
Research Article

Language Learning in Modular Set-Up: Challenges and Coping Mechanisms of Secondary Students

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ABSTRACT

The urgent need to respond to the Covid crisis has provided the impetus for the implementation of modular distance learning in the Philippines. Hence, this study is one of the very few studies which sought to investigate the modular distance learning in the country, particularly the challenges it brought to the English language learners. Also, this present research aimed to determine the coping mechanisms of students, relevant to the challenges raised. The participants of the study were senior high school students, two males and six females, who were purposely selected to fit into the inclusion criteria. Descriptive qualitative research design was employed and individual in-depth interviews were conducted to gather the data. The responses were transcribed, translated, and analyzed through thematic analysis. With regards the challenges, these themes were created: absence of teacher's instruction, struggles of self-learning, poor picture quality, limited contents of the module, insufficient allotted time, failure of teachers to respond to inquiries, unstable and limited access to internet, students lack of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, and less opportunity for correction. The paper ends with the discussion on how the students addressed the challenges of modular distance learning which was also subdivided into themes.

Keywords: Modular distance learning, Challenges, Coping mechanisms

Introduction

Distance learning is not a recent phenomenon, in fact, according to Allen and Seaman (2017, as cited in Fidalgo, Thormann, Kulyk, & Lencastre, 2020) it is commonly used and widely accepted in many countries around the world. However, in the Philippine context, the concept of distance education appears to be brand new and unheard of by the majority as it has not been introduced and formally used in

the country's instructional system. Perhaps this unfamiliarity is due to the reason that this setup is not a part of the Philippine educational system. Apparently, the situation has changed along the surge of covid-19 pandemic which has provided the opportunity for distance education, particularly the modular distance learning modality, to be operated in the country's school's system.

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Unarguably, the pandemic has caused the greatest damage to the global educational system, affecting not only its condition but also the most number of learners around the world (Labrado, Labrado, Rosal, Layasan & Salazar, 2020). Classes were suspended, institutions were closed, and authorities were in a dilemma on how to operate back the schools and deliver learnings without compromising student's safety. Thereupon, the need to respond to the Covid crisis has provided the impetus for the implementation of modular distance learning. For the first time in history, the department of education permitted this kind of learning modality to function in order to bridge formal education in the new normal setting (Labrado et al., 2020).

According to Dangle and Sumaoang (2020) modular learning is the most prominent of all types of distance learning and at the same time the method most favored by the parents. Considering that the face-to-face interaction has already been canceled, modular distance learning appears to be the best fitted option for the learners as it can reach students who reside in remote areas and places inaccessible to the internet. Supportive of this, Peraton (2008) maintained that distance education could be a great tool for mass education, because it could reach a great number of students. Additionally, it is believed that several advantages could spring from this learning modality. Dangle and Sumaoang (2020) mentioned that the use of modules promotes independent learning, it is more flexible for teachers, it costs less and more time saving.

While there are benefits springing from the modular distance learning, it is incontestable that it also has its own disadvantages. Since there is very limited face-to-face engagement, lack of interaction appears to be one of the greatest challenges of distance education, as well as the strong sense of isolation and the demotivation it brings to students to accomplish their tasks (Fidalgo et al., 2020). Given that English in the Philippine context is a compulsory subject to take, the sudden shift to modular learning most probably have had affected students' language learning. It is known that English is either a second or third language of this country, thus learning a language only

through modules puts Filipino language learners in a more disadvantaged situation.

It is a common knowledge that these challenges cannot simply be neglected. However, despite the need for these challenges to be recognized, very few have explored this topic. Seemingly, researches tended to focus on the adversities of online learning rather than on the problems brought by the newly implemented modularized curriculum. The studies done with relevance to the modular learning were restricted in foreign countries and only few researchers have attempted to investigate this phenomenon in the Philippine setting.

Since modular learning has been the preferred modality determined by DepEd to be efficient and most suitable for the Philippines, it is imperative for its usage to be investigated. Thus, this present study looked into the challenges of senior high school students when it comes to learning English in this modular distance learning setup. Additionally, this research also explored the coping mechanisms used by the students to grapple with the challenges that they have encountered. The findings of this study will contribute to raising teachers and implementers awareness of the drawbacks and major issues of these learning modality.

Literature Review

Modular distance learning

Keegan (2002, as cited in Fidalgo et al., 2020) defined distance education as an experience where learning and instruction occurs in different time and separated space. The same author claimed that central to distance learning is the physical separation of learners from the teachers. In a similar vein, Quinones (as cited in Dangle & Sumaoang, 2020) referred distance learning as a mode of learning happening in a location where both students and teachers are not together during the time of instruction and modular learning is one of its most famous types along with online and blended learning.

