

# Addressing the Learning Gaps in the Distance Learning Modalities

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**Abstract:** *This paper deals with the discussion of the challenging situation of the education system during this COVID-19 global pandemic. It narrates the various issues on how education officials and personnel fulfill their duties and responsibilities amidst the danger of the pandemic. The concept of learning gaps was defined to enlighten educators on how they can contribute to addressing it effectively with the different learning delivery modalities being implemented this school year. Ways on how to address (bridge and close) the learning gaps were discussed and the possible group of people who could always be of great help for the utmost and holistic development of the Filipino schoolchildren during this pandemic period and in the future.*

**Keywords** — *Learning Gaps; Distance Learning Modality; Face-To-Face Learning Modality; Distance Learning Modality; Blended Learning Modality; Homeschooling*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. There are no better descriptions of the Philippine education system and most of the countries this COVID-19 global pandemic, than these four adjectives borrowed from the concepts of VUCA. Our schools, and our world as well today, are living in a VUCA world. This concept, according to Giles [1], originated with students at the US Army War College to describe the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity of the world after the Cold War. At present, VUCA is gaining relevance in almost all sectors to characterize the current environment and the leadership required to navigate it successfully.

Philippine education, as it opened the School Year 2020-2021 on October 05, 2020, per DepEd Order No. 030, s. 2020 [2] in line with its Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) per DepEd Order No. 012, s. 2020 [3] to ensure the delivery of basic education despite the pandemic, faced several challenges in various forms in fulfillment of its mandate of delivering quality, equitable, and culture-based education without compromising the health, safety, and well-being of its people especially the teachers and learners all over the country.

Supports from various sectors, including the local government units (LGUs) and private sectors, poured their support to government schools, knowing its limited resources, especially during these challenging times of the pandemic. Education Secretary Leonor Magtolis-Briones, in a press release, cited the concerted effort of LGUs and external partners in supporting DepEd to provide digital learning assistance this school year. In the first month of 2021, over 475 partner LGUs, NGOs, and external partners partnered with School Division Offices (SDOs) to provide learning materials to learners, parents, and guardians, and teachers and personnel [4].

External supports are helping DepEd schools to withstand the challenges brought by the pandemic, especially on the parts of teachers and learners. For instance, in the case of SDO City of Malolos, the LGU through the Local School Board (LSB) allotted funds from the Special Education Fund (SEF) to finance the immediate procurement of Wi-Fi modems, USB flash disks, and laptops to all its teachers and personnel. The procurement and distribution of the said items were perfected before the end of 2020.

It is good to know that various forms of assistance are coming in to support people's efficiency in the delivery of services mandated to them to fulfill in the service in DepEd. Thus, morale within the organization is lifted to tackle the adversities of this school year, especially on how to strategically address the needs of the learners in various learning areas. As education officials find ways to support their people, teachers as education front liners are doing their best to ensure that every learner masters the most essential learning competencies (MELCs) amidst the new setup of schooling. Teachers are exerting efforts to address the learning gaps of their learners, thus making their teaching-learning engagement as meaningful and fruitful as the previous years.

## 2. WHAT ARE LEARNING GAPS?

Various educators arrived at a common definition of what learning gaps are, which are generally the difference between what learners are expected to have learned by a certain grade level versus what they have learned up to that point. These learning gaps are often compounding, which means that if they are not addressed promptly, learners are likely to fall further and further behind because of the skills and knowledge they have missed. This compounding phenomenon poses a major challenge for both educators and learners alike as learners progress to a higher level of the education ladder. [5, 6, 7, 8]

Learning gaps happened when learners missed a skill and proceeded to a new lesson without any remediation on it. Since the lessons are arranged from simple to complex competencies, any unmastered simple skills will hinder the learners to master, too, the higher level of competencies, thus leaving a gap from the standard mastery level to what is expected of them on their succeeding lessons.

Any gaps should be addressed at the soonest possible time for the successful mastery of competencies as prescribed in the curriculum. At this pandemic period, as we are embracing the various distance learning modalities, a big challenge for teachers and learners alike is facing our way on how to effectively bridge the identified learning gaps.

