

Unveiling Educational Evolution: School heads' Narratives on embracing Modular Distance Learning

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Abstract: This narrative inquiry examines the experiences of school heads in implementing modular distance learning (MDL) approaches during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study explored how school heads defined MDL, the strategies they adopted in implementing it, and their perceptions of its effectiveness. Key findings showed that MDL was a crucial tool for educational continuity, especially in remote and disaster-prone areas. Parent support limitation and inappropriate assessment techniques have also been a critical problem. In addition, younger children need scaffolding. The methods that head teachers employed to enhance MDL effectiveness include reading programs, peer teaching, and home visits. The strength of MDL is promoted by community involvement, resources use, and responsive teaching. The recommendations include improved funding, better training both for parents and teachers, and inclusion of multiple learning modules for a more holistic method of teaching.

Keywords—*Modular, Education, narratives.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a global crisis, compelling various sectors to adapt swiftly to ensure the safety and continuity of operations. Among these sectors, education stands as a significant focal point, necessitating innovative solutions to uphold learning while prioritizing health and safety measures for all stakeholders. In response to this unprecedented challenge, education experts have mobilized efforts to devise strategies that enable continued learning amidst the pandemic's threat [13].

Central to this endeavor is the Department of Education's issuance of DO 12 s. 2020, also known as "The Adoption of the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan for the year 2020-2021 in the light of Covid-19 public Health Emergency." [9]. This plan represents a groundbreaking approach aimed at sustaining education despite the global health crisis [1]. The Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan underscores the importance of ensuring the safety of all stakeholders while maintaining learning continuity through adjustments to the K to 12 curriculum and the utilization of various learning delivery modalities.

One such modality that has emerged prominently amidst the implementation of the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan is modular distance learning. With traditional face-to-face instruction rendered impractical due to health concerns, distance learning has become the primary mode of instruction. Distance learning entails educational interactions occurring between teachers and learners who are geographically separated during instruction [17]. This approach encompasses multiple modalities, including Online Distance Learning (ODL), Radio-Based Instruction (RBI), TV-Based Instruction (TVI), and Modular Distance Learning (MDL).

However, the transition to modular distance learning presents significant challenges for school heads, who serve as both instructional and administrative leaders within educational institutions. These leaders face obstacles in delivering this new learning modality effectively, particularly in providing students with the necessary learning materials, especially in areas with limited internet access and resources [18]

To address these challenges and explore the evolving landscape of education amidst the pandemic, this study aims to engage with the narratives of school heads regarding their experiences with embracing modular distance learning approaches. Specifically, the research seeks to understand how school heads define modular distance learning approaches, examine the methods they employ in implementing these approaches, and assess their perceptions of the effectiveness of modular distance learning in achieving teaching and learning outcomes. Moreover, this study aims to provide valuable insights and policy recommendations to enhance the implementation of modular distance learning and ensure the continued delivery of quality education during unprecedented and challenging times.

2. METHOD

The narrative research tradition delves into the stories, experiences, and perspectives of individuals to gain a deep understanding of a phenomenon. In this study, I employ narrative inquiry to explore the journey of school administrators in embracing flexible learning within educational settings. By listening to their narratives, we aim to uncover the evolution of educational practices, and the challenges and opportunities encountered along the way. The data collection procedure followed rigorous guidelines to ensure the reliability and validity of the research outcomes. Drawing from Braun and Clarke's [5] thematic analysis framework and Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's [16] approach to qualitative data analysis, semi-structured

interviews were conducted with three school heads representing elementary, integrated, and secondary schools. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants with diverse experiences in managing schools during emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews were conducted using a pre-defined interview guide, allowing for flexibility while ensuring key topics related to modular distance learning (MDL) were covered. Each interview, lasting between 45 to 60 minutes, was conducted via face-to-face modality, based on the participants' preferences and accessibility. Prior to the interview's, informed consent was obtained from each participant, outlining the purpose of the study, procedures, and potential risks involved. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent to ensure accurate transcription. Transcriptions were then meticulously anonymized to protect participants' identities, with names and other identifying information replaced by codes. Field notes were taken during the interviews to capture non-verbal cues, immediate reflections, and contextual details, supplementing the audio recordings and transcriptions.

