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Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the family of learners with special educational needs

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought so many disruptions in education because most institutions are not yet ready for the sudden mode of learning. Distance learning is a big challenge for many learners, especially students with special needs. This study explored the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic regarding the implementation of modular distance learning on the parents of learners with special educational needs. A qualitative-narrative research design was employed to explore participants' stories and experiences. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns of themes in the interview data. The results found that difficulty in teaching, lack of time, overloaded lesson activities, and low-quality modules were the challenges encountered by the participants in modular distance learning. Based on the findings, it is essential to create capacity-building activities and programs to equip them with the skills and competencies needed for modular distance learning.

Keywords: Impact of COVID-19 pandemic in education, learners with special education needs, challenges in distance learning, overcoming the challenges, Philippines

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has become a significant public health crisis and created a global impact on the educational system, resulting in the temporary closure of different educational institutions and other learning spaces. The aftermath of this global health crisis stimulated various adjustments in K-12 education. These instructional deviations affect all the schools' stakeholders, primarily the family of learners with special educational needs (Genova, Arora, & Botticello, 2021) [14]. Families play an essential role in the education of their children. Considering the COVID-19 pandemic and the changes it brought to learners, the school must intensify the role of the family as learning facilitators at home to ensure the continuity of learning (Ribeiro, 2021) [26]. This claim is imperative since face-to-face classes are prohibited due to the health crisis. Consequently, schools are forced to adopt various learning platforms to address existing instructional difficulties. Yet, despite implementing various instructional alternatives, concerns and demands are still rising (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020) [5].

Globally, 7.3 million learners who received special education services were crucially affected by the school closure triggered by the COVID-19 outbreak (NCES, 2021) [23]. Local education agencies and school districts in the United States of America confronted the educational challenges through providing auxiliary aids and services and designed practical modifications to any policies, practices, and procedures to guarantee that all learners with disabilities will receive equal opportunity to access educational programs. Other western countries like Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Peru took at least positive measures to ensure access to quality education for learners with disabilities, however, at the same time, they also employed policies and programs that had an unfavorable impact on people with disabilities (Sakellariou, Rotarou, Pilnre, 2020) [27].

The Philippine government established provisions and policies to aid educational challenges amid the pandemic in the country. The Department of Education (DepEd) addressed the crisis in primary education through its Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) under DepEd Order No. 012, s. 2020. The BE-LCP corresponds to the mandate of Section 1, Article XIV of the 1987 Constitution for the state to protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and take relevant actions to make education attainable. Thus, learning delivery modalities were adopted to uphold the right of all citizens to quality education, including varied learning methods to ensure the learning progression of all learners.

Approximately 400,000 Filipino children with special education needs are exposed to the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (United Nations Children's Fund, 2021) ^[32]. Specifically, there are no special provisions and particular programs for viable educational interventions to support learning concerning people with disabilities. The educational provision was for the general population of students and not distinct for learners with special education needs (Toquero, 2020) ^[30].

The COVID-19 pandemic precipitated numerous factors which disrupted learners with special education needs from learning productively. Some of which are short seminars and training for special education teachers and the demand for specialized programs and services for the learners with disabilities and their families. Moreover, the current situation has created a problematic routine for families who work from home while also taking responsibility for ensuring that their children's learning process continues seamlessly. Hence, it is imperative to conduct this study to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the family of learners with special educational needs and come up with practical methods or strategies and relevant programs to address the aforementioned instructional challenges.

1.1 Research questions

This study aimed to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the family of learners with special educational needs with regard to the implementation of modular distance learning. Specifically, this study intends to answer the following research questions:

1. How does the COVID-19 pandemic affect the parents of learners with special educational needs with regard to modular distance learning?
2. How do parents of learners with special educational needs overcome the challenges?
3. What are the recommended programs, approaches or methods to address these challenges?

