

Secondary Students' Assessment Challenges, Coping Strategies and Teachers' Performance in the New Normal in Zambales

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Abstract

The assessment of students is one issue that has arisen in distant learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This study described the assessment techniques and difficulties teachers faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research project used a descriptive survey methodology. The study was conducted in Zone IV Division of Zambales. There was a total of 100 junior high school teachers in Zone IV Division of Zambales who had at least three (3) months of experience in modular flexible learning modalities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Results of the study indicated that the teachers "sometimes" employ technology-enhanced assessment tools in addition to "frequently" using standard assessment techniques. When it comes to the grading system, academic integrity, resolving students' concerns about assessments, and formative assessment methods, teachers "frequently" run into difficulties. Because of this, people "frequently" use various coping mechanisms to deal with the difficulties they face. Using the assessment procedures, the teachers achieved a "satisfactory" level of performance. There were significant correlations between the assessment practices and assessment challenges, between the assessment practices and coping strategies, between the assessment practices and teaching performance, between assessment challenges and coping strategies between assessment challenges and teaching performance, and between coping strategies and teaching performance. Given that online and flexible learning have become the new standard, educators may be encouraged to adopt technology-enhanced evaluation techniques. The difficulties teachers face when evaluating students during the COVID-19 pandemic may be addressed with interventions and the proper course of action.

Keywords: Covid-19 Pandemic; Flexible Learning; Students' Assessment; Technology-enhanced techniques, Zambales

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed a myriad of challenges in the educational sector at the moment. The pandemic also challenged the teachers in terms of their usual teaching routine. One of the concerns in distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic is the assessment of the students. The country's Department of Education (DepEd) has given options for modular flexible learning to continue the education of Filipino learners. One of the challenges with this learning modality is student assessment.

Educational assessment is a major feature of the educational landscape. When we talk of schools, it is difficult not to deal with tests, examinations, or assessments - a mechanism designed to measure the effect of

educational policy, programs, and practices (Abulencia, 2010). Assessment is an essential component of the curriculum and when used in the right manner, it can help accomplish certain curricular goals (Alshammari, 2020). Without assessment, learning is less likely to be comprehensive and students are likely to be committed less to the learning process (Onwudiegwu, 2018).

While the usual quantitative assessment practice is expected to be still the dominant practice in the new normal, however, with the continuing global crisis, there will likely be a propensity towards forms of error in the school assessment systems (Cahapay, 2020). Considering the difficult circumstance of the learners, the assessment construct called leniency error is a situation where the teacher tends to be too “generous”, and all students are given high passing scores (Nitko & Brookhart, 2014). It is considered as one of the threats to the reliability of student performance which some education stakeholders expressed worries about.

Studies on the assessment during an educational disruption are underexplored specifically in the Philippine context. Hence, the researcher feels the necessity of exploring the practices and challenges of teachers in conducting assessments in a modular flexible learning modality during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a relevant and timely issue in the basic education system, this study would be a baseline study in addressing the assessment challenges of the teachers.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study employed the descriptive-correlational survey method of research.

2.2 Respondents

There was a total of 100 junior high school teachers in Zone IV Division of Zambales who three (3) months of experience in modular flexible learning modalities during the COVID-19 pandemic for the school year 2020-2021 which started on October 1, 2020. The respondents of the study include the Districts of Subic, Castillejos and San Marcelino.

2.3 Instrument

The instrument of the study was a researcher-made questionnaire titled “Assessment Practices and Challenges Questionnaire” (Appendix B). This was used to determine the practices and challenges of the junior high school teachers in assessment during the modular flexible learning modality.

Related literature and studies were reviewed and examined beforehand to prepare the contents of the questionnaire. The questionnaire is categorized into three main parts. This questionnaire was quantitative since it is structured. However, it may be noted that open-ended questions were included to provide support on the teachers’ responses and triangulate data results.

In the first part of the tool, the profile was asked. Data gathered include items on the district, age, sex, highest educational attainment, teaching position, length of service; and specialization. In the second part, the assessment practices of teachers were determined. It consists of two sub-variables, the assessment tools used with 14 items and technology-enhanced assessment with 6 items.

The third part determined teachers’ assessment challenges. It consists of four sub-variables with five items each, academic honesty, formative assessment strategies, addressing students’ concerns in assessment, and grading system.