Recently, modular distance learning has been adopted in the Philippines, but it did not simply come about as a move to improve the country's educational system, instead, it is a product of the immediate action to bridge learning amidst the global health crisis. Along

the height of the pandemic is the collapse of education, which obviously resulted to closure of schools and institutions. It is known to many, especially to the education sector, that learning could not be stopped for too long. Thus, under the behest of DepEd secretary Leonor Magtolis Briones, Modular distance learning was implemented (Labrado et al., 2020)

Particularly, this learning modality was embraced as part of the DepEd's continuity plan in an effort to provide means to continue the disrupted education (Bayod & Bayod, 2020). Though it can be noted that there are multiple types of distance learning, it seems that the strong inclination towards the modular approach was brought about by the lack of funds and equipment for some schools to engage in modes like online learning. Additionally, Bayod and Bayod (2020) claimed that Modular learning is much preferred due to the reason that it is more accessible and it can accommodate students residing in remote areas where internet connectivity is a real challenge. In reality, modular learning works in the way where teachers work from home and students learn at their own pace.

Challenges of Students in Modular learning

In recent years, various forms of distance learning have been widely used around the world, one of which is modular distance learning which Conford (1997) considered as one of the reasonable alternatives to traditional teaching methods. The use of modules for learning is believed by Netolicky, Timmers, and Tuscano (2020, as cited in Labrado et al., 2020) is capable of providing unparalleled opportunities for collaboration, it promotes independent learning, and enhances students' sense of responsibility. Similarly, in the study of Sadeghi (2019) the author enumerated reasons why distance learning is truly advantageous for learners, it does not follow strictly implemented schedules, it can take place anytime and anywhere, and it costs less. Despite these possible benefits, a number of disadvantages appears to outrank and overshadow its advantages.

Sadeghi (2019) elaborated that one of the greatest challenges of distance set up, like

modular learning, is the lack of social interaction, which causes students to feel isolated. On the extremes, the physical separation from peers and instructors may further cause depressing learning experiences. Supportive of this, Brown (2017) maintained that learners inside the four walls of the classroom are offered with a lot of learning opportunities and are allowed to meet people from various locations, while in this setup, students are posed with greater restrictions and are confined in a limited space. Bijesh (2017, as cited in Apriyanti, 2020) also raised another contention and asserted that staying motivated and interested is the true test of modular distance learning to the students for the reason that there is no real time instruction and interaction.

Given that modular setup is too time restricted and very much centered on the content, it does not create a room for practice and application of learning, as well as feedback (Conford, 1997). Additionally, in the recent study of Dangle and Sumaoang (2020) problems related to time were raised. As explained in the study, students complained about the limited time allotted to answer the modules, which is a real struggle for students due to the short span of time. Obviously, Modular distance learning offers a lot of desirable opportunities for students, but one could not deny that it also has its own limitations, drawbacks and issues that need to be further explored.

Research Questions

1. 1. What are the challenges encountered by the senior high students in Learning English in a Modular Distance Learning set-up?
2. How did the senior high school students overcome the challenges they have encountered in Learning English in a Modular Distance Learning set-up?

Methodology

Research design

This study focuses on knowing the challenges of senior high school students in this modular distance learning setup, as well as their coping mechanisms. Since this study aims to dive into the respondents' actual experi-

ences and thoughts through lengthy discussions, descriptive qualitative research design was employed. The primary source of qualitative data were interviews, which is deemed to be a practical tool to understand the world of others. As contended by Huang (2015), qualitative interviews' purpose is to elicit in-depth answers from respondents to get a more profound and elaborate understanding of the participants' experiences and probe questions in accordance with the research interest.

Particularly, semi-structured interview was used in this study, which according to Qu and Dumay (2011) is the common and most familiar amongst all the qualitative methods. Perhaps, its popularity and prominence in the field of research is due to its accessible and flexible nature, allowing interviewees to reveal meaningful facets of human experiences and reveal significant information and opinion. Also, Qu and Dumay (2011) added that semi structured interviews are guided by prepared questions which is beneficial in this type of studies as it permits excellent interviewers to extract full responses and address topics that may further come up.

