

UNTOLD STORIES OF TLE STUDENTS ON MODULAR DISTANCE LEARNING DURING THE PANDEMIC: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY STUDY

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ABSTRACT: *The COVID-19 pandemic prompted this study to employ a narrative inquiry approach to explore the experiences of two Grade 10 public high school students, their parents, and the teacher during the initial phase of modular distance learning (MDL). Purposefully selected based on their academic performance, the participants' stories offer insights into the challenges and adaptive strategies within the MDL context. Through personal interviews, anecdotal, and class records, the research reveals the nuanced impact of living conditions, module distribution and retrieval processes, engagement with module content, performance task completion, academic performance, and the pivotal role of parental support on students' learning experiences. Conventional content analysis identified six key themes that underline the complexities of navigating education during a pandemic. The findings highlight the critical need for enhanced educational policies and curriculum development, particularly within the Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE)-Cooking curriculum, to address the identified challenges. This study contributes to the discourse on educational resilience, offering directions for policy-making and curriculum enhancement to better support students and families in similar future scenarios.*

Keywords: Academic Performance, Curriculum Enhancement, Curriculum Enhancement, Educational Policy, Modular Distance Learning, Narrative Inquiry, Parental Support

INTRODUCTION

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has precipitated an unprecedented shift in the educational landscape, thrusting Modular Distance Learning (MDL) into the spotlight as a primary mode of instruction for students across the globe. This shift has been acutely felt in specialized subjects such as Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE), where the curriculum is designed to develop both cognitive and psychomotor competencies in students, preparing them for various Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) qualification courses [1]. TLE's hands-on nature makes it particularly challenging to adapt to a purely modular distance learning format, highlighting a significant research gap in understanding how students navigate these challenges without direct, in-person guidance from teachers. Moreover, the shift to MDL has underscored issues such as students' tendencies to copy answers for assessments without fully understanding the concepts, a practice that threatens the integrity and effectiveness of learning outcomes [2, 3].

The implementation of MDL during the pandemic has revealed a complex tapestry of strengths and weaknesses. On one hand, it has demonstrated the resilience and adaptability of educational systems, ensuring continuity of learning amidst global crises. On the other hand, it has exposed significant drawbacks, particularly in subjects requiring hands-on experience like TLE [4]. The overall conclusions suggest that the challenges and coping strategies in online learning differ among students and are influenced by numerous factors. Students' feedback indicates that their difficulties and approaches to online learning are shaped by factors such as the resources at their disposal, their interactions with teachers and classmates, and the school's online learning policies. Moreover, the challenges faced by students have been intensified by the pandemic's restrictions and their socioeconomic circumstances [5]. These challenges have prompted concerns about the depth of learning and the acquisition of practical skills, emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of MDL's impact on student learning experiences.

This research intends to fill the existing gap by employing a narrative inquiry to delve into the experiences of TLE students during the pandemic, focusing on both the struggles and successes encountered in modular distance learning. Previous studies within the Department of Education (DepEd) have explored the challenges associated with MDL, yet the literature is scarce on studies that have adopted an in-depth narrative inquiry approach to capture the rich, complex stories of students' experiences. By situating the study within the qualitative paradigm and employing narrative inquiry, this research aims to contribute valuable insights into the effective implementation of MDL, particularly in technical and vocational education, thereby enhancing educational practices and policies for future crises. Hence, this study seeks to restore the lived experiences of the TLE-Cookery students, their parents, and their teacher during the modular distance learning modality. Specifically, this study seeks to uncover how the students experienced the challenges in delivering the performance tasks as well as how the teachers assessed the performances of students during the MDL.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a narrative inquiry approach to explore the experiences of the participants in Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE)-Cookery during modular distance learning amidst the pandemic. Narrative inquiry allows for an in-depth examination of individuals' lived experiences, making it an ideal methodological approach for this research [6]. The narrative inquiry approach emerges as a particularly appropriate research design for exploring the untold stories of TLE students navigating modular distance learning. Narrative inquiry allows for an in-depth exploration of individuals' lived experiences, offering rich, detailed insights that quantitative methods may not capture [7]. This qualitative approach is well-suited to uncovering the complexities of learning within the MDL format, enabling researchers to understand the nuances of student engagement, challenges, and coping strategies from the perspectives of those directly involved. By focusing on personal narratives, this study aims to illuminate the specific experiences of TLE

students, offering a comprehensive understanding of MDL's strengths and weaknesses as experienced by learners themselves.

