

The lived experiences of teachers on the implementation of blended learning modality

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Abstract

This phenomenological study aims to examine the teachers' experiences on the implementation of blended learning modality using an interview guide questionnaire. Seven teachers were selected using purposive sampling and an individual interview was conducted to collect data from the participants. Data from the interview was analyzed thematically using the Colaizzi's (1978) method. This study illustrated that the main challenges of teachers' experience is lacked of exposure and readiness in the implementation of blended learning; they had experienced mixed reactions towards blended learning modality. They emphasized the struggles in time management, stress from excessive workloads, slow connectivity, and unmotivated students in blended learning instructions. They cope up with the challenges by having more patience and understanding for students who seemed uninterested in blended learning modality, integration of messenger app for educational purposes, adjustment for additional workloads as they eventually become more flexible, and conducting of home visitation for those students who experience internet connectivity issues. This study may serve as a component towards the implementation of blended learning modality among teachers, particularly in rural areas who experienced the same situation. Since blended learning modality is widely used as backup in education in case of calamity such as extreme heat inside the classroom, the results of this study provides relevant inputs to the proper planning of blended learning modality.

Keywords: *phenomenology, teachers' lived experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, blended learning modality*

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1. Introduction

Blended learning modality has become one of the options to continue the education of the students with face-to-face classes in combination with modular distance learning modality or online distance learning (Sorbie, 2015). Practically, it helped the students improve learning and enable them to learn at their own pace. However, there were schools where blended learning was difficult to implement, especially for students that needed someone, especially teachers, to facilitate their activities and assist them if they found it hard to answer. Hence, teachers may still endure the exhaustion of preparing modules, checking them afterwards, and preparing lessons and discussions simultaneously. Some teachers have excess workload in face-to-face classes, so they cannot provide modules on time.

As discussed by Jerry and Yunus (2021), the combination of traditional face-to-face interaction with technology-mediated learning also known as blended learning is ideal approach for education in the current digital world. It is the concept that includes framing teaching learning process that incorporates both face to face teaching and teaching supported by ICT (Lalima & Dangwal, 2017). However, blended learning in Western Aklan Academy, Inc. was a new modality encountered by the teachers. Since it was a new method in bridging learning to the students, the teachers had experience some issues and challenges but they enable to overcome those challenges as they develop coping mechanisms.

This study was focused on the lived experiences of teachers on the implementation of blended learning modality in Western Aklan Academy, Inc. and it determined the intervention program used to mitigate the problems. This study summarized the insight of teachers in blended learning modality and their coping strategies to the challenges they encountered. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experiences of teachers on implementation of blended learning modality for addressing the needs of diverse learners. It is important to examine the lived experiences of teachers as they are the most important component of any effective instructional approach.

2. Review of Related Literature

Lived experiences of teachers in the implementation of blended learning modality

Hrastinski (2019) characterized blended learning as a method also used to describe other blends, such as combining different instructional methods, pedagogical approaches, or

technologies. According to Dzuiban et al. (2001), blended learning considers the characteristics of digital technology, in general, and information communication technologies (ICTs), especially nowadays learners are exposed to modern technologies. In Western Aklan Academy, Inc. they preferred to use modular distance learning in combination of face-to-face classes but some teachers integrated their lessons with the use of ICT or online classes.

The Department of Education (DepEd) recognized the benefits of using technology to improve teaching and learning, so an influx of devices has emerged in K-12 schools. This has resulted in many classrooms being equipped with technologies teachers were unprepared to use to improve learning outcomes. Hence, teachers were the top priority in gaining access to tools that can be utilized to provide learning opportunities that were not previously available without technology. On the other hand, Modular Distance Learning (MDL) is imposed for learners with no online learning gadgets and a poor internet connection in their area. Considering the given factors, MDL was the most common learning modality used by teachers in the District of Nabas, particularly in Western Aklan Academy, Inc. It involved individualized instruction that allowed learners to use SLMs in printed or digital format, whichever was applicable in the learner's context, and other learning resources like learner's materials, textbooks, activity sheets, study guides, and other study materials (Camara, 2021).