Participants of the study

A total of eight respondents were involved in this study and subjected into in-depth interviews. The said number of respondents can be considered reasonable based on the contention of the Speziale and Carpenter (2002) that for interviews, five to ten participants is adequate and recommended if one would want to attain the goal of getting rich description from a certain phenomenon. Two of the said respondents were males, while six were females. The respondents were purposefully selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (a) a senior high school student that is of legal age (b) currently learning English in this modular distance learning setup (c) presently living in Zamboanga City.

Data Collection

Interviews were intended to be face-to-face, however due to the restrictions brought by the pandemic, it shifted to phone call interviews. The data were collected from a small sample of students in Zamboanga City. As

opined by King and Kitchener (1994), if one wants to extract high quality information from a small number of participants, interview is the best option to use due to the fact that it allows respondents to answer in their own terms and enables interviewers to ask for clarifications, seek for justification and draw more complicated narratives from the respondents.

Moreover, interviews, specifically the semi-structured ones, need a great amount of planning before its actual execution. Thus, in this study, alignment was done first to ensure that the interview questions support the aims of this research and also to further ensure reliability and validity. Additionally, no opinions and approving or disapproving statements were given by the interviewer during the interviews. Data were collected through audio recording of interviews and were later on transcribed. 3 participants responded with their local language. Hence, the transcription and translation have undergone thorough checking and correction from an expert to assure its accuracy.

Analysis of Data

Before interpreting and giving meaning to the information collected, the data were first sorted out and organized reflective of the interview questions, which Suter (2012) called the data display- the process of organizing data and revealing it in forms of graphs and charts to be easily understood. Subsequently, the data were reviewed for commonality and each response was examined in respect to how they are connected, which is usually termed as thematic analysis. Moreover, the main themes developed from the data, specifically with regards to the challenges and coping mechanisms of the respondents were categorized according to the recurring patterns observed.

Ethical Considerations

Since this type of research aims to collect data from people, access to them could not simply be demanded. Prior to the conduct of the interviews, the researchers requested for permission from those involved for ethical considerations. Respondents were informed of the objectives and asked for their voluntary participation. This particular step is anchored to the

interview guidelines as mentioned in the study of Qu and Dumay (2011) that participants must be well informed of the course of interview, how the data would be utilized, and their rights as respondents, which includes the fact that they can back away and decline answering questions they find uncomfortable with.

Furthermore, respondents were assured that their identity will remain confidential and anonymous. The information collected would not be disclosed to the public and made available to any person who is not directly involved in the study. Moreover, during the interviews, permission to record the interviews were asked from the participants.

Results and Discussions

On the initial part of the interview, participants were asked how do they find learning-English in this modular set up, most of them revealed interesting responses as presented on these excerpts:

It was very hard ma'am for us to learn especially English today in this set-up... (Participant7)

To be honest, it's very hard because even during the face-to-face, it's already very hard, sometimes we're unable to get it because of so many discussions. What more now that nobody's teaching... (Participant 5)

Evidently, the respondents admitted that English is difficult to be learned in this situation. Out of eight respondents, all of them expressed that they are experiencing struggles and are deeply troubled due to the constraints brought by this learning modality. Similarly, in the recent investigation done by Dangle and Sumaoang (2020) held in the same context, 90% of its student respondents testified that it is a lot more demanding and burdensome for them to learn in this current setup. Perhaps, these findings might indicate that this modular curriculum has not been effectively carried out due to some challenges.

Challenges encountered by the respondents while learning English in modular setup

Out of the responses of the participants with regards to the challenges they have faced, nine themes were generated which are briefly highlighted in the Table 1.

Table 1. Themes and Excerpts on the Challenges of students

Themes	Percentage	Excerpts
1. Absence of teachers' instruction and guidance	63%	<p><i>In modular, maybe you can understand it by yourself but you need someone or you need a teacher who will guide you (Participant 8)</i></p> <p><i>...because of that, I cannot understand well what is in the module because without guidance of the teacher (Participant 6)</i></p> <p><i>... There's no teaching like that. (Participant 4)</i></p>
2. Struggles of self-learning	38%	<p><i>For me, like it is quite difficult because ...sometimes I cannot understand because like its based only on my own understanding (Participant 6)</i></p> <p><i>For me, I struggle a lot in answering my modules because ... what am I going to write, I mean answer, is just really base on my knowledge. (Participant 4)</i></p>

