Lived Experiences of Rizal Elementary School Teachers in Implementing Modular Distance Learning

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Abstract — COVID-19 pandemic posed various challenges and issues in the education system in the country. The pandemic forced the schools to temporarily close to contain the spread of the virus. Thus, the School Year 2020-2021 became the "new normal" of education where traditional in-person learning shifted into distance learning which threatened not only the parents and learners but most especially the Department of Education. The pandemic created challenges to the Department of Education on what they can do to ensure that the quality of education remains the same. The study is qualitative research with a phenomenology research design to explain the lived experiences of teachers in Implementing Modular Distance Learning in Rizal Elementary School, Bansalan, Davao del Sur. Purposive sampling was used in selecting 10 teachers that participated in the study. The researcher used interviews to seek in-depth information that revealed the lived experiences of the teachers in implementing modular distance learning modality. Colaizzi's method of data analysis was utilized to analyze and interpret the results of this study. Findings from the study showed themes based on the experience of teachers in implementing MDL. Through the result of this study, Bansalan, Davao del Sur may utilize the results in designing various Professional Development Programs/training that would enhance the capability of teachers and provide a support system to teachers during modular distance learning.

Keywords —: Modular distance learning, teachers, new normal, experiences, realizations

I. Introduction

In accordance with the DepEd Order No. 12, s. 2020, the Department of Education employs multiple learning delivery modalities (LDMs) to ensure the continued provision of learning opportunities to learners while protecting the health and safety of both personnel and learners. This can be done through blended learning, distance learning, and home-schooling.

The Department of Education ensures that all learners have access to quality Basic Education. They distributed Self Learning Modules (SLMs) that are used by the learners together with the modalities suited for them. According to Department of Education Secretary Leonor Briones "The Self Learning Modules and the other alternative learning delivery modalities are in place to address the needs, situations, and resources of each and every learner and covers all the bases in ensuring that basic education is accessible amid the present crisis posed by COVID-19,".

The claim is in line with the result of a study conducted by Creus and Angeles (2019) where they found out that Module-based localized learning materials resulted in increased performance of most learners. (Espineli, 2021).

Though the Department of Education ensures that teachers have a support system in the implementation of modular distance learning to provide quality Basic Education to all learners, there are a lot of challenges and problems that the school and teachers experienced while implementing modular distance learning. In light of this, the researcher saw the need and relevance to see the lived experiences of the teachers in the implementation of Modular Distance Learning at Bansalan East, Rizal Elementary School.

It was conducted to explain the lived experiences of teachers in Implementing Modular Distance Learning. Specifically, this aims in discussing the experiences and dedication encountered by the teachers in implementing the MDL as part of the "New Normal". Purposive sampling was used in selecting ten (10) teachers that participated in the study. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What were the lived experiences of teachers in implementing modular distance learning modality?

2. What were the reasons of teachers' persistent dedication and commitment during the Modular Distance Learning (MDL)?

3. What were the realizations of teachers during the implementation of the Modular Distance Learning (MDL)?

The school offers two types of learning modalities, Online Distance Learning (ODL) and Modular Distance Learning (MDL) to address the needs of the learners while they are geographically away from one another. Online Distance Learning (ODL) is for learners who have access to the internet and can afford to buy gadgets for online classes and also are given modules in case the internet connection alters. Meanwhile, Modular Distance Learning (MDL) is for learners who have no gadgets for online learning and have a poor internet connection in their area. Considering the given factors, Modular Distance Learning (MDL) is the most common learning modality used by teachers in Davao City and Davao Provinces. Modular Distance Learning involves individualized instruction that allows learners to use 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.

In the study of Wigati, Maharta, & Suyatna (2019) as cited by Rahmawati, Lestari, and Umam (2021) further explained that "module is a learning tool in written form that is arranged systematically, contains learning material, methods, learning objectives based on basic competencies or indicators of achievement of competencies, instructions for self-learning

activities, and provides opportunities for students to test yourself through the exercises presented in the module".

Each SLM contains the learning competencies that should be learned by the learners. It contains an activity which aims to check what the learners already know about the lesson. It includes drill or review to help the learners link the current lessons with the previous one. There is a portion which introduces the new lesson. It also has a brief discussion of the lesson and activities for independent practice. It contains tasks to help the learners evaluate their level of mastery in achieving the learning competency. It has an activity which aims to enrich the learner's knowledge or skill of the lesson learned. The last part contains the answers to all the activities in the module (Gonzales,2021).