2. Method

2.1 Research design

This study utilized a qualitative research design. A qualitative research design was employed to collect, analyze, and understand the interviewed data (Aspers & Corte, 2019) ^[3]. Specifically, a narrative research approach was utilized to explore the stories and conceptualize the experiences of the participants in the modular distance learning throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2 Research participants

This study chose two (2) sets of participants through purposive sampling, in which participants were selected for a particular purpose. Criterion-based sampling was utilized to find participants who were willing to provide the information with the help of their knowledge. The first participants were the family of learners with special educational needs (KIs). The second set was special education teachers (SPEDTs) as triangulation interviewees were obtained to validate the results of the primary dataset.

2.3 Research instrument

The research instrument utilized in this study is an in-depth interview guide consisting of a series of interview questions to gather valuable data for this study, including direction

and probing questions to extract helpful information. The researchers utilized the same questions for the teachers' triangulation interviewees, though we made minor modifications to clarify their understanding. For consistency and structure in the interview process, this study used a general interview guide approach to solicit narratives or stories of the participants.

2.4 Data gathering procedure

To perform the study, the researcher sought approval from the college dean. A request letter was sent concerning the conduct of the study. After the approval, the letter was endorsed to the school principals. The informants were given a consent-to-participate form so they will be informed about all the aspects of the study including the risks and benefits of their participation. The interviews were conducted at prearranged times and places and an audio recorder was used with permission from the informants.

2.5 Data analysis

To have storage of documentation that enables tracing the steps of any process and procedure, the researchers utilized an audit trail. The audit trail is a strategy to establish the confirmability of a research study's findings. Confirmability involves establishing that the findings are based on participants' responses instead of the researcher's preconceptions and biases. Coding was initiated to find common concepts as part of thematic analysis thus, the method of thematic analysis was used to extract themes from the text by analyzing the word and sentence structure. Specifically, in analyzing the data, six major steps were undertaken as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) ^[4], to wit: 1) familiarizing yourself with your data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes; and 6) producing the report. Moreover, data source triangulation was used to validate the results of the prime participants of the study by comparing their responses with those of the other set of participants experiencing the same phenomenon.

2.6 Trustworthiness

In a qualitative report investigation that included credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability, I utilized the concept of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) ^[19] work on the assessment of truthfulness. These serve to give a vivid image of the paper's reliability through a thorough study-conducting method (Creswell, 2013) ^[10].

2.7 Ethical considerations

The ethical principles of Halai (2006) were taken into account in the study. These include (1) Informed and Voluntary Consent, (2) Confidentiality of Information Shared and Anonymity of Research Participants, and (3) No Harm to Participants, Beneficence, and Reciprocity.

Informed and voluntary consent was obtained for the participant to understand why they are participating in the research and what the research requires of them. It also allows the participants to make a voluntary decision regarding whether or not to participate in the research study. The second principle was rigorously applied to protect the privacy of the participants. The researcher took steps to properly safeguard sensitive and personal information that participants would not reasonably want to disclose to others or make public.

Moreover, the researcher provided the participants with an outline of the risks and benefits involved for each participant in the study. Information about risks and benefits was written in the consent form. The principle of reciprocity

requires that the researchers actively consider ways in which participants could be compensated for their time and effort; thus, tokens were given to each participant.

Results and Discussions

Challenges in modular distance learning

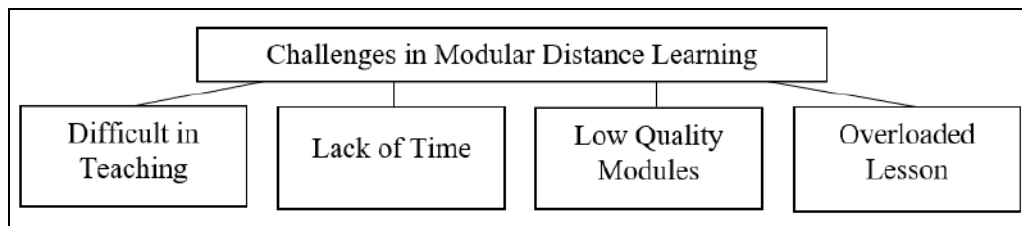


Fig 1: Thematic map displaying the extracted themes related to the challenges encountered by the families of learners with special educational needs in modular distance learning.

