

Modular distance learning modality: Challenges of teachers in teaching amid the Covid-19 pandemic

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify the challenges of teachers in the use of modular distance learning modality amidst pandemic and how teachers cope with these challenges. This study is a qualitative research which employed the phenomenological research design to determine the challenges encountered by teachers in the use of modular distance learning modality. The study was conducted among teachers in different public secondary schools within Tacloban City. Ten (10) professional public secondary teachers were approached to request their voluntary involvement as key participants through convenience sampling. The personal experiences and coping mechanisms of the teachers were gathered through a survey, particularly by using a semi-structured questionnaire with open-ended questions. Colaizzi's method was used in the interpretation of data. The challenges of teachers were identified based on how they plan, prepare and distribute modules, monitor students' learning, check, evaluate outputs, and provide feedback on students' performance. Furthermore, teachers used various ways to cope with the challenges encountered in modular distance learning modality such as time management, innovating teaching strategies, adapting to the changes brought by the new normal trend in education, being flexible, providing alternative plans, being optimistic, patient, and equipping oneself with the necessary skills for the new normal ways of education. Various stakeholders need to work and plan for alternatives on different issues that may arise as they are involved in the teaching-learning process considering all the limitations in these trying times brought by the pandemic.

Keywords: teachers, modular distance learning, education, pandemic, challenges

Modular distance learning modality: Challenges of teachers in teaching amid the Covid-19 pandemic

1. Introduction

Education plays an important role in shaping the lives of students. In the process, teachers are one of the essential instruments in delivering quality learning. Due to the emergence of COVID-19 in the Philippines, a lot of changes happened in the educational landscape. One of these is the mode of instruction that was implemented by the Department of Education. The current COVID-19 crisis has obliged most education systems to adopt alternatives to face-to-face teaching and learning. Many education systems moved activities online, to allow instruction to continue despite school closures (OECD, 2020). The shift of the teaching-learning delivery in schools to modular distance learning made more challenging, on the part of the school personnel, the delivery of basic quality education. That is why DepEd leaders are always finding avenues to solve the problems and capacitating its teachers and school heads to become more effective in the field of modular distance learning (Bagood, 2020).

Bagood (2020) also added that identified teaching personnel together with the Education Program Supervisors prepared modules starting in May 2020 in all subjects for all grade/year level across four quarters in accordance to the “Most Essential Learning Competencies”. These self-learning modules are already considered learning packages containing pre-test, discussion, and a series of evaluation/assessment. They are distributed to all learners with the modular learning class schedule. Indeed, this kind of instructional modality has been followed by public school teachers all over the Philippines. Teachers play a vital role in the continuous delivery of quality education amid the pandemic. According to the study conducted by Lapada et al. (2020), teachers were highly aware of the presence and consequences caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the threats of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers continue to serve by formulating modules as the learning guide of students. The teacher thus becomes a facilitator in the development of the student, both as a member of their community and a member of their society (Martineau et al., 2020). However, Malipot (2020) stressed that teachers also air their problems on modular distance learning. Bagood (2020) highlighted that as front liners in the educational system, they have undergone various training and seminars to be more equipped in delivering 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.

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 own stride. It is unrestricted self-learning panache in which instantaneous reinforcement, a comment is provided to practice exercise, which stimulates the students and builds curiosity in them. Hence, this kind of learning modality increases the student-centered approach in learning. However, the implementation of modular instruction fostered various challenges to teachers, students, and parents. The study of Dangle & Sumaoang (2020) showed that the main challenges that emerged were lack of school funding in the production and delivery of modules, students struggle with self-studying, and parents’ lack of knowledge to academically guide their child/children. Hence, it is evident that there are struggles associated with the use of modular distance learning.

1.1 Objectives of the study

This study seeks to identify the challenges of teachers in the use of modular distance learning modality amid pandemic. The following will be the focus of the study:

- teachers’ challenges in teaching using modular distance learning modality; and

- how teachers cope with the challenges they encounter on modular distance learning modality.