Before administration, the questionnaire was submitted to a group of three experts in the field of assessment and education for an evaluation of its content validity. It ensured that these experts are knowledgeable of the

assessment during the pandemic. They were asked to review and judge the items in the questionnaire to determine if they adequately sampled the domain of interest, and to check how closely the categories correspond to the objectives of the research. A pilot-testing of the instrument was also done among 10 non-respondents for reliability testing.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

Permission for the conduct of the study was sought from the Schools Division of Zambales. The researchers secured approval from the school principal to conduct the study. After which, the questionnaires were administered to the respondents of the study. The questionnaires were given to the teachers by the school. In case, teachers opt to answer online, a Google Form was prepared to avoid the risk of COVID-19. The researcher collected the data herself via face-to-face following health protocol and online using Google Form.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Assessment Practices of the Teachers

The respondents “sometimes” utilize assessment tools during the COVID-19 pandemic as shown in the overall mean of 2.23 (SD=0.23). This implies that teachers sometimes use different assessment tools in the new modality of learning due to the pandemic. Meanwhile, the teachers “sometimes” use technology-enhancement assessment tools as shown in the weighted mean of 1.79 (SD=0.29). The respondents also cited other assessment tools they are using in the new normal learning landscape.

Table 1. Assessment Practices of Teachers in terms of Assessment Tools Used

Assessment Tools	Mean	SD	QI
A. Traditional Assessment Tools			
Interview	2.45	0.63	S
Group/ Peer Assessment	1.57	0.57	S
End of unit paper-and-pen test	3.40	0.53	O
End of quarter paper-and-pen test	3.47	0.59	O
Self-assessment	3.15	0.64	O
Performance task	3.22	0.73	O
Student demonstration	1.67	0.60	S
Journal entries	2.01	0.78	S
Rubric/ checklist	3.14	0.74	O
Visual displays	2.77	0.74	O
Written report	2.31	0.79	S
Pencil-and-paper test/ drill	3.09	0.62	O
Home-based experiment	2.50	0.64	O
Quiz	3.11	0.71	O
Mean	2.70	0.29	O
B. Technology-Enhanced Assessment Tool			
Computer-assisted games	1.55	0.61	S
Online Quiz Bee	1.41	0.59	N
Online observation	2.33	0.62	S
Virtual oral recitation	2.15	0.76	S

Virtual experiment	1.88	0.71	S
DepEd Commons Quiz	1.40	0.53	N
Mean	1.79	0.29	S
Overall Mean	2.43	0.23	S

3.2 Other Assessment Tools Used by the Teachers

As presented in the table, the respondents indicated that they are using writing assessment strategies in the new normal. This writing assessment includes essay, poem, reaction paper, paragraph construction, among others. Apart from that, they are also using online platforms such as Google suite such as Google sheets, google forms and Google meets when assessing their junior high school students. Interestingly, some teachers are holding one-on-one messaging and online greetings to supplement students' learning amid the pandemic. Other assessment tools cited are product-based, performance-based, formative test, reading assessment, project-based and speaking assessment.

Table 2. Other Assessment Tools Used by the Teachers

Other Assessment Tools	Sample Given	Frequency
A. Traditional Assessment Tools		
Writing assessment	Essay, Poem, Reaction paper, Paragraph construction, Self-reflection activities, literary activities	11
Use of the online platform	Google Sheets, Google forms, Google meet, One-on-one messaging, Online Greetings	7
Product-based assessment	Poster, Slogan, Portfolio	7
Performance-based assessment	Video performance, Recording, Practical work	7
Formative test	Mastery test question and answer	6
Reading assessment	Reading text, Reading plan, Virtual reading	3
Project-based assessment	Projects, Situational problems	2
Speaking assessment	Dialogue simulation	1

3.3 Challenges Encountered by Teachers in the Assessment

The teachers “often” encounter challenges in assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic as shown by the overall mean of 3.41 (SD=0.35). This suggests that teachers face different challenges when it comes to student assessment during the pandemic. Among the four categories of challenges, the grading system ranked first as the most challenging area with a mean of 3.46 (SD=0.49).

