Modular Distance Learning Amidst New Normal: Challenges of Junior High Students towards Learning English

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine the challenges towards learning English as a Second Language in modular distance learning. The researchers used survey research to investigate the responses of the sample respondents. The researchers also integrated correlation-co efficient to determine the relationship between the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age, gender, and address and the identified challenges of high school students in learning English through modular distance learning. The researchers utilized validated, and modified Likert-type questionnaire to collect data that contain different questions that led to the result of this study. The major findings of the study revealed that delivery of content and learning preferences are the common challenges to high school students in learning English through modular distance learning. Although there are challenges encountered by junior high school students in learning English through the use of modular distance learning, it still signified that modular distance learning is not a cause of worry or burden to the students in the new normal. Hence, modular distance learning is not a hindrance in learning English. These identified challenges should be addressed with the help of every person involved in this matter.

Keywords: *modular distance learning, challenges, junior high school*

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 pandemic has brought severe changes to every corner of the world. The extensive disruptions include travel constraints, school shutdowns, and the global economic slump. It is undeniable that this virus has had a massive impact on the educational system.

It is impossible to deny that this virus has had a huge effect on the educational system. Given the situation the Philippines faced, the process of changing the teaching and learning styles of both the teachers and the students is indeed a sudden transition. From traditional to distance learning, this is the best possible alternative while the country and the rest of the world try to minimize the effect of this pandemic on the economy, which is, unfortunately, taking the lives of many. The world cries out for this striking situation affecting human capital

investment, and the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on economic, social, and political indices is uncertain, but it will, without a doubt, create a significant impact.

The term distance education, commonly known as distance learning, distributed learning, or remote education, has already occurred. It is still a way for the teaching and learning process to take place as an alternative in the absence of physical interaction or the traditional way of teaching and learning. This is currently the mode of teaching and learning in most schools in the Philippines. The Department of Education (DepEd) surveyed the parents of students who are enrolled in this academic year about the preferred distance learning method. The survey showed that printed and digital modules are the most preferred distance learning methods by parents for their children. The responsibility of a teacher is to monitor the progress and improvement of the learners. In this case, learners may seek help and guidance from their teacher through platforms such as email, telephone, messenger, text messaging, and other online platforms that can contact the teachers.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as of April 14, 2020, 188 countries around the world had closed schools, affecting over 1.5 billion children and accounting for more than 91 percent of all enrolled students. COVID-19 will likely have a big impact on economic, social, and political indices as the globe has never seen such a dramatic impact on human capital investment. Although most governments are making significant efforts to ensure access to continuing education, their ability to provide high-quality learning, particularly for the most disadvantaged, varies greatly.

Countries' attitudes to school closures also vary by region. The majority of countries in East Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) that offer remote learning use only online education, although a significant number also use TV and radio to reach rural areas and people without internet access. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), 28 percent of countries rely entirely on television and radio, slightly less than 40 percent rely entirely on online education, and 22 percent combine the two. In South Asia, approximately 40% of countries use broadcast (radio, TV, and radio), and nearly 50% use a combination of online and broadcast learning options. Only 11% of nations that are included in Sub-Saharan Africa rely only on internet access, while only 23% employ a combination of online and broadcast, according to the Center for Global Development and the World Bank.

Distance education involves acquiring information from sources other than the traditional way of gaining knowledge—attending institutions. To ensure the safety of both students and teachers, it is vital to change the way students learn, shifting from face-to-face classes to a new normal way of teaching and learning, which is distance learning. This would also help learners to continue doing their responsibilities as students without having to go outside their homes and risk their health, but the moment it was implemented, lots of factors popped up, making the situation even worse. Not everyone has the privilege of continuing studying with this kind of setup. Moreover, the preparation was never enough.

Distance learning takes place between the teacher and learners who are geographically remote from each other during instruction. In the Philippines, modular learning is the most popular type of distance learning. This is also to consider the situation of those students who are from far-flung areas where the location cannot access the internet and online learning is not possible. Teachers must make home visits to their students to ensure that they are studying and to identify and assist those who require extra assistance and attention (Llego, n.d.). The printed modules are being sent to students, parents, or guardians through teachers or local government officials.

Self-learning modules (SLMs) were used as a primary teaching and learning tool without face-to-face interaction, which was different before COVID-19. It has been said that independent learning is possible through the use of SLM; therefore, its quality of content and usability are important. These are characteristics of the module that will define its effectiveness as a teaching and learning tool.

