



# LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS ON BLENDED LEARNING AS A MODALITY OF INSTRUCTION DURING THE PANDEMIC

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Blended learning is an approach that combines face-to-face classes with one or more distance learning modalities. The Department of Education has strengthened its strategies in the delivery of learning instructions via online, TV-based, and Radio-based instructions. The participants in this research are public teachers in the Sorsogon Province Division. Issues and gaps in the implementation of the blended learning modality were identified and used as the basis for proposed procedural interventions. Teachers are positive about the need to implement blended learning due to the pandemic, but there are gaps in the implementation due to learners' low interest and lack of knowledge and skills. Procedural interventions targeting these specific factors may be proposed to better the implementation of blended learning.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Modality of Instruction,

## Abstract

### Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of a new coronavirus disease in Hubei Province, China to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern in January 2020. Despite efforts to contain the virus and inform the international community of the measures to be taken to prevent its spread, Covid 19 elevated to the pandemic category affecting nations around the globe. The social impact of the pandemic affected people from all walks of life, and the economic and social disruption threatens the long-term livelihoods

and well-being of millions. The Philippine government implemented the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) to contain the spread of COVID-19 on March 16, 2020, but due to the increase of COVID-19 cases in the Philippines, the ECQ was extended until April 30, 2020. Filipinos are also affected nationwide due to prolonged social isolation, which can lead to loneliness, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

The pandemic has severely impacted education delivery, with over 55 million U.S. schoolchildren under the age of 18 being forced to stay in their homes and nearly 1.4 billion children out of school or childcare by that time. The Department of Education (DepEd) issued DepEd Order No. 12, series 2020 to adopt the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) for School Year 2020-2021. Relevant issuances were also released to ensure that private schools and non-DepEd schools offering senior high school are also implementing alternative learning delivery modalities while face-to-face classes are prohibited. The Covid 19 pandemic has affected 862 million people around the globe, including half of the world's student population. In the Philippines, 860 private schools suspended their operations for the school year 2020-2021, affecting 56, 448 students and 4, 258 teachers.

Public school teachers were faced with a new challenge as front liners in education delivery. Modular and online learning modalities have caught education systems and many teachers off guard. The new learning delivery modalities must be adopted to ensure that education delivery does not put teachers and learners at risk of contracting the Covid 19 virus. In the Philippines, innovative programs were proposed by the different learning sectors, such as blended learning and virtual classrooms. In higher education institutions, the Commission on Higher Education suggested strengthening online platforms and blended learning.

#### Research Questions

This qualitative research was aimed at assessing the status of the implementation of blended learning in DepEd, Sorsogon Province Division. This was determined by exploring the participants' lived experiences. Using both the research questions and the interview questions, this study sought answers to the following queries:

1. What are the views of teachers regarding blended learning as an alternative learning delivery modality?
2. What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses of teachers in the implementation of blended learning?
3. What are the gaps and issues encountered by teachers in using blended learning as an alternative learning delivery modality?

4. What procedural innovations can be designed to improve the efficacy of teachers in using blended learning?

#### Research Process

Van Manen (2014) explained that phenomenology is fundamentally the study of the life world, or the experiences lived by the target participants. This research employed the phenomenological approach of Husserl in interpreting the data of the study. Polkinghorne, as cited by Davidsen (2012) described this endeavor as trying to make and understand meaning or meanings out of the experiences of a man as they are lived.

From the epistemological perspective, this approach was deemed more appropriate given the ahistorical nature of the inquiry, particularly since no study in the local setting can be used to establish a pattern of behavior and experiences. Epistemology deals with creating knowledge,

investigating how knowledge is obtained, and determining the most valid means of establishing the truth. Epistemology aims to determine the relationship between the researcher and reality.

The researcher himself became a research instrument facilitating the data gathering through the interview questions. As a research instrument, he ensured the conversational atmosphere during interviews made the participants at ease in sharing their experiences. Through random selection, a total of 105 teachers from 35 districts were identified as participants in the study. The data and information provided by the participants were consolidated into a matrix allowing the researcher to plot them into segments of information and identify the emergent themes. Significant responses were quoted to emphasize the points expressed by the participants. Direct transcription was made to ensure that the lived experiences were presented as narrated by the participants. Out of the segmented information, interpretations and conclusions were made guided by the phenomenological approach of Husserl. The approach views the information from an epistemological perspective.

Hayes & Singh (2011) contend that phenomenologists consider interviewing a more appropriate method for examining social phenomena which are otherwise unexplored or underexplored. Englander said that the phenomenological interview process involves asking broad questions that encourage rich and detailed descriptions of the participants' recollections of their experiences as the focus of the research at hand. The researcher's transcriptions allow for the extensive exploration of the lived experiences of the participants which are necessary for establishing the truth of the phenomenon being studied.

