

Modular Classes during Covid-19 Pandemic: The Emerging Opportunities, Challenges and Difficulties

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Abstract

The study sought to find out the effects of the Modular classes from the parents, teachers and students. There are numerous effects of modular learning modality on students' learning acquisition and social behaviour. Some students became busy to other works instead of focusing on the modules. The study also brought out the emerging opportunities, challenges and difficulties of the modular classes. The result revealed that there are opportunities that people enjoyed during the modular classes. Some of the opportunities are (1) parent-children relationship became even closer; (2) more time to study and research; (3) ensures life-work balance and (4) parents are able to focus on their children's studies. The respondents enumerated the challenges and difficulties they faced during modular classes. They emphasized the importance of cooperation among the students, parents and teachers. They pointed out that lack of direct supervision of the teachers is the greatest challenge. Validity and reliability of students' answers are questionable. Another challenge is the weakening students' learning outcomes and – worse – students became addict with computer games. Parents, teachers and students – the primary stakeholders – recommended the coming back to face-to-face classes because modular classes really affect students' learning.

Key words: Modular Classes; challenges and difficulties; Direct Supervision; Primary Stakeholders; Emerging Opportunities

1. Introduction

The first reports of a disease caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome Coronavirus-2 was in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak a Public Health emergency of international concern on 30 January 2020 and a pandemic on 11 March 2020. At the end of 2020, more than 100 million cases of COVID-19 have been reported, resulting in more than 2 million deaths (Khan, 2021).

When the coronavirus was declared “pandemic”, it was officially called by WHO “COVID-19”. After Wuhan, COVID19 swept across the world. It did not spare remotest village around the world. Many countries employed strict lockdowns in order to stop the disease from infecting people but this strategy was not able to stop the virus. Gardini (2020) opined that like any crisis the virus is both a challenge and an opportunity. As a challenge, it causes disruption, suffering,

short and long-term adjustment, eventually economic loss and tragically human casualties. As an opportunity, it offers us to reflect on how to find new solutions, new forms of behavior and organization. Ultimately, it offers people to reflect on how to do things better for the future and avoid shortcomings of the past.

In the Philippines, the Duterte administration provided strategies to contain the virus. Like many countries, Philippines imposed stricter lockdowns. After months of lockdowns, Philippine government was increasingly suffering from economic crisis. The administration opted to reduce the restrictions gradually. This strategy helped the government regain its economic muscles. Lockdowns affected not just the government but including the education sector. Public and private schools enforced restrictions. Schools and institutions were closed. Schools had to look for strategies and methods to change the platform of education. Face to face platform of education was increasingly becoming prohibited due to the onset of the virus. The Department of Education (DepEd) employed modular classes. Padsing (2021) stated that modular approach is an emerging trend in educational thinking that shifts traditional method of instruction to an outcome-based learning paradigm. Many see modular instruction as another tool to help educators achieve its goal of exposing students/learners to the new normal. Like everything else in our society today, education has been experiencing rapid change. It must change to keep up with our ever-changing world of work where occupations are here today and gone tomorrow. One of the largest changes in recent years has been the addition of technology education facilities with individualized instructional modules.

Modular mode unlike face-to-face platform is more difficult on parents' part. They had to teach their children on their lessons. They serve as their children's teachers. Modules were provided by the schools weekly. Parents had to secure modules for their children while teachers would check the papers and give grades. Thus, this paper sought to find out the perspectives of the main stakeholders namely, parents, teachers and students on the effects, emerging opportunities, challenges and difficulties of modular classes. Their perspectives were noted and documented.

1.1. Objectives

The general objective of the research is to find out the analyses of the teachers, parents and students/pupils on modular classes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The specific objectives are the following questions, to wit:

1. What are the effects of modular classes to the learning and social behaviour of the pupils/students?
2. What are opportunities modular classes could offer to the students, parents and teachers?
3. What are the challenges and difficulties the students, parents and teachers faced modular classes?