Participants of the Study

The Participants were two currently Grade 10 students who were purposefully selected based on their academic performance in TLE-Cookery while they were still in Grade 7, which coincided with the full onset of the pandemic, and their willingness to voluntarily participate in the interviews. We also included the parents of these students and their TLE subject teacher as participants to gain a multi-perspective understanding of the students' experiences. This selection process ensured that the study would capture a broad range of experiences related to TLE cookery education during the pandemic.

Data Collection

The development of interview questions was a critical part of the study, designed to elicit detailed narratives about the participants' experiences with modular distance learning. These questions were crafted by the researcher and subjected to validity checks by three experts in the fields of content, research, and methodology, ensuring that the questions were both relevant and capable of eliciting rich, informative narratives. We conducted the interviews in both English and the vernacular language, which facilitated a comfortable and natural conversational flow. We intended this bilingual approach to make participants feel more at ease, thereby encouraging openness and honesty in their responses [8]. With the participant's permission, we audio-recorded the interviews to ensure accurate transcription and data analysis [9].

Data Analysis

The collected data underwent a rigorous thematic analysis, following the conventional content analysis approach as outlined by Hsieh and Shannon [10]. This method involved transcribing the audio-recorded interviews into written text, which was then meticulously coded. Each participant's narrative was assigned specific codes that represented distinct elements or themes emerging from their stories. Similar codes were then grouped to form categories, and related categories were further consolidated to identify overarching themes. This systematic organization of data into themes facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of students and their families regarding TLE-Cookery education during the pandemic.

Throughout the analysis process, the researcher practiced bracketing to minimize potential biases. Bracketing involves acknowledging and setting aside the researcher's preconceptions and biases to focus purely on the participants' narratives, thus ensuring the integrity and authenticity of the data interpretation [11]. This methodological rigor underscores the study's commitment to providing an unbiased and profound exploration of the participants' experiences with modular distance learning in TLE-Cookery during the pandemic. By employing narrative inquiry and thematic analysis, the study aims to contribute valuable insights into

the challenges and strategies associated with distance learning in vocational education settings.

Ethical Considerations

In qualitative research, ethical considerations are essential, particularly when engaging participants in in-depth interviews where vernacular language is utilized to foster a deeper connection and understanding. This approach demands a heightened sensitivity to the cultural and linguistic contexts of the participants, guaranteeing the respect and accurate representation of their expressions and narratives. The researcher ensured the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants by using pseudonyms and seeking informed consent from their parents and teachers. This approach preserves sensitive or identifiable information about the participants [12]. Furthermore, obtaining informed consent becomes crucial, as participants are minors, to ensure that they are fully aware of how their language and expressions will be used and presented in the research findings, safeguarding against any potential misinterpretation or misuse of their words [8]. These ethical considerations underscore the responsibility of researchers to create a safe and respectful environment that honors the participants' voices and lived experiences, ensuring that the research process and outcomes are both ethical and impactful [13].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following the conventional analysis approach, six themes emerged in the data analysis.

Theme 1: 1 Living Condition

The living conditions of Filipino public school students significantly influence their ability to engage in and benefit from Modular Distance Learning (MDL). The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated this educational modality, which requires students to complete self-learning modules at home, often with the assistance of family members. The narratives of Aikah and Ivy, students at Misamis Oriental General Comprehensive High School, highlight the disparities in living conditions and their impact on students' academic experiences. Aikah, living in an area with unreliable internet, faces challenges in accessing online resources and communicating with teachers, compounded by her family's limited financial capacity to provide consistent support. Conversely, Ivy, despite living in a congested slum area, benefits from the strong academic support of her parents, underscoring the critical role of familial assistance in navigating MDL despite facing financial constraints.