## Findings and Interpretations

The purpose of this study was to establish truth based on the lived experiences of teachers implementing blended learning. The analysis in this chapter involves the discussion of the themes that emerged from the responses of the teacher participants and the insights learned from cited literature. The interpretations based on the epistemological view lead to the construction of knowledge and eventually the establishment of truth as experienced by the participants. The constructed knowledge led to the identification of emergent themes. These themes tend to overlap as the experiences present situations that are interrelated. Ziakas and Boukas (2014) cited Gergen who said that the fundamental argument is that reality is socially constructed by and between the persons who experience it. It is a consequence of the context in which the action occurs and is shaped. Such context includes the cultural, historical, political, and social norms that operate within the lived experience. Sica cited Berger & Luckman who assert that reality is subjective since it is dependent on our personal and unique understanding, and our experiences as part of the living world.

## Teachers' Views on Blended Learning

The teachers were initially apprehensive about the implementation of blended learning. It can be pointed to the anxieties relevant to the existing threat of the pandemic. Romero (2021) identified personal stress and anxiety as one the stressors of teachers in the new normal. They are worried that they may contract the virus should they report to school. In addition, Chiasson (2020) explained in his article that teachers' concern for vulnerable students is one of the most stressful aspects of their jobs right now. Despite these fears, teachers consider blended learning as a necessary shift for DepEd to

continue its mission of delivering education to learners.

However, given that distance learning has resulted in learning gaps, the teachers stressed the importance of having the traditional classroom setting to effectively teach the learners. Although the teachers are generally in favor of the limited face-to-face support with online and modular instructions, they are complaining about the weight of the tasks they are expected to perform in line with the implementation of blended learning. This is only made worse by the experienced challenges, particularly in the provision of necessary facilities, equipment, and materials.

#### Teachers' Strengths and Weaknesses as Learning Facilitators in Blended Learning

Despite the challenges met, teachers are very resourceful and innovative in implementing strategies to ensure that despite the difficulties, they can perform their responsibilities. They highlighted their strengths in the crafting of learning materials and the distribution and retrieval of the modules and learning activity sheets. Weaknesses identified were along with an assessment of learning and monitoring of learners' progress. Effective communication is a critical aspect of distance learning setups.

In relation, Hamilton et al. (2020) had a study involving teachers and principals. They concluded based on their survey that teachers' ability to monitor their students' work depends in large part on whether they have the technology and information needed to stay in touch with students and their families. Majorities of both teachers (59 percent) and principals (77 percent) reported being able to contact all or nearly all of their students and families while school buildings were closed. Although schools are now starting to open in the country with the implementation of limited face-

to-face classes, communication is still a major consideration in the effectiveness of education delivery. With the advent of technology, teachers, parents, and learners alike have adopted the use of social media platforms to facilitate matters relevant to school-home communication.

#### Issues and Gaps in the Implementation of Blended Learning

The result of the interviews with the teacher participants revealed several gaps in the implementation of blended learning. These gaps were categorized into four themes: DepEd Factor, Parent Factor, Teacher Factor, and Learner Factor.

##### DepEd and Digital Preparedness and Readiness

This factor consists of issues regarding supplies and materials, facilities and equipment, provision of technical assistance, and quality assurance of modules being the more preferred learning material over online and tv and radio-based instructions. Most of the teachers expressed challenges along with the availability of sufficient supplies, materials, and equipment which they very much need in modular distance learning. Wang (2020) pointed out that the crisis in education delivery due to the pandemic has shown that the education system is lacking in terms of digital preparedness. Although only a few employ online teaching as compared to the number of those who use the modular approach, still, preparing and reproducing modules require digital preparedness. Along this line, teachers have complaints about faulty and insufficient equipment for the reproduction of learning activity sheets and modules.

##### Parent As the First Teacher

Parents are now experiencing the difficulty teachers do in terms of motivating the learners

by imposing discipline during the teaching-learning sessions. They are now enlightened on the weight of the teacher's responsibilities and the importance of the well-being of teachers as facilitators of learning. Collie and Martin (2020) affirmed that teachers' well-being is not only a vital outcome in itself; it is a means to other vital outcomes, such as students learning and well-being. Teachers are tasked with the moral obligation to maintain a strong disposition as they push through with education delivery. They explicated those teachers must respond to the changing needs of students throughout a lesson, adapt to manage unexpected situations relating to student behavior, and make adjustments to their teaching plans when timetable changes occur.

