
Challenges and Coping Strategies of Novice Teachers in Modular Distance Learning Modality



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ABSTRACT: The study was conducted to determine the challenges and coping strategies of novice teachers in modular distance learning modality in Urbiztondo, Pangasinan. The qualitative research design particularly the phenomenological research design was used in this study. The respondents of the study were ten (10) novice teachers from Urbiztondo who were chosen purposively based on their length of service in public school specifically those with 1 to 3 years of teaching experience. The analysis used three stages in the form of data reduction, data presentation, and data conclusion. The study revealed that novice teachers' challenges in modular distance learning modality are lack of printing materials, and supplies, time consuming, power interruption, parents not getting the modules, schedule not being followed, late submission, unanswered/unfinished modules, and unidentified answer sheets, dirty, damaged modules with torn and missing pages, academic dishonesty and difficulty validating learners' performance. Moreover, proper time management, staying positive and asking advice or guidance from a mentor are the strategies employed by novice teachers in order to cope up with the challenges in modular distance learning modality. In addition being flexible and knowing how to adapt to changes help them cope up with the challenges encountered.

KEYWORDS: Challenges, Coping strategies, Novice teachers, Modular distance learning modality

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic swept across the globe, bringing with it unprecedented challenges and impacts concerning not only the physical and mental health of populations but also every other aspect of human activity. [1] In the realm of education, lockdown or regional quarantine is used to lessen the coronavirus epidemic, especially in the children of tomorrow (Abdullah, 2020; Setiati & Azwar, 2020). Large-scale social limitations have replaced the lockdown system as the preferred method of preventing the spread of the Covid-19 virus (Yanti et al., 2020). The application of social distancing does indeed protect students, lecturers, teachers, and staff, to ensure the continuity of education (Iyer et al., 2020). Work from Home (WFH) was implemented to stop the spread of Covid19 in the educational setting.

The most recent blended learning approach, which is currently being used globally, is currently being adapted by the Philippine educational system. In response to the Coronavirus outbreak, there have been calls for an academic freeze, but the education industry is adamant that education should not be jeopardized. Teachers, particularly traditional teachers, are finding it difficult to cope with this pandemic. The world stopped and the economy collapsed as all businesses shut down operations. For instance, to prevent the virus from spreading, most countries closed schools, colleges, and universities. Not only were the health and education sectors affected by the crisis. Educational institutions provided remote learning as an alternative at the pandemic's height. Classes are held despite the shutdown order (Kasrekar, 2020).

Students' lives are significantly shaped by their education. One of the key components in delivering highquality learning is the teacher. Numerous changes occurred in the educational environment as a result of COVID19's establishment in the Philippines. The Department of Education's implementation of the manner of instruction is one of these. The pandemic has forced the majority of educational systems to find substitutes for in-person instruction and learning. Many educational institutions transferred their operations online so that instruction could continue even while schools were closed. [2]

The classroom teaching methodology has been completely changed. Now teachers are teaching students with the help of internet access by sitting at their home place. However, teachers have to face many challenges to accomplish the objective of teaching and learning. Conducting online classes is itself a great challenge for teachers who are habitual of conducting classroom teaching from many years.

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The transition of teaching and learning in schools to modular distance learning made it more difficult for school staff to provide a foundational, high-quality education. DepEd officials always seek out ways to address issues and provide teachers and school administrators with the skills they need to be more productive in the field of modular remote learning. [3]

Teachers, students, and parents faced a number of difficulties as a result of the deployment of modular instruction. In the midst of the pandemic, teachers are essential to maintaining the quality of education being provided. In the study done by Lapada et al. (2020), it was shown that teachers were very aware of the COVID-19 pandemic's existence and effects.[4] Teachers continue to assist pupils by creating modules as their learning guides despite the COVID-19 pandemic's risks. As a result, the teacher takes on a new role as a catalyst for the student's growth as a member of their society and community (Martineau et al., 2020). Malipot (2020), however, emphasized the need of teachers discussing their issues with modular distant learning. [5]

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to determine the challenges and coping strategies of novice teachers in modular distance learning modality in Urbiztondo, Pangasinan.

Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. How do novice teachers deal with the challenges in modular distance learning modality in terms of:
 - a. preparation;
 - b. distribution;
 - c. retrieval; and
 - d. assessment?
2. What are the employed strategies to cope with the challenges in their modular teaching modality?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study used the qualitative research design particularly the phenomenological research design to determine the challenges encountered by novice teachers in modular distance learning modality.

Respondents of the study

The subjects of the study were ten (10) novice teachers from Urbiztondo with 1 to 3 years of teaching experience. They were chosen purposively based on their length of service in public school. They were given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity for their protection. The data gathered from the respondents were analysed qualitatively based on the context of the findings from each aspect of the study. Discussion of research results is at two elements 1) challenges in using modular distance learning modality, and 2) coping strategies in combating challenges in modular teaching modality. The analysis used three stages in the form of data reduction, data presentation, and data conclusion.

Research Instrument

The main instrument used was an open questionnaire. The questionnaire served as guide in interviewing the ten (10) novice teachers in Urbiztondo about the challenges they face and their strategies in coping with the challenges. The researcher asked consent from the teacher to be the respondent of the study. The researcher used interview method and used open questionnaire as guide in gathering data. A thorough transcription and analysis of data was conducted after the interviews with the respondents to make sense of the gathered data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

CHALLENGES OF NOVICE TEACHERS IN MODULAR DISTANCE LEARNING MODALITY

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

Challenges of novice teachers in the preparation of modules

Novice teachers' challenges in the preparation of modules are related to materials, and supplies, time and electricity which are needed to prepare and print the modules.

1. Lack of printing materials/supplies

The lack of printing materials and supplies is the first and common challenge to all the respondents which is evident from their responses, as it affects the production of modules.

"Kakulangan ng coupon para sa modules..." (Jane)

"Yung coupon, bitin ang supply kaya minsan kanya kanyang bili na..." (Ana)

"Kulang na budget para sa coupon at ink kasi may iba pang bayarin ang school..." (Fe)

"Kulang ang supply lalo na ang coupon para sa pagprint ng modules..." (Tina)

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“Limited supply ng ink kaya para makatipid nakadraft ang pagprint, malinaw din naman...” (Gel) “Lack of printer for fast reproduction...” (Ron)

“Kulang na kulang sa bilang ng estudyante yung supply ng modules galling division kaya need pa din magprint...” (Carla)

“Lack of modules, lack of coupon pati printer...” (Kat)

“Availability of printer with sufficient ink to be used in printing...” (Riza)

“Lack of coupon and ink, ang dami pa naman modules na piniprint...” (Jenny)

Due to lack of supplies, novice teachers sometimes ask for help or donations such as bond papers and inks from private individuals. Some of them even bought the needed supplies from their own pocket based from the response of Teacher Ana.

2. Time consuming

Based from the responses, preparation of modules is time consuming.

“Time consuming, di kaya matapos sa isa o dalawang araw lalo madami estudyante ko at ilan pa subjects. Saka hindi naman basta print agad yun kasi nga di ba kulang supply ng coupon kaya iaayos pa bago iprint...” (Jane)

“Hindi lang sa printing matagal pati na din sa sorting of modules kasi ipagpalagay mo na more or less 10 pages each per subject tapos 7 – 8 subjects pa...” (Gel)

“Minsan kahit weekends nagpiprint din ng modules para makumpleto kasi kung hindi gagawin yun madedelay pagrelease sa ibang modules...” (Ron)

The lack of enough time in preparing and printing modules causes late production of other modules. In order to provide all the modules, novice teachers start printing as early as possible even during weekends.

3. Power interruption

Electricity also plays an important role during preparation of modules. Power interruption affects the production of modules.

“Yung mga unannounced power interruption ang laking abala lalo pag nagpiprint ng modules tapos biglang magbrownout at ang tagal pa bago bumalik...” (Kat)

If there is power interruption, the reproduction of modules is delayed that is why novice teachers sometimes print in advance some of the modules for the following weeks.