	Themes	Percentage	Excerpts
3.	Poor picture quality	13%	<i>...sometimes the pictures will be colored black. Its white and black so I cannot see the pictures properly ... (Participant 1)</i>
4.	Limited and missing contents of modules	38%	<p><i>The problem is the content is what I feel like its missing. There's something that is missing. (Participant 1)</i></p> <p><i>some topics are missing ... that's why I'm troubled with it. (Participant 2)</i></p> <p><i>... its really hard to acquire information, not everything is being placed in the modules. (Participant 7)</i></p> <p><i>...Its so limited that's why its really hard for us to learn (Participant 7)</i></p>
5.	Insufficient allotted time	38%	<i>Its hard and there are a lot to answer then the time is limited only. One week then pass it immediately (Participant 5)</i>
6.	Failure of teachers to respond to inquiries	25%	<p><i>I'm not sure about others but I don't know why, but my questions are not received by my teacher in English, or the teacher is unable to answer it (Participant 7)</i></p> <p><i>It actually caused me inconvenience because if I ask ... something to the teacher, then not everyone has the time to, not all the teacher have the time to respond right away... (Participant 1)</i></p>
7.	Unstable and limited access to internet	63%	<p><i>its so hard to learn things because the internet connection is slow... (Participant 7)</i></p> <p><i>For me, because I don't have enough where I can search (Participant 4)</i></p> <p><i>... and our internet is not stable... (Participant 2)</i></p> <p><i>...sometimes I answer it at 12 am already because of the internet because I really need to search (Participant 5)</i></p>
8.	Lack of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge	38%	<p><i>... I certainly lack of these vocabularies to apply it on my essay stories and other activities in modules (Participant 2)</i></p> <p><i>... I'm not fluent in English especially when making an essay, my grammar sometimes wrong.. (Participant 3)</i></p> <p><i>... in deep vocabularies, in deep words of English and I'm not clearly, I really don't know, so its hard for me ... (Participant 2)</i></p>

Themes	Percentage	Excerpts
9. Less opportunity for correction	13%	<i>In writing essays, we are not able to let it check in an instant whether it is write or wrong, if its already enough. So its very hard to correct our learnings (Participant 2)</i>

Absence of teacher's instruction and guidance

Drawing on the participants' responses, the absence of teacher's instruction and guidance emerged as a major theme from the data. Out of eight respondents, five of them admitted that not being able to interact with the teacher and not receiving any formal teaching is one of the biggest challenges of learning English in this set up.

One of the participants exemplified this situation as seen on this excerpt:

I really find it hard. I don't know what to do because there's no one who will teach me, there's no one who will guide me on what's written on the module... (Participant 8)

It can be extrapolated from the response that participants find themselves lost and unable to function well, for the reason that there is no coaching and guidance from teachers. Participant 5 elaborated this situation by pointing out that there is no discussion done, there is no one to ask and no one to talk to in this highly restricted modular setup. Relative to the learning of English, Abukhadrah (2015) claimed that interaction is an integral part of language learning, exposing students in meaningful scenarios allows them to acquire important parts of the language. Thus, having only the self-learning modules at hand, without the discussions, formal instruction and proper guidance, successful language learning is most likely not going to happen. Seemingly, participants are aware that they need instruction as evident in the following words:

Of course, when we enter school, we need guide from the teacher...What we learn, it's not only about our self, from our own understanding. (Participant 6)

This response reveal that participants cannot simply rely on their own, guidance and tutelage from the teacher is a great necessity, which is obviously not available in this learning setup. This particular finding is in congruence with the results of Venter's (2003) study, where participants have expressed the need for academic supervision. As reported, the absence of teachers brings a lot of setbacks to students, as it does not offer a chance for discussion, no additional information and elaboration is given, students are uncertain if they are on the correct track and there is no figure of authority.

Struggles of self-learning

The participants are also faced with the several struggles related to self-learning. As mentioned by three of the respondents, they are having difficulty understanding the modules on their own. Specifically, Participant 5 have mentioned that she is confronted by the challenge of not knowing what to answer on the modules because it is solely based on own knowledge and understanding.

This is supported by the following excerpt:

...because if modular, its only self- learning and I'm lack of knowledge in some parts of the subjects and it's hard for me to understand (Participant 2)

It can be inferred from the response that one of the reasons why participants struggle to learn on their own is because they have insufficient knowledge about the subject matter. Similarly, participant 5 narrated that the content of the module could not be easily understood and grasped, it needs to be read multiple times for its meaning to be captured. Because students are on their own and unable to get most of what is in the module, Participant 8 have admitted that sometimes the modules are simply left unanswered. This reported struggle has also been narrated by the respondents in the study of

Dangle and Sumaoang (2020) where 70% of its respondents mentioned that they cannot follow directions in the modules and they cannot study on their own.