Aikah's and Ivy's stories encapsulate the broader challenges and resilience found within the Filipino public school system. Aikah's struggles with unreliable internet and limited family resources reflect a common issue among students in similar socio-economic standings: external factors severely limit their educational opportunities. On the other hand, Ivy's situation demonstrates how familial support can mitigate some of the adverse effects of financial constraints on education. Both narratives emphasize the importance of external support systems in facilitating successful engagement with MDL, highlighting a significant variance in the academic experiences of students based on their living conditions and available support. [14]

These findings underscore the need for targeted educational policies and curriculum development that consider the diverse living conditions of students. Enhancing internet accessibility, providing additional academic support resources, and developing policies that address the specific needs of financially constrained families are critical steps toward leveling the playing field [15, 16]. Furthermore, the education system could benefit from integrating strategies that foster community support and leverage local resources to support students like Aikah and Ivy. Ensuring that all students have equitable access to education, regardless of their socio-economic status or living conditions, is essential for the development of a resilient and inclusive educational system in the Philippines

Theme 2: Distribution and Retrieval of Modules

The distribution and retrieval of modules in the Modular Distance Learning (MDL) modality present a critical aspect of the educational process during the COVID-19 pandemic. This system necessitates a coordinated effort between schools and families to ensure that students continue to receive their education despite physical school closure. The logistics involved in distributing and retrieving learning materials weekly highlight the importance of this process in maintaining the flow of education. It reflects the commitment of both educators and families to adapt to new learning environments, ensuring that students have the necessary resources to continue their studies.

The narratives of Aikah and Ivy provide insight into how families navigate the distribution and retrieval processes of MDL. Aikah's family, with her brother stepping in to assist due to her mother's occasional illnesses, highlights the communal effort to support students' education under MDL. Similarly, Ivy's narrative showcases the diligence of her family, particularly her mother's dedication to ensuring that Ivy receives her modules early enough to maximize her study time. Teacher Kysilyn's account of Ivy's disciplined approach to her studies further emphasizes the positive impact of early module retrieval on students' time management and academic responsibility. These stories illustrate the varied yet crucial roles that family members play in facilitating students' access to education through MDL.

These narratives' implications suggest the need for educational policies and curriculum development that recognize and address the challenges inherent in the MDL modality. Enhancing the efficiency of module distribution and retrieval processes could alleviate some of the burdens on students and their families. This might include the introduction of more flexible schedules for module pickup and return, as well as the development of digital platforms to streamline communication and resource distribution [17] and [18]. Additionally, considering the significant role of family support in MDL, policies aimed at providing guidance and resources to parents and guardians could further empower them to assist their children effectively. The ultimate objective is to establish a more inclusive and supportive MDL environment that meets the needs of every student, guaranteeing that no learner falls behind because of logistical or socio-economic obstacles.

Theme 3: Answering the Modules

The theme "Answering the Modules during the Modular Distance Learning (MDL) Modality" encapsulates the experiences and challenges students face while engaging with self-learning modules. This theme explores how students navigate the process of understanding, completing, and submitting modules without the traditional classroom interaction, focusing on the varying degrees of support they receive and their strategies for overcoming obstacles in learning. The emphasis is on the autonomy and resourcefulness required from students in this self-directed learning environment, as well as the critical role of external support in facilitating their academic progress.

In the narratives collected, Aikah and Ivy represent contrasting experiences within the MDL modality. Aikah, facing difficulties with unreliable internet and limited guidance, often finds herself struggling to complete modules. Her narrative highlights issues of accessibility and the need for external support, which, when insufficient, leads to incomplete submissions or reliance on peers' work. On the other hand, Ivy's story is one of resilience and success, showcasing how diligent work, effective support from family, and the strategic use of online resources can lead to high academic achievement despite financial constraints. Ivy's ability to consistently submit complete and timely modules, alongside achieving high scores, illustrates the positive outcomes possible when students are well-supported and can effectively navigate the challenges of MDL.

