# Student's Challenges and Coping Strategies on Self-directed Modular Distance Learning: Input for Implementation Review

## Abraham B. Bayron Jr., EdD

Assistant Professor III, College of Education, Jose Rizal Memorial State University Katipunan Campus, Katipunan, Zamboanga del Norte, Philippines

## ABSTRACT

The sudden transformation of learning modality had a remarkable impact on education. Teachers and students have been facing challenges in adopting the changes in the system. Thus, the study aimed to explore students' challenges in implementing the self-directed modular learning modality. The study employed the quantitative and qualitative mixed method of research and thematic analysis technique. The study found that secondary students encountered challenges in implementing the modular modality, such as lack of access to modern technology, module content issues, family and financial matters, time management, communication with the teacher, and the teachers' unclear instruction. Thus, financial support (e.g., food, school supplies, and monetary assistance) will be extended to students to lessen stress, anxiety, and depression. The government will allocate a sufficient budget for internet connection, bending machines, and computer sets. Training and programs in line with the technical skills enhancement of the students and parents will be taken into consideration, and the JRMSU College of Education must facilitate this as an extension program.

**Keywords:** *Distance Learning, Self-directed Modular Modality, Challenges and Coping Strategy, Home-based learning*

## 1. Introduction

The Philippine education system is adapting the new learning modality to resume classes nationwide despite covid-19 crisis. However, students suffered a sudden change in the educational modality. According to Abuhammad (2020), there are technological barriers to distance learning, including insufficient investment and maintenance, poor connectivity, and a

lack of gadgets. Students have been affected psychologically by school closures, lack of equipment to participate in courses, inability to access online materials from home, and inability to leave home for a long time (Apriyanti, 2020). These are the reasons why the students experienced stress and depression and were even discouraged, which hampered them from continuing to work on their assignments, classes, or exams. Thus, this study aims to determine the challenges encountered and the coping strategies applied by the selected secondary students of the Municipality of Katipunan, Zamboanga del Norte, in implementing the new mode of learning, the modular modality. The findings of the study will be a basis for giving doable recommendations to the Department of Education and the Philippine government to help students survive the challenges in the new mode of learning. This will also be the springboard for the College of Education to give extension services to DepEd to help them cater to the need of the students in the new normal.

This study seeks to answer this specific objective which is identifying the coping strategies of secondary students in the implementation of the new learning modality.

The crisis brought on by the corona virus, schools underwent a sudden transformation in the educational system. This brought a huge change and transformation in all aspects of humanity. The government restricts convergence, bans large meetings, and limits face-to-face instruction. The current disruption in education is unprecedented in its global scope and pace, and if it continues, it could put the right to education in danger (Vlachopoulos, 2020, cited by Bayron, 2023). During the Covid-19 pandemic, institutions, administrators, educators, students, and even parents have unpreparedly found themselves in the distance education process. The transition from face-to-face teaching to more indirect methods has forced schools into a flow of learning full of complexities and limitations (Rasmitadila, 2020). As the coronavirus pandemic stops face-to-face learning, parents find themselves at the frontlines of education once more. Teachers and parents now have the important task of ensuring the quality of education without compromising the child's safety (Gueta et al., 2021).

Boutsika et al. (2019) noted that distance learning modality increasingly plays a critical role in education in developed and developing countries and, consequently, a significant role in social development and economic growth. The positive attributes of this mode are very evident. Keles et al. (2016) pointed out several advantages of distance learning, such as flexibility in learning, students may gain useful, transferable skills, such as planning and research, there is no waste of time in transport, learning is more associated with technology than face-to-face, it can reach a wider audience and can equalize access to education, making information notes open to everyone yet minimizes the costs of stationery. Bayron (2023) noted that 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 (2021), cited by Bayron (2023), said that because of the crisis, the Philippines faced many changes in the educational landscape; one of these is the mode of instruction that the Department of Education implements. Baticulon et al. (2021) said that 32% and 22% of 3670 Filipino students surveyed need help adjusting to new learning styles and reliable internet access, respectively. Other studies have also revealed that students are confronted with difficulties in online learning due to inadequate learning resources, electric