The use of modules also encourages independent study. It directs students to practice or rehearse information. To gain mastery of the concepts, exercises are given following the progression of activities from easy to difficult. The arrangement of the exercises as such formalizes the level of difficulty that the learners can perform. Another benefit of using modules for instruction is the acquisition of better self-study or learning skills among students. Students engage themselves in learning concepts presented in the module. They develop a sense of responsibility in accomplishing the tasks provided in the module. With little or no assistance from the teacher, the learners progress on their own. They are learning how to learn; they are empowered. (Nardo,2019).

In modular distance learning, the role of the teacher shifted from traditional lecturing in-person models into remote learning environments. Teachers need to adapt their practices to keep their students engaged to effective and efficient learning as every household has become a classroom. Teachers are also responsible for monitoring the progress of the learners. They address the queries of their students through text messaging, phone calls, messenger chats, and calls. They also conduct home visitation to provide instructional support to the learners or any member of the family who serves as home facilitator. As in-person learning is put to a halt, the teacher's crucial role in delivering learning is conspicuous.

Teachers' persistent dedication and commitment during the Modular Distance Learning (MDL)

As schools began to close in late March due to COVID-19, educators were tasked with finding new ways to continue teaching their students with little time to prepare. We had the opportunity to speak with two teachers at the very beginning of the school closures (March), then again at the end of the school year (June) to learn about their adjustment to distance learning. They reflected on the changes in their approaches, what strategies worked best for their students, and how they are preparing for the upcoming school year.

Teaching in the era of distance learning depends heavily on a school's preparedness, available resources, and community expectations. Like many other school districts, the school

originally closed with the expectation of reopening in a few weeks. This resulted in multiple waves of district messaging regarding technology, instructional requirements, and grading.

However, after a few weeks, it became clear that schools would not reopen. Teachers have since adjusted their expectations for student engagement and describe a tiring process of trial and error in an effort to engage and re-engage their students in learning.

To add more to her literature, the researcher talked to three (3) teachers and got their reasons for being dedicated and committed to modular learning even during the pandemic. The researcher did not include what the teachers reasoned out in the research question and decided to place it here in the literature.

Realizations of teachers during the implementation of the Modular Distance Learning (MDL)

Sudden school closures have turned student and teacher routines upside down, but both teachers found ways to create adaptive schedules and take advantage of their new free time. With support from the district, the teachers make sure to log off after their required work day and take time to relax and recharge. They understand that their learners are also on an adjusted schedule and are more likely to start their days later in the morning, so they use her extra time in the morning to take walks, read, and cook.

Teachers found comfort in engaging with other educators. Whether done in a professional capacity to swap notes on distance learning strategies, or on a social level, it is comforting to hear other teachers going through a similar challenging experience. Teachers said they have even held a few virtual gathering just to exchange notes with great success!

Teachers emphasized that a crucial part of their remote teaching experience is recognizing the effects of these changes on their learners. Many learners assumed new roles in their home; others have lost the daily escape of leaving home to attend school. Setting realistic expectations and intentionally recognizing the new contexts of their students helped the teachers practice patience in their new teaching roles.

However, the teachers voiced an important main takeaway: most K-12 learners are not yet motivated to learn for the sake of learning. A physical classroom, a space many students already associate with learning, also promotes social motivation. At school, students are driven by personal connections and relationships and encounter face-to-face accountability for their work and behavior by their peers and teachers. When these systems are not present, many students seem to struggle to find the self-motivation to 'log on' to engage in learning.

With uncertainty regarding what learning will look like in the re-opening of classes, teachers voiced great strategies for how to prepare for continued distance learning:

Take advantage of the beginning of the school year! Districts will have more clear rules in place regarding attendance, grading, and workload. On the first day of school students will know what is expected of them.

Consider online and offline learning opportunities. Many schools will use this time to reach 1:1 device ratios, but many can't. Worksheets, creative visual assignments, or community exploration activities can create opportunities for students to learn without being connected to the internet.

Create structure and routines. Consider what time the learners will be ready to start virtual learning and coordinate schedules and workload with other teachers. Create a calendar available to all students to provide a visual roadmap throughout the school year.

Develop lesson plans, including contingency plans. Use the time before school opening to plot what parts of your curriculum can be done virtually and what can't.