1.2 Framework of the study

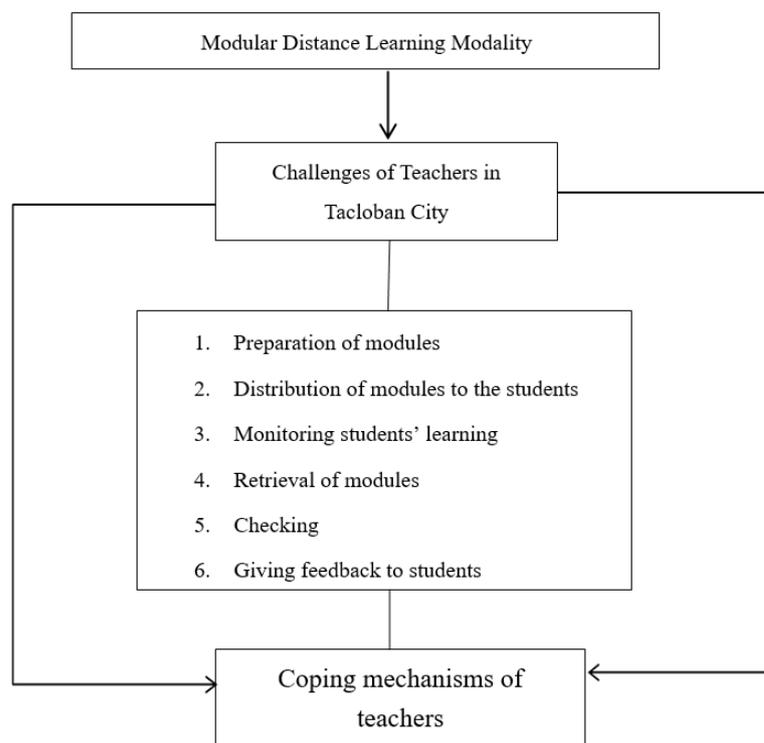


Figure 1. Framework of the study

The framework above shows the variables of the research on the Challenges of Teachers in the Use of Modular Distance Learning Modality (MDLM). The challenges of teachers will be identified through six (6) stages on how teachers are involved in the process. These covers the preparation of the modules, distribution of modules, monitoring students' learning, retrieving, checking the modules, and giving feedback to students' outputs/performances. The coping mechanisms of the teachers will also be identified in the study.

2. Methodology

This study is a qualitative research which employed the phenomenological research design to determine the challenges encountered by teachers in the use of modular distance learning modality. The study was conducted among teachers in different public secondary schools within Tacloban City. Ten (10) professional public secondary teachers were approached to request their voluntary involvement as key participants through convenience sampling. Emails, Google forms, and other social media platforms were used for communication purposes and in the distribution of questionnaires and retrieval of data. The researchers wrote a letter to the respondents asking for their approval to participate in the study. A consent form was voluntarily signed by the respondents while confidentiality of their profiles was considered. The personal experiences and coping mechanisms of the teachers were gathered through a survey, particularly by using a semi-structured questionnaire with open-ended questions. Colaizzi's method was used in the interpretation of data.

3. Results and discussion

As COVID-19 threatens the lives of people across the globe, it also affects the different sectors of society. Education is one of these which strive to cope with the challenges of times. In the Philippine educational system, public secondary schools as led by the Department of Education implemented modular distance learning modality. Teachers crafted modules that were used by students in learning. This shift of mode of instruction does

not only pose struggles to the students but also to the teachers who play an integral part in the new normal education. Based on the study conducted by the researchers, the teachers in the selected secondary schools under the Division of Tacloban City encountered various challenges in teaching using the modular distance learning modality amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes the process of how they prepare, distribute and collect modules, monitor students' learning, check and evaluate their outputs, as well as provide feedback on students' performance.

Preparation of modules. The table below shows the challenges faced by teachers during the preparation of modules.

Table 1

Challenges of teachers in the preparation of modules

Challenges of teachers	Teacher's experience
Time Consuming	"It takes so much time to prepare and print the modules..."
Lack of printing materials/scarcity of supplies	"It is difficult to reproduce the modules due to lack of printing materials and scarcity of supplies such bond papers and inks..."
Insufficient time and assistance in printing the modules	"It is hard to print all the modules for the whole quarter..."

Based on the table above, it can be seen that teachers' challenges in preparing the modules are related to the time, materials, and supplies needed to prepare and print the modules. The lack of enough time in preparing and printing the modules of the students causes the late production of modules. Furthermore, the lack of printing materials and scarcity of supplies affect the productivity of teachers in the production of modules. Sometimes, teachers ask for donations from other individuals such as bond papers and inks. Also, on the part of teachers, it is difficult to print all the modules for the whole quarter because of insufficient time and assistance in printing all the modules. Instead, teachers prepare the modules only per unit or chapter to be able to produce the modules on time.