Teachers have implemented pedagogical practices proven to be effective with students for decades. Innovative teachers understand that blended learning has to be an integral part of learning. However, Western Aklan Academy, Inc. found blended learning in a combination with online distance learning was difficult to achieve, especially in remote areas. They preferred full face-to-face rather than blended learning. It was the best when balancing traditional instructional strategies with technology can engage students in authentic learning experiences focused on exploration, creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration. The pedagogical practice of combining face-to-face instruction with innovative technologies has evolved into the phenomenon known as blended learning (Hensley, 2020). Because of this, the time commitment and understanding of ever-advancing technologies can be exhausting for the teacher (Sorbie, 2015). This made the teachers increase their workload by preparing PowerPoint presentations, online classes, or even designing their own modules and checking afterward. That was why teachers in Western Aklan Academy felt blended learning modality as a burden since it increased their workload.

Some teachers thought that blended learning meant what they have been doing successfully

for years, using a range of resources and activities to provide individualized, student-centered learning experiences for their students. For other teachers, blended learning was challenging (Rao, 2019). Aside from designing their modules, the teachers will check those answered modules and give it back to the learners for their reference and feedback. In modular distance learning, the role of the teacher shifted from traditional lecturing in-person models into remote learning environments (Camara, 2021). Teachers need to adapt their practices to keep their students engaged in effective and efficient learning as every household has become a classroom. Teachers were also responsible for monitoring the progress of the learners. They address the queries of their students through text messaging, phone calls, messenger chats, and video calls.

In basic education, the DepEd offered different learning delivery modalities depending on the geographical location, socio-economic status, and quality of students, particularly in the District of Nabas, Province of Aklan. Those learning modalities aimed to cater to the needs of learners from various walks of life. The education sector, through the Commission on Higher Education, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, and the Department of Education have to find ways to continuously deliver quality and equitable education for all students across all levels of learning (Jamon & Boholano, 2021).

Most schools all over the country adopted the MDL delivery as a mode of learning for their students; hence, Western Aklan Academy, Inc. adopted this mode of learning as well. With this modality, students were given self-learning kits and self-learning modules to answer weekly with the help of their guardians and parents at home for supervision. Teachers also ensured that there was open communication with the parents and students to monitor and address their needs continuously. However, it cannot be denied that teaching in the new normal has weaknesses and threats. To cite one concrete example, the health of frontline teachers is at risk for they have to distribute and retrieve modules from the parents or guardians physically. On the other hand, the new normal in education offers strengths and opportunities (Jamon & Boholano, 2021). The best example of that, the teachers were more exposed in using technologies and became more innovative in teaching.

Challenges and issues encountered by the teachers in the implementation of blended learning modality

Studies revealed that there were many issues that teachers have to take into consideration when creating blended learning. In particular, teachers must think about the pedagogical

implications carefully and make new designs for instruction that are suited to the learners' capacity. Jokinen and Mikkonen (2013) categorized the factors of potential barriers to using blended teaching into three groups: instructional processes, community concerns, and technical issues. Admittedly, even the college faculty who had more exposure to online and remote teaching were having difficulty teaching in the new normal because no one prepared them in these unprecedented times (Hew et al., 2020). Toquero and Talidong (2020) stressed that teachers are not fully prepared to teach in the new normal. Similarly, the difficulty of monitoring, feedback, and assessing learning is another challenge. Though the DepEd order provides clear and specific guidelines on assessing and grading learners, teachers are still experiencing problems with monitoring, feedbacking, and assessing student learning due to several gaps, such as communication, technology, and students' socioeconomic status.

Teachers and students in the new normal in education were burdened to achieve all curriculum requirements (Aliyyah et al., 2020). In fact, students are given at least seven modules or SLKs per week in at least eight weeks per quarter. Students have to answer at least 240 modules or SLKs for the entire school year. Teachers also faced obstacles such as balancing their time for printing and sorting the modules, marking the modules, making the modules, and creating weekly home learning plans.

There was also the threat to the teachers in the new normal in Philippine public education, which is the challenge of reaching out to students and parents. This implied more students at risk of dropping out or failing because teachers have difficulty communicating and giving feedback to them. Students who were not monitored and given intervention in the new normal have a greater chance of dropping out of school and, if not given proper attention, may lose chances to come back to school (Fontanos et al., 2020).