power interruptions, vague learning contents, overloaded lesson activities, limited teacher scaffolds, poor peer communication, conflict with home responsibilities, poor learning environment, related financial problems, physical health compromises, and mental health struggles (Rotas et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the Department of Education has implemented distance learning, a delivery modality where learning occurs between the teacher and geographically remote learners during instruction. The Department of Education has been firm on its stand that "learning must continue" Different modalities have been considered and explored, making sure each will be best fit for student's needs and interests in continuous learning it is an unprecedented event, and no one was prepared. It is a time when most educators would define it as going to battle unarmed and ready to lose (Gueta et al., 2021). This pushed DepEd to implement the modular distance learning mode. However, this modality has challenged students since they are far away from the classroom and teachers. The new teaching structure is very hard to apply, but it turned out to be the most applicable in the new normal.

The use of modules facilitates self-directed learning. One of the advantages of using modules for instruction is that students acquire stronger self-study or learning skills. Students actively participate in interpreting the concepts discussed in the module. When they finish the tasks in the module, they develop responsibility. With little to no assistance from others, the students advance independently. However, it has challenges that impede the learning of the students. Some empirical studies have revealed that students suffer from stress and anxiety while working on their school-related jobs during this pandemic (Islam et al., 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to undertake this study to identify the challenges students encountered when self-directed modular learning was implemented in secondary schools in Katipunan, Zamboanga del Norte, and to assist them in overcoming such difficulties. However, many studies touched on the difficulties that affected educational operations.

## 2. Methodology

The study employed the sequential explanatory mixed methods design and thematic analysis technique. The sequential explanatory design is a two-phase design where the quantitative data were collected first, followed by the qualitative data collection (Creswell, 2003, cited by Bayron 2023). 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 provide the data that will be gathered additional legitimacy.

This study utilized a modified questionnaire checklist from Cadeliña et al. (2021). The instrument has two parts. The respondents will rate all the questions accordingly using a scale of 1 to 4 with a parameter range from 1.0-1.74, defined as not challenged, and 3.25-4.0, described as highly challenged. This is to determine the respondents' challenges in the implementation of modular learning modality. Below are the scaling, parameter, and verbal description used in the quantitative data analysis.

| Scale | Parameter | Verbal Description |
|---|---|---|
| 4 | 3.25 – 4.00 | Highly Challenged |
| 3 | 2.50 – 3.24 | Moderately Challenged |
| 2 | 1.75 – 2.49 | Less Challenged |
| 1 | 1.00 – 1.74 | Not Challenged |

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 coping strategies applied by the respondents in overcoming it. Hence, statistical tools such as frequency count and percent were used in the analysis. The transcription was performed based on the qualitative data generated and recorded through the interview.

The respondents of this study were the selected students from the secondary school in the Municipality of Katipunan Zamboanga del Norte. The number of respondents for the sample size was chosen using stratified sampling. Written interviews were used to collect qualitative data while employing convenient sampling. The avenues for distributing questionnaires and collecting data online included emails, Google Forms, and social media. Following the correct IATF process, questionnaires were also distributed face-to-face. Prior to starting the study, the researcher sought approval from the JRMSU Research Ethics Committee. After the request was approved, the researcher sent letters to all involved personnel in the study.

Furthermore, consent from parents was obtained because this survey included high school students as respondents. Both the parents and the student responders received a letter of consent to ensure that there will be mutual consent before the study begins; a separate letter was also issued to the teachers of the respondents to ensure that they are also informed about the study. Through Republic Act No. 10173, also known as the Data Privacy Act, the researcher protected the privacy rights and confidentiality of the respondents' data. The researcher assured the participants that the information acquired would be kept private and would only be utilized for analysis. Additionally, the data were kept in the researcher's personal Google Drive account for six (6) months following the study's initial paper presentation or publication.

