Challenges and Alternatives of Parents as Home Learning Partners in the Implementation of Printed Modular Distance Learning

Jigger M. Tomarong[1], Joel D. Potane[2]
jigger.tomarong2024@gmail.com
[1]https://orcid.org/0009-0000-9621-8917, [2] https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0210-8149
Graduate School, Capitol University
Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines

Abstract

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, public educational institutions have adopted printed modular distance learning as an instructional method. This study explores the challenges faced by parents acting as home learning partners during the last two quarters of the 2020-2021 school year, using the printed modular distance learning approach, as well as investigating their suggested alternatives. Employing an exploratory descriptive qualitative (EDQ) approach, fourteen parents from a public elementary school were purposively selected. In-depth interviews (IDI) were conducted to collect data, and themes were identified through inductive coding. Findings revealed that parents encountered challenges including a lack of electronic gadgets, difficulty in explaining or teaching, time constraints, non-conforming modules, and inconsistency in self-learning module (SLM) distribution schedules. To cope, parents employed strategies such as effective time management, utilizing information and communication technology (ICT), seeking assistance from more knowledgeable others (MKOs), implementing motivation through reward systems, and providing assistance in learning. Although parents considered various options, the preference was to alleviate the burden by returning to in-person classes. To mitigate workload, parents suggested providing free mobile phones and Wi-Fi zones, updating modules, and implementing monthly SLM distributions. The role of being a home learning partner adds an additional burden on parents, prompting recommendations for collaboration between the government, schools, and other relevant organizations to implement parents' suggestions.

Keywords: challenges, alternatives, home learning partner, modular distance learning

Introduction

The 2020-2021 school year marked a significant turning point in Philippine education history. Face-to-face classes are no longer permitted; instead, the entire nation has adapted to the culture of distance education. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, originating in Wuhan City, China, in December 2019, has had extensive ramifications globally, escalating into a significant global public health crisis (WHO, 2020). At the core of this crisis is a new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2, previously referred to as 2019-nCov), attracting widespread attention due to its rapid spread and the urgent necessity to control

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infections and flatten the transmission curve (Gou et al., 2020). The primary mode of transmission occurs through close contact with an infected individual via coughing, sneezing, respiratory droplets, or aerosols, leading to symptoms such as cough, fever, and respiratory distress (Sherren et al., 2020). The global tally of infections and deaths continues to climb steadily. In response, the World Health Organization advocates for a comprehensive prevention approach, encompassing measures such as contamination prevention, implementation of containment strategies, mitigation efforts, contact tracing, adherence to self-isolation protocols, observance of social distancing, adoption of universal mask-wearing, improvement of healthcare services, maintenance of regular hand hygiene, and implementation of stringent surface disinfection protocols (WHO, 2020).

The ongoing struggle against the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in profound effects across all aspects of society. Actions like implementing travel restrictions (Chinazzi et al., 2020), closing schools (Viner et al., 2020), experiencing a global economic downturn (Fernandes, 2020), encountering political tensions (Barrios & Hochberg, 2020), witnessing instances of prejudice (Habibi et al., 2020), and facing the spread of misinformation and contentious discussions (Enitan et al., 2020) have collectively led to widespread disruption. Among the sectors significantly impacted, education stands out prominently. In an effort to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and mitigate its associated health risks, numerous countries worldwide have implemented temporary closures of educational institutions (UNESCO, 2020). Responses such as community lockdowns and quarantine mandates have required both students and educators to transition towards remote learning and telecommuting, marking a shift in the educational landscape.

