Education

Challenges Encountered and Technical Assistance Needed by Parents and Learners Utilizing Modular Distance Learning: Basis for a Proposed Support Program

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Abstract: The shift from face-to face to distance learning brought about by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic is a major adjustment to all school administrators, teachers, students and parents. The study aimed to determine the challenges encountered and needed support of parents and learners in an elementary school of the Schools Division of Meycauayan City as basis for crafting a contextualized support program. It employed a mixed method design using survey-questionnaire and interview guide as data gathering tools to 123 parents and 10 learners respectively. Frequency and percentage were used to describe the demographic profile, frequency counts and ranking were used on the challenges encountered and support/technical assistance needed by parents while thematic analysis was used to describe the experiences of the learners. The study found out that difficulty in independent learning, difficulty in concentrating on studies and parent's limited knowledge on the content of child's lessons are the top struggles of parents in the modular distance learning while almost all learner-respondents describe their experiences of distance learning as difficult because of difficulty in learning by themselves, lack of reference materials for more examples, limited guidance from parents and teachers, challenges in load to research and difficulty in understanding English. Moreover, both respondents are unanimous in declaring that provision of additional reference materials will greatly help lessen the struggles they encountered. Therefore, it is recommended that the support program crafted should be implemented and monitored to fully reinforce the continuity of learning amidst the challenges encountered in the first quarter.

Keywords: Encountered Challenges, Distance Learning, Modular Learning, Support Program, Technical Assistance.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has sparked fears of an educational crisis globally as the education system was shaken from all levels – pre-school to tertiary level [1]. Countries around the world have temporarily closed educational institutions to contain the spread of the virus and reduce infections [2] [3] [4]. Likewise, various health protocols including social distancing measures that most of the countries implemented has affected millions of people as it made their life motionless [5]. It has also influenced the ways and means of learning [6]. The announcement of lockdown from various countries left the education sector no choice but to resort to distance learning [7]. With these kinds of exhibit, the COVID-19 pandemic is considered to be disaster that entails proper management [8], compliance [9], impact [10], knowledge [11] and preparation [12] among the community, the people, and the government.

Philippines is no different from other countries when President Rodrigo Duterte declared the suspension of classes as early as March 14, 2020. But as lockdowns are extended, contingency plans are crafted aiming for the continuity of learning amidst the pandemic. As the country continues to confront different issues brought about by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Department of Education (DepEd) is addressing the challenges in the basic education for the school year 2020-2021 through its Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) under DepEd Order No. 012, s. 2020 [13]. The BE-LCP presented new learning delivery modalities like distance learning, blended learning, and homeschooling.

The shift from face-to-face teaching and learning to distance learning is a major adjustment to all school stakeholders – administrators, teachers, learners, parents, and the community. However, these adjustments should not hinder the realization of the educational objectives of the department.

2. Literature Review

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic changed the course of delivering quality education to learners [14]. As the world continue to grapple with the effect of this pandemic, shifting from face-to-face to distance learning is the most viable alternative as this lessens physical contact [15] [16]. Distance education, which is so different from traditional education, consists of studying from home where students and teachers are physically distant while classroom learning is the type of education system in which the learners and the teachers work under one roof [17].

In the Philippines, the Department of Education has introduced different distance learning modalities with the goal of continuing learning despite the pandemic. Distance learning refers to a learning delivery modality where learning takes place between the teacher and the learners who are geographically remote from each other during instruction. This modality has three types: Modular Distance Learning (MDL), Online Distance Learning (ODL), and TV/Radio-Based Instruction [18] [19] [20]. Stadler, Camargo and Maioli [21] posits that the variation in delivery methods helps teachers and students interact with content and process the information synchronously or asynchronously.

However, Gurajena et al. [7] argues that the adoption of distance learning by most institutions is not without its limitations and challenges. This was supported by Sadeghi [17] as he posits that like any kind of educational program, distance learning comes with a host of pros and cons. Before learners enroll in any kind of distance learning program, they had better make sure to carefully consider these points to be sure they'll be getting an education that meets their personal needs, strengths, and career goals.