1.2. Scope and Limitation of the Study

The scope of the study is the modular classes in the Special Geographic Area (SGA) in the newly-established Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). The SGA

schools are now under the office of the Ministry of Basic, Higher and Technical Education (MBHTE).

In addition, the researcher sought the views of the primary stakeholders of modular classes such as the parents, students and teachers.

1.3. Significance of the Study

The study is very important to the end-users: MBHTE-BARMM, National Government policymakers and the primary stakeholders.

The MBHTE-BARMM and National Government can make the findings of this study as a guide in understanding the real situation during modular classes. This will further widen their opinions. The policymakers can review and re-invent education platform in the Philippines.

To the stakeholders, this study serves as the venue in expressing their insights on Modular classes. This is a paper where the grievances of the stakeholders in the community are put into writing.

1.4. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual model shows modular classes during pandemic as the platform used for teaching. Parents during the modular classes would act as the teachers of their children. The study sought to find out the effects of modular classes on the learning and social behaviour of the pupils/students. It discusses the effects, opportunities, challenges and difficulties of the modular classes.

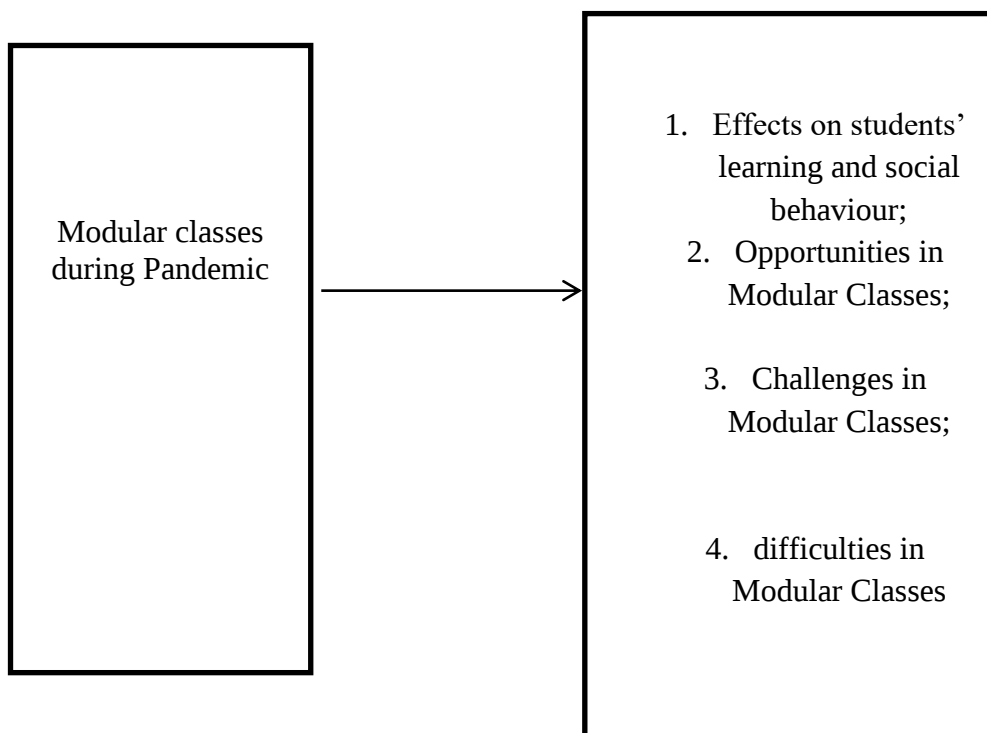


Fig. 1, Schematic Diagram of the conceptual framework

1.5. Definition of Terms

Covid-19 pandemic is a coronavirus disease that appeared in 2019 from Wuhan, China which became pandemic after it spread around the world.

Modular Classes refer to the education platform which is an alternative to face-to-face classes during pandemic. Under this platform, parents would act as the teachers to their children. The modules are only to be returned to teachers for checking.

Effects refer to the immediate state/impact of modular classes be it negative or positive to teachers, parents and students/pupils.

