Blended Learning Modality: Philippine Context

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Blended learning has emerged as a critical educational approach, particularly in sustaining instruction during disruptions that limit fully face-to-face engagement. It combines traditional classroom interaction with modular or online distance learning components, enabling students to benefit from direct teacher support while engaging in flexible, self-paced study (Sorbie, 2015). This dual modality offers several advantages: it allows learners to manage their study schedules, revisit materials as needed, and cultivate greater autonomy in the learning process.

Despite these strengths, blended learning also presents notable challenges. Students who require immediate, direct assistance from teachers may struggle when continuous in-person guidance is not available, hindering their ability to grasp complex concepts or complete assigned tasks. For teachers, implementation often entails a dual workload: preparing and distributing learning modules, providing timely feedback, and conducting face-to-face lessons concurrently. This additional burden can

lead to exhaustion and delays, particularly for educators managing large classes or lacking sufficient institutional support (Sorbie, 2015). In many instances, the demands of creating and grading modules alongside traditional teaching responsibilities have resulted in delays in material distribution, thereby reducing the overall effectiveness of the blended learning approach.

Research further supports the potential of blended learning as a model for 21st-century education. Jerry and Yunus (2021) describe it as an ideal framework that merges the strengths of face-to-face interaction with technology-mediated instruction. This integration facilitates more engaging and diversified learning environments, accommodating different learner preferences while leveraging digital tools to enhance content delivery. Similarly, Lalima and Dangwal (2017) emphasize that effective blended learning requires structuring instruction in a way that seamlessly integrates classroom-based teaching with the affordances of information and communication technology (ICT).

While blended learning holds considerable promise for modernizing education and promoting student engagement, its success ultimately depends on addressing barriers faced by both learners and educators. Ensuring adequate teacher training, providing access to resources, and strengthening institutional support systems are essential steps toward maximizing the benefits of this modality. When effectively implemented, blended learning can serve as a sustainable and equitable approach, enabling schools to deliver high-quality education that is both resilient to disruption and responsive to diverse student needs.

Challenges and Adaptations in Implementing Blended Learning in the Philippine Basic Education Context

Blended learning is a multifaceted concept that extends beyond simply combining face-to-face and online learning. Hrastinski (2019) defines blended learning as the integration of various instructional methods, pedagogical approaches, or technologies. This understanding acknowledges the evolving nature of education, especially as learners today are increasingly exposed to modern digital technologies (Dzuiban et al., 2001). In the Philippines, the preferred modality has been modular distance learning combined with face-to-face classes, though some teachers have incorporated ICT and online classes into their lessons.

Teachers play a crucial role in accessing and utilizing technological tools to create learning opportunities that were previously unavailable. Recognizing this, the Department of Education (DepEd) has facilitated the influx of devices into K-12 classrooms. However, many teachers find themselves unprepared to effectively use these technologies to enhance learning outcomes. Modular Distance Learning (MDL), designed for learners without access to online devices or reliable internet, remains the most common modality. MDL provides individualized instruction through printed or digital self-learning modules (SLMs) and various learning resources tailored to learners' contexts (Camara, 2021).

Despite the longstanding effectiveness of traditional pedagogical practices, the integration of blended learning remains challenging, especially in remote areas. Schools experienced difficulties implementing blended learning that combines face-to-face and online modalities. Many educators preferred full face-to-face instruction, as balancing traditional teaching strategies with technology requires significant time and effort. The

pedagogical approach that combines these elements aims to engage students in authentic learning experiences emphasizing exploration, creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration (Hensley, 2020). However, the fast pace of technological advancement demands continuous teacher adaptation, increasing workloads as teachers prepare presentations, conduct online classes, design modules, and grade student work (Sorbie, 2015). This added burden caused many teachers to view blended learning as overwhelming rather than beneficial.