Table 3. Challenges Encountered by Teachers in the Assessment of Techniques

Challenges	Mean	SD	QI
A. Academic Honesty			
It is hard for me to establish a mechanism in ensuring academic honesty in assessment in a flexible learning mode.	3.35	0.67	O
I find it difficult to identify the reliability of the students' answers.	3.51	0.64	A

I lack tools that detect plagiarism issues from the students' outputs.	3.45	0.59	O
It is quite difficult to differentiate students' assessments as one way to prevent copying.	3.30	0.73	O
Due to internet connectivity issues, it is a challenge to monitor students online in a synchronous quiz or exam.	3.48	0.69	O
Mean	3.42	0.39	O
B. Formative Assessment Strategies			
It is hard to give a formative assessment to students in this remote learning mode.	3.37	0.71	O
I struggle to give immediate feedback to the student's works.	3.16	0.76	O
Due to the remote learning, it is quite hard for me to monitor student progress.	3.35	0.74	O
I cannot fully evaluate students' level of performance through modular learning mode.	3.43	0.67	O
Due to connectivity concerns, it is difficult to do formative assessments online.	3.52	0.70	A
Mean	3.37	0.46	O
C. Addressing Student Concerns in Assessment			
I find it difficult to immediately address the assessment concerns of my students.	3.35	0.73	O
It is challenging to communicate with my students since some of them have no gadgets and have no internet connection.	3.56	0.62	A
It is challenging for me to explain to students about assessment tools in the module through phone calls or social media videoconferencing applications (e.g., FB messenger).	3.35	0.74	O
I find it difficult to respond to queries and questions regarding the assessment through calls and messages.	3.22	0.75	O
I find it difficult to give general feedback to the students about their assessment since there is no face-to-face setup.	3.45	0.70	O
Mean	3.39	0.44	O
D. Grading System			
It is a burden to check a bulk of student works at a time.	3.56	0.67	A
I struggle with the points I have to give to student works since I am not certain if the student accomplished the task.	3.50	0.67	A
It is challenging for me to use the analytic rubric in assessing student products that are entirely made at home.	3.43	0.71	O
The grading system is quite problematic in this flexible learning modality.	3.48	0.66	O
There is an unclear guideline on the grading system provided to the teachers.	3.35	0.80	O
Mean	3.46	0.49	O
Overall Mean	3.41	0.35	O

3.4 Assessment Coping Strategies of Teachers

The teachers often employ different coping strategies on the challenges they encounter in assessing their students during the pandemic as shown by the overall mean of 2.98 (SD=0.25). Among the four categories, the teachers often employ strategies in formative strategies (M=2.99, SD=0.48), addressing student concerns in assessment (M=3.34, SD=0.40), and grading system (M=3.48, SD=0.40) except academic honesty (M=2.01, SD=0.65) in which this area is sometimes given particular attention. Since ensuring academic honesty is a bit difficult to ensure during this era of educational disruption, teachers sometimes do not employ any coping strategies in this concern. This can be worked out by school administrators and education supervisors as to policies and sound mechanisms in ensuring that academic honesty is taken into consideration in this distance.

Table 4. Assessment Coping Strategies of Teachers

Coping Strategies	Mean	SD	QI
A. Academic Honesty			
I use online tools in ensuring academic honesty in assessment in a flexible learning mode.	1.82	0.64	S
I give open-ended questions, apart from close-ended tests, to identify the reliability of the students' answers.	2.28	0.75	S
I use free online tools to detect plagiarism issues from the students' outputs.	1.79	0.77	S
I prepare two sets or more for students' assessments as one way to prevent copying.	2.35	0.66	S
I monitor students online in a synchronous quiz or exam using social media groups.	1.80	0.65	S
Mean	2.01	0.46	S
B. Formative Assessment Strategies			
I give at least one formative assessment monthly to students in this remote learning mode.	2.83	0.74	O
I give feedback to the student's works every two or three weeks.	2.76	0.79	O
I monitor student progress through the FB group chats.	3.35	0.69	O
I evaluate students' level of performance through modular learning mode through summative tests.	3.00	0.72	O
I do formative assessments asynchronously.	3.01	0.69	O
Mean	2.99	0.48	O
C. Addressing Student Concerns in Assessment			
I immediately address the assessment concerns of my students through chats or text messages.	3.37	0.68	O
I do a house visit to communicate with my students.	3.68	0.51	A
I do record supplemental lecture videos which students can watch offline.	3.38	0.74	O
I ask students to write their concerns at the end of the module and I respond through writing regarding their queries and questions regarding the assessment.	3.01	0.64	O
I give general feedback to the students' work through short narratives and written comments in their module.	3.27	0.76	O
Mean	3.34	0.40	O
D. Grading System			
I devise a schedule in checking my students' outputs.	3.43	0.70	O
I allocate points to student works based on how they answer both the close-ended and reflection questions.	3.49	0.59	O
I use the holistic rubric in assessing student products that are entirely made at home.	3.53	0.64	A
I ask my supervisor and colleagues about the grading system in this flexible learning modality.	3.48	0.61	O
I confer with my head regarding the guidelines on the grading system provided to the teachers.	3.49	0.63	O
Mean	3.48	0.40	O
Overall Mean	2.98	0.25	O