The analysis of the collected narratives followed a thematic approach. Initially, transcripts were reviewed multiple times to immerse researchers in the data and identify recurring patterns and themes. Through open coding, initial categories were generated, capturing key concepts and ideas expressed by participants [5]. Next, a process of thematic coding was conducted to organize the data into broader themes and subthemes, establishing connections and relationships between different elements of the narratives. This phase involved constant comparison and refinement, allowing a comprehensive understanding of the administrators' experiences with modular distance learning (MDL) to emerge [16]. Finally, selective coding was employed to identify overarching narratives that encapsulated the essence of the administrators' journeys in embracing MDL. These narratives were presented coherently and compellingly, providing insights into the evolution of educational practices and informing future strategies for promoting flexible learning in diverse educational contexts [7]. The data analysis involved a systematic approach to handling qualitative data collected through interviews with three schools from elementary, integrated, and secondary schools. Using purposive sampling, these participants were selected to provide diverse insights into MDL. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and anonymized to maintain confidentiality. The transcriptions underwent content analysis, beginning with familiarization, where the researcher repeatedly read the transcripts to gain a deep understanding of the data. Initial coding was performed manually to capture relevant segments related to the research questions, which were then grouped into categories based on similarities. These categories were synthesized into broader themes that encapsulated the core responses of the participants. The final step involved presenting the themes in alignment with the specific research questions, ensuring a structured and coherent narrative of the findings. This methodical analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of the school heads'

perspectives and strategies regarding the implementation of MDL.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study focused on the narratives, experiences and or stories of school heads in embracing the modular distance learning approaches. In addition, using purposive sampling, three (3) school heads coming from elementary, integrated, and secondary schools were selected as participants of the study. The responses from all participants were subjected to content analysis where the themes across all responses were drawn. Codes had been used to keep the identities of the research participants hidden. The presentation of the result was done according to the order of specific research questions used to gather information in this study.

3.1 how do school heads define modular distance learning approaches?

Theme 1: Empowerment through MDL

MDL was identified as a valuable tool for empowering learners by promoting independent and self-directed learning. This approach was particularly beneficial during emergencies, as it allowed students to continue their education without relying solely on teacher-led instruction. The emphasis on self-learning helped foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills among students, preparing them for future academic challenges.

"Mdl is a good approach use by deped to empower learners for independent and individual learning especially in this challenging time with have implemet Education in emergencies which is more effective that way. As a school head assign in IP community. Mdl is not ideal since not all parents can facilitate home based learning, mostly base on my experience parents dili kayo kabasa, naa gyod learning loss sa bukid unlike here in a mainstream school daghang way pwede sila magpatutor-participant 2"

MDL's ability to empower students by fostering independent learning is a significant advantage, particularly during emergencies when traditional classroom instruction is disrupted. This empowerment aspect aligns with the educational goal of developing lifelong learners who can adapt to various learning contexts [11]. Schools should continue to promote and support self-directed learning initiatives within MDL frameworks to enhance student autonomy and resilience.

Theme 2: Essential Role of MDL in Pandemic

The pandemic underscored the essential role of MDL in maintaining educational continuity when face-to-face classes were not feasible. By providing a structured framework for learning through modules, schools ensured that students could continue their education despite the restrictions

imposed by the pandemic. This approach was particularly vital in ensuring that learning did not come to a halt, especially in regions where internet connectivity was limited or unreliable.

MPL is very important in school especially in pandemic time it is very useful especially in the community nga nabiyaaan bata nila so. In time of pandemic dili man gyod siya face to face classes noh, maghatag silag mga modules para macope up sa mga bata ang competencies.

The pandemic has highlighted the indispensable role of MDL in maintaining educational continuity. By enabling students to continue their education remotely, MDL helped mitigate the adverse effects of school closures. This finding echoes the broader educational discourse that emphasizes the need for flexible and resilient education systems capable of withstanding crises [19]. Policymakers and educational leaders should consider integrating MDL into standard educational practices to ensure preparedness for future emergencies.

Theme 3: Significance of MDL in Pandemic

MDL proved to be particularly significant in remote and disaster-prone areas. In these regions, the approach facilitated the continuation of education even in the face of natural disasters and other disruptions. By enabling students to meet learning competencies through well-structured modules, MDL played a crucial role in minimizing educational disruptions and ensuring that students remained on track with their studies.

Modular distance design to help the school to address especially sa mga panahon nga kinahanglan nga dili muadto ang ang bata sa school especially sa amoa nga naasign sa farflung school nga nay magbaha, floods, sa akoo panglantaw nakatabang siya . the ibjectives is good to meet the competencies. Siguro challenge siya kay pangitaan man paagi nga mga problema.

In remote and disaster-prone areas, MDL has proven to be an effective solution for ensuring that education continues uninterrupted. This adaptability is crucial for regions frequently affected by natural disasters, where traditional schooling can be sporadically disrupted. The success of MDL in these contexts suggests that it could be a permanent fixture in the educational strategies of such regions, providing a reliable alternative to face-to-face learning during disruptions [4]

3.2: In what ways school head implement modular distance learning approaches?

