



THE EFFECTS OF THE DISTANCE LEARNING MODALITY ON THE TEACHING PERFORMANCE OF EDUCATORS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Luigi Reginald B. Resoles

Instructor I (COS), Philippine State College of Aeronautics

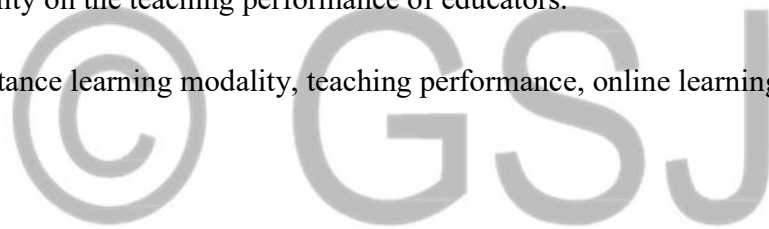
Pasay City, Philippines

luigiresoles@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

As the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) spread rapidly throughout the world, many activities were put into a halt to prevent the spread of the said virus. One of the most affected sectors of society from this pandemic is the education sector. Many schools have been shut down to combat the spread of the disease. Because of the rapid development of events due to the pandemic, the effects of the current distance learning modality on educators have not been fully studied yet. This literature review aims to find out and understand the effects of the current distance learning modality on the teaching performance of educators.

Keywords: distance learning modality, teaching performance, online learning,



INTRODUCTION

Distance learning may sound like a recent innovation but such learning modality has existed for over two centuries already (Spector, Merrill, Merrienboer, & Driscoll, 2008). When it was initially conceived, distance learning did not intend to entirely replace the traditional mode of education. It was only conceptualized to augment with the existing mode of learning. Before the advent of modern technology, the correspondence school modality served as the first form of distance education. (Harting & Erthal, 2005). Distance learning intends to extend educational opportunities to learners who could not be accommodated by the traditional learning setup.

The distance learning modality has become one of the most common mediums of instruction for teaching professionals these days. A year ago, although such a concept already existed, distance learning was only previously reserved for learners with particular needs. Today, learners and teachers alike from all walks of life were forced to adapt to the current distance learning modality when numerous health protocols were put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In an instant, schools were shut down, physical appearance in educational institutions were put into a halt, and teachers all over the world were expected to rapidly adapt to this abrupt shift in teaching methods.

In the education sector, a change in the learning modality could cause changes in job performance. Kell & Motowidlo (2012) defines job performance as the total expected value to the organization of the discrete behavioral episodes that an individual carries out over a standard period of time. In other words, job performance is the sum of all the tasks an employee is expected to accomplish within a reasonable timeframe.

Most existing studies focus on the effects of the current distance learning modality on students. This paper intends to explore the other end of the spectrum—the teachers and educators who did not have a choice but to adapt to this modality.

Six discussions were particularly given an importance, namely, the student-teacher dynamic in the distance learning modality, motivation and willingness among teachers, technological limitations of the distance learning modality, accessibility issues of the distance learning modality, wages and benefits of teachers, and mental health issues among teachers in the distance learning modality.

DISCUSSIONS

The Student-Teacher Dynamic in the Distance Learning Modality

The distance learning modality has greatly impacted the dynamics between students and teachers. The interaction the normal classroom instruction offers no longer exists in this modality. Thus, teachers are forced to find a way to make sure that their students still get good, or even better, instruction. The following outlines the gap in the study of the implementation of the distance learning modality on a larger scale and how it affects teachers in particular.

A year into the pandemic, the Philippines has resorted to different subtypes of the distance learning modality (Magsambol, 2020), like flexible, modular, and pure online mode, to name a few. These subtypes emerged out of necessity due to technical, logistical, and practicability issues surrounding this new type of learning. These diverging subtypes have also presented varying educational outcomes. For instance, those who are under the flexible modality are able to receive both modular and online instructions. This has enabled students to receive a wider range of information and instruction. At the same, educators have more techniques at their disposal because of the possibilities extended by such modality. In addition, students who may have intermittent internet connectivity are still able to perform academic tasks with few complications because of the flexible nature of such modality. On the other hand, pure online modality allows students and teachers to conduct learning activities over the internet on-demand. Academic consultations in this modality continue to exist so long as both the student and the teacher have a stable internet connection.

Most of the country, however, operates mostly under the modular modality because of the aforementioned constraints and limitations of the current learning setup. The use of self-learning modules has thus become the most reliable method among teachers in delivering their academic instructions. With this type of instructional delivery, it has become immediately evident that teachers and students are not able to interact on a regular basis since learning solely rests upon the cognizance of the students on the learning materials they have at hand. Moreover, because all quarantine restrictions that are currently in place prohibit minors from going out of their homes, students are not able to consult with their teachers if there are parts of their lessons they could not understand. Students are therefore forced to seek the help of other people who may not have the necessary qualifications teachers have. For instance, several reports have surfaced that many students often ask help from their friends or relatives for educational consultations and even for answering their self-learning modules (Bernardo, 2020). It defeats the purpose of self-learning modules for the students of the modular modality. This setup also limits the ability of the teachers to properly assess the progress of their students.

Motivation and Willingness Among Teachers

The distance learning modality is without any problems. The normal face-to-face interaction of students and teachers alike have drastically changed without addressing the persisting problems and issues in the utilization of such modality. Even in the advent of massive internet use, Sherry (1995) pointed out that distance learning has expanded dramatically and that curriculum developers have fully immersed themselves in using latest technologies without discussing potential problems that could affect the learning process of students and teaching strategies of educators.

