Challenges and Barriers Encountered by G10-Agoncillo Learners in the Implementation of Modular Distance Learning at Taal National High School

Waylie Niña D. De Claro[*]

Teacher II, Taal National High School, Taal, Batangas, Philippines

Abstract: The action research aimed to determine the challenges and barriers that G10 - Agoncillo learners from Taal NHS had encountered due to the implementation of Modular Distance Learning. The respondents of the study were the 39 learners who were currently enrolled as Grade 10 Section Agoncillo. The researcher used a research-made questionnaire to gather data necessary for the study. The data collected were analyzed and statistically interpreted to support the identified questions. The researcher made use of frequency count, weighted mean and ranking to explain the data gathered. The results of the study revealed that respondents considered "Poor Time Management" as one of their greatest challenges encountered. Moreover, the researcher found out that the respondents have series of solutions to the identified challenges and thus ranked them from the most relevant to least relevant. The study further revealed that a series of suggested activity may help learners address their challenges and barriers properly thus accomplishing their MDL-SLM properly.

Keywords: Barriers, Challenges, MDL implementation, Modular learning.

1. Context and Rationale

The implementation of the Modular Distance Learning through Self-Learning Modules has provided a different approach to learning. However, though Distance learning has been practiced for a long time, it is still new to most of the learners' today.

MDL-SLM is a part of DepEd's Learning Continuity Plan. Since, most learners are not that familiar with this modality, it is giving them a hard time to cope with it. Several challenges and barriers hinder the learner's accomplishment of MDL-SLM. Identifying these challenges and barriers will help assist learners with their dilemma and address their needs prior to MDL.

Distance learning is the new rage in the world of education (Kofahi & Srinivas,2004). It provides an exceptional learning opportunity as it allows for flexibility in learning methods and materials, schedules, and physical location (Tutordoctor, 2015).

The convenience of time and space is a big promise made by distance learning. Students do not have to physically be with the instructor in space and, depending on the method used, they do not have to be together in time as well (Savoye,2001).

According to Kofahi & Srinivas (2004), DL is gaining in popularity due to two inbuilt tools, 'Self-motivation' and 'Self-discipline'. Self-motivation is one's inner spirit; the self-drive that makes you capable of doing whatever you put your mind to do.

On the other hand, Modular learning is the most popular type of Distance Learning. In the Philippines, this learning modality is currently used by all public schools because according to a survey conducted by the Department of Education (DepEd), learning through printed and digital modules emerged as the most preferred distance learning method of parents with children who are enrolled this academic year (Bernardo, 2020).

The use of modules encourages independent study. One of the benefits of using modules for instruction is the acquisition of better self-study or learning skills among students. Students engage themselves in learning the 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 others, the learners progress on their own. They are learning how to learn; they are empowered (Nardo, M.T.B, 2017). Nardo also added that learners will benefit because they become independent and responsible attending to their individual tasks with minimal supervision. As teachers raise their level of trust to their students, the value of independence among the students will manifest in their lives. Their proficiency and competency will grow. The students' writing skills will also be honed through the language tasks provided in the modules. The use of the modules will arm them with the necessary skills to express themselves better. Modular instruction include more choice and self-pacing for students; more variety and flexibility for teachers and staff; and increased adaptability of instructional materials. (Dangle & Sumaoang, 2020)

Like all learning models, distance learning does have some inherent problems, especially in the areas of isolation, support,

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*Corresponding author: jonborgsnathanela25@gmail.com

technology and discipline (Tutordoctor, 2015). Despite the promises and obvious advantages to distance learning, there are problems that need to be resolved. These problems include the quality of instruction, hidden costs, misuse of technology, and the attitudes of instructors, students, and administrators. Each one of these has an effect on the overall quality of distance learning as a product. In many ways relate to the others (Valentine, 2002).

Pe Dangle & Sumaoang, (2020) also identified the disadvantages of modular instruction that include greater self-discipline and self-motivation required for students, increased preparation time and lack of concrete rewards for teachers and staff, and greater administrative resources needed to track students and operate multiple modules.

Tutor doctor's (2015) also named some common problems of distance education. These problems were lack of support, feelings of isolation and academic discipline. They added that distance learning can be an incredible experience for students, but distance learning is only as effective as the student is.

Moreover, most modules were written in English. However, Nardo (2017) also stated that the English proficiency of Filipino students is continually declining over the years as shown in the low performance in national assessment in their competency in the use of the English language. Students have great difficulty in expressing their ideas in the classroom and in writing which could also be attributed to the utter neglect of developing the writing competence of the students. Students have writing problems in expressing themselves systematically and logically. This lack of skills as one of the most common complaints students have when they encounter a particularly difficult assignment may be an outcome of neglecting one's studies for a considerable period, poor education or something else. Thus, these struggles also affect in the delivery and accomplishment of the students' modules.