Opportunities refer to the strategic gain, good and benefits acquired in modular classes to teachers, children and parents.

Challenges and Difficulties refer to challenges and difficulties of modular classes to teachers, parents and children brought about by the modular classes during pandemic.

2. Methods and Materials

The study utilized the qualitative technique in investigating the opinions and perspectives of the teachers, parents and students/pupils. The research employed the methodology of Key Informant Interview (KII). There were 15 key informants: 5 teachers, 5 parents and 5 students/pupils. The qualitative approach sought to gather and collect information to provide narratives and descriptions on the opinions and views of the teachers, parents and students/pupils on modular platform. The scope of the study is school year 2020-2021.

2.1. Locale of the study

The locale of the study is the sixty-three (63) barangays of the Special Geographic Area (SGA) which opted to join the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) during the Bangsamoro Plebiscite in 2019. Formerly, they belong to the province of Cotabato, Region XII.

2.2. Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study are teachers, parents and students of elementary and high school in the 63 barangays in the SGA. The research had 15 Key Informants. The KII participants were composed of teachers, parents and students/pupils who had children studying in schools covered by SGA.

2.3. Data Gathering Procedure

The data gathering procedure was undertaken into phases. The first phase was the preparation of all the necessary documents for the conduct of the study. The second phase was the actual interview. The researcher asked the teachers, parents and students to share their opinions on modular classes. After the interview, the researcher took note all their responses for thematic analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

This part presents the answers of the respondents on the effects, opportunities, challenges and difficulties of the modular classes based on their experiences. The researcher analyses their responses.

3.1. Effects of Modular Classes on Students' Learning and Social Behaviours

The table shows the effects of modular classes to the students. It summarizes the effects of modular classes.

Table 1 Challenges and Difficulties of the Modular classes

Question	Responses
Effects of Modular Classes	• Little learning because students are not interested to the Modules. • Some students prefer computer games and other internet-related activities because they are not supervised by teachers while parents are busy looking for livelihood; • Others are sharing answers in their modules; • Parents are answering the modules; • Parents cannot afford to conduct science experiment.

The stakeholders have different ideas and opinions on the emerging effects, opportunities, challenges and difficulties of the modular classes during pandemic. There is a need to listen to the opinions of people who are directly affected by modular classes. Brinkerhoff & Crosby (2002) opined that with certain methods or approaches to stakeholder analysis contend that all those

affected by policy, even potentially, should be included in a stakeholder analysis. While perhaps desirable, such inclusive approaches are very practical. To be useful, stakeholder analysis must point to why interests should be taken into account.

In December 2019, the whole world came by surprise as Coronavirus rapidly spread all over the world. Economy of every country suffered most especially the educational system of all the countries. Philippines Educational System is no exception of the abrupt changes happening now (Gueta & Janer, 2021). Gardini (2020) stated that the Coronavirus has besieged the world and found the humanity unprepared and highly vulnerable to its ruthless and ferocious virulence and that education through a health promotion program would be as economical as it is vital. The education of the people was affected because of lockdowns and controls of human movement. Before the arrivals of COVID-19 pandemic, there was only one best learning modality: Face to face classes. Schools galore especially the Public schools in different parts of the Philippines would conduct face to face classes. Interactions in classrooms were fruitful and full of learning. Sports events, academic competitions, programs, conferences and commencement exercises were conducted face to face. There were no health restrictions and protocols until the world conquest of the coronavirus.

Education has changed in the Philippines and the world. Two approaches to education emerged especially after the covid19 restrictions: online classes and modular classes. The Department of Education (DepEd) pursued modular classes in lieu of face to face classes especially in the provinces and remote communities. Dangle & Sumaoang (2020) pointed out that this is in consideration of the learners in rural areas where internet is not accessible for online learning. The teacher takes the responsibility of monitoring the progress of the learners. In this learning modality, the learners may ask assistance from the teacher via e-mail, telephone, text message/instant messaging among others. Where possible, the teacher shall do home visits to learners needing remediation or assistance. Printed Modules are delivered to students, parents or guardians by the teachers or through the Local Government Officials.