Distribution of modules. After preparing the modules, the teachers are tasked to distribute them to the students. To avoid the risks of the COVID-19 pandemic, the schools implemented a system of delivery and retrieval. One of the secondary schools in Tacloban used the IYA-KADI stations where the parents/guardians are the ones who will get and pass the module. The said stations are situated in the nearest area where the students are residing. Some IYA-KADI stations are within the barangay halls where there is an assigned teacher. The table below shows the challenges encountered by teachers in the distribution of modules.

Table 2

Challenges of teachers in the distribution of modules

Challenges of teachers	Teacher's experience
Late students who claim their modules	"There are students who get their modules late than the given schedule..."
Transaction system between parent and teacher	"Some parents do not get the modules on time..." "The QR code given by the adviser of the student being presented by parents in school as a requirement to get the module encounters error in scanning..."
Inactive contact numbers of learners (Access to students)	"The contact number given by the students is inactive causing difficulty in communicating with them to get the module..."
Difficulty in contacting students' parents	"It is difficult to contact the parents for communication about the modules and their learners..."

Based on the table above, it can be seen that teachers' challenges in the distribution of modules are connected with the late claiming of modules and difficulty in contacting both learner and parent. There are

students who claim the modules late than the scheduled time that became the reason why some students submit late outputs or even do not submit at all. With this, the teachers directly contact the parents but unfortunately, there are also parents who will not get the modules on time and do not have the QR code needed to claim the modules of their learners. Also, the contact numbers given by the students are difficult to contact and sometimes they give inactive phone numbers that create problems in communicating with them. This also happens with the interaction between parents and teachers. There are also parents who are not responsive to the queries of the teachers and there are also inactive contact details given by the parents that compromise the scheduled time in the distribution and retrieval of the modules.

Monitoring of students' learning. The table below shows the challenges faced by teachers in monitoring the student's learning.

Table 3

Challenges of teachers in monitoring students' learning

Challenges of teachers	Teacher's experience
Unable to contact learners	"It is hard to contact the students for monitoring their progress and answering their queries..."
Students/parents with no contact numbers/internet connection	"It is difficult to contact both the students and parents because of inactive contact number and lack of gadget..." "Since we sometimes use social media platforms such as messenger and email to monitor the students learning and for the submission of some activities, some students cannot submit due to lack of internet connectivity and the gadget needed..."
Difficulty in validating students' performance	"Some students have tutor who are answering their modules ..."
Personal monitoring may cause health-risks	"Going to the house of students for personal mentoring may impose health-risks ..."
Hard to monitor due to limited face to face transaction	"Monitoring the student's learning is difficult due to limited face to face interaction with the students..."

The result of the study shows that the common problem of teachers in monitoring students' performance is the lack of effective communication. This is due to students' lack of gadgets as well as unstable internet connectivity since most of the monitoring is being done through messenger and other social media platforms. However, teachers also make use of text messages but there are parents whose numbers are inactive and cannot be reached. However, the validation of students' learning is also difficult on the part of the teacher since there are modules being answered by parents and tutors, not the learners.

Retrieval of modules. The retrieval of students' answer sheets/modules is being done through a system organized by the school/teachers. Below are the challenges that teachers encounter in the process of collecting the modules.

Table 4

Challenges of teachers in retrieving the modules

Challenges of teachers	Teachers' experience
Students' failure to follow the schedule set for the submission of modules	"There are some students who can't submit their modules on time..."
Submission of incomplete answers in a particular module	"Students submit modules with lacking answers in a particular activity."
Unidentified answer sheets of students	"Students submit modules with no names."
Not all students submit the answered modules	"Poor attendance of students' submission of modules..."

Based on the table above, it can be seen that teachers' challenges in collecting the modules are associated

with students' responsibility in complying with all the requirements specified in their activities. The failure of students to follow the set schedule for the submission of modules affects the teacher's schedule in checking the modules as it consumes time in checking all the outputs of the students. However, teachers are struggling in terms of the identification of student modules because during submission, students do not indicate their names. As teachers segregate the modules, traceability of students' answered modules becomes a challenge on their part. Sometimes this becomes the reason why there are modules being given to the wrong adviser or teacher-in-charge. Aside from the modules with no names, there are also students who submit modules with incomplete answers. Teachers tend to accept these modules but they give instructions to the student to accomplish the lacking activities. But teachers find it hard whenever there are students who do not submit any answered module in a specific quarter. This does not only pose a challenge on teachers' responsibility in monitoring the student's performance but also a struggle on teachers seeing a student not learning anything from school amid the pandemic. As stated by one teacher, *"It hurts knowing that you have a student who seems to give up on his studies."* This is the reason why teachers do their best in motivating their students to continue their studies amid the challenges that they experience.