## 3. Result and Discussion

**Table 1**

*Students' Challenges on Modular Learning Modality in the New Normal*

| Items | Mean | Description |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Students' access to technology (computers, printers, software, stable internet connection, etc.) | 2.87 | Moderately Challenged |
| 2. Modules Contents are clear and well organized | 2.98 | Moderately Challenged |
| 3. Modules provide a clear understanding of the topic | 2.99 | Moderately Challenged |
| 4. Modules allow answering own pace | 2.99 | Moderately Challenged |
| 5. Time management and organization | 2.93 | Moderately Challenged |
| 6. The assessment and activities in the module are highly related to its content | 2.97 | Moderately Challenged |
| 7. The examples are understandable enough to relate to the discussions on the topic | 2.91 | Moderately Challenged |
| 8. Receives full financial support from the family | 2.98 | Moderately Challenged |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 9. Family did not offer help whenever encountered difficulties in dealing with the module | 2.83 | Moderately Challenged |
| 10. Family gives space and does not interfere during learning time. | 2.86 | Moderately Challenged |
| 11. Follow up with family about the possible needs, such as projects and activities related to learning | 3.11 | Moderately Challenged |
| 12. Teacher gives clear instructions and entertained queries relating to the subject | 3.12 | Moderately Challenged |
| 13. Teachers are considerate in times of difficulties related to modules. | 3.18 | Moderately Challenged |
| 14. Teachers monitor student's progress and updates | 3.14 | Moderately Challenged |
| 15. Communicating with teachers | 3.09 | Moderately Challenged |
| 16. Keeping all students motivated and engaged | 3.09 | Moderately Challenged |
| **Average Weighted Value** | 3.00 | Moderately Challenged |

*Adapted from Cadeliña et al. 2021*

The table shows that item 13, which states that "Teachers are considerate in times of difficulties related to modules," obtained the highest mean of 3.18 with a verbal description of moderately challenged. On the other hand, item 9, which states that "Family offers help whenever encountered difficulties in dealing with the module," got the lowest mean of 2.83 with a verbal description of moderately challenged. "It can also be glimpsed in the table that the average weighted value is 3.00, with a verbal description of moderately challenged. Moreover, other items such as 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10,11,12,14,15, and 16 are still described as moderately challenged. This indicates that the students are moderately challenged in dealing with the Distance Learning Modality, specifically, Self-directed Modular Learning.

The result is supported by the study of Abuhammad (2020) cited by Bayron (2023) when he found out that there are technological barriers to distance learning, including insufficient investment and maintenance, poor connectivity, and lack of gadgets. Thus, the students experienced stress and depression and were even discouraged, which hampered them from continuing to work on their assignments, classes, or exams. Some empirical studies have revealed that students are suffering from stress and anxiety while working on their school-related jobs during this pandemic (Islam et al., 2020). In a recent study, at the height of the pandemic, Kapasia et al. (2020), as cited by Bayron (2023), investigated how lockdown impacts students' learning performance. Their findings revealed that the lockdown made significant disruptions to students' learning experience. The students also reported some challenges that they faced in distance learning. These include anxiety, depression, poor Internet service, and an unfavorable home learning environment, which are aggravated when students are marginalized and from remote areas.

**The participants were interviewed, and the consolidated answers are presented as follows:**
**Challenges and Coping Strategies of Students on Lack of Access to Modern Technology**

The problems related to lack of access to modern technologies (e.g., computers, printers, software, stable internet connection, etc.), student-respondents conceded that they seek assistance from friends, family, and even teachers, as well as from reading informative books or using printed materials, searching for dictionaries and going to libraries or otherwise by requesting more from the top management and notifying the school principal about this matter. Abdul Rahman et al. (2021) revealed that learners from rural areas needed help joining their online classes and sometimes could not join due to a lack of access to the internet. Sahu (2020) supported that learners who do not have access to the Internet may have difficulties with tests and evaluations.

**Challenges and Coping Strategies of Students on Module**

Many students had commented that there were problems concerning the module, such as its unclear and disorganized content, the module's evaluation and activities were not related to the content, and would not let them answer at their own pace; Students stated that they asked for help from the teacher for further clarifications, sometimes they surfed/browsed to the internet or searched information from books and other resources to understand the topics better. There were times that they took actions such as searching the irrelevant activities online to acquire correct answers, evaluating the irrelevant activities in the modules, asking for help from an elderly family member or friends, and, if possible, asking for help from their teachers. Students noted further that they never learned from the module, causing them to leave the activities blank. Dargo & Dimas (2021) concluded that learners' academic performance after the implementation of Modular Distance Learning (MDL) decreases.