From a study made by Pe Dangle & Sumaoang (2020) on the implementation of Modular Distance Learning in Balbalayang National High School (BNHS) and Baguio City National High School (BCNHS) during the School Year 2020-2021, they found out that the main challenges that emerged were lack of school funding in the production and delivery of modules; students struggle with self-studying, and parents' lack of knowledge to academically guide their child/children. Their study was able to determine the prevailing challenges of the participants in terms of resources, preparedness, and communication.

According to Mahlangu (2018), distance learning is one of the most financially affordable and viable forms of education. However, even if modules were provided free of access to public schools, many learners tend to work and study at the same time. Thus, adding difficulty in the accomplishment of their LAS due to poor time management and priorities.

They added, that students' own motivation is not sufficient to prevent them from dropping out. There are different barriers that can hinder students' access and success in education—for example, situational and social barriers. Situational barriers are those barriers that can hinder students' access to higher education, because these learners may drop out because they are unable to cover the costs of their training.

There are different barriers to distance learning in higher education that is unique to each and every country. For example, in Finland, there are challenges that are related to: (a) costs (there is a challenge of the high cost involved in network connections); (b) lack of feedback and support (students do not get enough personal support); (c) lack of face-to-face meetings; (d) isolation; (e) insufficiency in self-directed learning; (f) family and work responsibilities; (g) difficulties in network connections; (h) change in one's life situation; (i) difficulties with technology; (j) lack of support from employer, and (k) lack of education.

Also, in Germany, the perceived challenges to distance learning are related to the following: namely: (a) costs; (b) lack of feedback and support; (c) lack of face-to-face meetings; (d) isolation; (e) lack of adjusted programs, and (f) lack of formal regulations.

Distance-learning organizational support of the educational process that depends on the availability and convenience of the administrative system and staff can be a challenge for some students. The abovementioned challenge may be connected with the accuracy and timeliness of the information provided to the students. Another challenge for distance learning can be the problem of how the content of the course or module meets the expectations of students oriented on getting the opportunity of career growth, personal and professional development on the basis of distance learning. Other challenges of distance learning can be related to the psychological state of students. Among others, this can include: (a) problems caused by the lack of direct contact between student and lecturer; (b) problems associated with feeling of alienation and isolation from the student community; and (c) problems associated with anxiety and concerns regarding the education process and learning results (Mahlangu,2018).

2. Action Research Questions

The study tried to determine the challenges and barriers that G10-Agoncillo learners from Taal NHS encountered due to the implementation of Modular Distance learning. Specifically, it pursued to answer the following questions:

1. What were the common qualities/demographic characteristic of the respondents in terms of:
   1.1. age;
   1.2. gender;
   1.3. marital status;
   1.4. financial status ?
2. What were the challenges and barriers that hinder the execution and completion of SLM?
3. To what extent did these challenges and barriers affect Grade 10 Agoncillo's completion of SLM?
4. What possible solutions can be suggested to resolve the challenges and barriers encountered?

3. Proposed Innovation, Intervention and Strategy

Challenges and barriers encountered by G10 Agoncillo in the implementation of Modular Distance Learning that hinder the

Table 1
Work Plan

Evidence Based/ Practice/Program	Expectations	Persons Involve	Resources	Timeline	Measurement of Progress
Project CARE (Community Assistance Revives Enthusiasm)	-Coordination and Support from partner localities -List of Learners who needs to be helped/ assisted	Principal Teachers Parents Barangay Officials Students Other Stakeholders	Survey for both parent and learners Action Plan	Year Round	Narrative Reports Pictorial Reports Recorded testimonials from learners, parents, teacher and Brgy Officials
Project REACH (Reassuring Empowerment and Compassion Highly)	-Matrix of planned intervention activities -Continuous update and support from both school and local -Parents' support	Principal Teachers Parents Barangay Officials Students Other Stakeholders	Records of updates from advisers and focal persons Student Profiles	Year Round	Narrative Reports Pictorial Reports Recorded testimonials from learners, parents, teacher and Brgy Officials
Project HOLD (Help Overcome Learners' Difficulty	-Evaluating Projects and Preparing Best Practices on the use of strategies/ activities. -One on one counselling for students who are struggling in MDL-SLM	Principal Teachers Parents Barangay Officials Students Other Stakeholders	Reports and feedback from Project CARE and REACH Learners' HG outputs	Year Round	Learners' and Parents' Testimonial Report Card Narrative and pictorial Reports

learners' capability to accomplish the expected output thus, resulting to the failure of DepEd's mission, vision and LCP. Most learners were unable to accomplish the learning tasks on time , find difficulty in their SLMs and fail to submit their outputs. Some learners also even dropped out from school due to MDL-SLM struggles.