Difficulty in teaching

Established on the analysis of the participants' responses, it is evident that the parents of learners with special educational needs find it hard to teach their children the self-learning modules. Parents struggled to teach the modules in a very effective and efficient way, as stated by a key informant:

“I find it difficult to teach my child since I don't know how to teach” (personal communication KI-1, November 2021).

The initial statement is supported by other key informants as articulated:

“My problem is really how to teach that he would understand the module efficiently” (personal communication KI-3, November 2021).

“I really find it difficult to teach the module to my son” (personal communication KI-4 November 2021).

“I find it challenging to teach the activities in the module because I don't know what is the best thing to do so he can understand the lessons immediately” (personal communication KI-6, November 2021).

Moreover, special education teachers 1, 3, and 4 substantiated the abovementioned experiences as stated:

“I believe that the most challenging is teaching their child” (personal communication SPEDT-1, November 2021).

“For me, I think they find it challenging to teach their child” (personal communication SPEDT-3, November 2021).

“The only problem they encountered is the teaching” (personal communication SPEDT-4, November 2021).

Based on the participants' responses, difficulty in teaching is one of the challenges encountered by the majority of parents in modular distance learning. It implies that these parents struggled to fit into a new role as their children's teacher. Part of the participants have not completed their education, and teachers asserted that some parents are functionally illiterate. This claim denotes that parents do not know how to read and write, making it more difficult for them to teach their children the lessons in specific competencies. Hence, there is a strong possibility that they will have issues mentoring their children in subject matters and particular lessons that are unfamiliar to them.

The lack of content knowledge and pedagogy justifies the impediments of parents in delivering instruction to their children. Teachers are experts in content, pedagogy, and interaction in the traditional school context. However, during the emergency shift to remote learning, real-time transmission of ideas, explanation of processes, and

assistance for deeper comprehension appear to be mostly lacking (Garbe, Ogurlu, Logan, *et al.*, 2020; Hawkins, 2020) [13, 35]. Similarly, Brom, Lukavský, Greger, *et al.* (2020) [5] reported that some parents could not displace teachers due to the lack of expertise in subject knowledge and instructional practices. Moreover, parents could not assist their children in engaging in learning activities because of the lack of understanding of some concepts or lessons (Olivio, 2021) [24].

Lack of Time: Another theme the researchers had extracted based on the key informants' responses was the lack of time. This research determined that parents' lack of time for their children's education is an inevitable concern throughout modular distance learning, as stated by a key informant:

“It is really difficult for me because I don't have time to teach my child because of my job” (personal communication KI-1, November 2021).

Key informant 2 affirmed the previous statement as she said:

“We don't have time to help our kids because of our work” (personal communication KI-2, November 2021).

Furthermore, special education teachers 2 and 3 confirmed the accounts of the above stated responses of the participants:

“They cannot guide or teach their children because of their work” (personal communication SPEDT-2, November 2021).

“The parents don't have time to teach their children because most of our parents here have a work; so, they don't have the time to assist their children” (personal communication SPEDT-3, November 2021).

It is clear from the given responses that parents' lack of time due to their work responsibilities is an apparent problem in modular distance learning. Most of the teachers affirmed that this issue transpires throughout the learning modality. Low-income families must work much harder to meet their family's needs. Many parents temporarily lost their livelihoods due to the pandemic, forcing them to seek alternative means of income. These situations imply that parents with full-time jobs found it hard to support their children in completing their modules. Their jobs consume their time, which hinders them from participating in their children's learning tasks. This claim can be inferred that parents prioritize their work over their children's modules because providing food on the table is essential than

submitting thoroughly answered modules. The result is similar to the study conducted by Caplan (2008) [8], which revealed that family members' personal and financial support activities are the primary reasons for inadequate participation in their children's education.