The implementation of modular distance learning relies on the self-learning module to deliver education and facilitate teaching and learning. Its effectiveness can be dependent on the quality of content and usability as a teaching and learning tool. Challenges such as access to the internet and technology, and provisions of instructional support from parents and guardians are among the considerations of teachers in providing interventions to ensure the effectiveness of the implementation of MDL. These challenges concerning distance learning for students that hinder productive learning processes cannot be denied.

That is why it is important to identify these challenges, especially in the English subject, that destroy the focus of the learners in rural areas, specifically the junior high school students of Cumabao Integrated School. Specifically, the researchers aimed to answer the following questions: (1) What is the profile of the respondents in terms of the following: (a.) age; (b) gender; and (c) address? (2) What are challenges encountered by the students in the implementation of modular distance learning? (3) Is there a significant relationship between the profile of the respondents and the challenges face by the respondents in the implementation of modular distance learning in English subject?

METHOD

Research Design

This study is designed as a quantitative study, aiming to determine the challenges of the high school students and their relationship with the demographic profile of the respondents. Among the quantitative research methods, survey research was used in this study to investigate the responses of the sample respondents. The method describes the demographic profile of the respondents as to their age, gender, and address, and the challenges faced by the learners in the use of modular distance learning. The responses of the respondents were determined through frequency count, weighted mean, and correlation coefficient. Frequency

count was used to determine the number of respondents when group to age, gender, and address. Weighted mean was used to get the average response of the respondents by summing all the products divided by the number of items per component in the identified challenges faced by high school students.

Respondents

The respondents of the study were the junior high school students of Cumabao Integrated School clustered according to their respective barangay. The total number of enrollees in Cumabao Integrated School is 542. Using the slovin's formula with a margin of error of 0.0695 equivalent to 31.5 percent, the total number of study participants is (N=150), the number of respondents from barangay Camasi is (n=50), respondents from barangay Cumabao is (n=50), and (n=50) are the respondents from barangay Dy-Abra. This means that 31.5 percent of the total population of junior high school students are the sample respondents of the study.

Instrument

A survey questionnaire was used in the study. The questionnaire is divided into two parts. The first part is the demographic profile of the respondents containing their age, gender, and their address; the second part is the checklist containing the challenges encountered by the high school students in modular distance learning, particularly in the English program, in terms of (a) delivery of content, (b) learning preference, (c) language use in the learning activity sheet, (d) degree of difficulty, (e) study atmosphere, (f) parental support, and (g) teacher's support.

Data Gathering Procedure

After the validation of the instrument, the researchers secured a written permit addressed to the school principal and head teacher of Cumabao Integrated School. Records from the registrar's office are useful enough for the needed data on the list of junior high school enrollees of the said school coming from the three feeder barangays, namely: Camasi, Cumabao, and Dy-Abra. After getting the sample size, the researchers also performed a random sampling of the names of students from each barangay. The researchers also sought permission from the advisers and parents of the respondents. After giving permission, the researchers explained the purpose of the study to the sample respondents before they were asked to respond to the questionnaire. The researchers collected the data by means of a survey questionnaire that comprised their age, gender, and address. The challenges encountered by the respondents were identified in the second part of the survey questionnaire that was given to them. After the respondents had taken the tests, the papers were checked, tallied, interpreted, and analyzed.

Statistical Treatment

Percentile and frequency distribution was utilized to interpret the factors aggravating distance learning among high school students of Cumabao Integrated School.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic profile of the respondents. It was noted that most of the respondents were under the age of 15 (26.0%). There are more females involved, 77 (51.3%), than males. However, the number of respondents involved was equally distributed to each barangay: 50 (33.3%).

Table 1
Socio-demographic Profile of the Respondents

Items	Frequency	Percent
Age		
12	17	11.3
13	30	20.0
14	35	23.3
15	39	26.0
16	23	15.3
17	5	3.3
18	1	.7
Total	**150**	**100.0**
Sex		
Male	73	48.7
Female	77	51.3
Total	**150**	**100.0**
Address		
Camasi	50	33.3
Cumabao	50	33.3
Dy-Abra	50	33.3
Total	**150**	**100.0**

Challenges of the Students in the Implementation of Modular Distance Learning (MDL)

With a mean score of 2.35 (agree), Table 1 clearly demonstrates that students experienced overloaded lesson activities in the content of their MDL. This suggests that students have been working hard, which can be contributing to their tension or worry. Stranger (2018) clarifies the basis of this experience and demonstrates that overloading students affects not only their academic performance but also their mental and physical well-being, which, consequently, impairs their ability to learn.