One respondent shared that this rapid conversion of learning modality from face to face classes to modular classes is proved to be difficult and challenging especially in remote villages. Learners would potentially begin to fall in 2020 with roughly 70% of the learning gains in reading relative to a typical school year especially in lower grades. In mathematics, students were predicted to show even smaller learning gains from the previous year, returning with less than 50% of typical gains. By monitoring the academic performance of students in pre-covid19 and now, people can see big differences.

Respondents revealed that there is a significant loss in students' learning because students made little or no progress at all while studying from home. According to some students, the pandemic made them less interested to their lessons. There are concepts and ideas that they did not understand but no one to ask for help so it made them less interested. Since lessons are not anymore so interesting to them, they turn away their attention from the modules to other works. Most of the students are active during night time playing games and chatting with friends in the net forgetting and abandoning their modules. Added to the mix is the belief that even if they do not answer the module they will still be promoted to next level. So knowledge and competencies were least learned from the subject areas.

Another angle is that students or learners do not learn from the modular classes because some

parents are not educated which is especially true in remote villages. For other parents who are capable and well-to-do, they hired tutors for their children. Still other parents cannot teach lessons or subjects which require intelligence and knowledge such as science and mathematics. In science experiment, it cannot be taught during modular classes because only the teachers have the capacity to do so. In short, the effect of modular classes is so unbelievably huge. It has enormous effects on their learning due to less motivation to go through the modules.

One respondent-teacher disclosed that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is drastic that has ultimately changed the lives of the people – including the lives of young students. This pandemic badly affects getting hold of knowledge from grade school to tertiary level. According to them, they have learned nothing and some say they learn only a little. Most of them say that they learn nothing because they could not personally interact with their teachers. They could not understand the topics in all of their subjects because teachers are not able to explain like they used to do in face-to-face classes. Similarly, Gueta & Janer (2021) emphasized that students do not have enough time to answer all the modules within a week because of difficulties of the contents. Therefore, the instructions in every exercise must be clear enough for the parents and learners to understand. The topics must be simplified and have more examples.

On social behaviour, feeling of anxiety and fear is the reason why students have to suffer this incredible effect of the pandemic. It minimizes social interactions with their peers. The social distancing and security measures have affected the relationship of people and their perception of empathy toward others. Respondents said that with the prolonged movement and face to face restrictions especially for the learning process of the students, their social behaviour is also impacted. However, the impacts may differ in contexts. In areas where residents can freely move such as in the remote communities, for instance, in Maguindanao and Cotabato provinces, students find more time to mingle with their friends, families and relatives. There are more interactions within their circle which also promotes social cohesion. However, those that are in the cities and towns with limited spaces and cannot cross boundaries, many of the students are confined in their compounds and homes. There are perceived increased engagements of these students to social media which both have positive and negative influences. With social media, children are more focused with distant social relations but with negative consequences in their health and their day to day reality-touched roles and responsibilities.

During the modular classes students would just chat and mingle with one another in social media or in any other available platform. They can share whatever they want and they can express everything in the net. Thus, cyber bullying became rampant, undesirable attitudes and filthy words are expressed against one another. Students are becoming insensitive about the feelings of others. Furthermore, some students tend to experience social withdrawal, they wanted to be alone doing their things such as playing game, watching drama, chatting and making some friends.

A respondent used to say that Modular Classes have effect in students' social relations since they study alone in their respective homes without classmates and peers. They easily get bored. They are not focused because they want their teachers and classmates to be with them and that would be possible in face to face class. Accordingly, face to face classes would have wide possibility of developing students' intelligence and skills. Learning of the students is lost because they suffer mental health concerns. In support to this, Rotas & Cahapay (2020) have solution to this when they said that parents need to be practically involved in arranging the learning time and space of their children. They should likewise provide all the needed support so that students will eventually

survive in this remote education amid the crisis. The good relationship of parents and their children will eventually develop inner peace among themselves.