3.5 Performance of Teachers in Using the Assessment Practices

As shown, the teachers' overall performance rating is satisfactory based on the overall performance mean score of 2.68 (SD=0.56). This suggests that teachers are performing satisfactorily in using online tools

in ensuring academic honesty ($M=2.84$, $SD=0.60$), in using free online tools to detect plagiarism issues from the students' outputs ($M=2.81$, $SD=0.73$), and in giving open-ended questions, apart from close-ended tests, to identify the reliability of the students' answers ($M=2.64$, $SD=0.77$). This performance of teachers can still be improved once the challenges they meet in the assessment are given the appropriate interventions and actions.

Table 5. Teaching Performance of Teachers in Using the Assessment Practices

Teaching Performance	Mean	SD	QI
I use online tools in ensuring academic honesty in assessment in a flexible learning mode.	2.84	0.60	S
I give open-ended questions, apart from close-ended tests, to identify the reliability of the students' answers.	2.64	0.77	S
I use free online tools to detect plagiarism issues from the students' outputs.	2.81	0.73	S
I prepare two sets or more for students' assessments as one way to prevent copying.	2.62	0.87	S
I monitor students online in a synchronous quiz or exam using social media groups.	2.51	0.82	S
Overall Mean	2.68	0.56	S

3.6 Pearson Correlations among Assessment Practices, Coping Strategies and Performance

There was a significant relationship between the assessment practices and assessment challenges ($r=-0.378$; $p<0.01$). However, there was a negative low correlation between assessment practices and assessment challenges. The more the teachers practice assessment strategies during the pandemic, the lower the chance that they can encounter assessment challenges.

There was a positive but negligible significant relationship between the assessment practices and coping strategies ($r=0.209$; $p=0.05$). The more the teachers practice assessment strategies during the pandemic, the more they will likely employ coping strategies in assessment. Meanwhile, there was a positive moderate significant relationship between the assessment practices and teaching performance ($r=0.526$; $p<0.01$). The more the teachers practice assessment strategies during the pandemic, the higher the performance rating they will get.

In terms of assessment challenges and coping strategies, there was a significant positive low correlation ($r=0.244$; $p<0.05$) obtained. This means that as the teachers encounter more challenges in assessment, the more they employ coping strategies. Between assessment challenges and teaching performance, there was a significant negative low correlation ($r=-0.244$; $p<0.05$) obtained. This means that as the teachers encounter more challenges in assessment, the lower they can perform in assessing their students. Lastly, there was a significant positive moderate correlation between coping strategies and teaching performance ($r=0.410$; $p<0.01$). This means that the more the teachers employ coping strategies, the higher the performance rating they will get in assessment.

Table 6. Pearson Correlations among Assessment Practices, Coping Strategies and Performance

Variables	Assessment Practices	Challenges	Coping Strategies	Teaching Performance
Assessment Practices	1			
Challenges	-0.378**	1		
Coping Strategies	0.209*	0.244*	1	
Teaching Performance	0.526**	-0.261**	0.410**	1

4. Conclusions

The study concludes that the teachers often encounter challenges in assessment in terms of grading system, academic honesty, addressing students' concerns in assessment, and formative assessment strategies. Due to this, they often employ different coping strategies for the challenges they encounter. The teachers attained a satisfactory level of performance using the assessment practices. There were negative significant relationships between the assessment practices and assessment challenges, and between assessment challenges and teaching performance. However, there were positive significant relationships between the assessment practices and coping strategies, and teaching performance.

5. Recommendations

An in-depth analysis of the teachers' profile may be done to find out some relevant factors that might affect teachers' assessment during the pandemic. And, interventions and appropriate actions may be crafted to address the challenges of the teachers in assessing students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sharing of the coping strategies among teachers may also be done through LAC sessions.

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