Table 2
Challenges Encountered by the High School Students in the Implementation of Modular Distance Learning (MDL) in Terms of Content Delivery

DELIVERY OF CONTENT	Weighted Mean	Description
The contents of the lessons are not clearly presented in the Learning Activity Sheets (LAS)/ worksheets.	2.37	Disagree
The lessons through the LAS/worksheets are presented and arrived late weekly.	2.31	Disagree
The lessons and activities in the LAS/worksheets are unreadable and ineligible.	2.49	Disagree
Illustrations, graphs, and pictures used in the lesson are confusing.	2.10	Disagree
The instructions on the activities are unclear.	2.33	Disagree
Deepening of the content through examples is not present.	2.35	Disagree
Key concepts of the content are missing.	2.35	Disagree
The lesson activities are overload	2.53	Agree
General Weighted Mean	**2.35**	**Disagree**

Legend:
1.00 – 1.75   **Strongly Disagree**
1.76 – 2.50   **Disagree**
2.51 – 3.25   **Agree**
3.26 – 4.00   **Strongly Agree**

Table 3 illustrates that in terms of learning preference, students' activities and exercises are inappropriate to their learning style (2.52, agree), the given time to finish their tasks is inadequate (2.60, agree), and they study alone most of the time. Hence, students learn effectively because learning activities are interesting (2.37), they understand (2.34), and they work with peers. The study's findings are at odds with those of Gee (1990), who found that successful distance learners liked an individual learning environment whereas successful on-campus learners favored collaboration.

Table 3

Challenges Encountered by the Students in the Implementation of Modular Distance Learning in Terms of Learning Preferences

LEARNING PREFERENCES	Weighted Mean	Description
The activities and exercises are inappropriate to my learning style.	2.52	Agree
I do not understand the activities given to us through the Learning Activity Sheet (LAS).	2.37	Disagree
I find the activities in the Learning Activity Sheet (LAS) uninteresting.	2.34	Disagree
Time given to finish the assigned tasks is inadequate.	2.60	Agree
I am studying alone most of the time.	2.73	Agree
I effectively learn when I am studying with my peers.	2.41	Disagree
General Weighted Mean	**2.50**	**Disagree**

Legend:
1.00 – 1.75   Strongly Disagree
1.76 – 2.50   Disagree
2.51 – 3.25   Agree
3.26 – 4.00   Strongly Agree

The words or terms utilized in their learning activity sheets, as can be seen in Table 4, do not correspond to the student's comprehension level (2.41, disagree). They are unable to comprehend the learning activity or the provided examples (2.49) because of the usage of the English language (2.46, disagree). It is therefore obvious that using Filipino enabled students to understand the learning activity sheets. Hence, students' inability to understand the LAS in English suggests that they are not competent in the language.

The study by Albakri (2017) about the impact of English-medium instruction on the academic experiences of college students in Oman had similar results. It has been learned that participants indicated having crucial issues with their studies, which were primarily brought on by their insufficient command of the language. It was also recognized that using Arabic as a medium of instruction (AMI) would result in students having a deeper understanding of the subject matter and, most likely, performing better academically.

Table 4

*Challenges Encountered by the Students in the Implementation of
Modular Distance Learning in Terms of Language Use in the Learning Activity Sheets*

LANGUAGE USE IN THE LEARNING ACTIVITY SHEET (LAS)	Weighted Mean	Description
The term and words used in the LAS/worksheets are familiar and are on our level of understanding.	2.41	Disagree
The LAS/worksheets using Filipino as the medium are more understandable.	2.69	Agree
The LAS/worksheets using English as the medium are more understandable.	2.46	Disagree
The use of the Filipino language in giving examples is more comprehensible.	2.74	Agree
The use of the English language in giving examples is more comprehensible.	2.49	Disagree
General Weighted Mean	**2.56**	**Agree**

Legend:
1.00 – 1.75   Strongly Disagree
1.76 – 2.50   Disagree
2.51 – 3.25   Agree
3.26 – 4.00   Strongly Agree

Table 5 demonstrates that students were struggling with the inputs required (2.22, disagree) and the outcomes themselves (2.31). This suggests that MDL is unquestionably challenging for learners. In contrast to the study Argallon et al. (2022), the modular distance learning strategy aids students in developing a better understanding of modules. Therefore, even if the pandemic ends, face-to-face training must continue using a modular way.