### 3. WHAT ARE THE DISTANCE LEARNING MODALITIES?

A basic definition of learning modalities is how we take in, process, and learn using our senses. These modalities should always conform to the needs and capabilities of teachers and learners to ensure effective implementation. [9]

In the context of DepEd, learning delivery modalities are the mode on how teaching-learning episodes will take place. There are various modalities that schools can adopt, maybe one or a combination of its kinds, depending on the health restrictions and the context of the learners in the school or locality. The four kinds of learning modalities are defined herein from DepEd's BE-LCP for a common understanding.

**The Face-To-Face Learning Modality.** This modality refers to a learning delivery modality where learners and teachers are both physically present in the classroom, and there are opportunities for active engagement, immediate feedback, and the socio-emotional development of learners.

**The Distance Learning Modality.** This modality 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.

- (a) **Modular Distance Learning** involves individualized instruction that allows learners to use self-learning modules (SLMs) in print or digital format, whichever is applicable in the context of the learner, and other learning resources like learner's materials, textbooks, activity sheets, study guides, and other study materials. Learners access electronic copies of learning materials on a computer, tablet PC, or smartphone. CDs, DVDs, USB storage, and computer-based applications can all be used to deliver e-learning materials, including offline e-books. The teacher takes the responsibility of monitoring the progress of the learners. The learners may ask assistance from the teacher via email, telephone, text message/instant messaging, etc. Where possible, the teacher shall do home visits to learners needing remediation or assistance. Any member of the family or other

stakeholders in the community need to serve as para-teachers.

- (b) **Online Distance Learning** features the teacher as facilitator, engaging learners' active participation using various technologies accessed through the internet while they are geographically remote from each other during instruction. The internet is used to facilitate learner-teacher and peer-to-peer communication. Online learning allows live synchronous instruction. It requires participants to have a good and stable internet connection. It is more interactive than the other types of distance learning and the responses are in real-time. The learners may download materials from the internet, complete and submit assignments online, and attend webinars and virtual classes. This is practiced effectively by using a Learning Management System or related technologies. The DepEd Commons and LR Portal fall in this category.
- (c) **TV/Radio-Based Instruction** utilizes SLMs converted to video lessons for Television-Based Instruction and SLMs converted to radio scripts for Radio-Based Instruction. Distance learning modality is most viable for independent learners, and learners supported by periodic supervision of parents or guardians. The challenge will be in dealing with learners not capable of independent learning. This is the subject of further discussion within DepEd and with partners and parents.

**The Blended Learning Modality.** This modality refers to a learning delivery that combines face-to-face with any or a mix of online distance learning, modular distance learning, and TV/ Radio-based Instruction. Blended learning will enable the schools to limit face-to-face learning, ensure social distancing, and decrease the volume of people outside the home at any given time. Critical for implementation will be the production of the needed teacher's and learner's learning materials (LR Portal and DepEd Commons will be maximized), as well as the support of media institutions like TV and radio stations.

**The Homeschooling Learning Modality.** This is an ADM that aims to provide learners with quality basic education that is facilitated by qualified parents, guardians, or tutors who have undergone relevant training in a home-based environment. It allows families to educate according to their faith, philosophy, and values, and to adjust learning schedules around family schedules and circumstances. However, there remain several issues in its implementation, including the supervision of licensed teachers and alignments with the curriculum. Thus, this modality will be the subject of a later DepEd issuance before its expansion.

### 4. HOW TO ADDRESS LEARNING GAPS?

According to Heather (2020), the first step in addressing learning gaps is to identify exactly **where** and **what** those gaps are, and **which learners** struggle with them. The author noted

that quizzes are a quick and easy way to formatively assess learners on what they have learned. She added that these can be mini end-of-topic quizzes, or even one covering a few units of a subject. Teachers must ensure a good spread and mix of questions to uncover learning gaps. After knowing the gaps, teachers must apply the necessary actions and test again the mastery level acquired by the learners through quizzes. Through these steps, learning gaps can be addressed and bridged. [10]

In a published study by Cabigao (2021), the author started the identification of learning gaps in writing from the outputs of the learners in his class. From the date acquired, he conceptualized the intervention program and implemented it. Learners' levels of performance before and after the implementation phase were compared to determine the level of improvement achieved. The gaps among learners in basic writing skills were addressed by the teacher through a systematic approach, which was shown in Figure 1.