**Challenges and Coping Strategies of Students on Financial and Family Issues**

Most students were from far-flung areas and belonged to a financially challenged family. Thus, some noted that they prefer to find an excellent job to satisfy their financial needs. Some of them were self-financing. Their families refused to aid their studies, yet students pursued them aggressively. Some families hesitated to help answer the module; the student said their parents did not know about it, making them unwilling and timid to help. Considering also their education, the student noted that their parents were uneducated. Patience was to be considered in this situation; instead of arguing with them, focusing on solving module-related problems is better. Initiatives, intensive searching, and reading were essential to continue answering the activities and exams in the module, and could submit them on the given deadlines. Though there were times when it was very hard for them to manage new learning modalities still, they did not stop studying, as claimed by the students. Barrot (2021) noted that many students are at home in unstable environments, are struggling with financial hardships, and are struggling with a regular routine.

**Challenges and Coping Strategies of Students on Time Management and Teacher's Unclear Instruction**

On the one hand, the student said that they managed and organized their time by setting their goals correctly, prioritizing things wisely and setting a time limit to complete a task, spending their free time or non-working hours answering modules or related tasks, putting their

vacant time to the essential matters and setting more time on the schedules for works and studies. However, there were circumstances wherein the teachers' instructions were unclear, and sometimes they refused to answer students' queries related to the course. Students conceded that they took different actions, such as taking the initiative to understand better and solve the problems, giving updates to the teachers and requesting them to help privately through messenger and other channels, or asking for help from their classmates or friends. Moreover, students stated that they just tried to study solely, talked to their teachers, and asked for a chance to retake the challenging activities/exams in the module. Otherwise, leaving the exams and activities unanswered. Some empirical studies have revealed that students suffer from stress and anxiety while working on their school-related jobs during this pandemic (Islam et al., 2020). This is supported by Abuhammad (2020), who said that students experienced stress and depression and were even discouraged, which hampered them to continue working on their assignments, classes, or exams.

**Challenges and Coping Strategies of Students on Communication with Teacher**

Talking about their progress and updates, students responded that if the teachers have not kept tracking their progress and never make updates, they immediately took actions such as updating their teachers through social media like FB in GC, asking for their records, or submitting their completed activities. The student answered that they took the initiative to solve certain problems. They communicated with the teachers during the retrieval and distribution of LAS or Learning Activity Sheets or through online platforms. If there is no internet connection, students said they met their teachers in school and visited them during their vacant times to establish harmonious relationships and acquaintances better. Osman (2020) conceded that assessing and evaluating learners' performance in online learning is challenging for educators and learners, mainly when teaching practicum and technical competence and assessing practical skills is challenging. Learners' assessments are conducted online, with educators, learners, and parents experiencing trial and error, ambiguity, and misunderstanding.

**4. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The study concluded that there were challenges encountered by the secondary students in the implementation of the modular modality, such as lack of access to modern technology, issues in the content of the module, financial and family issues, time management, communication with teachers, and the teachers' unclear instruction.

Thus, financial support (e.g., food, school supplies, and monetary assistance) will be extended to students to lessen stress, anxiety, and depression. The government will allocate a sufficient budget for internet connection, bending machines, and computer sets. Training and programs in line with the technical skills enhancement of the students and parents will be taken into consideration and the JRMSU college of education must facilitate this as an extension program.

Moreover, future research would have to examine the significant differences among the challenges faced by students, parents, and teachers since it is not included in the study. This will contribute to a profound understanding of the different challenges encountered in the implementation of the Self-directed Modular Learning modality.