Poor picture quality

Another challenge drawn from the responses is the poor quality of pictures in the modules. Participant 1 have explicitly revealed that there were instances where the images are unable to be viewed properly because it is printed in black and white. This was further elaborated in this excerpt:

It's not colored. I think it's a photocopy production that is very troubling to some students. (Participant 1)

It is incontestable that self-learning modules are the primary learning material that the students in this modular distance setup are offered with. Thus, reproducing its contents, particularly images, in a hazy and monochrome reproduction simply gives students additional hassle. As reported, the participant is displeased and troubled with the uncolored illustrations, which the participant thinks is a product of a plain photocopy.

Limited and missing contents of the module

Interesting findings were also revealed by the respondents concerning the modules. Two out of eight participants have mentioned that the modules were limited and some of its contents are missing. Participant 2 have elaborated this problem, saying that it falls short of explanations and in worst cases, it is cut from the modules. Similar impressions were suggested, stating that there are instances where examples are not provided in the modules.

The following excerpt suggests the idea:

The problem is the content is what I feel like its missing. There's something that is missing. For example, if I am reading the sentences, I get it but sometimes I need more examples to get the lessons right. (Participant 1)

These response is invalidated by the claim of Conford (1997) that modules, by their nature, really tend to fragment knowledge instead of in-

tegrating them in whole. This situation is considered by the students to be one of their problems as it impedes their understanding of the content. Participant 2 have clearly stated that the missing topics in the indicated modules hamper their understanding and gives them additional task to research for it on their own, which proves that the topics which are not completely laid out in the modules poses additional hurdles for students. This challenge has also been realized in the investigation of Celikler and Aksan (2012, as cited in Apriyanti, 2020), revealing that worksheets, such as the ones provided in the self learning modules, are successful and effective, however the materials it contain are somehow limited.

Insufficient allotted time

Insufficient time was also one of the major themes that emerged in this study. The participants expressed their frustration over the limited time allocated for them to answer the modules. Particularly, participant 6 explained that other than English, there are several other subjects that come along with it, which makes one week disposed time insufficient. Relevant impression was revealed by respondent 5.

The following is the excerpt:

It's hard and there are a lot to answer then the time is limited only. One week then pass it immediately (Participant 5)

It is apparent from the responses that the numerous task and several subjects they have makes the one week given time not enough. This theme is in line with the results indicated in the study of Dangle and Sumaoang (2020), that the limited time offered in this modular distance learning is one of the adversities of students in this setup. Apart from that, Participant 5 added that there are a lot of household chores at home which contributes to the reasons why they run out of time to study and finish their modules. Additionally, the inability of the respondents to manage their time contributes to this particular challenge.

The following is the excerpt:

Sometimes I lose time management in answering because like today, were just on the modular, so I can just do it tomorrow. like I lose concentration or focus to really

do the modules on time. Sometimes I cram, while I'm cramming the outcomes of doing my modules is not anymore well-done.
(Participant 6)

Sadeghi (2019) discussed that the idea of procrastination, chances of being distracted and losing focus on studies are really high in this type of distance education like Modular learning. Undoubtedly, the previous response echoes this claim, revealing that the respondent sometimes resorts to delaying task, which adds to the reason why respondents cannot meet the expected time.

Failure of teachers to respond to inquiries

The patterns and themes emerged from the data revealed that failure of teachers to respond to inquiries as another challenge reported by three of the respondents. Participants have narrated that in this modular learning, keeping in contact with the teachers is a huge challenge. Participant 8 have elaborated that clarifications and few questions are addressed to the teachers through private messages in messenger. However, this instance causes inconvenience to students.

The following excerpt suggests the idea:

We have to wait for a little while to get the response out of my teacher. That's why, it's a little bit inconvenient and that wastes my time. **(Participant 6)**

Clearly, the participant explains that it takes a moment for teachers to respond to their questions which puts them in a more difficult situation because they have to wait. In addition to the problem, teacher's responses sometimes appear to be unclear on student's end.

The following is the excerpt:

...sometimes the instructions that they (teachers) give is not also clear. I can't really tell because my teachers are also busy like I am not their only student, there are many others. **(Participant 7)**

As expressed by Hutt (2017, as cited in Sadeghi, 2019) keeping in touch with teachers during this distance learning is a difficult thing to do because immediate responses would be

very hard to achieve. The responses admitted by the participants is validated by the previous claim. It can be said that in attempt of students to seek for solutions, they sometimes find themselves in a more difficult situation.