From the results of the study, suggested activities may be established. Suggested activities would be based on the learners' responses from the individual survey forms. Interventions may also be created to address the learners' needs. One on one counselling may also be executed if deemed necessary.

Series of more entertaining activities, revision of LAS into simpler and more engaging, scheduling face to face interaction, creating group page and chat rooms and prolonging schedules of deadlines may be some of the considerations in planning for an innovation for the learner's ease of accomplishing their modules. A means to blended learning or hybrid learning may also quite better than plain modular delivery.

These suggested activities will be executed through Project CARE-REACH – HOLD.
CARE- Community Assistance Revives Enthusiasm
REACH – Reassuring Empowerment and Compassion Highly
HOLD - Help Overcome Learners' Difficulties

4. Action Research Methods

A. Participants and/or other sources of data and information

The target participants of this study were the 39 heterogeneous Grade 10 Agoncillo Learners enrolled at Taal National High School. These respondents represented 100% of the population of Grade 10 Agoncillo enrolled in School Year 2020-2021. Therefore, no sampling was done.

B. Data gathering methods

To gather information from the respondents of the study, a research-made questionnaire was prepared and was sent through messenger. Those learners who were unable to access these questionnaires were personally called and interviewed. The survey questionnaire form was developed based on the possible challenges and barriers a learner may be experiencing or has experienced from the past grading periods. Moreover, the researcher also referred from different resources that may also contributed to the possible considerations of the study.

The questionnaire is made up of three parts. The first part was for the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The second focused on the challenges and barriers encountered by the learners while the third discussed the learner's suggestions on how they could probably address their own challenges and barriers.

The respondents were asked to answer the questionnaire that was sent through messenger - the classroom group chat. Others willingly answered calls that the researcher conducted to gather data for the research.

The researcher used a scale with corresponding verbal interpretation. The data gathered from the respondents were given weights ranging from 1-4 with 1 as the lowest value and 4 as the highest value.

C. Data Analysis Plan

The data collected were analyzed and statistically interpreted to support the identified questions. The researcher made use of frequency count, weighted mean and ranking to explain the data gathered.

5. Discussion of Results and Reflections

After the collection of responses from 39 respondents, the researcher tabulated and presented each item correspondingly.

Data gathered through the questionnaire were subjected to frequency counts. In other words, the subjects' responses for each individual question were added together to find the highest

frequency of occurrence. This analysis was presented in tabular form and combined two or more variables in a single table.

A. Grade 10 Agoncillo Demographic Characteristics

This first section of the questionnaire sought to identify gender and age distribution of the 39 respondents. It was the researcher's conviction to obtain reliable results. The responses to the questions were summarized in the table below.

Table 2
G10 Agoncillo Distribution of Gender vs. Age

	15-16 years old	17-18 years old	19-20 years
Male	12	2	1
Female	20	4	0
TOTAL	32	6	1

The table showed that learners from G10 Agoncillo have diverse distribution of age groups for both males and females. This may also be considered as one of the factors that contribute to the learners' differences in priorities and personal experiences.

The researcher also gathered learners' marital status vis-à-vis their monthly family income in order to consider if these variables may contribute to the challenges and barriers that these respondents have encountered.

Table 3
Learners Marital Status vs. Monthly Family Income

	< P 3,000	P3,000 -P5,000	P5,001 -P8,000	>P8,000
Single	14	10	11	2
Married	2	0	0	0
TOTAL	16	10	11	2

The table showed the respondents' financial and marital status distribution. Results showed that respondents' monthly family income were not too far apart though there were two of them who were already married. However, a follow-up questions were also administered to these married respondents to identify their source of income. This data were also collected in support for the possibility that financial capability may be considered as one of the challenges or barriers that contribute to the learners' failure of MDL-SLM compliance.

The researcher identified several possible challenges and barriers and placed these on the survey questionnaire form. Respondents were asked to identify their challenges and barriers. They were also asked to mark 1 to 4 for each identified challenges and barriers to provide reference on how extensive each challenges and barriers affects their MDL-SLM accomplishment.

As shown from the tabulated data, poor time management was the learners' major challenge among the predefined challenges and barriers in the implementation of the modular distance learning through self-learning modules. This was supported by the weighted mean of 3.205. Peers and financial challenges were not considered applicable challenges and barriers of MDL-SLM, for it only earned a weighted mean of 1.718 or no effect at al. The information from the table confirmed that a learners' accomplishment of each learning activity (LAS) and tasks from the modules was challenged or hindered by certain factors from their environment.