Some teachers believed blended learning was simply an extension of their existing student-centered practices that use various resources to individualize instruction. Others found the transition challenging, especially as they had to check answered modules and provide timely feedback remotely (Rao, 2019). The shift from traditional in-person lecturing to remote learning required teachers to adapt their methods to maintain student engagement, often taking on roles as monitors and communicators via texts, calls, and video conferencing (Camara, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the Philippine education sector, forcing agencies like the Commission on Higher Education, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, and DepEd to seek ways to deliver quality and equitable education amid unprecedented challenges (Jamon & Boholano, 2021). In basic education, DepEd introduced multiple learning delivery modalities based on geographical, socioeconomic, and educational contexts to meet diverse learner needs, with Modular Distance Learning widely adopted nationwide. Under this system, students receive self-learning kits and modules, which they complete with the support and supervision of parents or guardians. Teachers maintain open communication with families to monitor progress

and address issues. While this new normal posed risks such as the physical health concerns of teachers distributing modules, it also fostered innovation and increased technology use among educators (Jamon & Boholano, 2021).

Nonetheless, blended learning presents significant pedagogical challenges. Jokinen and Mikkonen (2013) identify barriers including instructional design, community issues, and technical difficulties. Even higher education faculty, with more exposure to online teaching, struggled to adapt during the pandemic, highlighting the lack of preparedness for such rapid shifts (Hew et al., 2020; Toquero & Talidong, 2020). Monitoring student progress, providing feedback, and assessing learning remain problematic, despite DepEd's clear guidelines, due to communication gaps, technological limitations, and students' socioeconomic conditions.

The burden on both teachers and students has increased, with students often required to complete multiple modules weekly, amounting to hundreds per school year (Aliyyah et al., 2020). Teachers face logistical challenges managing module printing, distribution, grading, and creating home learning plans. Additionally, communication barriers place some students at risk of dropping out or failing due to insufficient monitoring and support (Fontanos et al., 2020). These challenges emphasize the need for ongoing support systems to ensure that all learners remain engaged and receive appropriate interventions.

One key strength of teachers in the new normal educational setting was their technological literacy as 21st-century educators. Today's teachers are expected to be proficient in ICT and technology (Jamon & Boholano, 2021). Computer literacy is among the most common skills demonstrated by teacher applicants, driven by the pervasive influence of technology in daily life (Oliver, 2002, as cited in Nawaz & Kundi, 2010). Teachers play a

crucial role in effectively integrating technology into education and are encouraged to continuously enhance their computer skills to improve teaching and learning (Asan, 2003). Another strength identified was teachers' capacity for collaboration, commitment, and competence, which are essential qualities for adapting to the new educational landscape. Grangeat and Gray (2007) define teacher competencies as the acquired skills and knowledge that enable educators to perform their tasks effectively and efficiently.

Despite these strengths, teachers acknowledged the need for training on new pedagogical approaches suitable for the current situation (Jamon & Boholano, 2021). Many admitted feeling like strangers in the transformed educational system. While they were "pedagogical and content knowledge experts" in face-to-face classrooms, the pandemic forced a rapid shift to online, modular, and blended learning modalities (Hew et al., 2020). This transition required teachers to quickly adapt their skills and teaching methods to meet the demands of the new normal.

Teachers Lived Experiences of Blended Learning Modality: A Case Study

In one private high school in Aklan, Philippines, blended learning represented a new and challenging experience for teachers. Many initially struggled with mastering digital tools, managing time, and balancing online with offline instruction. Despite these difficulties, teachers demonstrated resilience by developing coping strategies and gradually adapting to the modality. Their experiences highlight the critical importance of institutional

support, targeted professional development, and adequate resources in ensuring successful blended learning implementation.

This qualitative study investigated teachers' lived experiences with blended learning and examined the intervention programs employed to address its challenges. The objective was to provide insights into teachers' coping strategies and adaptive practices in implementing blended learning to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Methodology

This study employed a phenomenological qualitative research design to capture the essence of teachers' lived experiences in implementing blended learning. The design was selected for its capacity to generate comprehensive insights into shared challenges and coping mechanisms among educators.

The research was conducted during the 2022–2023 academic year in a private high school in Aklan, Philippines, with an enrollment of 1,357 learners and 32 faculty and staff members. Seven teachers participated in the study: three from Junior High School and four from Senior High School. Participants were purposively selected based on two criteria: (a) they taught subjects requiring hands-on activities and close guidance, and (b) they had at least three years of teaching experience at the school.