Unstable and limited access to internet

As emerged from the themes, the findings of this study revealed that the unstable and limited access to internet is a challenge to the students. It is worthy to discuss that modular distance learning has been nominated and preferred by DepEd to be one of the learning modalities so that education could still be delivered to remote locations where internet is inaccessible (Bayod&Bayod, 2020). Despite that fact, 5 participants of this study still claims that the internet is still needed in this modular set-up.

The following is the excerpt from the transcript:

there are some other ways that the topics should be searched or needed to be searched on the internet and my signal here is not that strong **(Participant 2)**

Brown (2017, as cited in Bayod&Bayod, 2020) asserted that when one wants to take distance learning, he must be equipped with technology and of course, internet. This claim may initially appear to be solely applicable to online distance learning, but in reality, technology and internet is also a great necessity even in modular learning. Evidently, on the excerpt of one of the participants, it was disclosed that there are instances where topics are needed to be looked into on the internet, however the poor internet connection is a challenge for students. Similarly, in the response of participant 5, it was admitted that the respondent does not have enough of the equipment needed to search the topics in the modules. Based on the excerpt of participant 7, it was said that the poor internet connection that they have does not add their learning or help them in this situation, instead it slows and impedes their learnings. This simply shows the frustration and dissatisfaction of the respondent over the poor internet connection.

Lack of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge

Problems relative to students insufficient vocabulary and grammatical knowledge also emerged as one of the key themes in this study. Four participants have conveyed their difficult experiences in trying to comprehend deep English words, which according to Participant 2 hinders her overall understanding of the topic. Furthermore, participants have also expressed their reservation toward the Modular distance learning, because they deem themselves to be not fluent in the English language. Particularly, participant 3 complained about not being good with grammar and weak in terms of expressing oneself in English.

Participant 3 substantiates this findings as seen on these excerpts:

My grammar sometimes wrong and sometimes its fine... but all the answers I have are already in my brain, I just can't translate to English **(Participant 3)**

It is clear from the participants' responses that the having only little knowledge of the correct grammar and English vocabulary, troubles students as it is needed in various writing activities present in the modules.

Less opportunity for correction

The discussants also revealed that this modular distance learning provides less opportunity for correction. Particularly, Participant 7 elaborated that they are unable to ask for correction and at the same time receive feedback from the teacher, which makes learning much harder for the participants because they do not know which things needs to be corrected.

Apparently, students simply answer the self-learning modules and pass It on its scheduled collection date, which obviously does not provide any room for comments and corrections from the teacher. This result is in accord to the contention of Conford (1997) that because of the time restricted and content concentrated nature of Modular learning, opportunity for feedback and practice comes in rarity. Relative to that claim, it was also suggested that other skills in English are not further developed.

The following response seems to prove this:

...our English skills are not being enhanced, when it comes to talking orally.
(Participant 7)

The participant also pointed out that in learning English through this setup, other skills are not addressed and they are unable to practice English orally. This response might have been brought by the fact that students are simply given activities to answer and the opportunity for other macro skills in English to be enhanced is very much limited.

Coping mechanisms of senior high school students

As expressed from the data analysis done with the responses regarding how they have addressed the problems they have faced, the results are discussed under the themes of (1) Taking responsibility to search for topics and lessons, (2) Utilization of internet and search engines, (3) Devoting more effort to study, (4) Asking and reaching out to teachers, (5) Seeking assistance from more knowledgeable others, and (6) peer mentoring.

Table 2. Themes and Excerpts on the Coping Mechanism of students

Themes	Percent-age	Excerpts
1. Taking responsibility to search for topics and lessons	13%	<p><i>I just research also to overcome the challenges that are hard for me...</i> (Participant 2)</p> <p><i>...search the things that are missing in the module.</i> (Participant 1)</p> <p><i>I'm going to search. If there's something I don't know to search sometimes</i> (Participant 8)</p>