In 1998, Galusha already foresaw a potential problem and a barrier to the distance learning modality. She posited that the distance learning modality may not work for educators who are not overly enthusiastic to it and that educators that are forced to teach such non-traditional coursework are less likely to succeed over their peers that are more motivated.

Because of the abrupt circumstances in which the distance learning modality in the Philippines was implemented, the educator sector was inherently not prepared for the shift. Various technical and structural problems, which existed way before the pandemic started, began to manifest. These problems have been partly amplified by Arinto (2016) in her paper by exploring the issues and challenges in implementing distance learning modalities. One issue she pointed out is the unwillingness of some educators in the academe to go through such transition. Although the situation in this time of the COVID-19 pandemic is different compared to when the study was penned, it can be connected to this article in the sense that this unwillingness still exists in the academe. However, because of existing policies regarding the implementation of the distance learning modality to foster continuing education while preventing the further spread of the pandemic, unwilling educators are left without any choice but to adapt to this current learning setup. Despite being integrated in this current learning setup, unwilling educators still exist which may affect learning outcomes if remedies are not presented. Duttweiler (1986) shared this view that motivational strategies can help foster positive learning outcomes.

Technological Limitations of the Distance Learning Modality

Another persisting problem is the quality of internet connection in the Philippines. Since the distance learning modality requires the remote interaction between student and teachers, relevant infrastructure and tools should be present to cater to the needs of students and teachers and ensure the success of this modality shift.

Manalo (2020) explored this very issue of connectivity issues in the country. He pointed out that the state of the internet in the Philippines is poor and slow, citing the issues of existing policy and

development gaps, lack of competition, and the disadvantageous geographic position the Philippines is in, making it prone to natural calamities which affects internet connectivity. In the 2020 study of the Internet Inclusivity Index, the Philippines ranked 63rd out of 100 countries mentioned in the study. The said study assessed the country's internet infrastructure across several key aspects like internet availability, affordability, relevance and readiness. These structural issues exacerbate the already existing learning gap way before the start of the pandemic.

Accessibility Issues of the Distance Learning Modality

Another problem worth mentioning is the domino-effect of the economic downturn on the affordability of education because of the pandemic. Although public education in the Philippines is near-universal, thanks largely to Republic Act 10931 or the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act, many students still need to find a way to support other miscellaneous costs, including, but not limited to internet subscription fees. Many students also belong to families who have working-age family members who were laid off because of the pandemic. This situation has forced many students to seek employment, while studying at the same time. Students who are under this situation are known to have poorer educational outcomes because of their divided attention of providing for their families and attending classes, all at the same time (Uaminal, 2020).

Furthermore, the problems surrounding the distribution of learning modules has disrupted the push for equitable education. Many schools located in rural and far-flung areas lack even the most basic facilities to produce learning modules and have thus requested the national government's assistance to necessitate the production of the said learning materials. Despite such requests, the national government has instead relegated these tasks to regional and provincial education offices which are already plagued with inequities even before the pandemic hit the Philippines. Because of these bureaucratic issues, the intended result has greatly diverged from the actual policy implemented. The Department of Education has also found out that dozens of self-learning modules contained multiple errors, as well as inappropriate contents (Mateo, 2020), which may also significantly impact the learning outcomes of students (Magsambol, 2020).

Wages and Benefits of Teachers

On top of the aforementioned problems, many teachers are also affected by delayed salaries as well as other benefits that they are entitled to. This is not to say that these problems only arose when the COVID-19 pandemic hit but it was particularly magnified because of the economic slump caused by the pandemic. For instance, the disbursement of the Performance-based Bonus (PBB) of public elementary and secondary school teachers have been grossly delayed (Hernando-Malipot, 2021). In fact, the PBB for 2019 has only been disbursed in 2021 (Department of

Education, 2021). As with most government workers, entry-level teachers only receive 23,877 Philippine pesos or about US\$ 475 every month (Department of Budget and Management, 2021). Such salary can be considered a mere pittance especially when considering that Manila has been recently ranked as one of the most expensive cities to live in Asia (Dumlao-Abadilla, 2021). The study conducted by iPrice found out that for a single person to live comfortably in Manila, an income of over 50,000 pesos or about US\$ 1,000 is needed. This amount is more than double the aforementioned salary for an entry-level teacher. With a subpar salary, a teacher's job performance may be seriously impaired. This is in congruence with Umar's 2014 research where he concluded that workers' salaries have direct effects on their job performance.

Mental Health Issues Among Teachers in the Distance Learning Modality

New problems have also arisen because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The burden of the pandemic has led to multiple emotional and mental health issues among teachers. Being unable to separate professional and personal lives, teachers are forced to juggle both responsibilities simultaneously (Luthra, 2021). As with any other factors that may affect someone negatively, this can also translate to negative educational outcomes, but most importantly, the well-being of teachers involved.

The Department of Education even recognizes that mental health issues among teachers have surged because of the isolation brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of this, the agency launched programs to extend help and support to teachers at this time of the pandemic (Department of Education, 2021). In addition, mental health webinars are also conducted regularly to ascertain the effects of the distance learning modality on the mental well-being of teachers and provide appropriate response to the concerns that they might raise (Department of Education, 2021).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper highlights the issues surrounding the current distance learning modality in place and its effects on the job performance of teachers. From the discussions presented above, it can be concluded that there are various problems in the distance learning modality that call for immediate solutions through appropriate policy proposals, strategic programs, and further studies to explore the issue. In the meantime, it is recommended that policymakers respond to the demands of the distance learning modality, including but not limited to areas surrounding investment on public internet infrastructure, on-time payment of wages and benefits, logistical and technical support for teachers as well as mental health support, just to name a few.

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