It will be difficult to virtually instruct students you have never met before. Strategize ways to socially engage with your new students at the beginning of the school year (e.g., video or phone calls).

Recently, a wider range of theoretical notions has provided a richer understanding of the learner at a distance. Four such concepts are *transactional distance, interaction, learner control, and social presence.*

Transactional Distance. Moore's (2019) concept of "transactional distance" encompasses the distance that, he says, exists in all educational relationships. This distance is determined by the amount of dialogue that occurs between the learner and the instructor, and the amount of structure that exists in the design of the course. Greater transactional distance occurs when an educational program has more structure and less student-teacher dialogue, as might be found in some traditional distance education courses. Education offers a continuum of transactions from less distant, where there is greater interaction and less structure, to more distant, where there may be less interaction and more structure. This continuum blurs the distinctions between conventional and distance programs because of the variety of transactions that occur between teachers and learners in both settings. Thus distance is not determined by geography but by the relationship between dialogue and structure.

Saba and Shearer (2019) carry the concept of transactional distance a step farther by proposing a system dynamics model to examine the relationship between dialogue and structure in transactional distance. In their study, Saba and Shearer conclude that as learner control and dialogue increase, transactional distance decreases. It is not location that determines the effect of instruction but the amount of transaction between learner and instructor. This concept has implications for traditional classrooms as well as distant ones. The use of integrated

telecommunication systems may permit a greater variety of transactions to occur, thus improving dialogue to minimize transactional distance.

Interaction. A second theoretical construct of recent interest to distance educators, and one that has received much attention in the theoretical literature, is that of interaction. Moore (2019) discusses three types of interaction essential in distance education. Learner-instructor interaction is that component of his model that provides motivation, feedback, and dialogue between the teacher and student. Learner-content interaction is the method by which students obtain intellectual information from the material. Learner-learner interaction is the exchange of information, ideas, and dialogue that occur between students about the course, whether this happens in a structured or non-structured manner. The concept of interaction is fundamental to the effectiveness of distance education programs as well as traditional ones. Hillman, Hills, and Gunawardena (2019) have taken the idea of interaction a step farther and added a fourth component to the model learner-interface interaction. They note that the interaction between the learner and the technology that delivers instruction is a critical component of the model, which has been missing thus far in the literature. They propose a new paradigm that includes understanding the use of the interface in all transactions. Learners who do not have the basic skills required to use a communication medium spend inordinate amounts of time learning to interact with the technology and have less time to learn the lesson. For this reason, instructional designers must include learner-interface interactions that enable the learner to have successful interactions with the mediating technology.

Control. A third theoretical concept receiving attention in the distance education literature is that of independence and learner control. Studies that examine locus of control (Altmann & Arambasich, 2019; Rotter, 2019) conclude that students who perceive that their academic success is a result of their own personal accomplishments have an internal locus of control and are more likely to persist in their education. Students with an external locus of control feel that their success, or lack of it, is due largely to events such as luck or fate outside their control. Thus, externals are more likely to become dropouts. Factors of control that influence dropout rate have been of concern to distance educators as they search for criteria to predict successful course completion. Baynton (2019) developed a model to examine the concept of control as it is defined by independence, competence, and support. She notes that control is more than independence. It requires striking a balance among three factors: a learner's independence (the opportunity to make choices), competence (ability and skill), and support (both human and material). Baynton's factor analysis confirms the significance of these three factors and suggests other factors that may affect the concept of control and which should be examined to portray accurately the complex interaction between teacher and learner in the distance learning setting.

Social Context. Finally, the social context in which distance learning takes place is emerging as a significant area for research. Theorists are examining how the social environment affects motivation, attitudes, teaching, and learning. There is a widespread notion that technology is culturally neutral, and can be easily used in a variety of settings. However, media, materials, and

services are often inappropriately transferred without attention being paid to the social setting or to the local recipient culture (Mclsaac, 2019). Technology-based learning activities are frequently used without attention to -the impact on the local social environment. Computer-mediated communication attempts to reduce patterns of discrimination by providing equality of social interaction among participants who may be anonymous in terms of gender, race, and physical features. However, there is evidence that the social equality factor may not extend, for example, to participants who are not good writers but who must communicate primarily in a text-based format (Gunawardena, 2019). It is particularly important to examine social factors in distance learning environments where the communication process is mediated and where social climates are created that are very different from traditional settings. Feenberg and Bellman (2019) propose a social factor model to examine computer networking environments that create specialized electronic social environments for students and collaborators working in groups.