Themes	Percent-age	Excerpts
2. Utilization of in-ternet and search engines	38%	<p><i>Like this in our modules, online platforms, we go to online platforms like google and of course our internet (Participant 7)</i></p> <p><i>That's why I use google ... (Participant 3)</i></p> <p><i>What I do is, that's it, I get information from online platforms (Participant 7)</i></p> <p><i>So I am very fortunate to have Wi-Fi or internet connection that's why I have the, if I need to search something then I go for google and ask right away to google. (Participant 1)</i></p>
3. Devoting more ef-fort to study	25%	<p><i>In the study of English, I patiently study more to expand my knowledge in learning English (Participant 2)</i></p>
4. Asking and reach-ing out to teachers	38%	<p><i>sometimes I ask my teacher, I ask about how to do the activ-ity (Participant 8)</i></p> <p><i>Sometimes I would ask the teacher ... (Participant 1)</i></p>
5. Seeking assistance from more knowl-edgeable others	50%	<p><i>...sometimes, I also ask my Tita to teach me (Participant 5)</i></p> <p><i>I ask my sister because my sister, I really think she's so good at like this at English, so I ask her every time I have questions about this (Participant 7)</i></p> <p><i>I also ask questions to colleges because they have more deeper and wide knowledge about this subjects that I lack knowledge (Participant 2)</i></p>
6. Peer mentoring	25%	<p><i>if there's no one, I will just go to my classmates and we will just... brainstorm (Participant 8)</i></p> <p><i>For me, if I am not to understand the lesson or what is in our module, sometimes I ask ... my classmates like "how did you do this", "can you teach me how ... (Participant 6)</i></p>

Taking responsibility to search for topics

When faced with the challenge of encountering unfamiliar words and unelaborated concepts in the modules, students take responsibility to search for topics. Specifically, most of them noted that they do research to overcome the aforementioned challenges.

The following is the excerpt:

I just research also to overcome the chal-lenges that are hard for me, for example are the vocabularies for the knowledge that I need (Participant 2)

Similar response was said by Participant 8, stating that when confronted with new topics, the respondent takes charge of his learnings and searches for the topic on his own. Correspondingly, Participant 4 narrated that lectures from previous years remains to be useful and could be used as a lecture resource for this modular setup.

Utilization of internet and search engines

The respondents have also expressed their reliance on internet and search engines. Although poor internet connection was determined to be a hindrance to effective learning, still students remain dependent on the online platforms. Despite the fact that slow internet brings inconvenience to students, there seems to be no other better solution aside from this. With regards to the difficulty in understanding and expressing words in English, students main source of aid is the internet.

The excerpts below suggest this idea:

...That's why I use google to translate in English (Participant 3)

...for example, there's a spelling like this, or the correct punctuation of this, I do not know so I'll go to Meriam Webster's or other things (Participant 7)

Evidently, respondents use search engines to aid them with their problems in English, mainly for translation purposes, to check their usage of punctuations, and as well as to check their spellings.

Devoting more effort to study

It was revealed that students patiently studied and exerted more effort to their learning since they do not anymore receive instructions from teachers. Participant 2 mentioned that to address the challenge raised, the respondents tried to strive and put extra effort on their studies, since they are now only learning by themselves. Furthermore, Participant 5 have elaborated this and narrated that they read the modules multiple times to understand it better. This is supported by the claim of Venter (2003), that the more one read and put effort in studying, more ideas could be gained and it could result to good outcomes.

Asking and reaching out to teachers

Another way of coping up with the foregoing challenges is through reaching out to teachers, which was mentioned by three out of eight respondents. As stated, students find themselves troubled by most of the instructions and activities in the module, thus to address this challenge, students try to find the means to connect to teachers.

The following is the excerpt from the transcript:

I will ask one of my teacher how to do this, how to do that, then, we're able to make it (Participant 8)

Although it was reported that it is a challenge for students to communicate with their teachers in this setup, it seems that students still try to connect with them despite the uncertainty of getting any responses. It is apparent from the excerpt presented that when students are fortunate enough to be responded by the teachers, their queries or questions are somehow clarified.

Seeking assistance from more knowledgeable others

Having only the self-learning modules at hand and not receiving any formal education, students turn to seek for assistance from people whom they think are more capable and knowledgeable. The following is the excerpt:

...I ask my sister because ...I really think she's so good at like this, at English. So I ask her every time I have questions about this. (Participant 7)

It can be inferred from the participants' responses that they see the benefit of asking for help from other people. Perhaps, this clever move is driven by their need to have someone who can somehow fill the role of a teacher. Relatively, other participant have also admitted that help are being extended to them by their sisters, Titas and Seniors from school. This finding is in line with the study of Dangle and Sumaoang (2020) where siblings were found to be the primary helpers of students in answering their modules followed by their friends and peers.