The contrasting narratives of Aikah and Ivy bring to light several implications for educational policy and curriculum development. Firstly, there is a clear need for policies that ensure all students have equitable access to the necessary resources for MDL, including reliable internet and learning materials. Additionally, these findings highlight the importance of providing comprehensive support systems for students, encompassing not just academic guidance but also technical and emotional support. Developing teacher training programs focused on effective remote instruction and feedback can enhance the MDL experience. Furthermore, incorporating strategies to foster peer support and collaboration among students could mitigate feelings of isolation and improve learning outcomes. Addressing these aspects is essential for maximizing the efficacy of the MDL modality and ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed academically, regardless of their socio-economic background or home learning environment.

Theme 4: Doing the Performance Tasks

The theme "Doing the Performance Task" emerges as a critical aspect of the modular distance learning system, especially within the context of TLE-Cookery. Performance tasks serve as capstone projects that assess students' mastery of the competencies required in the module, carrying a significant weight in the final grading system. This theme reflects the challenges and strategies employed by students to meet these requirements, highlighting the importance of performance tasks in the educational assessment process. The emphasis on performance tasks underscores the shift towards practical demonstrations of learning, which are essential for subjects that involve hands-on skills such as cooking.

Ivy's narrative reveals her determination to excel academically by completing her modules and performance tasks on time, aiming for high grades as a reflection of her efforts. The grading system in TLE-Cookery, which places a 70% weight on performance tasks, emphasizes the importance of these practical demonstrations in the overall assessment. Ivy enlists her mother's help to guarantee the excellence of her performance tasks, which necessitate video recording and submission for assessment. However, Teacher Kysilyn's observation of Ivy's mother providing procedural guidance during the performance task recordings suggests a deviation from the intended assessment of student learning. When parental involvement extends beyond support to direct instruction, it compromises the requirement for students to independently demonstrate their learned competencies through these tasks.

These findings' implications highlight several areas for educational policy and curriculum development. First, the heavy weighting of performance tasks in subjects like TLE-Cookery necessitates clear guidelines and support structures to ensure students can independently demonstrate their competencies [19]. While parental involvement is beneficial for student learning, the assessment of performance tasks must accurately reflect the student's abilities and understandings. This situation calls for educational policies that encourage authentic student work, possibly through the development of more robust integrity verification processes or guidelines for parental assistance [20]. Additionally, curriculum developers might consider integrating instructional materials or resources that better prepare students for these tasks, ensuring they have the necessary skills and confidence to complete them independently. Addressing these challenges can enhance the validity of performance-based assessments, ensuring they serve their intended purpose of measuring student learning effectively [21].

Theme 5: Academic Performance During the Modular Modality of Learning

The theme of "Academic Performance during the Modular Distance Learning (MDL) Modality" brings to light the varied experiences and outcomes of students navigating the shift to remote education amidst the pandemic. This modality, while designed to ensure continuity of learning during school closures, presents unique challenges that directly impact students' academic performance. The reliance on self-learning modules, coupled with the variable quality of home learning environments and support systems, creates disparate educational experiences. These factors significantly influence students' ability to engage with and absorb the curriculum, leading to a broad spectrum of academic outcomes within the MDL framework.

Aikah's and Ivy's stories exemplify the dichotomy of experiences under MDL. Aikah, despite her determination and efforts to learn independently, struggles with unreliable internet access and limited guidance, often resulting in incomplete module submissions and reliance on classmates' work. This scenario underscores the challenges faced by students lacking adequate support structures, ultimately affecting their academic performance. Conversely, Ivy's

narrative reflects a more positive outcome, where diligence, family support, and resourcefulness in seeking information online contribute to her continued academic success. Ivy demonstrates the potential for success under MDL when students receive adequate support, as evidenced by her ability to submit modules on time, achieve high scores, and utilize digital resources for additional learning.