Dubey & Pandey [6] enumerates common problems at present on distance learning which includes: (a) majority of learners' population resides in remote rural areas; (b) lack of adequate infrastructure; (c) challenges in paradigm shift in thinking for adoption of distance learning; (d) access to technology; and (e) preparedness for delivery. As well as internet connectivity and learning device availability for students [22]. Additionally, staying home may entail problems (pandemic-related stress, anxiety, depression, domestic violence, divorce, and pregnancy), preventing students and teachers from learning and teaching [16]. Abante, et.al. [23] shares from their study that some public-school teachers find it difficult to use the new modalities of teaching. Although, Asio [24] mentioned in his pre-COVID-19 pandemic analysis that teachers and staffs were productive in line of their work nature. As well as proper sleep and perform religious tasks routines in time of the pandemic [25].

But blaming it all to unresponsive parents, one must also consider that distance learning entails the learners to stay at home and this has become a tough routine for the parents since they are the ones who will be teaching their child just to ensure their child's education.

Bhamani et.al [26] details that although parents are trying to the best of their abilities to keep their children engaged in meaningful activities, there are some challenges that they recognize as well. Several children are considering this time as a vacation from school; hence they want nothing to do with a normal school-like routine. Instead, they want to sleep and wake up according to their own wish and spend the rest of the time playing video games and watching cartoon/movies. This is a potential threat to their social, educational as well as physical development. Their lifestyle is becoming sedentary with limited outdoor access, and they are not used to physical activities inside their house, probably because of the lack of space. It is especially challenging if the parents are working from home or offices and have their own schedules to follow. Keeping their children in check all the time now that house help is not available has become cumbersome and parents end up allowing the children to do things their way.

Constantino et.al. [27] revealed in their study that one challenge encountered in the modular distance learning is the quality of printed modules since there are items or parts that are not readable, and some colors of the figures are not appropriate. With this, they suggested that e-copies can be provided to parents so that they can view the modules on whatever gadgets that they can use. They also suggested that there should be an open communication between the parents and the teachers about the situation of the children so that the teachers can accommodate challenges encountered by the parents.

With the literatures reviewed, the researcher was prompted to conduct the study to better understand the challenges encountered by the parents and the learners in the modular distance learning in her respective school and to be able to provide the support system based on their stated needs.

3. Methodology
3.1. Research Design
The study used an explanatory sequential mixed method design that both utilized quantitative and qualitative data [28]. A survey questionnaire which aimed to elicit quantitative data on the challenges encountered and technical assistance needed was administered to the parent-respondents together with the distribution/retrieval of modules. Also, an online interview was conducted to elicit qualitative data from the learner-respondents to corroborate the challenges encountered by the parents with their personal experience.

3.2. Respondents
There was a total of one hundred twenty-three (123) parent-respondents and ten (10) learner-respondents in an elementary school in the Schools Division of Meycauayan City. To get the sample of parent-respondents, the researcher used universal sampling technique, however, only one hundred twenty-three (123) questionnaires were returned with consent. For the learner-respondents, purposive sampling was used and only those with parent's consent were interviewed. The demographic profile of the respodnets are presented in Table 1.

3.3. Research Instrument
Two instruments were used in the study specifically survey questionnaire and interview guide. The survey questionnaire was a slightly modified instrument adopted on the standardized instrument used by the Department of Education. It is modified in the sense that some items are removed and/or added based on its applicability to the context of the respondents.

The survey questionnaire has three parts:
   a) demographic profile,
   b) challenges encountered by the parents while assisting their child in the modular distance learning, and
   c) support/technical assistance needed by the parents in assisting their child.

On the other hand, the interview guide for the learner-respondents contained questions that aimed to corroborate the responses of the parents. Since the instrument was previously used by the Department of Education with Filipino translation, there is no need for it to undergo validation and translation process since Filipino is the vernacular language being used in the locale on where the instrument will be utilized.