Data were collected through an interview guide consisting of open-ended questions. The guide was structured into three sections: teachers' lived experiences with blended learning, challenges encountered, and coping mechanisms employed. Content validity was established by a panel of experts who reviewed the instrument for clarity, format, and relevance.

Prior to data collection, permission was secured from educational authorities, including the senior education program specialist, district superintendent, and school principal. In-person interviews were conducted with participants' consent, recorded, and transcribed. Confidentiality was assured through anonymization.

Data analysis followed a seven-step phenomenological process: (1) familiarization with transcripts, (2) extraction of significant statements, (3) formulation of meanings, (4) clustering of themes, (5) development of a comprehensive description, (6) articulation of the phenomenon's essential structure, and (7) validation of findings with participants to ensure accuracy and credibility.

Findings

Teachers' experiences revealed both negative and positive dimensions. On the negative side, participants reported (a) being mentally and physically unprepared for blended learning, and (b) the heavy additional workload, which caused stress and exhaustion. On the positive side, teachers highlighted (a) adaptability over time, (b) improved flexibility in managing schedules, and (c) enhanced innovation in integrating online and offline resources.

The majority of participants admitted they were initially unprepared, with stress and exhaustion emerging as significant challenges. Limited prior exposure to blended learning made time management particularly difficult. The main challenges identified were: (a) difficulties in creating and distributing modules, (b) student disinterest in blended learning (leading to

dropout risks), and (c) weak internet connectivity in remote barangays, which disrupted participation.

Managing two instructional modes modular and face-to-face was described as complex and time-consuming. Despite efforts, some students remained disengaged, reflecting both systemic and contextual barriers to blended learning. In terms of coping mechanisms, teachers: (a) integrated digital platforms such as Facebook Messenger and Zoom, despite connectivity constraints, (b) significantly modified teaching strategies to suit blended delivery, and (c) conducted home visits for students at risk of disengagement or dropout.

These strategies fostered greater innovation, flexibility, and empathy. Some teachers noted that blended learning unexpectedly improved their teaching skills, while home visits deepened their understanding of students' circumstances.

The school's intervention program was found to be effective in reducing teachers' workload, particularly in module preparation. However, challenges persisted due to annual reassignments of teaching subjects and non-renewal of some faculty contracts, which disrupted continuity. To address this, the school introduced a learning management system (LMS) to store instructional materials and modules securely online, ensuring accessibility, data privacy, and sustainability.

Recommendations

To strengthen the effectiveness of blended learning, several strategic measures are essential. First, capacity building for teachers must be prioritized through seminar-workshops focused on module development

and ICT skills enhancement. As students' digital competencies continue to expand, educators need to be equipped with the technical expertise and pedagogical flexibility required to deliver quality instruction. Such initiatives not only improve teaching effectiveness but also foster a culture of professional growth and adaptability among educators.

Equally important is the well-being and workload management of teachers. School administrators should actively safeguard the mental, emotional, and physical health of faculty members by providing opportunities for mental health breaks and by minimizing redundant tasks. The effective use of a learning management system (LMS) can further streamline instructional delivery by facilitating module organization, feedback mechanisms, and resource sharing. This reduces duplication of effort and ensures that teachers can devote more time to meaningful engagement with students.

Strengthening institutional resource support is also vital. The school library should be regularly updated with current academic references and provide reliable internet access to both teachers and students. Such resources enhance lesson preparation, facilitate research, and reinforce the blended learning environment. By ensuring that both digital and traditional academic supports are available, schools can promote equity and academic rigor.

Moreover, collaborative planning across subject areas can maximize efficiency and enrich learning outcomes. Interdisciplinary coordination allows teachers to design culminating activities that integrate multiple disciplines into a single output. This approach not only reduces students' workload but also optimizes instructional time and resources, fostering deeper engagement with complex, real-world problems.

Finally, healthy student support systems are essential to sustain participation and academic success in blended learning environments. Regular counseling sessions led by the school's guidance clinician, coupled with targeted home visits for at-risk students, can mitigate truancy and prevent dropouts. Continuous monitoring and timely intervention strengthen learner well-being, attendance, and overall academic performance. Collectively, these measures create a more sustainable, equitable, and effective blended learning model that responds to the diverse needs of both educators and students.

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