To facilitate the collection of modules, a particular school formulate its own system of gathering students' answered modules in a week. In each barangay, the assigned teacher collects the modules from the parents. It is the parents who submit the modules to ensure that students are safe from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, based on the interview conducted by the researchers there are challenges encountered by the teachers that require attention from both students and parents. Therefore, teachers need to coordinate with their students and the parents to ensure that they will submit modules with complete answers, with names or labels for identification and if possible, will follow the schedule set for the submission of outputs.

Checking and Evaluating Students' Answers in the Modules. After collecting the modules, teachers are expected to check and evaluate students' answers. Checking is considered as one of the essential parts of teachers' role in monitoring the students' performance. However, there are various issues and challenges that teachers encounter in the process of checking and evaluating students' outputs.

Table 5

Challenges of teachers in checking and evaluating students' answers in the modules

Challenges of teachers	Teachers' experience
Modules with no answers/incomplete answers	"There are students who submitted with incomplete answers while others did not answer any activity..."
Answer sheets with no names	"There are students who forgot to write their names in the modules that is why it's difficult to identify whose output is being checked..."
Limited time in checking due to other tasks	"Due to other paper works, the time for checking in school is limited..."
Low scores of students	"Students got scores below the passing rate..."
Not legible handwriting of a student	"There are students whose penmanship is difficult to recognize that's why it is also hard to check their answers..."

The table above shows some of the challenges that teachers encounter as they engage in the process of checking and evaluating students' answers in the modules. The teachers find it difficult to check outputs with no answers as it indicates that they have nothing to record with regards to the students' performance. On top of that, the fact that students have no answers means that students are not interested in the process of learning. Hence, it is challenging for teachers to evaluate a student without evidence of learning. There are also students who submit answer sheets without names and it becomes difficult for a teacher to check without being able to recognize the owner of the output, especially when recording scores.

The teacher is also expected to perform other tasks in school. However, according to the respondents of the study, too many loads of paper works affect the teachers' time and efficiency in checking students' outputs. The

time spent in checking is being given to other tasks being done by the teacher. Some teachers added, *“We even bring students’ output at home so we can have time to check”*. This is the reason why teachers’ “family time” is being spent in checking modules. In today’s context with modular distance learning, there are many activity sheets that a teacher needs to check and teachers ensure that they are able to record the scores of the students as it is their basis in evaluating students’ performance.

It is during the checking and evaluation of outputs that a teacher discovers the current performance of the student. According to one of the respondents of the study:

“Because of this peril, you will not know if the student is really learning or just passing the modules for grades.”

This is due to the low scores that students got from the activities in the modules. It becomes difficult for the teacher to validate the actual performance of the student since there are some who have tutors while the others do not learn by themselves. The modules are expected to be their self-learning guide but teachers admit that the students still need their guidance and teaching in learning a particular concept. Low scores of students challenge the teachers to find alternative ways on how to supplement and reinforce every student’s performance.

Checking also requires careful attention and examination by the teacher when it comes to the answers written by the students. According to the respondents of the study, teachers find a hard time recognizing students’ written answers due to illegible penmanship. This affects the teachers’ interpretation and understanding of what students have answered. This may also result in teachers being unable to check the outputs of students since the students’ penmanship is not legible.

Giving feedback to students. As the teacher evaluates the performance of students, giving feedback to students is also necessary to let the students know the status of their learning through the given modules. However, the researchers found out that the current way of learning and giving of instruction creates a dilemma on how can teachers address students regarding their performance. According to the respondents of the study, communication to both teachers and parents is being done through text and social media platforms such as the messenger. However, not all students in Tacloban City have the access to these gadgets and not all of them can afford to buy a load. There are also students who are residing in areas with poor internet connection. Due to these, the teachers find it difficult to inform learners of the status of their learning as well as they find it challenging to give feedback on students’ outputs. As stated by one of the respondents of the study:

“We cannot give feedback to all students because we cannot contact some of them. It is also difficult in today’s situation because of limited face to face interaction.”