B. Distribution. After preparation, distribution follows. Teachers are tasked to distribute the modules to parents or guardians. In order to stay safe and avoid the risks of Covid-19 pandemic, schools implemented schedules of distribution and retrieval of modules. Parents or guardians are the ones who will get the modules and when entering the school premises they are all required to follow safety health protocols implemented by the school such as temperature check, wearing of face mask, sanitizing hands and maintain social distancing.

Challenges of novice teachers in the distribution of modules

Novice teachers' challenges in the distribution of modules are connected with unclaimed modules and schedule not being followed. The respondents have the same experiences based from their responses.

1. Parents not getting the modules

“May mga hindi kumukuha ng modules...” (Ana, Riza, Kat, Ron, Gel, Tina) “kasi wala daw maiiwan magbantay sa anak nila...” Riza added.

“Hindi lahat kumukuha ng modules...” (Jane, Fe, Carla, Jenny) “yung iba pumapasok din sa trabaho...” Fe added.

There are parents who cannot get modules due to their work or no one will be left to look after their kids, and some are just not getting the modules. Specifically, Teacher Carla said:

“Naiipon yung modules kaya pag nakuha na tambak na activities ang gagawin ng bata same din sa teacher pag binalik na yun tambak din na modules icheck...”

With this challenge in the distribution of modules, some teachers ask help from other parents to give the modules to their neighbor and sometimes they are the ones who personally give modules at home and communicate to the parents in order to know their reasons of not getting the modules.

2. Parents do not follow the schedule

Some parents do not follow the schedule of distribution of modules and are always late in getting modules. This is because some are working too, sometimes they forgot the schedule or they have other appointment on the scheduled distribution day.

“May mga hindi sumusunod sa schedule ng distribution...” (Ana, Ron, Jenny, Fe) “Merong kukuha lunchtime na at nanananghalian na kami...” Ron added.

“Minsan nga pauwi na ako nun tapos may dumating kukuha daw modules, pero understandable naman yun kasi galling pa sya sa trabaho at pauwi na din nagbakasakali lang na baka nasa school pa ako...” Fe added.

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“Nakakalimutan ng iba yung schedule or di kaya may ibang lakad sila kaya late sila nakakakuha” Ana added. Teachers’ rest time and schedule for other school related activities is affected when the scheduled distribution is not followed. In order to address this challenge, teachers constantly update and remind parents in their group chats about the schedule of distribution of modules.

C. Retrieval. The retrieval of modules is done weekly in order to give enough time to finish the given modules. Just like in the distribution of modules, parents/guardians are the one to submit the modules. Below are the challenges encountered by novice teachers during retrieval of modules.

Challenges of novice teachers in the retrieval of modules

The challenges encountered by novice teachers in the retrieval of modules were associated with the failure of following the schedule, unanswered or unfinished modules, unidentified answer sheets and damaged modules.

1. Late submission / Failure to follow the schedule

Some parents don’t follow the scheduled submission day and some cannot submit on time due to unfinished activities.

“Katulad din sa kuhaan ng modules, may mga hindi sumusunod sa schedule. Late kasi sila kumukuha ng modules kaya late din sila nagpapasa...” (Jenny)

“Late magpasa yung iba. May mga nagtetest or chat naman din na hindi muna sila makapagpasa kasi hindi pa daw tapos ibang activities or subject. Pinapakiusapan ko na lang din sila na ipadala na lang sa kamag-anak or kapitbahay mga natapos na nila para maisabay na din sa pagcheck bale to follow na lang mga di pa natapos...” Jane

“Late nagpapasa kasi may trabaho at minsan nalilimutandin nila schedule kasi busy din sila...” Fe *“Walang magpapasa kasi hindi makaalis sa bahay dahil walang magbabantay sa mga bata, meron kasi yung iba may baby pa...”* Riza

Late submission or failure of submitting modules on time affects the teachers’ work schedule specifically in checking the modules.