Given this, it is of paramount to consider that there are two kinds of students: fast learners and slow learners. Modular classes are good to the fast learners because they can understand the subjects easily but for the slow learners they find it harder than face to face classes.

Therefore, the effects of the modular classes to the students' learning are really numerous. It is undeniable that this learning modality is new and unexpected. The students need to adapt with this kind of environment. Lack of parents' trainings on how to teach is perceived as one of the shortcomings of the department of education. The parents should have undergone training-workshops before the implementation of the Modular classes.

3.2. Opportunities of the Modular Classes

The table shows the opportunities the modular classes offer. It summarizes the opportunities gained from the modular platform.

Table 2 Opportunities of the Modular classes

Question	Responses
Opportunities	1. Parent-children relationship became even closer; 2. More time to study and research; 3. Ensuring life-work balance; 4. Parents are able to focus on their children's studies.

According to a respondent the effects of modular classes vary from one student to another. Those who have adapted well to the new modality of teaching and learning process, they are able to cope with the demands of their studies and also their regular social and domestic life. He observed that some students have gained advantage in balancing their studies and in doing more opportunities mostly productive (supporting parents in their livelihood activities) and finding more time to be with their family and relatives. In social area, the bright side of the pandemic is that parent-children relationship became very close as the daily routine has been adjusted to new normal. They find new interests to keep entertained during the pandemic.

Modular classes have the fair share of opportunities and advantages. Those that are good in juggling their life-school balance, it is an advantage. Students can develop their own study schedules and practices based on their time, roles in their family and other priorities in life. It develops students the sense of responsibility and accountability especially that they are not directly supervised by their teachers. Covid19 pandemic has offered a lot of opportunities especially in relation to personal growth. Modular classes give more time to research and study. Students have

extensive time to search and research. They have enough time to review and re-examine their answers in their modules. In other words, learners have ample time in answering their modules. There is longer time to answer activities and that deadline is longer compared to face to face modality. Other parents see modular classes as an opportunity to focus on the learning of their children.

For the teachers, the modular classes give them the opportunity to find a way to ensure their life-work balance. They can attend to the needs and attention of their family quickly because they are not regularly required to go to school. They have more opportunities to attend to their family and social obligations. This also develops sense of discipline and dedication to the teachers especially that with lack of focus, there are lots of distractions.

Modular classes help students to learn independently, to make students strive to gain knowledge by their own efforts. It is also at their advantage because they can do and perform their academic tasks at their own pacing without mental pressure. It develops more efficient uses of different resources and increased opportunities. The most significant approach is cooperation of parents, teachers and students and to be more open in improving the new normal set-up of education to make it effective and productive. Modular mode is challenging yet fruitful because it opens opportunities for the children to develop their self-study, self-reliance and self-confidence.

3.3. Challenges and Difficulties

The table shows the challenges and difficulties brought by the modular classes. It summarizes the challenges and difficulties faced by the stakeholders due to the modular platform.

Table 3 Challenges and Difficulties of the Modular classes

Question	Responses
Challenges and Difficulties	• Cooperation among the students, parents and teachers is so challenging; • Lack of the direct supervision of the teachers; • Validity and reliability of students' answers; • Weakening learning outcomes; • Some students became addict with computer games.

There are enormous number of challenges and difficulties in education brought about by the pandemic. It was a new phenomenon which tested human intelligence. Modular classes are more challenging on the parents because they suddenly became teachers to their children. Undeniably, parents have to face difficulties in adapting the new education environment. Houses turned out to be classrooms. In parallel situation, Rotas & Cahapay (2020) provided contextual pieces of

evidence on the multifaceted challenges that confront students in a developing country amid the current global crisis. It is recommended accordingly that these difficulties should be considered as inputs for the further development of the current educational process. Given these challenges, teachers should re-examine their instruction as far as the contents and activities are concerned as students find issues in these elements. An instructional evaluation may also be periodically done to assist learners who are learning behind to monitor the existing learning situation. This learning modality needs cooperation between the main stakeholders namely the parents and the teachers. On parents side, they need to be practically involved in arranging the learning time and space of their children.