Parents' time engagement in the new educational norm is a critical aspect of successfully implementing modular distance learning. Parents play a vital role as home facilitators. Their primary role in modular learning is to connect and guide the child. With this in mind, parents must devote more time and effort to their children's education than they did in prior school years. However, this appears to be a challenge for working parents who manage jobs, housework, and their children's education. Brown and Beckett (2007) [7] described parental engagement as the time offered by parents in a variety of school and home-based activities and instruction to improve their children's education. This engagement includes learning activities such as school-related discussions, homework assistance, and reading with children (Sanders, 2013) [28]. Thus, the inability of parents to provide time for giving further instruction and supervision may have a significant impact on children's learning outcomes, particularly during school closures (Brossard, Cardoso, Kamei, *et al.*, 2020) [6].

Overloaded lesson activities

One of the emerging themes is overloaded lesson activities. It was evident that overloaded lesson activities were one of the challenges encountered by some of the participants in modular distance learning. The theme was extracted from the responses as stated:

“Too many activities and we cannot finish all the modules right away” (personal communication KI-4, November 2021).

Other key informants shared the same sentiment as they enunciated:

“The modules have so much activities; considering that the child has special needs” (personal communication KI-5, November 2021).

“There are so many activities that need to be accomplished on time” (personal communication KI-6, November 2021).

The correspondence of the key informants indicated that they have difficulties in modular distance learning due to overloaded lesson activities. These parents deemed the module very upsetting because of the large number of tasks needed to be finished and submitted on time, especially since these modules would be completed by learners with special needs. Notably, specific duties entail drawings, demonstrations, and other output-based activities. It was

very challenging to meet all of the tasks in the modules, especially when pupils were expected to complete all of the modules in a limited period. Unfortunately, the responses of the key informants were not supported by the special education teachers.

This obstacle in modular distance learning was corroborated in research conducted by Jalali Sarvestani, Ahmadi, and Farhang Rik (2020) [16], which posited that parents and guardians complain about the excess quantity and complexity of modules they must address. The results confirmed the claim of Olivio (2021) [24] that parents regarded the activities as far too extensive to accomplish in the allocated time. Dangle and Sumaoang (2020) [11] reported a similar situation in which parents expressed tension over the excessive number of tasks from the self-learning modules. Their studies also highlighted that this difficulty considerably influenced both the parents' and students' psychological distress levels.

Low-quality modules

Based on the participants' responses, it was examined that the low quality of self-learning modules is one of the vital issues in modular distance learning. The problem is evident as stated by a key informant:

“Some of the modules are not clear. I find it difficult to read. Some of the pictures are blurred” (personal communication KI-4, November 2021).

Special education teacher 2 added the same idea as asserted:

“Some parts of the modules are not clear” (personal communication SPEDT-2, November 2021).

One significant theme that emerged from the participants' responses is the low-quality modules. It can be noted from the feedback that some of the printed modules contained vague contents. In detail, graphic representations and written context were not displayed clearly, making them hard to identify and interpret.

During the first quarter of 2021, the Department of Education (DepEd) discovered numerous flaws in the self-learning modules. The sheer volume of mistakes and lapses is proof of the low quality of the distributed modules (Dela Cruz, 2021) [12]. Similarly, Dangle and Sumaoang (2020) [11] explored the challenges experienced by parents and students during modular distance learning. They found that some modules do not have clear instructions and explanations and that students have difficulty answering them. In addition, the pictures in the modules are not clear, and the provided answer lines are too short.