Peer mentoring

To cope up with the limitations of modular learning, particularly the absence of interaction, students have tried to find means in order to seek for support and assistance from their peers. As narrated by Participant 6, they resort to asking their friends through private messages on messenger, video calling and peer discussions on group chats. Furthermore, the respondent supported the claim as presented on this excerpt:

Sometimes I ask my classmates like "how did you do this", "can you teach me how" or if not, "What did you understand, can you share it" ... (Participant 6)

It can be gleaned from the response that explanations and instructions are being asked and shared among peers. As emphasized by Fuller, Holzweiss and Joyner (2015), giving students the chance to learn from peers is vital for an effective learning, for the reason that the community created within the distance environment provides learners satisfactory experiences, increases their retention, and builds linkages among students which further support their learning. This particular finding is in line with the results pointed out in the study of Dangle and Sumaang (2020), that to cope up with the challenges of Modular learning, students ask their peers for support and assistance.

Furthermore, Participant 8 added that if there is no one to ask for help at home, the situation would really require him to meet with his friends and brainstorm together. As evident on the response, the participant admitted that peers come together and resorted to have meet-ups. Although this may seem detrimental considering the present day situation, other researchers such as Almala (2006, as cited in Fuller et al. 2015) continuously sees the potential of peer connection in distance education. Accordingly, just like during face to face, student relationships built for academic purposes in distance environment contributes positively to the learners since it could help them expand their ideas and share resources.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the current literature by illuminating the challenges and

problems of senior high school students when learning English in this modular distance learning setup, which is previously not cited as well as concurring in the previous investigations. 9 themes have been generated from the difficulties relayed by the participants which are as follows: absence of teacher's instruction, struggles of self-learning, poor picture quality, limited contents of the module, insufficient allotted time, failure of teachers to respond to inquiries, unstable and limited access to internet, lack of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, and less opportunity for correction.

At some point, the key aspects of modular learning, which is the physical separation of students and teachers, appears to be the greatest predicament this learning modality has ever pose to students. Because of the absence of formal instruction, students are forced to learn things by themselves and they are not given corrections and opportunity to enhance their skills in English. Perhaps it is one of the saddest truths of modular learning, that while some teachers work from home, students struggle to learn on their own. Particularly, students reported that they struggle in understanding English terminologies and in expressing their answers in English in most of their essays. Furthermore, students are also troubled by the modules itself, as it is reported to be a photocopy production which causes some illustrations to be unclear. Additionally, the limited access to internet have also been reported to hamper their learning. The challenges delineated in this study may suggest that the modular curriculum has not been truly effective and efficient due to these reported struggles.

When faced with the aforementioned challenges, the respondents have discussed several ways of coping up, which are as follows: Taking responsibility to search for topics and lessons, Utilization of internet and search engines, devoting more effort to study, Asking and reaching out to teachers, Seeking assistance from more knowledgeable others, and peer mentoring. Perhaps, it could be said that the circumstances this modular setup brought have somehow shaped students and allowed them to think of ways on how to positively cope up with the adversities they have faced. Clearly, findings generated in this study affirm that

students should never stop striving in finding the most suitable ways that will benefit them, in spite of facing challenges and limitations in this mode of learning.

Implications

In view of the challenges revealed in this investigation, it can be said that the implementation of the modular distance learning setup has been partly ineffective and somehow full of constraints on the learners side. The respondents have admitted that this learning modality had placed them in a more grueling and deprived situation. Thus, implementers and administrators must take a step to consider these setbacks and not be totally delimited by the restrictions of the pandemic. Thorough supervisions and follow-ups must be conducted to fill the gaps of this learning modality.

Evidence from previous investigations have exhibited the idea that teachers are the most important actors in the educational arena, being the person in charge of what goes in and out of the classrooms (Anyiendah, 2007). However, teachers' absence in this particular mode of learning has posed a huge challenge for the learners. It can be implied from this result that despite the physical separation of the students from their teachers, efforts to deliver quality instruction must still persist. Participants also expressed their desire for connection, feedback and support which teachers and other people from the academe must strive to hand over to students.

With respect to the problems faced related to the modules itself, material developers should take into account that self learning modules are the primary source of information in this setup. Therefore, its quality must be prioritized so that learning would not be compromised, ensuring that there is appropriate instruction, clear illustrations, comprehensible explanations, and relevant questions. Interestingly, the experiences of students have led them to show their resourcefulness, which drove them to seek for possible assistance. This implies that guardians and more knowledgeable individuals around the students also have the responsibility to extend some help and take the initiative to teach and act as facilitators.

Unarguably, the present situation called for this learning modality to be enforced, in order for students to have easy access and for learners in remote areas to still have the opportunity to study even without the internet connection (Bayod & Bayod, 2020). However, as reported, access to online resources and the internet is still a necessity despite their efforts to have it in printed format. Therefore, implementers should revisit their grounds on approving this modality, for the reason that the conditions and considerations they have taken appears to contribute to the challenges it brings.

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