Table 1. Demographic Profile

Profile	Parents		Learners	
Gender	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Male	12	10	6	60
Female	111	90	4	40
Age				
11 years old			5	50
12 years old			4	40
13 years old			1	10
25-30 years old	5	4.1		
31-35 years old	29	23.6		
35-40 years old	40	32.5		
41-45 years old	28	22.8		
46-50 years old	12	9.8		
51 years old above	9	7.3		
Total	123	100	10	100

3.4. Statistical Analysis

After gathering the data, the researcher tabulated and encoded the data. The study used frequency count and percentage for the demographic profile of the parents and learners. Frequency counts and ranking were used on the challenges encountered and support/technical assistance needed by parents. On the other hand, thematic analysis was used in the result of the interview which helped the researcher come-up with a generalization.

4. Results

The study aimed to determine the challenges encountered by the parents while they are assisting their child in the modular distance learning including the needed support/technical assistance. The study found the following results as show in Table 2.

Table 2. Challenges Encountered by Parents in the Modular Distance Learning

Challenges Encountered by Parents	**Frequency**	**Percentage**	**Rank**
Difficulty in independent learning	89	72%	1
Difficulty in concentrating on his studies	86	70%	2
Parents has limited knowledge on the content of the lesson	61	50%	3
Conflict with household chores	56	46%	4
Absence of person to guide/teach the guide	52	42%	5
There are so many activities in each module	51	41%	6
Distractions from gadgets and social media	47	38%	7
Lack of interest of child	42	34%	8
Unreadable/unclear module (images, texts, instructions, etc.)	40	33%	9
Difficulty in communicating with the teacher due unavailability of gadgets	19	15%	10
Health factors	11	9%	11
No/Late response of teacher when asking about the lesson	5	4%	12

Table 2 enumerated the items pertaining to the challenges encountered by the parents while their children are in the modular distance learning. As seen from the table, the most common challenges

encountered are difficulty in independent learning and difficulty in concentrating on his studies. The frequencies of the two items are statistically close. According to Bijeesh [29], with no faculty around for face-to-face interaction and no classmates who can help with constant reminders about pending assignments, the chances of getting distracted and losing track of deadlines are high. Next on the list is the limited knowledge of the parents on the content of the lesson. The parents cannot help their child if they do not know what to do. Conflict with household chores is also a challenge as the learners are prompted to help in household chores since they are at home. Some of the parents are working outside their homes during daytime which leaves no one to guide/teach the learner. Being tired all day, they are not motivated to help either because of too many activities that needs to be accomplished in the given modules. Distractions from gadgets and social media is also evident especially with learners whose parents are not around to remind them of their tasks. Lack of interest of the child on learning may be attributed also to distractions from gadgets. They are more interested on playing online games than in answering their modules. There are also unclear/unreadable modules which can be attributed to the printing process. Due to the sudden implementation of distance learning, budget for the printing of the learning materials is limited which made the teachers do photocopies instead of printing it colored. Some minor challenges include communication difficulty with teachers because of gadget constraints, health factors and late response from teachers. Overall, the abovementioned challenges can be addressed if there is an open communication between the parents, school head, teachers and other stakeholders to talk about these challenges for possible solutions. Asio & Bayucca [14] suggests that partnership with the different stakeholders must be strengthened for them to be able to aid in the production of needed resources for the delivery of distance learning. Non-government organizations and the local government units at the local, city, or provincial levels can greatly increase and help the school and the students in the distance learning implementation and funding at the same time. Abante, et al., [23] also suggested to let the parents be accountable of their child's learning.