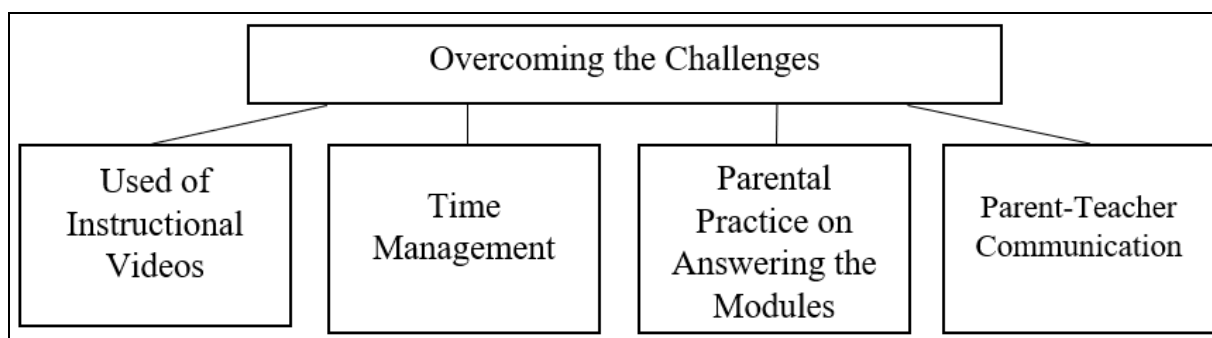


Fig 2: Thematic map depicting the extracted themes regarding how the families of learners with special educational needs overcome the challenges in modular distance learning.

Used of instructional videos

Viewing instructional videos on the internet is one of the ways participants overcame challenges during modular distance learning. Parents make use of the available instructional videos to help themselves in teaching their children as stated:

“I watch videos on the internet so I can understand the topics in the module and teach my child well” (personal communication KI-1, November 2021).

Other key informants added the same idea as stated:

“I told my son to watch videos on the internet” (personal communication KI-2, November 2021).

“I let her watch the video” (personal communication KI-3, November 2021).

The abovementioned statements are supported by special education teachers 1 and 2 as they suggested:

“If they have internet in their home, they can utilize it and let their child watch the videos available on YouTube” (personal communication SPEDT-1, November 2021).

“There are videos available on YouTube that can help their children learn the specific competency” (personal communication SPEDT-2, November 2021).

It is evident from the responses that parents utilize instructional videos uploaded on the internet to support their children's learning. A participant shared that she watched videos on the internet to guide her child effectively. Other participants take advantage of the instructional videos to assist their children directly. Moreover, teachers encourage parents to employ instructional videos uploaded on the DepEd YouTube channel to grasp their problem in modular distance learning.

The use of instructional videos has proved capable of assisting parents and learners since these can be watched repeatedly and contain audio-visual substance, allowing the learning process at home to be just as tangible as learning at school (Suci, Eva, & Tri, 2021) ^[29]. The use of instructional videos can generate a retention reinforcement for material information, even if the material is challenging for learners (Wang & Antonenko, 2017) ^[33]. According to Cihak, Smith, McMahon, *et al.* (2015) ^[9], as cited in Wong, (2015), watching an instructional video is a strategy in which students watch a video followed by an opportunity to learn the competency and proven to be an effective learning strategy for students with disabilities. The claims are consistent with the findings of Mechling (2005), Bellini and Akullian (2007), and Collins and Collect-Klingenberg (2017), that using instructional videos to provide learning reinforcement for learners with special needs is a highly effective method. However, the results contradict, and in certain instances, researchers have concluded that using any video content does not benefit pupils in their learning process. Moreover, the study revealed that the use of instructional videos varies regarding students' willingness and perception to watch and adopt the online video content for their learning (Ulrich *et al.*, 2019; Pappas *et al.*, 2017; Zhang *et al.*, 2006) ^[31, 36, 37].

Time management

Another theme was identified by this research from the participants' statements on how they managed the challenges of adopting modular distance learning. As stated, their time management was an aid that equipped them to guide their children:

“Every morning, I help my son with his module so I can

spend my time sewing in the evening” (personal communication KI-4, November 2021).

Another key informant shared the same proposition as enunciated:

“I made and posted a schedule on our wall. It's like a bulleted to-do-list. It's like my own timeline, so I can manage my time” (personal communication KI-6, November 2021).

Furthermore, special education teacher 2 validated the above-mentioned responses:

“There are parents who cannot assist their child in the morning because of their work, so they spend time helping their child every night” (personal communication SPEDT-2, November 2021).

This notion is noted from the responses above that parents use their time management abilities to assist their children with school tasks. One parent stated that he allocated his time between helping his child and accomplishing his obligations. Another parent remarked that she constructed a task timeline to manage her time effectively. Accordingly, a teacher affirmed that parents scheduled their duties in the morning and evening to help them manage their responsibilities.