Theme 1: Budget and Resource Management

School heads reported significant budget constraints impacting the implementation of MDL. Costs associated with printing modules, purchasing printers, transportation, and the logistical challenge of delivering materials to students were highlighted. Despite these financial limitations, school heads managed the available resources provided by the Department of Education (DepEd), such as books and printed materials, to support modular learning effectively.

Mdlp is difficult since naa siya kaakibat nga budget, like printing of modules purchases of printters, transportation then challenge pud ang layo ang bata but gusto mo school, so far sa amoa karun giutlize namu ang resources books provided by deped, gihatag namu sa gusto mag modular distance learning dili man pud tanan tagaan kay kung kinsa ratung willing mao rapud amoa tagaan og modules.

Effective resource management is crucial for the successful deployment of MDL, especially under financial constraints. School heads demonstrated resilience and ingenuity by optimizing the resources at hand. This aligns with the findings of Lourens and Bleazard [15], who emphasized the importance of resource allocation and management in educational settings, particularly in developing countries. Ensuring that schools have adequate funding and resources is vital for the sustainability of MDL. Future policy recommendations should include increased financial support and resource provision to mitigate budgetary challenges.

Theme 2: Incorporation of Radio-Based Approaches

In areas with limited internet connectivity, some school heads incorporated radio-based learning to supplement MDL. This approach allowed students to access educational content through radio broadcasts, ensuring that learning continued despite the digital divide.

We utilize a radio-based approach as one of our ways in implementing the MDLP.

The use of radio as an educational tool demonstrates the adaptability of MDL to local contexts with limited technological infrastructure. Radio-based learning has proven effective in reaching students in remote areas where digital access is restricted [20]. This method enhances accessibility and ensures that students remain engaged in their education. Schools should consider integrating various non-digital educational mediums to complement MDL, especially in areas with connectivity issues.

Theme 3: Structured Implementation and Community Coordination

The implementation of MDL involved structured coordination with local barangay officials to facilitate the distribution and collection of modules. This collaborative

effort ensured timely delivery and retrieval of learning materials. Additionally, interventions were put in place to address unmet learning competencies, and proper assessment mechanisms were established to evaluate student progress.

Since gkan tag pandemic, kami sa oro full blast amn me modular then ni tap man me sa brgy official then matag purok magkuha ang mga pupils. As to amoang mechanism, naa amn ang modules, amoang gihatag sa mga studyante labi prior sa mga mga panawagan nga magmodular. Nahimo pud namu siyang intervention labi na mga mga comtencies nga wala n address. Naa pud me proper assessment kung unsaon pagcheck sa modules. Then kung nay parents ipadala pud namo ang modules.

Community involvement and local governance play a critical role in the structured implementation of MDL. Coordinating with barangay officials and leveraging local networks helped overcome logistical challenges, ensuring that educational delivery was efficient and organized. This community-based strategy aligns with the findings of Arenas et al [2], who highlighted the importance of community engagement in educational programs. Strengthening ties with local authorities and communities enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of MDL initiatives.

3.3: how does school heads perceive the effectiveness of modular distance learning approaches?

Theme 1: Challenges and Limitations in MDL Effectiveness

School heads reported significant challenges in implementing MDL, particularly in rural areas and lower grade levels (Key Stage I). These challenges include:

Scaffolding Learning: Students in lower grades require more direct instruction and scaffolding, which is difficult to provide through MDL. Many students come from backgrounds without proper pedagogical support, making independent learning more challenging.

Parental Support: The effectiveness of MDL is compromised due to minimal parental support. In many cases, parents end up completing the assignments for their children, leading to discrepancies between the apparent performance (high module scores) and actual performance (low quarterly assessment scores).

Assessment and Monitoring: Monitoring student progress through MDL is unreliable. While feedback mechanisms with parents are in place, they often fail to provide accurate assessments of student learning. Face-to-face classes enable better follow-up and monitoring by teachers.

Sa bukid dili siya ideal and effective especially key stage I. pero different ang story kung sa key stage 2-3 naka. Mao nang challenging siya pag implement of MDLp labi na

kindegarten nga dapat iscaffold pa natu kung magsalig man gud ta sa ginikangan wala man gud sila gitudloan og teaching pedagogy. Maong ng challenge kaaayo. Ang learning performance magkadeteriorate gyod ang bata kung madugay sila og expsoe sa mdl kay dha man poud ang mps.