## References

Abdul Rahman, N., Ahmad Zukarain, Z., Mohd Zain, N. A., & Yusof, R. (2021). An Exploratory Sequential Sentiment Analysis of Online Learning during the Movement Control Order in Malaysia. Malaysia Journal of Learning and Instruction, 18, 235-261.https://doi.org/10.32890/mjli2021.18.2.9

Abuhammad, S. (2020). Barriers to distance learning during the COVID-19 outbreak: A qualitative review from parents' perspective. *Heliyon*, *6*(11), e05482. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e05482

Apriyanti, C. (2020). Distance learning and obstacles during COVID-19 outbreak. *Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar*, *7*(2), 68. https://doi.org/10.30659/pendas.7.2.68-83

Barrot, J. S. (2021). Social media as a language learning environment: A systematic review of the literature (2008-2019). *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *35*(9), 2534-2562. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2021.1883673

Baticulon, R. E., Sy, J. J., Alberto, N. R., Baron, M. B., Mabulay, R. E., Rizada, L. G., Tiu, C. J., Clarion, C. A., & Reyes, J. C. (2021). Barriers to online learning in the time of COVID-19: A national survey of medical students in the Philippines. *Medical Science Educator*, *31*(2), 615-626. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40670-021-01231-z

Bayron, A. (2023). Teachers' challenges on self-directed modular distance learning (SML): Basis for extension program development. *Sprin Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, *2*(05), 12-20. https://doi.org/10.55559/sjahss.v2i05.101

Boutsika, M., & Kadianaki, A. (2019). Drivers and Barriers to Distance Learning implementation – A Case Study at TEI of Athens. https://www.diva portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1385867/FULLTEXT01.pdf

Candeliña, A., Bayron, A., Castillon, D., Gonzales J.,(2020), Challenges of Modular Distance Learning amid Covid-19.

Castroverde, F., & Acala, M. (2021). Modular distance learning modality: Challenges of teachers in teaching amid the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Research Studies in Education*, *10*(8). https://doi.org/10.5861/ijrse.2021.60

Creswell, J. W. (2003). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. London: Sage Publications

Dargo, J. M., & Dimas, M. (2021). Modular distance learning: Its effect in the academic performance of learners in the new normal. *JETL (Journal of Education, Teaching and Learning)*, *6*(2), 204. https://doi.org/10.26737/jetl.v6i2.2672

Gueta, M. F. & Janer, S. S. (2021). Distance Learning Challenges on the Use of Self-Learning Module. United International Journal for Research and Technology. Vol 02/ISSN:2582-6832

Islam, M. A., Barna, S. D., Raihan, H., Khan, M. N., & Hossain, M. T. (2020). Depression and anxiety among university students during the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh: A web-based cross-sectional survey. *PLOS ONE*, *15*(8), e0238162. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0238162

Kapasia, N., Paul, P., Roy, A., Saha, J., Zaveri, A., Mallick, R., Barman, B., Das, P., & Chouhan, P. (2020). Impact of lockdown on learning status of undergraduate and postgraduate students during COVID-19 pandemic in West Bengal, India. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *116*, 105194. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105194

Keles, M. K., & Özel, S. A. (2016). A review of distance learning and learning management systems. *Virtual Learning*. https://doi.org/10.5772/65222

Osman, M. E. (2020). Global Impact of Covid-19 on Education Systems: The Emergency Remote Teaching at Sultan Qaboos University. Journal of Education for Teaching, 46, 463-471. https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2020.1802583

Rasmitadila, Aliyyah, R. R., Rachmadtullah, R., Samsudin, A., Syaodih, E., Nurtanto, M., & Tambunan, A. R. S. (2020). The Perceptions of primary school teachers of online learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic period: A case study in Indonesia. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies, 7*(2), 90-109. https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/388

Rotas, E.E.; Cahapay, M.B. Difficulties in Remote Learning: Voices of Philippine University Students in the Wake of COVID-19

Crisis. *Asian J. Distance Educ.* **2020**, *15*, 147–158

Sahu, P. (2020). Closure of Universities Due to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19): Impact on Education and Mental Health of Students and Academic Staff. Cureus, 12, e7541. https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.7541

Vlachopoulos, D. (2020). COVID-19: Threat or opportunity for online education? DOI: 10.18870/hlrc.v10i1.1179

National Privacy Commission. (2023, June 15). *Implementing Rules and Regulations of the Data Privacy Act of 2012 - National Privacy Commission*.
https://privacy.gov.ph/implementing-rules-regulations-data-privacy-act-2012/