Despite the urging to delay classes until the availability of a vaccine, the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines maintains its stance that the education of millions of Filipino students should not be postponed. As a result, government-funded schools were reopened on October 5, 2020. Additionally, to ensure uninterrupted learning, DepEd has adopted a distance learning approach, which involves the delivery of instruction when the educator and students are physically separated. This entails delivering lessons outside of the traditional classroom setup. Distance learning can take various forms, including modular distance learning, online distance learning, TV/radio-based instruction, and blended distance learning. Due to technological innovation and internet access challenges, most government-funded schools have opted for printed modular distance learning. Printed Modular Distance Learning utilizes Self-Learning Modules (SLMs) based on DepEd's core learning competencies (MELC). These modules include portions on motivation and assessment, which provide thorough assistance to help teachers and students achieve their desired abilities. Teachers can evaluate kids' progress through home visits while following health guidelines and use feedback tools to facilitate communication.

The printed modular distance learning model offers Filipino students the opportunity to learn within the confines of their homes. With limited direct interaction with educators, guardians or parents have assumed the role of home learning partners or facilitators. According to Vygotsky's theory, they act as the Most Knowledgeable Others (MKOs), individuals with a more profound understanding or higher proficiency level than the learner regarding a specific task, process, or concept. Their crucial function in the learning journey is establishing connections and guiding the child (Flip Science, 2020). As home learning partners, guardians and parents collaborate with educators to acquire and return the Self-Learning

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Modules (SLMs) and activity sheets the students require. Additionally, parents are tasked with reviewing the child's weekly home learning plan to ensure adherence to the schedule. They are also responsible for creating an optimal learning environment and offering appropriate encouragement, support, and incentives to enhance their child's learning motivation.

Objectives of the Study

This study explores the challenges and alternatives faced by parents as they performed their role as home learning partners during the previous two quarters of the 2020-2021 school year using the printed modular distance learning modality. Specifically, it attempted to (1) identify the challenges that parents face as they perform their role as home learning partners, (2) determine the alternatives that parents use to fulfill their role as home learning partners, and (3) make suggestions for parents as home learning partners.

Methodology

This study used an exploratory descriptive qualitative (EDQ) approach to investigate parents' experiences as home learning partners during the first two quarters of implementing a printed modular distance learning modality. The study included fourteen parents (two per grade level from kindergarten to grade six) from a public elementary school who were chosen through purposive sampling.

An in-depth interview was scheduled based on the participants' availability and convenience. As Creswell (2012) outlined, interviews are the most efficient approach in qualitative research, as they elucidate, enhance understanding, and delve into research subjects' opinions, behaviors, experiences, and phenomena. Research protocols and principles, such as obtaining approvals and providing participants with an informed consent form, were observed before the interview. The questions were open-ended to allow participants to respond in their own words. The actual one-on-one interviews were recorded with the participants' permission. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, and inductive coding was used to identify various themes.

Results and Discussions

It is essential to note that finding relevant studies amid the COVID-19 pandemic and global struggle is difficult. However, the participants in this study were parents of learners using the printed modular distance learning modality. The findings presented below are reflections of their personal experiences and sentiments.

1. Challenges encountered by parents in their capacity as home learning partners

Table 1 depicts the themes of the challenges parents face as they carry out their roles as home learning partners in their children's education. Table 1 depicts the themes of the challenges parents face as they carry out their roles as home learning partners in their children's education.

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Table 1
Challenges faced by parents as home learning partners

1. Lack of electronic gadgets
2. Difficulty in explaining/teaching
3. Insufficient time
4. Non-conforming modules
5. Inconsistent schedule of SLMs distribution

1.1. Lack of electronic gadgets

Two of the participants identified a lack of electronic gadgets as a significant challenge in their role as home learning partners. Preliminary findings from the enrollment survey conducted by the Department of Education (DepED) prior to the commencement of the academic year indicated that 6.8 million parents identified the scarcity of accessible gadgets and equipment suitable for distance learning as their primary hurdle, potentially impacting their children's educational progress (Mateo, 2020). Despite the provision of printed Self-Learning Modules (SLMs), the necessity for electronic devices remained inevitable. As per DepED Order 31, s.2020, summative assessments, including written assignments and performance tasks, will persist in evaluating student learning at specific intervals throughout each quarter. Performance tasks entail assessment activities that "allow learners to showcase their knowledge and skills in various ways," indicating occasions when parents may need to record their children's performance tasks via video and audio as assigned by the teacher.