Among the greatest downsides of the modular classes is the lack of direct supervision and support by the teachers to the students. More often than not, students tend to utilize whatever resources they have. Some parents especially among the elementary level do find more stress in attending to the learning needs of their children. There are reports that parents and tutors are the ones answering the learning exercises instead of the students, which really affects the learning process. Lack of social contact between participants in the educational process topped all challenges.

Modular approach requires a lot of energy resources from the side of the school. In the early days of this modality, many teachers were complaining due to lack of printers, paper prints, inks and budgets to comply with the requirements. Some of them ended up doing their preparations at the middle of the night which renders them sleepless, prone to stress and health problems. With lack of discipline and determination from the side of their learners plus lack of direct guidance provided by the teachers many students failed to achieve the optimum level of learning.

With the lack of guidance from their teachers in a setting where there is a face to face interaction, there are also effects of the pandemic in the acquisition of knowledge. There is less interaction, hardly find the good timing to get assistance from teachers to clarify some learning difficulties, the learning performance of the students do not reach the optimum or ideal level. There is still learning while the pandemic constraints the teaching and learning process. Yet, the expected amount of learning is lesser as compared to the pre-pandemic state. Modular classes create a possibility that not all students do their modules wholeheartedly. This modality weakens learning outcomes in the sense that some parents do the job instead of teaching their children to make efforts in answering their modules. Moreover, some students do not take the modules seriously. They tend to undermine the essence of studying. They answer without reading because nobody is watching them. In the modular classes, students were sharing answers and outputs. Students were not answering the modules; they let others answer the modules for them. So, the ability to learn is less possible.

Without face-to-face classes, addiction to gadgets impacted the children's social life. Students are not interested in the lessons anymore as they are deeply-soaked in games. This is the reason why there is little learning. According to respondent-parents, the greatest challenge during the pandemic, as far as teaching her kids is concerned, is the loss of their interest during sessions. It had a great, profound and sudden impact especially during teaching hours. Another challenge is determination of the validity and reliability of students' answers. The teachers cannot surely know who would do the answering. One respondent divulged that parents and tutors are answering the modules instead of students. After the students' activity, they share and show their answers to their classmates.

4. Conclusion

The arrival of the pandemic was unexpected and that there was no government preparation. The face-to-face classes were suspended all of a sudden that gave way to another learning platform. Modular classes were introduced to educational system. This learning system and modality has inevitable effects on the teaching-learning process. Despite negative effects of modular classes to the students' learning, this learning modality has also offered opportunity. Parents were able to observe and focus on their children's educational growth. They have more time to mingle with them which bolsters closeness of relationship and affection with each other. It awakened the minds of the authority and the common people to find and look solutions amidst this global crisis. The positive and optimistic minds of the people have emerged leading to the survival and continuity of children's education.

Challenges outnumbered opportunities the modular classes have. Without the supervision of teachers, the validity and reliability of students' answers in the modules are questionable. Modular classes manifest gaps and problems of injustice that continuously beset communities. For instance, parents who are uneducated would significantly affect the learning output of their children while parents who are educated could properly and effectively teach the modules to their children. The most difficult part especially in rural communities is that students do not take the modular classes seriously. They think that after the school year, they will necessary be promoted in higher grades. Instead of spending their time to their modules they choose playing computer games because they are far from school's supervision.

Modular classes affected the learning power of the students. This is why most of the respondents recommended that schools should return to face-to-face classes most especially in the rural communities. However, given all these happenings, modular classes manifested the fact that the government is resilient and flexible enough braving the challenges and difficulties. Despite the ferocity of the virus, it was able to think ways forward. While the government did its best for the continuity of education, parents and teachers also performed their roles for the betterment of students.

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