarification since activities were irrelevant.

On the other hand, the assessment made by most of the teachers was a paper and pencil test online, they let the students take the exam virtually, but they used pen and paper, then took a picture of it and submitted the work online. Sometimes, through print cards, group chats, personal and/or individual exams. Formative and summative exams were still applicable during this pandemic. Giving grades was still based on the DepEd grading system.

To address the challenges faced, most of the teachers said they regularly examine, monitor, provide feedback, and get connected with the students now and then. They made a tracking list of every students outputs to avoid work delays. They frequently convened meetings with colleagues to devise solutions for collecting and verifying outputs. They

established a timeline to ensure that the output would be checked and will be collected. Other teachers said they communicated with their pupils and parents daily via social media platforms like Facebook, Google+, and others. Group Chat was created to regularly monitor students and send letters to parents and students who could not access school personally. These things ensured a strong connection with the students, parents, and stakeholders. Feedback was crucial; virtual monitoring, actual house visitations, and adjustment in the communication were applied to check students' progress to guarantee effective and productive bonds with clientele. Proper dissemination was important; most teachers said they let the parents collect and submit the modules in school. The teachers scheduled the retrieval and distribution ahead of time to avoid cramming. Modules were printed in advance and have it prepared a week before the retrieval and distribution. Teachers' comments and assessments of the student's work have significantly impacted students' learning. Thus, teachers said they gave positive, true, and no bias comments. They further stated that they set and submitted reports to the heads and the principal for proper resolution and action. They conducted a parent-teacher meeting to discuss matters that would benefit the students.

Besides, teachers attested that they attended several training, workshops, seminars, and webinars to ensure they could deal with the modular modality. The teachers applied the self-study to warrant that their skills were suitable for the modular modality. To avoid misleading the modular modality, most teachers were simply following the learning competency of the curriculum provided by the DepEd. Teachers said advanced study, research, and downloaded modules from the DepEd site were essential.

Another problem met by the teacher was the students from low-income families. Teachers said they included them in the adopt a child program of the school, sometimes provided them with the learning materials and activities that were not costly, helped them apply to any government programs such as the 4Ps, and sometimes shared with them their basic needs such as food, snacks, clothes, school supplies, and many others to ensure that no students will be left behind. Creating a learning environment conducive to learning was indispensable for the learners, so teachers in the new normal scheme allowed students to be involved in all school activities. Teachers mentioned that they initiated students' positive thoughts toward life. Provided them with positive comments and appreciation and encouraged them for future careers and success. Teachers specified that by extending patience to students with special needs and maintaining an intimate relationship with these students, they gave them positive feedback, spiritual guidance, and support. Sometimes included them in counseling and put them in a very student-friendly environment. To maintain student support, teachers solicited provisions from the government, stakeholders, and even the school. They strengthened the school-community linkages and organized a Parent-Teacher Association.

The teachers managed their time properly to manage many workloads and stress working at home and school. They claimed that they print, check and segregate modules ahead of time. Schedules and itineraries were necessary to prioritize urgent concerns and triage to achieve the tasks and goals to avoid stresses and delays of work to ensure they can rest adequately. The teacher is responsible for monitoring the learners' progress, and the learners may ask for assistance from the teacher via email, telephone, or text message/instant messaging, among others (Gatus et al., 2022). This becomes a challenge for parents, teachers, students, and even local government officials because everybody should work hand in hand for the success of this new learning modality.

Table 2

The significant relationship between students' Challenges on Self-directed Modular Learning Modality in the New Normal and the Academic Performance

Variables	Spearman's rho	p-value	Interpretation
Student's Grade * Student's Skills	-0.108	0.127	Not Significant

The association between the student's grades and students' skills is negatively very weak, with a value of -0.108. The p-value is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, which means failure in the rejection of the null hypothesis. Thus, there is no significant relationship between the student's grade and skills. This indicates that the students' academic performance shows learning consistency despite the challenges faced in the new learning modality. This is supported by the claim of Guskey (2022), who said that in schools required to give grades for the current term, even when not all students have adequate access, grades are typically based on evidence of student learning gathered up to the time of school closure.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concluded that teachers and students encountered challenges in dealing with the Self-directed modular learning modality. However, the challenges the teachers meet do not affect the student's academic performance.

The study strongly recommends that the implementation of the Self-Modular Learning Modality will be reviewed carefully. Strategies to overcome the challenges will be examined thoroughly to devise constructive inputs to improve DepEd school's existing programs and guidelines. As a partner institution, JRMSU-Katipunan Campus, through the College of Education, with the collaboration of the Guidance office, will conduct intervention programs for teachers. Orientation for parents on home-based learning will be conducted. Budget allocation for internet connectivity, bending machines, and computer sets will be requested from the government through the barangay. Training programs in line with the technological skills development of teachers and students will be implemented.

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