Mao nang ubus ang performance sa mga bata kay parent ramn gud mag.asnwer. sa learning assessment. masaligan. Kung tan,awon natu ang modules nindot ang agi perfect ang score pagabut sa quarterly assessment bagsak ang bata ang findings diay atu ang parents ang nag.answer. in terms of monitoring naa me feedback mechanism namo sa parents, lisud man gud ang monitoring usually Dili kayo reliable ang monitoring kay first place dili mn siya effective sa amoa. Usually kung magface-to face na magfollow-up ang teachers kung unsa ang ilala gihatag nga modules.

These findings reflect the broader challenges of remote learning, especially for younger students who require more structured guidance and support [12]. The discrepancy between module scores and actual performance indicates a need for improved assessment methods that can accurately gauge student learning in an MDL context. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including better training for parents, enhanced monitoring systems, and tailored instructional strategies for younger learners [3].

Theme 2: Effectiveness Perceived Through Student Competencies

Despite the challenges, some school heads perceived MDL as effective in helping students cope with and meet learning competencies. The ability of students to adapt and continue their education through MDL during the pandemic was seen as a positive outcome. However, reliance on parental assistance was noted as a double-edged sword—while it helped students stay on track, it also compromised the integrity of independent learning and assessment.

Effective siya kay kadtu bitawng competencies nga nabiyaan nila macopeup gihapon sila. In terms of the performance of the bata ang uban dili nae effective kay magsalig na sa parents.

The mixed perceptions of MDL effectiveness highlight the complexity of remote learning environments. While MDL provides a viable alternative for maintaining educational continuity, its success largely depends on the home environment and the level of parental involvement. Studies have shown that parental engagement is crucial for student success in remote learning settings, but it must be balanced to ensure that students are genuinely learning and not merely completing tasks with external assistance [6]. Implementing support systems for parents and providing clear guidelines can help mitigate these issues.

Theme 3: Strategies to Enhance MDL Effectiveness

Several strategies were employed to enhance the effectiveness of MDL, including:

Reading Programs: Addressing the issue of non-readers through targeted reading programs helped improve literacy levels.

Peer Teaching: Grouping bright students within barangays to monitor and assist their classmates through peer teaching strategies.

Home Visitation: Teachers conducted home visits to assess literacy and numeracy skills directly, ensuring a more accurate evaluation of student competencies.

Sa tinood lang dako namo nga problema is non reader. Pero sa hinay2 naaddress na tungod sa amoa reading program.

As to effectiveness nanginahanglan gyod siyang dako nga poagtagad para mahimo siyang effective. Sa amoa kay wala lang. kung pagaassess namu dili gyod kayo siya effective in the since that lahi man gud og level and interest sa mga bata. Isa apud nga probelema is dili pud stable ang internet connectivity. Sa monitoring, gi mando bitaw na sa amoa psdi nga icheck gyod ang modules. As to monitoring ang among gitry, mao nang nakaconclude me nga dili gyod siya effective. Sa amoa amoang man gud gigroup matag purok. Gigroupo ang bright student within the poruk nga monitor sa ilaha classmates. Peer teaching ang strategies. Pagmonitor pud namu

These strategies reflect a proactive approach to addressing the inherent limitations of MDL. Reading programs and peer teaching leverage existing resources and community strengths to support student learning. Home visitation by teachers provides a direct method to assess and support students, ensuring that learning outcomes are met more reliably [10]. These interventions are critical for enhancing the overall effectiveness of MDL and ensuring that all students, regardless of their home environment, receive quality education.

4. CONCLUSION

This study of narrative inquiry has given an insight into the complex experiences of school heads in the implementation of modular distance learning approaches during the COVID-19 pandemic. As stated in the introduction, this study went ahead to identify how school heads define MDL, the strategies they implement in the process, and their perceptions on the effectiveness of MDL.

Major findings included that, MDL was an imperative tool in achieving educational continuity as well, especially in some of the remote and prone to disasters areas. Issues that needed to be catered to included lack parental support, inadequate assessment process, and need for scaffolding for young children. School leaders improved on the use of MDL by having a reading program as well as peer teaching during home visits.

The study emphasizes the need for community involvement, resource utilization, and adaptive teaching methods in ensuring that MDL is successful. Policy recommendations include increased funding, better training for parents and teachers, and inclusion of different learning modalities for a more holistic and effective approach to education.

Future research can be done exploring the long-term effects of MDL on student outcomes, particularly in terms of equity and inclusion. Finally, developing innovative strategies that improve parental engagement and support could further optimize the effect of MDL. By adding to the knowledge generated in this study, educators and policymakers can collaborate to craft more resilient and equitable education systems that are responsive to future changes.

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