Table 5

*Challenges Encountered by the Students in the Implementation of
Modular Distance Learning in Terms of Degree of Difficulty*

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY	Weighted Mean	Description
Questions and test items are difficult.	2.67	Agree
Most of the questions and test are average.	2.67	Agree
Questions and test are easy.	2.22	Disagree
The outputs asked are difficult to do.	2.56	Agree
The outputs are of average level to perform.	2.71	Agree
The outputs asked are easy to perform.	2.31	Disagree
General Weighted Mean	**2.52**	**Agree**

Legend:
1.00 – 1.75   Strongly Disagree
1.76 – 2.50   Disagree
2.51 – 3.25   Agree
3.26 – 4.00   Strongly Agree

It is evident in Table 6 that the students are aware that their learning environment does not support MDL. Although worksheets were completed at a table or desk (2.82), there were other issues that interfered with learning, such as the inability to motivate oneself (2.77), poor peer communication (2.77), susceptibility to noise and disruptions (2.69), and trouble managing time to complete the task (2.69). According to research, an engaged learning environment encourages higher levels of student performance, fosters meaningful learning experiences, and motivates students to practice higher-level critical thinking skills.

Table 6
Challenges Encountered by the Students in the Implementation of
Modular Distance Learning in Terms of Study Atmosphere

STUDY ATMOSTPHERE	Weighted Mean	Description
The worksheets are done on a table or a desk.	2.82	Agree
There are no reference materials (books, internet, others) while I am learning.	2.60	Agree
My learning is prone from noise and disturbance.	2.69	Agree
During the time of learning, my parents/ guardians give me household chores.	2.60	Agree
I have a poor peer communication.	2.77	Agree
I find it hard to motivate myself.	2.77	Agree
I am struggling to adapt in the new learning environment.	2.73	Agree
There are practices I do that result to poor academic discipline.	2.68	Agree
It is hard for me to manage my time in accomplishing the tasks and exercises in my English module.	2.69	Agree
General Weighted Mean	**2.71**	**Agree**

Legend:
1.00 – 1.75   Strongly Disagree
1.76 – 2.50   Disagree
2.51 – 3.25   Agree
3.26 – 4.00   Strongly Agree

Parental support is shown in Table 7 by the fact that siblings and parents both help kids with MDL with their schoolwork (2.33) and (2.29). Hence, their families provide them with space in their modules for answering activities (2.29). Gevero (2021) highlighted the high level of parental involvement in online education. It was clear how conscientiously and responsibly parents contributed to the education of their children in this new standard time as co-teachers.

Table 7

Challenges Encountered by the Students in the Implementation of Modular Distance Learning in Terms of Parental Support

PARENTAL SUPPORT	Weighted Mean	Description
My parents/guardians do not assist me with my school activities if I have difficulties.	2.29	Disagree
I have elder siblings and relatives but they do not assist me with schoolwork.	2.33	Disagree
My parents and other family members do not understand the importance of modular distance learning.	2.21	Disagree
My family does not give me personal space and time when I am answering my modules.	2.29	Disagree
There is a lack of parental involvement because my parents are not aware of the new learning process.	2.25	Disagree
General Weighted Mean	**2.27**	**Disagree**

Legend:
1.00 – 1.75   Strongly Disagree
1.76 – 2.50   Disagree
2.51 – 3.25   Agree
3.26 – 4.00   Strongly Agree

Table 8 indicates that students receive support from their teachers. As such, teachers give feedback about the results of their outputs (2.31), teachers give them attention (2.31), etc. On the other hand, teacher, physical absence greatly affects students English comprehension and reading skills (2.93). This implies that teacher assistance in developing their English reading and comprehension skills is crucial. Manda (2022) revealed that teachers in modular distance learning perform a variety of functions, such as preparing and distributing the modules, tracking learner's progress, and doing a lot of paper work, and need upskilling to manage this learning modality. Teachers adjust to the implementation of modular distance learning by adjusting their new routine.

Table 8

Challenges Encountered by the Students in the Implementation of
Modular Distance Learning in Terms of Teacher Support

Teacher Support	Weighted Mean	Description
I cannot reach out my teachers whenever I have difficulties regarding the LAS/worksheet.	2.21	Disagree
My teacher does not provide feedback about my assessment results.	2.31	Disagree
The teacher does not support and assist me when I do not understand what's in my module.	2.19	Disagree
The teacher's physical absence greatly affects my English comprehension and reading skills.	2.93	Agree
The teacher focuses only to certain students and does not give his/her attention to me.	2.21	Disagree
General Weighted Mean	**2.37**	**Disagree**

Legend:
1.00 – 1.75   Strongly Disagree
1.76 – 2.50   Disagree
2.51 – 3.25   Agree
3.26 – 4.00   Strongly Agree

Table 9 shows the significant relationship between the profile of the respondents and the challenges faced by the respondents in the implementation of modular distance learning in English when grouped according to age. Based on the findings, delivery of the content (0.140, 0.088), learning preferences (0.156, 0.057), language use in the learning activity sheet (0.052, 0.525), degree of difficulty (0.093, 0.258), study atmosphere (-0.058, 0.480), parental support (0.104, 0.205), and teacher support (0.118, 0.152) revealed no significant relationship to the age of the sample respondents.