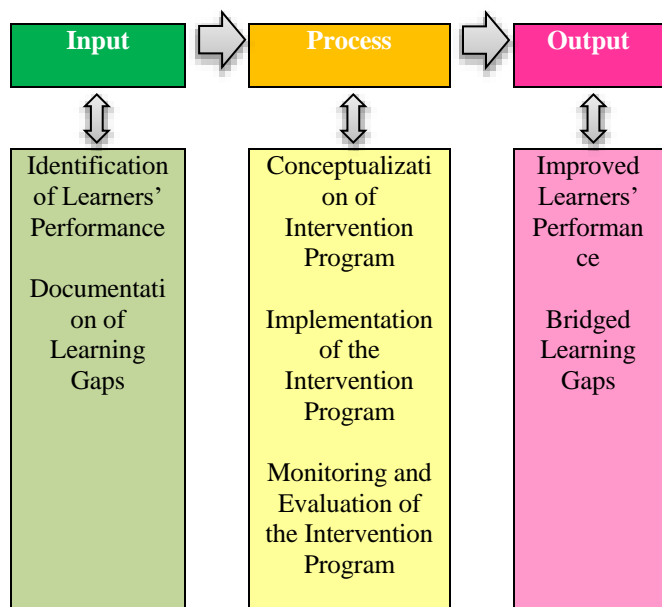


Fig. 1. Suggested Conceptual Model in Addressing Learning Gaps

Psychology.iresearchnet.com gives a powerful statement on the use of the Input-Process-Output (IPO) model in every systematic inquiry. According to it, "the IPO model has historically been the dominant approach to understanding and explaining team performance and continues to exert a strong influence on group research today. The framework is based on classic systems theory, which states that the general structure of a system is as important in determining how effective it will function as its components. Similarly, the IPO model has a causal structure, in that outputs are a function of various group processes, which are in turn influenced by numerous input variables." Using this premise of the IPO model, addressing and bridging learning gaps will always be feasible and possible. What we need is a support system to initiate and

sustain our initiatives of helping our learners master what they ought to master as they progress to the education ladder.

### 5. IT'S WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY TO ADDRESS THE LEARNING GAPS?

Teachers should be at the forefront in addressing the learning gaps of learners. Present and previous teachers should work collaboratively to offer developmentally appropriate learning tasks, thus ensuring effective implementation of the intervention program. The words *developmentally appropriate* mean an approach to teaching that respects both the age and the individual needs of each child. This pedagogical concept reiterates that the program should fit the learner, not the other way around. [13]

Aside from the support system within the school, parents' support at home is indeed essential in addressing (bridging and closing) the learning gap. A study conducted in an elementary school proved that strengthened school-home relationships have positive effects on the performance of learners (Cabigao, 2014). [14]

### 6. GENERALIZATION

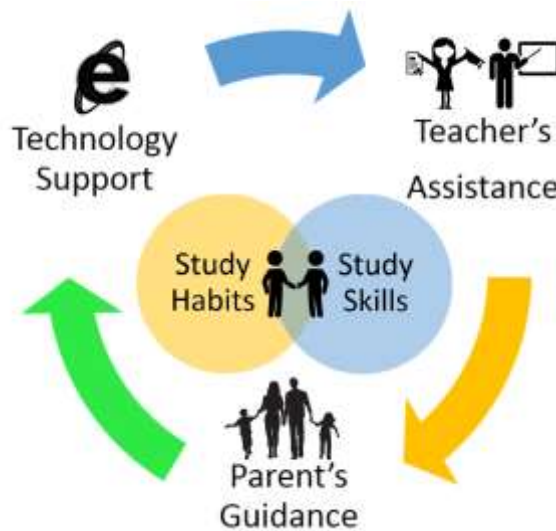


Fig. 2. Effective Teaching-Learning Model in the COVID-19 Pandemic and New Normal Era of Cabigao, 2020

It takes a village to educate a child, as a popular African adage says. The success of education services relies on the collaboration of various sectors, the school and its people, the home and the community, local and national governments, and the private sectors. Everyone's contribution plays a significant part in the delivery of quality education to our learners.

In the model of Cabigao (2020) on effective teaching-learning this pandemic period, aside from teachers' and parents' roles, technology likewise dictates its success. Providing technology support and provision to our learners is a great challenge to education officials and advocates in truly

addressing the existing learning gaps for the holistic development of every Filipino learner today and beyond.

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