The contrasting experiences of Aikah and Ivy underscore the necessity for educational policies and curriculum development tailored to address the disparities in student experiences under MDL. Enhancing access to reliable internet and digital learning resources, providing additional support for students with limited guidance at home, and developing strategies to ensure the integrity and comprehensiveness of module completion are critical steps toward improving academic performance in a distance learning context. Furthermore, fostering an environment that encourages independent learning while also providing avenues for teacher and peer support can mitigate MDL challenges. Addressing these issues is vital not only for the immediate goal of academic achievement but also for ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all students, regardless of their socio-economic status or home learning environments.

Theme 6: Role of Parents During the Modular Distance Learning

The theme "Parents' Role during the Modular Distance Learning Modality" underscores the significant impact of parental involvement on students' academic experiences and performance in the context of distance learning. As schools shifted to modular distance learning (MDL) in response to the global pandemic, the home environment and parental support became crucial in facilitating students' learning processes. This theme explores the spectrum of parental involvement, from highly supportive and engaged to those challenged by various factors such as work commitments, lack of content knowledge, or the clarity of instructional materials. The variability in parental support reflects broader issues of access, equity, and the diverse capacities of families to contribute to their children's education during MDL.

In the narratives shared by Teacher Kysilyn, the contrasting experiences of Aikah and Ivy in Teacher Kysilyn's narratives highlight the diversity in parental roles and their effect on students' academic journeys. Ivy benefits significantly from her mother's diligent support, which helps her maintain high academic performance despite financial constraints. Her mother's proactive engagement in her education, from ensuring module completion to supplementing learning with online resources, exemplifies the positive impact of parental involvement. Conversely, Aikah's narrative reveals the challenges some parents face in supporting their children's MDL, including a limited understanding of module content and health issues that prevent consistent support. Despite these challenges, Aikah's family attempts to provide support, with her brother stepping in to assist, underscoring the collective effort required to navigate MDL successfully.

Recognizing that not all parents can provide the same level of support [22, 23], it becomes essential to develop strategies that minimize the dependence on parental assistance for

academic success. This could include providing clearer, more accessible instructional materials, offering teacher support via regular online check-ins, and creating community-based learning hubs to assist students lacking adequate support at home. Additionally, professional development for teachers on engaging with families effectively and equipping parents with strategies to support their children's learning could enhance the MDL experience. The Department of Education (2021) emphasizes the importance of such measures in ensuring equitable access to quality education through MDL, highlighting the need for collaborative efforts among educators, families, and communities to support all learners effectively.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided crucial insights into the experiences of TLE students navigating modular distance learning (MDL) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Six key themes emerged from the analysis: living conditions, module distribution and retrieval, answering modules, performing tasks, academic performance during MDL, and the pivotal role of parents. These themes collectively underscore the complex interplay between socioeconomic factors, educational support systems, and the challenges in the authenticity of learning and the assessment thereof in the implementation of MDL in delivering quality education. The narratives revealed significant challenges, including access to learning materials, the importance of supportive living environments, the critical role of parental involvement, and the need for practical assessments that accurately reflect students' competencies. These findings suggest that while MDL offers a viable alternative to traditional classroom learning, its effectiveness is contingent upon addressing these multifaceted challenges to ensure equitable educational outcomes for all students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to the Department of Education (DepEd) and educational stakeholders. First, there is a need for DepEd to develop and implement policies aimed at improving access to reliable learning resources, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This includes enhancing the distribution and retrieval process of learning modules through localized collection centers or digital platforms, which can alleviate the logistical burdens on families and those of teachers. To address the challenges related to performance tasks in TLE-Cooking, curriculum enhancements may focus on integrating virtual simulations and interactive online platforms that allow students to demonstrate practical skills in a remote setting. Furthermore, enhancing parental engagement through targeted workshops and resources can empower parents to better support their children's learning. Lastly, future research may aim to address the limitations of narrative inquiry by incorporating mixed-methods approaches that combine qualitative insights with quantitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of MDL on student learning outcomes. Implementing these recommendations will require collaborative efforts among policymakers, educators, and communities to ensure that MDL not only continues to provide educational continuity

but also promotes inclusive and quality learning experiences for all students.

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