These statements show how communication plays a big role in teachers’ way of providing feedback to the learners. However, because of certain factors such as internet connectivity, health risks, and lack of gadgets, it becomes difficult for teachers to inform the learners about their performance. The conduct of Portfolio Day and Card Day is still being practiced by the different secondary schools in Tacloban. However, due to the restrictions brought by the pandemic, students are not encouraged to go to school. Instead, the parents are the ones who attend the said activity and it is the chance for them to talk to the teachers regarding their concerns on their child’s performance. Hence, the parents also play a big role as the channel of teachers in contacting the students. At this time of the pandemic, parents serve as the teachers’ instrument in guiding the learners.

How teachers cope with the challenges they encounter in modular distance learning modality - As teachers face different challenges in the implementation of Modular Distance Learning Modality by the Department of Education, they strive to overcome such challenges through different approaches. Based on the results of the study, the secondary school teachers under the Division of Tacloban City have various coping strategies on the different challenges that they encounter. **Time management** is one of the steps to ease the tasks that a teacher is handling daily. Through providing a schedule of activities and balancing tasks, teachers are able

to deal with tasks in ways that they know which to prioritize. The accomplishment of tasks such as preparing lessons, the printing of modules, and checking of modules will be achieved if a teacher knows how to spend his/her time efficiently.

The impact of COVID-19 does not only concern the teachers but also the students, parents, and others involved in the teaching and learning process. Accepting and embracing the challenges of times keeps an individual positive amidst everything. As stated by one of the respondents of the study:

“To overcome these challenges, simply it is only by embracing the reality brought by this new normal style of education. Of course, doing the necessary tasks and just staying positive.”

It can be seen above how **positivity** contributes to teachers’ peaceful outlook in the challenges brought by the changes in the educational landscape. Being positive lessens the burdens of teachers and it shows the teachers what to focus on and how to deal with things calmly without causing mental stress. The respondents of the study highlighted that frustrations, anxiety, stress, and depression will be avoided if teachers will establish within themselves the spirit of optimism and trust that everything will be accomplished as planned.

The results of the study also showed that incorporating **alternative plans** on various situations helps in addressing issues related to the process of teaching. One of the respondents added, *“I always have an alternative plan or intervention just to cope up with these challenges”*. This includes certain situations where sometimes teachers spent from their own pocket when necessary in terms of the reproduction of modules or learning activity sheets and other related learning materials. However, in case of failure to receive the communication or announcement due to unavailability of phones or other gadgets for means of communication, teachers just contact other students to call the attention of the concerned student or sometimes conduct a home visitation. Coordinating with colleagues and other school authorities on what to do when a problem arises concerning the modular distance learning approach is also helpful in addressing such issues. Discussing with an immediate supervisor so that he/she can bring them up during their executive meeting opens collaboration and unity in solving various problems concerning the students’ welfare and quality of learning. Hence, it is good that teachers know how to innovate some strategies, methods, and approaches like home visitation and online distance discussion.

The shift of mode of instruction also challenges the teachers on the current trends of teaching tools, strategies, and approaches. As stated by one of the respondents of the study, *“I read articles to arm me with the knowledge in this new normal way of teaching”*. There are teachers who are not well-equipped with the use of technological devices such as the computer and it adds to their struggle in preparing the modules. To ease this struggle, teachers equip themselves by attending online webinars and training, reading articles, and even asking help from a colleague. Indeed, the flexibility of teachers and knowing how to adapt to the changes brought by the pandemic help in overcoming certain challenges encountered in the implementation of modular distance learning modality.

4. Conclusion and recommendation

Based on the study, teachers encounter different challenges in the implementation of modular distance learning modality. These challenges were identified based on how teachers plan and prepare the modules, deliver, collect, monitor students’ performance, check and evaluate students’ outputs, as well as on how they provide feedback to students. Time management, innovating teaching strategies, adapting to the changes brought by the new normal trend in education, being flexible, providing alternative plans, being optimistic and patient, and equipping oneself with the necessary skills are some of the ways on how teachers cope with the challenges that they encounter in modular distance learning modality.

The researchers recommend that teachers need to formulate alternative plans on different issues that may arise as they are involved in the process of teaching. Managing time wisely also aids in dealing with various

tasks in school. The school authorities shall also implement a system in terms of delivery and retrieval of modules to ensure that both parents and teachers are aware of what to do as well as to keep everyone safe from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The conduct of webinars for equipping teachers with the current trends of new normal education also helps educators in adapting to the changes of times. These steps will help the educational system in our country to continue providing quality education to learners deemed to be the future of society. The researchers also recommend that further studies on the current situation of teachers in the implementation of new normal education be conducted.

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