2. Unanswered/unfinished modules

There are some who submits unanswered or unfinished modules.

“Meron mga modules na walang sagot, as in hindi nasagutan nilagyan lang ng pangalan. Minsan walang idea pa yung nagpasa na wala pala sagot module na pinasa kasi pinadala or pinasabay lang pala yun sa kanila...” Carla

“Yung may nagpapasa kahit hindi pa nasasagutan. Meron din hindi pa tapos pinapasa na although mas okay pa naman yun kesa sa wala talagang nasagutan. Yung iba hindi na talaga kaya tapusin kasi hindi na din nila alam, yung iba naman gahol na daw sa oras kasi pasahan na hindi pa natatapos dahil late nagstart magsagot ng modules...” Tina

“Hindi na tinitignan ng ibang parents kung nasagutan na ng anak nila yung module basta na lang nila ipapasa din...” Ana

3. Unidentified answer sheets

There are unidentified answer sheets due to failure indicating the name. Teacher Kat said:

“Ang hirap i-identify kung kanino mga modules or answer sheets na walang names. May mga basta na lang din kasi naglalagay sa retrieval box na hindi man lang muna nagpapakita at nagsasign sa logbook...”

4. Dirty, damaged modules, torn pages

Dirty, damaged modules with torn or missing pages also add to teachers’ challenges as it causes the modules to be unreadable and the dirt might carry viruses that might affect the teachers’ health.

“Madumi na yung modules pag pinapasa nila. Meron mga nabasa daw, hindi na readable yun kasi kumalat yung ink at may parang naapak-apakan or nailapag sa may putik. Hindi naman sa nandidiri ako ha pero kasi we’re not totally covid free and baka may virus na dala yun so mabuti na yung nag-iingat...” Ron

“Hindi na kumpleto yung pages ng module na binabalik. May mga napunit daw dahil nabasa or nabutas kasi nagdoodle sa module yung kapatid. Meron nga nung minsan may nagpasa ng basang module, nahulog daw nung paalis na sila kaya ako na nagpatuyo...” Gel

In order to facilitate stress free collection of modules, teachers constantly remind parents of the schedule of retrieval. Whenever there are still unfinished activities, parents are encouraged to submit whatever they have finished and they can submit unfinished activities when they are done with it. For the unanswered or unfinished modules, teachers provide assistance and have open communication with parents to address their queries and other concerns. In addition, teachers always remind parents to double check the modules before submitting it, making sure that the name was clearly indicated. Also, make sure that the modules were place in a clean, dry place to avoid getting wet and dirty, torn and damaged.

D. Assessment. Teachers assess the learners in order to evaluate whether the educational objectives or competencies of the lessons were met.

Challenges of novice teachers in assessment

The challenges faced by teachers in assessment were mainly academic dishonesty and difficulty in validating performance.

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1. Academic dishonesty

Academic dishonesty is the common challenge faced by novice teachers as they have the same responses when asked about assessment. They said: *“Magulang naman ang nagsasagot eh..”* *“Mga magulang ang nagmomodule..”* Specifically, Teacher Jane said:

“Palagi perfect sa mga written assessments at activities sa modules pero halatang sulat ng magulang or guardian, meron pa nga yung iba kahit grade 1 pa lang cursive na ang sulat...”

2. Difficulty in validating performance

Validation of learning or performance is also difficult since there are assessments and modules answered by parents, guardians or tutors not the learners themselves.

“Nung modular na, madami tumaas ang grades pero hindi naman lahat yun eh sigurado if talagang performance ng bata kasi nga walang face to face...” Carla

“May mga estudyante ako na halata naman sa mga sinagutan nila na talagang sulat ng bata pero hindi pa din nakasisiguro kung lahat nga ay bata talaga nagsasagot kasi may naexperience ako one time na nasama sa naipasa yung papel na may nakasulat na mga sagot at halatang sulat ng matanda yun so pinapakopya na lang pala nila yung sagot para magmukhang yung bata ang nagsagot...” Tina

With this situation, teachers humbly ask and remind parents and guardians not to answer the learners' assessment, but to facilitate and guide them while they are answering. Teachers even conduct “virtual kamustahan” with the learners or home visitation when they have their free time.