Table 3. Support Needed by Parents in the Modular Distance Learning

Support Needed by Parents	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Provide additional references like books, booklets, pictures and video lessons	89	72%	1
Guide us on how to teach our child/ren on their lesson	51	41%	2
Give consideration on deadline for submission of modules/outputs	50	41%	3
Immediate response of teacher to queries about the lesson	49	40%	4
Offer feedback to submitted activity sheets/modules/outputs	45	37%	5
Give other activities other than academic works	17	14%	6

Table 3 portrays the ranked support/technical assistance needed by the parents for them to be effective para-teachers to their child/ren in the modular distance learning. The parents are almost unanimous in their response on the provision of additional references like books (not all subjects have books), self-learning kits, pictures of lectures and video lessons. Other needed support in the list which received a close result include guidance on how they are going to teach their child/ren on their lessons, consideration on the deadline for submission of modules and outputs, immediate response of teacher to queries about the lesson and offer feedback to submitted activity sheets/modules for them to be able to check if what they are doing is correct or not. Teaching materials come in many shapes and sizes, but they all have in common the ability to support learning. The purpose and importance of teaching and learning materials is to make lessons interesting, learning easy and enable teachers to easily express concepts [30].

Table 4 show the interview responses of the learners with regards to their learning experiences. One can deduce from their responses that they have varied struggles while using the modular distance learning. But distraction and difficulty in managing time emerged as the main challenge.

Table 4. Interview Responses: Learning Experiences on Modular Distance Learning

Participant	Response
1	"It is difficult because I cannot manage my time"
2	"Struggle because there are no resources to base my answer especially in Araling Panlipunan"
3	"Difficult because the Activity Sheets have limited explanations and examples"
4	"I am distracted with my environment and even gadgets, so I was not able to finish my outputs"
5	"I answer it on my own because my parents are working"
6	"My parents cannot teach me because they do not know how to explain it to me"
7	"I usually spend my time drawing so I was not able to finish on time"
8	"If only there are books that I can study to be able to answer the Activity Sheets"
9	"I cannot research because of limited load.
10	"Answering Activity sheets in English medium is difficult because I find it difficult to understand English"

Other responses are no one at home is present to guide in understanding and answering the Activity Sheets, parents cannot help because they don't understand it either, limited load for research purposes and difficulty in understanding Activity Sheets written in English. Some of these problems coincide with the results of the study of Dubey & Pandey [6] where the duo enumerated the common problems of distance learning and Asio et al., [22] for gadget problems.

Table 5. Interview Responses: Support Needed on Modular Distance Learning

Participant	Response
1	"Guidance from teacher. I still want face to face classes"
2	"I wish for a lecture in Araling Panlipunan or video lessons"
3	"I hope there will be books for references or video lesson"
4	"Maybe timetable from the teacher or from my parents and online class"
5	"I would benefit from video lessons or pictures of lectures"
6	"Video lessons in our language will help me understand the lesson"
7	"Other activities aside from computing and writing can be given to us"
8	"Books, video lessons or pictures of lesson"
9	"Printed lectures if there are"
10	"Tagalog lecture or help from the teacher"

Table 5 shows the interview responses of the learners on what support or technical assistance do they need. Video lessons, books, pictures of lectures and other supplementary materials were the earnest request since the Activity Sheets being provided has limited lectures and examples. One learner even opted for face-to-face because of difficulty in independent learning. One suggested for online class although another learner has limited load, so she requested for printed lectures. However, parents still try their best to have their children engaged to other life activities [26].

6. Conclusion
The result of the study showed that most of the parent-respondents are female within the age range of 36-40 while there is an almost equal distribution in terms of gender among the learner-respondents but most of them are 11 years old. Difficulty in independent learning, difficulty in concentrating on

studies and parent's limited knowledge on the content of child's lessons are the top struggles of parents in the modular distance learning. On the other hand, the learner-respondents are one in declaring that distance learning is difficult considering the different contributory factors including difficulty in learning by themselves, lack of reference materials for more examples, limited guidance from parents and teachers, challenges in load to research and some have difficulty in understanding English. Both parent-respondents and learner-respondents are unanimous in declaring that provision of additional reference materials including books, self-learning kits, booklets and video lessons will greatly help lessen the struggles being encountered in the modular distance learning. Finally, a detailed support program was proposed based on the result of the study.

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