"Nireklamo gyud kong Maam nga wala koy Cellphone, kana bitawng parte nga videohan siya (bata) nga naa siyay buhaton unya wala man koy Cellphone dili gyud mi makapasa. Wala gani miy kurente kay naputlan mi" (P1).

["I really complained to Ma'am because I didn't have a cellphone since she wanted me (the child) to record something and I didn't have a cellphone, so we couldn't pass. We didn't even have electricity because it got cut off."", P1]

Note: Participant 1 is a plain housewife, and her husband works as a construction worker. Acquiring a cell phone is not the family's top priority.

1.2. Difficulty in explaining/teaching

Teachers undergo years of education and training before being hired. Unlike parents, they are exposed to various learning theories, principles, and styles, which provides them with adequate knowledge and skills for teaching children. Parents who lack teaching experience struggle to explain difficult lessons in modules.

"Kanang mga sabjek nga wala nako naagian sanauna, maglisud kog exlain sa iya", (P3).

[Subjects that I haven't experienced before, I find it difficult to explain to him/her", P3]

"Naay mga leksyon nga maglisud kog pasabot sa akong bata", (P6).

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[There are lessons that I find difficult to explain to my child", P6]

Aside from the difficulty of explaining the module's difficult lessons, some participants are also struggling to teach their children, particularly in getting them to focus on their studies.

"Nah, usa pa, ang mga bata dili maminaw nah, maglisud gyud ka. Then kung imo gyud sila ipokus nga tudluan sila mura wala ra sa ilang hunahuna", (P10).

[Well, another thing, children don't listen, it's really difficult. Then, if you really try to focus on teaching them, it's like it doesn't even cross their minds." P10]

1.3. Insufficient time

Both working and non-working parents struggle to find time to assist their children in answering their modules and completing the performance tasks outlined in the weekly home learning plan. Working parents leave their homes early for work and return home in the early evening. Because they are already tired from work, they are unable to devote adequate time to learning with their children. Non-working parents, particularly those with young children, struggle to focus on their tasks as home learning partners.

"Gamay rapud nga oras akong mahatag sa akong bata kay nagtrabaho lagi pod ming duha. Siya gabie na makauli, unya akong pud trabaho napud sa buntag", (P2).

[I can only give my child a little time because we both work. He only comes home at night, and I also work in the morning," P2]

"Sa grade 1 man gud, kailangan man gyud nga abayan. Maglisud kog balance sa akong oras kay upat akong anak, unya nagtrabaho man gud pod akong bana. Di gyud makatutok sa pag-assist", (P12).

[In Grade 1, you really need to be there to guide them. It's difficult for me to balance my time because I have four children, and my husband also works. It's tough to focus on assisting them", P12]

Note: Participant 12 had four children: a fifth grader, a first grader, a three-year-old child, and a one-year-old baby. Her husband works for the government, which makes it difficult for her to manage her time effectively.

1.4. Non-conforming modules

One of the issues raised by parents during the interview was the non-conformity of certain modules. Some parents have noticed that there are modules with very little content about the topic. Others claimed that some modules lacked pages, or that the pages were improperly arranged or sequenced.

"Usahay ang modyul kulang kay gamay ra kaayo ang explanation , kinahanglan pag extra time nga magreserts para maka-answer sa modyul, dapat pa ma-expand ang sulod sa modyul. Unya nay part sa modyul nga murag na-skip, example 1-2, unya niditso sa page 7", (P9).