One social factor particularly significant to distance educators is social presence, the degree to which a person feels "socially present" in a mediated situation. The notion is that social presence is inherent in the medium itself, and technologies offer participants varying degrees of "social presence' (Short, Williams & Christie, 2019). Hackman and Walker (2019), studying learners in an interactive television class, found that cues given to students such as encouraging gestures, smiles, and praise were social factors that enhanced both students' satisfaction and their perceptions of learning. Constructs such as social presence, immediacy, and intimacy are social factors that deserve further inquiry.

II. Methodology

This study utilized qualitative research with a phenomenology research design. The phenomenological design describes the interpretations of the participants from their experiences. It was mentioned in the study of Giorgi (2019) as cited by Espineli (2021) that phenomenological research culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. This research project focused on the lived experiences of teachers in modular distance learning.

The selection of the participants employed the non-probability sampling technique called purposive sampling. The participants were selected according to the needs of the study; they were the teachers of Rizal Elementary School, Bansalan East District, Davao del Sur.

The participants of this study were teachers of Rizal Elementary School who witnessed the onslaught of the pandemic and who were present in the implementation of the modular distance learning. Reflection on a certain phase of their teaching and personal life were needed to achieve the purpose of this study. This study involved ten (10) teachers and were coded Teacher A to Teacher J.

In the analysis of collected data, the researcher utilized Colaizzi's (1998) method of data analysis. It is distinguished with a seven-step process that provides a rigorous analysis in each step closely related to the data. The result summarizes yet an inclusive description of the phenomenon under study directly from the respondents' mouths or points of view.

III. Results and Discussion

The perspective of the teachers were grouped and categorized under the following topics based on the research questions: *experiences of teachers in implementing modular learning, teachers' persistent dedication and commitment, and realizations of teachers during implementation of modular distance learning.* These topics are discussed thoroughly with themes supported by narratives of teachers and served as a basis for the analysis of the data. This study involved ten (10) teachers and were coded Teacher A to Teacher J.

Teachers show persistent dedication and commitment during Modular Distance Learning because of the *journey of students, dreams of students, teachers' love of students, and teachers' calling.*

In this "New Normal", teachers shared on how they reflect in this brave new world of distance classrooms due to the *situations of the students, positive mindset, acting as guide to students, and teachers need to be innovative.*

Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic provided educators with strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the new normal. The findings contextualize the numerous experiences of teachers in a developing country like the Philippines, which were faced in the midst of a pandemic. As to their strengths, they worked with optimism, dedication, patience, and commitment. They also practiced collaboration and being resourceful as essential traits. Furthermore, they become innovative and they possess pedagogical skills, knowledge, and competence in the new normal. On the other hand, teachers experience difficulty while teaching in the new normal. They had difficulty monitoring, providing feedback, and assessing student learning. They struggled to communicate with students. They also considered the COVID-19 virus a potential threat in their workplace, and they considered the quality of education at risk. Despite these struggles and difficulties, they became technologically inclined 21st-century educators, and they were able to enhance their skills in module writing.

Thus, teaching in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic provided teachers' deficiencies in some course delivery; however, they worked diligently to transform and demonstrate resilience in teaching in the new normal amidst pandemics, converting them into strengths and opportunities. On the other hand, instructors' and professors' strengths should be recognized, and professional

development opportunities should be provided to help them become more competent educators. Moreover, the problems encountered by teachers could be considered as educational inputs. The university's administration should strengthen teacher support in all areas.

Furthermore, the findings of this study highlight the essential need for additional research on educators' experiences throughout the pandemic. Again, extensive research into the types of training that would be most useful to both educators and learners, particularly in terms of technological and module use, is required. Additional significant research on various training methodologies, particularly the use of technology and modules, is necessary. Another area for research would be to look at the content modifications made by teachers in various fields of study to meet the requirements of flexible learning and the alignment of a project-based instructional curriculum with the principles of blended teaching and learning in comprehensive detail. These are just a number of the potential avenues for future investigation, as there are a multitude of opportunities for further investigation. Finally, proper dissemination of the study's findings to the administration could help teachers cope with the new normal.