Similar results as in the study of Aksan (2021) on the effect of the modular distance learning approach on the academic performance in mathematics of the students in Mindanao State University-Sulu Senior High School, it was revealed that there was no significant difference in the students' perceptions when they were grouped by age, which means the students had the same perceptions regarding their modular distance learning approach academic performance.

Table 9

Significant Relationship Between the Respondents' Profile and the Challenges They Faced in the Implementation of MDL in English when Grouped According to Age

Variables	Mean	STD	R-value	p-value	Interpretation
Delivery of Content	2.3908	.42527	.140	.088	Not Significant
Learning Preferences	2.5133	.44976	.156	.057	Not Significant
Language Use in the Learning Activity Sheet (LAS)	2.5653	.43023	.052	.525	Not Significant
Degree of Difficulty	2.4867	.29190	.093	.258	Not Significant
Study Atmosphere	2.6756	.36717	-.058	.480	Not Significant
Parental Support	2.2587	.45439	.104	.205	Not Significant
Teachers Support	2.3190	.42473	.118	.152	Not Significant

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 10 shows the significant relationship between the respondents' profile and the challenges they faced in the implementation of modular distance learning in English when grouped according to sex. Based on the findings, learning preferences (0.029, 0.725), language use in the learning activity sheet (0.033, 0.686), degree of difficulty (0.001, 0.988), study atmosphere (0.121, 0.141), parental support (-0.003, 0.967), and teacher support (-0.035, 0.670) revealed no significant relationship to the sex of the sample respondents. On the other hand, on the delivery of the content, this study shows that it has a significant relationship with the sex of the respondents, with an r-value of 0.194 (a very weak positive correlation) and a p-value of 0.018.

Richardson and Woodley (2003) found that women were more devoted and persistent than men, which allowed them to attain higher learning results. Males and females demonstrated different levels of self-regulation, and females also experienced considerably better outcomes from modular distance learning than males (Alghamdi et al., 2020).

Table 10

Significant Relationship between the Respondents' Profile and the Challenges They Faced in the Implementation of MDL in English when grouped according to sex.

Variables	Mean	STD	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Delivery of Content	2.3908	.42527	.194*	.018	Significant
Learning Preferences	2.5133	.44976	.029	.725	Not Significant
Language Use in the Learning Activity Sheet (LAS)	2.5653	.43023	.033	.686	Not Significant
Degree of Difficulty	2.4867	.29190	.001	.988	Not Significant
Study Atmosphere	2.6756	.36717	.121	.141	Not Significant
Parental Support	2.2587	.45439	-.003	.967	Not Significant
Teachers Support	2.3190	.42473	-.035	.670	Not Significant

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

When grouped by address, Table 11 demonstrates the strong correlation between the respondent profiles and the difficulties they encountered implementing a modular distance learning in English. Based on the results, there was no correlation between the addresses of the sample respondents' respondents and the delivery of content (-0.014, 0.861), language use in the learning activity sheet (-0.023, 0.004), degree of difficulty (-0.140, 0.087), study atmosphere (-0.151, 0.065), parental support (-0.061, 0.456), or teacher support (0.042, 0.606). On the other hand, this research demonstrates a substantial association between respondents' addresses and their learning preferences, with an r-value of -0.234 (a mild negative correlation) and a p-value of 0.004.

Table 11

Significant Relationship between the Respondents' Profile and the Challenges They Faced in the Implementation of MDL in English when Grouped According to Address.

Variables	Mean	STD	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Delivery of Content	2.3908	.42527	-.014	.861	Not Significant
Learning Preferences	2.5133	.44976	-.234**	.004	Significant
Language Use in the Learning Activity Sheet (LAS)	2.5653	.43023	-.023	.781	Not Significant
Degree of Difficulty	2.4867	.29190	-.140	.087	Not Significant
Study Atmosphere	2.6756	.36717	-.151	.065	Not Significant
Parental Support	2.2587	.45439	-.061	.456	Not Significant
Teachers Support	2.3190	.42473	.042	.606	Not Significant

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

CONCLUSION

It is clearly reflected in the study that students recognized difficulty in the use of modular distance learning in the English program. The use of the language and study atmosphere are challenges that hinder their progress in learning the course. Hence, despite experiencing difficulty in the use of MDL, parents and teachers support is well manifested. Thus, schools, faculty, and language experts must attend to concerns and find ways to improve the use of MDL in English programs.

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