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[Sometimes, the module is lacking because the explanations are too brief. You need extra time to research to answer the module; the content of the module should be expanded. Also, there are parts of the module that seem to have been skipped, for example, from 1-2, then it jumps to page 7", P9]

1.5. Inconsistent schedule of SLM distribution

One participant mentioned that she sometimes forgot to pick up the modules at school because the distribution schedule changes from time to time.

"Usahay malimot ko sa pagkuha sa modyul kay labi na kay nag-eskwela pud ko. Diha ko naproblema anang pag-adto sa eskwelahan kay mautro-utro man gud ang iskedyul sa pagkuha sa modyul", (P13).

[Sometimes I forget to pick up the module because I'm also attending school. It's problematic for me to go to school because the schedule for picking up the module is quite tight", P13]

Note: Participant 13 is a mother of two who is currently pursuing her higher education.

2. Alternatives of Parents as Home Learning Partners

Table 2
Alternatives of parents as home learning partners

1. Effective time management
2. Utilization of ICT
3. Approaching MKO's
4. Motivation through a reward system
5. Spoon-feeding

2.1. In terms of Effective time management

Time management involves efficiently allocating time to various activities. It enables individuals to designate specific time periods for tasks based on their significance, thus optimizing the limited time available. Effective time management is crucial for achieving goals and enhancing performance (Alay & Kocak, 2003; Macan et al., 2000).

"Kanang pag-uli na nag-extend kog time nga para lang gyud nila, at least two hours para e-check kung naka-answer ba sila, naa poy muabot og Sabado og Dominggo. Usahay kay medyo tag-as ang activity, unya walo ka sabjeks. Usahay gani while galaba ko, sila ga-answer sa sulod, mangutana kung makatubag ko, answer nasad, multi-tasking gyud para mahuman ang modyul", (P9).

[When I get home, I extend my time just for them, at least two hours just to check if they've answered, even on Saturdays and Sundays. Sometimes the activity is quite long, and there are eight subjects. Sometimes while I'm doing the laundry, they're answering inside; it's really multitasking to finish the module", P9]

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2.2. In terms of Utilization of ICT

Parents stated that when they found lessons difficult to understand, they used ICT tools such as Google and YouTube to help them understand the lesson and pass it on to their children. In cases where the learner is already digitally literate, parents simply instruct their children to conduct their own research.

" Kung nay lisud nga leksyon, didto dayun mi sa google mudagan, pangitaon didto ang e-answer",(P7).

[If there is a difficult lesson, we seek help from Google, we will search the answer there", P7]

"Unya tan-awon nako sa You Tube ang ubang leksyon",(P8).

[Then I'll watch on YouTube the other lessons", P8]

2.3. In terms of Approaching MKO's

Psychologist Lev Vygotsky suggested that human learning is inherently social. While learners can engage in solitary learning, they typically benefit more from a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) presence. Vygotsky defines MKOs as individuals who possess a deeper understanding or higher proficiency level than the learner in a specific task, process, or concept.

"Naa poy klasmet niya nga maarang-arang maoy magtabang-tabang niya usahay", (P5).

[He has a classmate who is good in the class who sometimes help him", P5]

"Patabangan nako sa magulang arun ma-answeran nila ang modyul kay ang magulang high school naman so nakaagi na sila anah", (P14).

[I'll let his elder sister help so that they can answer the module since the elder sister is already a high school student which means she's already familiar with the lessons", P14]

2.4. In terms of Motivation through a reward system

Motivating children to study or complete their learning is a difficult task for parents, especially if they did not study teaching in college. To motivate their children to complete their tasks, some parents use a reward system. Rewards are commonly used as a motivational strategy to encourage students to complete tasks efficiently. Students tend to adopt suitable behaviors when they receive rewards, either intrinsically or extrinsically. They also demonstrate increased interest and engagement in daily classroom activities, responsibilities, and learning tasks.

"Amo lang puyuk-puyukon arun mag-answer. Ingnon nako ang ate nga dili lang dak-an og tingog arun dili saputon. Ako lang puyukon og kwarta o dulaan. Puyok nga puyok gyud aron mubasa. Tagdan lang gyud siya kanus-a siya ganahan mo-answer",(P11).