IV. Conclusion

In the implementation of Modular Distance Learning (MDL), teachers experienced transition and change in the teaching and learning process from traditional in-person learning into distance learning. Thus, teachers had experienced various issues and challenges in MDL like difficulty in transporting modules in remote areas as well as monitoring the progress of learners.

Fontanos et al (2020), cited in Jamon et al (2021) discussed the perceived threat of the teacher in the new normal is the challenge of reaching out to students and parents. For them, it is difficult to communicate with parents and students in the present situation.

This implies that more students are at risk of dropping out of school or failing because teachers have difficulty communicating and giving feedback to them. Despite the sudden change in the education system of the country, teachers innovate and create ways to deliver education to every child. As evident in their lived experiences, teachers showed persistent commitment and dedication to support and provide the learning needs of the learners for they uphold that "every child should access quality education" amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Officials of the DepEd need to revisit the curriculum and reduce the activities, and take out the unnecessary topics. As of now, teachers are more confused than committed in their work.

DepEd should lessen the reports and paper works of teachers and let them focus on teaching itself. More time is needed for reports; even more time is needed for teaching. The study reveals that more time is needed by teachers in teaching.

Supervisors and administrators should devise strategic planning together with the teachers and parents. Planning is necessary when implementing changes in the school.

Consistent and enough time in assessing and monitoring of pupils' performance must be taken into considerations.

Better orientation and debriefing for teachers amidst modular distance learning; teachers were unprepared for modular learning (and the rest of the modality); a briefing and orientation is a must to prepare teachers for the task.

The provision of equipment essential to modular distance learning shall be provided to teachers in a financially flexible way; not only teachers, but school were left to source out their own materials.

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APPENDIX - THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
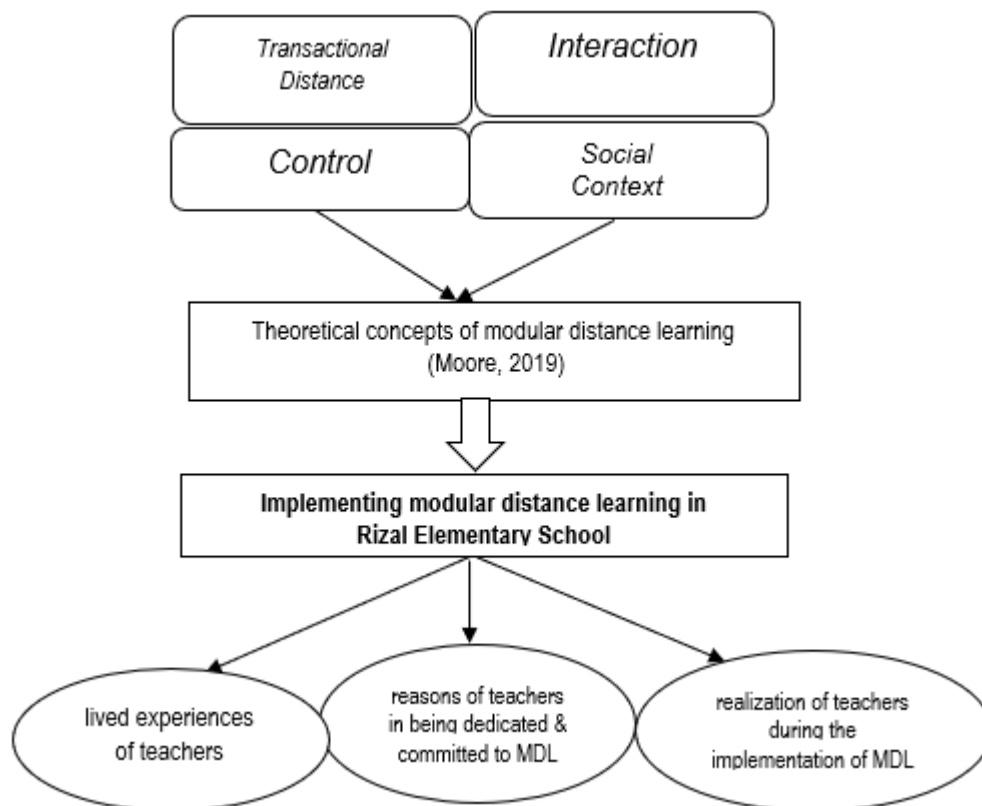
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