Some of the results of this study particularly in the challenges in preparation and retrieval of modules is consistent with the findings of Castroverde and Acala (2021). [6] Furthermore, with regards to the challenges in assessment, the responses corroborates with the findings of Guangul et. al. (2020) that one of the challenges identified in assessment was academic dishonesty. [7]

COPING STRATEGIES OF NOVICE TEACHERS IN MODULAR DISTANCE LEARNING MODALITY

Novice teachers faced many challenges in this new normal education brought by Covid-19 pandemic. Teachers employed different strategies in order to overcome stress and cope up with the many challenges in modular distance learning modality.

Time management. Proper time management is common answer of all the respondents as it is very important in order to ease their daily tasks as teachers. *“Meron akong weekly task schedule na sinusunod, and I make sure na tapusin mga task ko sa school para hindi na ako mag-uuwi ng gawain sa bahay...”* Sir Ron said. With proper schedule of activities, teachers were able to identify which task needed to be prioritized first. If a teacher utilizes his/her time well, accomplishing all tasks in preparation, distribution, and retrieval and assessment will be achieved easily.

Stay positive. According to the respondents, being positive and believing that everything will be accomplished as planned lessens their burdens, frustrations, pressures, worries, and stress. The respondents claimed that having a positive outlook and having faith that things would go as planned helps them feel less burdened, frustrated, pressured, worried, and stressed.

“Think positive lang basta wag sa Covid ha, I mean kahit nakakastress sa dami ng reports eh isipin na lang natin na maswerte pa din tayo kasi nakapasok na tayo sa public, ang hirap kaya makain...” Ana

“Naniniwala ako sa sinasabi na “What the mind conceive, the body can achieve.” Magtiwala lang na lahat ng pagsubok na pinagdadaan ay lilipas at malalampasan din. Stay positive dapat and always be happy para hindi tayo mabilis tumanda...” Fe

Positive thinking helps novice teachers maintain a calm perspective despite the difficulties and challenges caused by the changes in educational setting.

Ask for advice/guidance. By seeking advice, assistance or direction from a mentor or other experienced teachers, novice teachers were able to overcome the challenges in modular distance learning modality. Being open and willing to accept constructive criticisms also helps them perform better.

“Nagtatanong ako sa mga coteachers ko kapag may hindi ako alam or maintindihan...” Jenny *“Nanghihingi ako ng advice sa mga datihan ng teachers lalo na sa mga naging teachers ko din noon na coteachers ko na din ngayon kapag hindi ako sigurado sa gagawin ko...”* Gel

Aside from the challenges in modular distance learning modality, novice teachers also face high expectations and pressure from other colleagues since they are being expected to have fresh and new ideas. To ease their mind from the stress brought by pressure, novice teachers equip themselves by attending webinars and trainings and even asking help from experienced teachers.

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“Embrace and accept changes, Teacher tayo eh. Kahit saan tayo ilagay makakasurvive tayo. Para sa bata, para sa bayan...” Ron

Additionally, by being flexible and knowing how to adapt to the changes in the educational system brought by the pandemic, they are also able to overcome the challenges encountered in the implementation of modular distance learning modality.

CONCLUSIONS

Based from the findings, the following conclusions were derived:

1. Novice teachers' challenges in modular distance learning modality are lack of printing materials, and supplies, time consuming, power interruption, parents not getting the modules, schedule not being followed, late submission, unanswered/unfinished modules, and unidentified answer sheets, dirty, damaged modules with torn and missing pages, academic dishonesty and difficulty validating learners' performance.
2. Proper time management, staying positive and asking advice or guidance from a mentor are the strategies employed by novice teachers in order to cope up with the challenges in modular distance learning modality. In addition being flexible and knowing how to adapt to changes help them cope up with the challenges encountered.

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