Coping mechanisms of teachers in the implementation of blended learning modality

The first strength of the teachers in the new normal educational setting was their technological literacy as 21st-century teachers. Moreover, teachers nowadays were expected to be ICT and technologically literate (Jamon & Boholano., 2021), which is the most common skill demonstrated by the teacher-applicants. The demand for ICT or technologically literate teachers emanated from the dominance of ICT and technology in their lives (Oliver, 2002, as cited in Nawaz & Kundi, 2010). Teachers were important regarding the effective use of technology in education. They were urged to improve their computer literacy continuously and use this skill in teaching and

learning (Asan, 2003). In addition, teachers in the new normal have the capacity to collaborate, be committed, and be competent, which is one of their essential skills. Grangeat and Gray (2007) elaborate competencies as acquired skills and knowledge that enabled them to perform their tasks effectively and efficiently.

Despite their skills, teachers still need training on the new normal pedagogies (Jamon & Boholano, 2021). Research shows that teachers were strangers in terms of the current situation of the Philippine educational system. They were “pedagogical and content knowledge experts” in face-to-face classes, but during pandemic outbreak in the Philippines compelled all the educational institutions to change the mode of learning from face to face to online (Hew et al., 2020), modular, and blended learning.

3. Methodology

In this study, phenomenological qualitative research design was utilized to comprehensively capture the research questions appropriately. According to Giorgi (2009 as cited in Espineli, 2021), phenomenological research culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. The design was used for its relevance and appropriateness to the research problems experienced by the teachers in the implementation of blended learning modality.

This study was conducted at Western Aklan Academy, Inc. during school year 2022-2023. The school was located at Poblacion, Nabas, Aklan with a total enrolment of 1,357 learners and thirty-two (32) faculty and staff. The participants of this study were selected seven (7) teachers; three (3) Junior High School teachers and four (4) Senior High School teachers. Teachers were purposively chosen using the criteria set; criterion number 1, must be teaching subjects that need hands-on activity and teachers’ guidance; and criterion number 2, must be at least three years in teaching at Western Aklan Academy, Inc.

The instrument used open-ended questions. Open-ended questions are important to find out what the respondents think of a certain situation. In this study, open-ended interview questions are developed to explore the respondents’ responses. Researcher-made interview guide based on research objectives was used to find out what the participants think of a certain situation. Open-ended or unstructured questions are used so that it would enable the researcher to insert follow up questions to extract the most comprehensive and substantial information. The interview guide was divided into three parts. Part I gathers information on the lived experiences of the participants in

the implementation of blended learning modality. Part II generates answers on the challenges and issues they encountered in blended learning modality. Part III elicits information on the coping mechanisms adopted by the teachers to address the challenges they encountered.

The instrument was subjected to content validation by a panel of experts composed of three members who were selected for their expertise and competence. The panel was composed of Academic Coordinator, research adviser, and a Master's Teacher in English. The panel members evaluated the instrument in terms of wordings/grammar, format, and content. The suggestions, recommendations, and comments made by the jury were considered in the revision of the instrument to ensure its validity.

The researcher sought permission from the senior education program specialist in planning and research to conduct the study. When the request to study was approved, the researcher presented a letter to the Public Schools District Superintendent to seek permission to conduct a study in the District of Nabas, specifically in Western Aklan Academy, Inc. When the request letter was approved, permission letter was submitted to the school principal to conduct a study in Western Aklan Academy, Inc. When the school head and district superintendent approved all the permit letters, a letter was given to the selected participants, along with the attached interview questionnaires. When the participant accepted the invitation, the most convenient time for an in-person interview was set. With the respondents' permission, recorders were used throughout the interview for better transcribing as a supporting evidence and reference but respondents were well noted for confidentiality.

In the data analysis procedure, the study utilized Colaizzi's (1978) method of data analysis. It is distinguished with a seven-step process that provides a rigorous analysis in each step closely related to the data. The result summarizes yet an inclusive description of the phenomenon under study directly from the respondents' mouths or points of view. The seven steps can be summarized through the following: (1) read the transcript to be familiar with the data; (2) identify and extract significant statements and phrases; (3) formulate meanings; (4) group all formulated meanings into categories, clusters of themes and themes; (5) define all emergent themes into an exhaustive description; (6) describe the fundamental structure of the phenomenon; (7) return the findings to participants to seek verification.