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[We really entice him (the learner) so that he will answer the module. I will tell the elder sister not to raise her voice so that his mood will not be ruined. I will entice him with money or toy so that he will read. We will wait for him when he is ready to answer the module", P11]

"Ako gyud siya istriktohon nga isa ka adlaw, naa siya'y mahuman isa o duha ka modyul, ayha na molakaw para magdula", (P14).

[I really have to be strict with him that in a day, he can answer one or two modules before he can play", P14]

2.5. In terms of Spoon-feeding

Spoon-feeding in education means that instructors provide students with all of the required information regarding a task, reducing the need for pupils to think independently (Smith, 2008). According to Mohanan (2000), spoon-feeding entails executing actions for children that they can manage independently or learn with some effort.

Nonetheless, Chhem (2000) points out that spoon-feeding has significant disadvantages. For starters, it fosters rote memorization rather than active interaction among students. Second, it doesn't promote individual learning or innovation. Finally, spoon-feeding causes pupils to lack initiative and problem-solving skills because they are not used to seeking knowledge on their own. Despite its drawbacks, some parents continue to use spoon-feeding to guarantee their children finish their learning objectives.

"Usahay ako nalang magbasaha unya ako dayung itudlo nga kani o basaha para maka-answer siya", (P14).

[Sometimes, I'll do the reading, then I will pinpoint what to read so that he can answer", P14]

"Honest lang usahay kay kapuyan naman ko, ako nalang gyud then ipakopya ko nalang para mahuman", (P5).

[To be honest, sometimes because I'm already tired, I'll do it myself, then, I'll let him copy so that it will be done", P5]

3. Suggestions of parents as home learning partners

Table 3
Suggestions of parents as home learning partners

Resume of face-to-face classes
Free mobile phone
Installation of free Wi-Fi zone
Modification of modules
Monthly distribution of SLMs

3.1. In terms of Resume of face-to-face classes

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Face-to-face learning involves teaching course content and materials to students in person. This enables a live interaction between a learner and an instructor. Learners benefit from greater interaction with their peers as well.

Though parents were able to manage their roles as home learning partners, the majority of them want face-to-face classes to resume. They believed that face-to-face instruction would be more effective for their children than printed modular distance learning.

"Maayo unta nga mabalik na ang face to face ba sa pag-ekwela kay arun ang bata makakat-on gyud kay naa man gyud puy usahay nga tapolan sila, de siyempre kita guinikanan malooy gyud ta sa atong anak nga musurender sila nga ingon ana, unya ang maestra pursehigon man gyud na sila", (P1).

[It would be better if face-to-face classes resume so that the child can learn because they (the learners) feel lazy, and as a parent, we feel pity to our child, unlike the teacher who is good in persuading the child to answer", P1].

3.2. In terms of Free mobile phone

Mobile phones are used for various purposes, including family communication, business transactions, and photography. Today's mobile phones are already more advanced, with the ability to record audio/video and search the internet on Google or other websites.

Parents who do not own a mobile phone want to be able to record their children's performances so that teachers can see how they are learning.

"Maayo unta og makahatag or makapahulam ang gobyerno og selpon kay kami tawon wala man gyud.", (P1).

[It would be better if the government could give or lend a cell phone since we do not have it", P1]

3.3. In terms of Installation of free Wi-Fi Zone

Under the printed modular distance learning modality, parents and students use websites like Google and YouTube to gain additional knowledge and better understand the lessons in the modules. However, without access to the internet, it is impossible to search websites. Parents must pay for the internet connection, which results in additional expenses.

The internet plays an important role in education. There is no doubt that in today's world, everyone prefers Google for answers to their questions, problems, and doubts. People prefer popular search engines such as Google and Yahoo because they provide quick and easy access to a vast amount of information in a matter of seconds.