#### Teacher As designer and Facilitator of Learning

Despite the shift in learning delivery modalities, teachers remain the most influential factor in the success of learners. Sadly, teachers are already complaining about time constraints, given that they are bombarded with too many tasks and not just the actual teaching. Moreover, teachers have grown used to bringing their work home, and with that, their personal lives are affected. Moeller (2018) conducted an investigation that revealed that 85 percent of their teacher respondents reported that work-life imbalance was affecting their ability to teach. This is made worse by the new expectations of the shift in education delivery requiring them to be distance learning experts to support uninterrupted learning for all their students while attending to the needs of their own families.

Related to this, Holdheide (2020) argued that the rush to distance learning with little to no training for teachers is troubling, and teacher preparation programs should learn from this experience. Toquero (2020) recommended the conduct of teacher training on online instruction, blended learning, and distance learning to adjust to the new instructional format. He further

concluded that changes in the grading system, assessment, and evaluation of student's performance will also be a challenge to every administrator.

#### Learners as Constructors of Learning

The implementation of a modularized curriculum encourages active learning and promotes independent or self-directed learning. Sejpal (2013) contends that a modular approach to teaching enables learners to have control over their learning and accept greater responsibility for learning. However, the learners of the teachers involved in this study demonstrated low interest in their learning. Consequently, they resorted to cheating instead of striving to get the answers and learn in the process of inquiry and problem-solving.

On the other hand, Sejpal also cautioned that modular instructions require maturity on the part of the learner. He explained that this teaching style is more appropriate for more mature students since the learner-teacher contact time is very limited and all the capabilities required to perform are closely related. It is to be understood that as teachers found it difficult to adapt to the new normal setting, it is expected that learners will experience perhaps greater challenges as learners. And as teachers needed the training to be able to effectively teach in a distance learning set-up, learners also need to be properly prepared to receive educational instructions outside the classroom. To this end, the Department of Education has not provided the learners with enough time and training to cope with the new setup.

#### Conclusions

Based on the findings and interpretations presented, the researcher formulated the following conclusions:

1. Teachers are generally positive about the necessity to implement blended learning to ensure uninterrupted delivery of learning despite the constraints brought about by the threat of the pandemic. This is despite experiencing challenges in the implementation of the modality.

2. The resourcefulness and innovativeness of teachers resulted in the implementation of effective and efficient strategies in the crafting, preparation, distribution, and retrieval of learning materials. This strength was developed with the support of stakeholders, particularly parents. However, they need assistance in monitoring learners' actual progress and assessing their actual academic performance. This weakness resulted from learners' low interest in their studies and the parent's lack of knowledge and skills as learning facilitators at home.

3. There are many gaps in the implementation of blended learning, and they can be categorized into the DepEd factor, parent factor, teacher factor, and learner factor. Each factor is composed of subfactors about challenging situations that negatively affect the success of the implementation of blended learning.

4. Procedural interventions targeting these specific factors may be proposed to better the implementation of blended learning.

#### Recommendations

From the thematic findings, the following conclusions are formulated:

1. To further strengthen the teachers' positive attitude toward blended learning, the Department of Education should devise strategies to improve the working conditions for teachers.

2. In response to identified weaknesses, the Schools Division Office of Sorsogon Province should consider crafting and implementing a systematic technical assistance plan particularly focused on facilitating the monitoring of learners' progress and assessment of learning.

3. The Schools Division of Sorsogon Province thru the leadership of the Schools Division Superintendent should design interventions to address the issues and gaps as categorized into the four factors – DepEd, Parent, Teacher, and Learner factors.

4. As a reference, the SDO of Sorsogon Province should consider this study and the proposed procedural interventions as input in devising a more comprehensive plan of action.

#### Suggestions for Future Research

Davidson (2012) cited Polkinghorne who observed that there is a growing recognition of the limitations in establishing unquestionable truth through understanding human experiences. The researcher gives the following suggestions to individuals who may want to conduct studies in this area:

1. Conduct a study on the feasibility of implementing distance teaching thru online and offline strategies in the Schools Division to propose the institutionalization of online classes in selected schools. This study should be based on the experiences of learners and teachers alike regarding the accessibility of the internet in their respective areas.

2. Conduct a study that would develop and propose enhancements to the existing guidelines relevant to the assessment of learners' performance that would be more accurate and effective.

3. Conduct a study that would lead to the crafting of a comprehensive and standardized scheme for monitoring learners' actual progress

4. Conduct a study underscoring the need to assess teachers' well-being and propose relevant policy recommendations

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