4. Results and Discussion

In terms of lived experiences of the participants, there were positive and negative major findings. The negative experiences were: (a) unprepared mentally and physically on the implementation of blended learning modality; and (b) additional workloads that caused them stress and exhaustion. On the other hand, the positive experiences of the teachers were: (a) being adaptive as they were able to adopt changes as the time went on; (b) participants improved their flexibility as they manage their time in doing blended modality; and (c) being innovative as they integrate online and offline for different sources in implementing blended learning modality. The major findings showed that the participants were unprepared mentally and physically on the implementation of blended learning. Most of them experienced stress and exhaustion as they were lack of readiness in additional workloads. Participants did not anticipate the excessive workloads in blended learning modality, so they found time management challenging. This attributed to the limited or no exposure of teachers in blended learning modality.

In considering the challenges and issues encountered by the participants, the major issues were: (a) struggles in making modules; (b) uninterested students in blended learning modality; and (c) slow internet connection in some distant barangays in Nabas. The participants obtained the complexity in managing the two modes of teaching such as modular and face-to-face classes, thus they struggled in creating modules. Despite all efforts given by the teachers to teach the students, there are some students who are uninterested in blended learning modality and likely dropping out of school. Aside from uninterested students, participants also consider the poor internet connection in some area of Nabas which can hindrance the online learning of the students.

In terms of coping mechanisms of the participants, the majority of the participants identified: (a) integration of internet and social media in teaching; (b) major adjustments in teaching strategies especially it was a new way of teaching other than traditional face-to-face classes; and (c) conduct of home visitation for the uninterested students in blended learning who are likely to dropout. Teachers integrated the use of internet and social media in their class such as Facebook messenger and Zoom although there were some areas having slow internet connection. Despite the lack of readiness in blended learning modality, they were still able to enhance their capability of being innovative, flexible and adaptive to the new way of teaching other than traditional face-to-face classes. Participants were unaware that blended learning modality already enhanced their teaching skills. In addition, home visitation is their way of reaching out to the students who were not motivated to study in blended learning modality. They were willing to visit

and witness the real students' situations at home. As for this reason, they became more considerate for their students.

The imposed school intervention program showed effectiveness and convenience as it will serve as a one of the school system that will help lessen the work of the teachers in creating modules every school year. This study also found out that teachers were being reshuffled every school year to handle different subjects giving them additional responsibility of making another module for the subject. Additionally, they experienced insufficient number of teachers as some of them have finished contract and intended not to renew. In these situations, the school-based learning management system will help store all instructional materials including modules made by the teachers and keep them safe, private and easy to access online by the authorized personnel.

5. Conclusion

This study found that teachers at Western Aklan Academy, Inc. have lack of preparations for the implementation of blended learning modality. They have experienced the excessive workloads that caused them stress and exhaustion in teaching. At first, they struggled on how they manage their time in doing modules weekly and preparing face-to-face classes. Subsequently, it developed positive results as they learn to become more flexible, adaptive, and innovative. Despite all the struggles, issues, and challenges they had faced, they become resilient and passionate on their field of work. Those challenges which obstruct them from the implementation of blended learning modality should call the attention of the school administrators to work with the teachers and other stakeholders for the intensive preparations and planning about blended modality.

With the clear understanding about blended learning modality, teachers would be able to guide the students to become competent individuals and enhance their 21st century skills in this era of digitalization as they integrate ICT in teaching using blended learning modality. With their adequate knowledge and skills in blended learning modality, teachers are able to adjust, be more confident and organize in planning their lesson and time management. Hence, teachers should have been given seminar-workshop training about blended learning modality with emphasis on module-making and also upgrading of knowledge in ICT skills. The need to improve their acquisition of blended learning knowledge and digital skills are associated with quality education and versatility in implementing teaching strategies. On the other hand, school administrators should provide mental health break for the teachers to ensure that they are mentally, emotionally, and physically healthy after excessive workloads. Similarly, they should have learning management system

wherein all of the modules of the teachers are secured and ready in the portal. To support the teachers, the internet connection in the library must be accessible to both the teachers and students.

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