"Siguro kana gyud sigurong free wifi zone, nga makasearch sila og pila ka oras didto, kay kung kada adlaw, gasto na kaayo, bisan og nakoy trabaho, dugang expenses na nako", (P9).

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[Maybe, it's the free Wi-Fi zone, where they (the learners) can search for how many hours there, because if its everyday, it will be costly, though I have work, it is an additional expense", P9]

"Unta naay free wifi kada zone kay gasto pud baya ang magpaload pirmi unya halos kada adlaw naan dapat magpaload para magreserts",(P7).

[How I wished that there would be free WI-FI in every zone because it is costly if you load your cell phone always, then it is almost every day that you need to load to do research.

3.4. In terms of Modification of modules

In the printed modular distance learning modality, parents and students use websites such as Google and YouTube to gain additional knowledge and better understand the lessons in the modules. However, it is impossible to conduct searches on websites without the internet. Parents must pay for an internet connection, which incurs additional expenses.

The significance of the Internet in education cannot be overstated. Undoubtedly, Google has become the go-to resource for individuals seeking answers to their questions, solutions to problems, and resolution of concerns. Popular search engines like Google, Yahoo, and others are favored due to their ability to offer rapid and convenient access to vast amounts of information within seconds.

" Mas maayo unta pagamayan ang modyul, baga ra kaayo, unta manipis", (P2).

[It would be better if the module will be lessened, it's too thick, hope it will be thinner", P2]

"Unta e-check ang modyul kay naay mga pages nga nabalintong, wala na-aarrange ang mga pages", (P9).

[Hope the modules will be checked because there are pages which were not arranged well", P9]

3.5. Monthly distribution of SLMs

One participant mentioned that she sometimes forgets to get the modules because the teacher's schedule for module distribution is constantly changing. Because some parents work, the scheduled day for module distribution must be fixed.

"Unta ang iskedyul sa pagkuha sa mga modyul dili unta mautro-utro", (P13).

[Hope the schedule for module distribution will be fixed", P13]

Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a considerable shift in the methods through which educators deliver quality education. In the Philippines, the DepEd has adopted a distance learning approach, including modular distance learning in digital and print formats, online learning, and TV/radio

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broadcast instruction. The transition from traditional classroom teaching to distance learning poses a unique and challenging experience for both parents and teachers.

The role of parents as home learning partners in the implementation of printed modular distance learning has presented unexpected challenges, but it has also demonstrated their resilience and dedication. Despite feeling unprepared and unfamiliar with the new learning modality, parents have risen to the challenge, devoting valuable time and effort to guiding their children through the learning tasks outlined in the weekly home learning plan. Even those without access to mobile phones have demonstrated remarkable selflessness by devising alternative ways to support their children's education. While facing challenges due to their lack of experience with lessons and teaching, parents have persevered, demonstrating their dedication to their children's academic achievement. Despite challenges such as non-conforming modules and inconsistency in module distribution, parents have persevered in their efforts, recognizing the value of their role as home learning partners. Their dedication emphasizes their critical role in their children's learning journey, transforming what may appear to be an extra burden into a testament to their love and commitment to their children's education.

Recommendations

Considering parents' ideas are very important for ensuring that educational programs work and include everyone. Including parents' ideas in school policies and practices is possible by encouraging partnerships between the government, schools, and other relevant groups, such as government agencies or non-government organizations. These partnerships can be great ways to get parents' feedback and include them in the decision-making process by talking to each other and working together. Non-government organizations (NGOs) can offer expertise and community-based solutions, while government agencies can provide resources and help to put parental suggestions into action. By working together, people with a stake in the education system can make it more responsive and open to everyone. This will help the system better meet the needs and priorities of families. Collaboration like this not only builds trust and communication between parents and schools but also gives everyone a sense of ownership and gives them the power to shape the future of education.

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