Table 4
Challenges and Barriers Encountered

Challenges and barriers Indicators	WM	VI	Rank
Household chores	2.897	SE	3
Lack of assistance from parents/ guardians	3.128	ME	2
Lack of motivation	2.846	SE	4
Internet connection	2.231	SE	8
Vices (smoking, drinking alcohol)	2.231	SE	8
Peers	1.718	NE	15
Poor time management	3.205	ME	1
Priorities	2.077	SE	12.5
Siblings	2.179	SE	11
Business-related activities	2.077	SE	12.5
Lack of assistance from teacher and school	2.692	SE	5
Inability of comprehend	1.718	NE	15
Difficulty to understand the directions from the module	2.231	SE	8
Time allotment for each learning task	2.205	SE	10
Financial	1.718	NE	15
Health issues	2.308	SE	6
AVERAGE WEIGHTED MEAN	**2.341**	**SE**	

On the other hand, though some indicators identified on the list appeared to be with an average mean of 2.341, this meant that these indicators can be easily addressed with carefully planning and coordination. The researcher considered reexamining these challenges and barriers and found out that most of them were common to most of the respondents. In fact, though these were just on moderate extent, such challenges and barriers still need to be attended before they could cause worst problems.

The last part of the questionnaire tried to identify the respondents' opinion on the best ways their challenges and barrier be addressed. They were given open-ended question regarding the possible solutions they are ought to consider as solution for the identified challenges and barriers.

The respondents' answers were analyzed carefully and identified into 15 possible solutions. These were then listed and tabulated. The researcher ought to use a frequency count and ranking since the respondents' number of answers were not uniformed. Some respondents identified three possible solutions while others were able to identified only one or two.

Table 5
Learners' suggested solutions to overcome challenges and barriers encountered in the implementation of MDL

Learners' Suggest Solutions	Frequency count	Rank
… disregard what is happening around me	5	13
… focus only on the learning	21	3
… think positive thoughts	8	10
… manage time wisely	31	1
… search for assistance	16	4.5
… set priorities	9	9
… take some rest	4	14
… avoid distractions	11	7
… plan tasks	13	6
… focus on goals	10	8
… stay motivated	22	2
… look for financial support	3	15
… find help from teacher	6	11.5
… extend schedule of answering modules	16	4.5
… simplify lessons and tasks	6	11.5

Table 6
Action Research Work Plan and Timelines

ACTIVITIES *Shade the corresponding month per activity Add rows if necessary*	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6
1. Writing of SOP	▓					
2. Writing of AR Proposal	▓					
3. Preparation of Survey questionnaire	▓					
4. Distribution of Survey questionnaire	▓					
5. Collection of relevant resources		▓				
6. Collection of survey questionnaire responses		▓				
7. Tabulating , analyzing and utilizing responses		▓				
8. Conceptualizing suggested activities			▓			
9. Writing recommendation			▓			
10. Completing the Action research			▓			

Table 7
Plans for Dissemination and Utilization

DISSEMINATION ACTIVITIES *add rows if necessary*	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6
1. Inform learners about the study	▓					
2. Distribute survey questionnaires	▓					
3. Collect survey responses		▓				
4. Gather data from survey forms		▓				
5. Utilize and analyze data from survey responses		▓				

On the basis of quantitative findings, Table 5 revealed several solutions as suggested by respondents' answers based on the survey questionnaires provided. Management of time wisely ranked one based on the frequency count that indicated learners' knowledge on how to deal with their own challenges. The results were also a clear indication that though learners experienced several challenges and encountered different barriers, they were fully aware on the possible solutions. More so, learners considered looking for financial support least among their suggested solutions.

It may be inferred from the results of the survey that though the identified challenges and barriers were only slightly evident and have affected learners on a very minimal scale, there was still no doubt that there was a problem to be addressed. Hence, a series of suggested activities should be planned carefully before the suggested innovation and projects be executed.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

To supplement the results and to fill the gaps left in the questionnaire and the study as well, a qualitative approach is suggested. This kind of technique will more likely give more substance and reveal detailed information. Qualitative research is concerned with trying to achieve a clear understanding of the problem under review in a more complex way than in the generalized way. This methodology is used to get information about how people think, feel and act and what they know. The researcher suggests individual interviews and focus group discussions. The information collected will be presented in a narrative form that includes the description and analysis of data. Moreover, the researcher believes that some variables may be added to the study like learners' subject preferences.

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