The result conforms to the study of Milkie, Mattingly, Nomaguchi, *et al.* (2004) ^[22]. They explored the association between parental perspectives of the significance of time management and their capacity to participate in their children's education. The study revealed that parents employed time management strategies to promote positive parent-child interaction despite time constraints imposed by work schedules and other external demands. Time management is the process of effectively utilizing time to undertake and accomplish a specified activity within a time constraint (Harris, 2008) ^[15]. Regarding time constraints issues, parents' ability to manage time is proven to be beneficial and is correlated to children's academic success. Other outcomes, such as achievement and motivation, have been discovered to be intrinsically associated with time management (Wolters, Won, & Hussain, 2017) ^[34].

Parental practice on answering the modules

Based on the participants' accounts, it is evident that the parents' initiative to answer their children's modules was a step they took to overcome the challenges they encountered in modular distance learning. This malpractice is apparent, as stated by a key informant:

“I will be the one to answer the module to finish it immediately” (personal communication KI-4, November 2021).

Key informant 5 revealed the same action as stated:

“I am the one who is answering his module” (personal communication KI-5, November 2021).

This idea can be implied from the participants' responses that parental practice of answering the learner's self-learning module is how these parents overcome their concerns in modular distance learning. Some parents are forced to answer the self-learning modules due to their child's inability to read and their capacity to respond to the activity sheets alone. Although parents have very little time to guide their children, they are still required to submit all the modules with complete answers every week. To present just for compliance, parents exhaust all available options, including answering the modules on behalf of their children. These circumstances suggest that the learners are no longer

involved in answering their modules. Apparently, the answer sheets will be graded based on the students' performance, granted that they did not answer their modules and activity sheets. This wrong practice was not mentioned by any of the teachers from the other set of participants. Hence, it indicates that teachers are knowingly unmindful of the parents' academic dishonesty.

Luaña (2021) ^[20] investigated the ways and practices of parents in guiding their children in answering self-learning modules at home. His research revealed that the malpractice of parents answering their children's modules is an inevitable consequence of the challenges experienced by the parents, which include: their children's poor reading and writing skills; time constraints due to work and household chores; having too many children to attend to; having too difficult lessons and subjects; and having too many learning activities in the modules. The study emphasizes that parents' prime reason they have resorted to answering their children's self-learning modules is their children's poor reading and writing abilities. Since the learning delivery modality is modular distance learning, a task is necessary because all the lessons are written. As a result, the children's weak reading and writing abilities may negatively influence the learning process since they have difficulties comprehending the lessons.

Parent-teacher communication

Parent-teacher communication is one of the emerging themes. Based on the analysis, some parents communicate with teachers to resolve their concerns regarding modular distance learning. The theme was extracted from the responses as stated:

“I also informed the teacher that my husband and I have jobs, which is why we don’t have time to help our son. I immediately asked her what I should do to help my child”

(personal communication KI-2, November 2021).

Key informant 3 affirmed the previous statement as she said:

“When I took the module, I talked to his teacher. We talked about my problem with my son” (personal communication KI-3, November 2021).

The statements are supported by the special education teachers 1, 3 and 4 as they stated:

“They communicated to us professionally. They approach us if they have problems” (personal communication SPEDT-1, November 2021).

“If they have concerns, they send us messages” (personal communication SPEDT-3, November 2021).

“They really contacted us with their problems with their children” (personal communication SPEDT-4, November 2021).

This notion is extracted from the parents' accounts that communication with the teacher is one step they took to transcend their problems in modular distance learning. They utilized the use of gadgets to communicate with the teachers. On the other hand, teachers affirmed the role of parents in settling their concerns. They received messages and calls from parents regarding the current instructional issues.

The result is parallel to the findings of Adams, Harris, and Jones (2016) ^[1], in which parents of learners with special needs communicate with teachers to adjust more effectively to their responsibilities, roles, and actions to improve students' developmental outcomes continuously. Furthermore, the result conforms to the study of Krisnawati (2021) ^[18], to which they illustrate the implementation of parents' roles as teachers at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study revealed that parents carried out learning for their children at home by communicating with teachers to seek support or an explanation of the given tasks.

Recommended programs, approaches, or methods

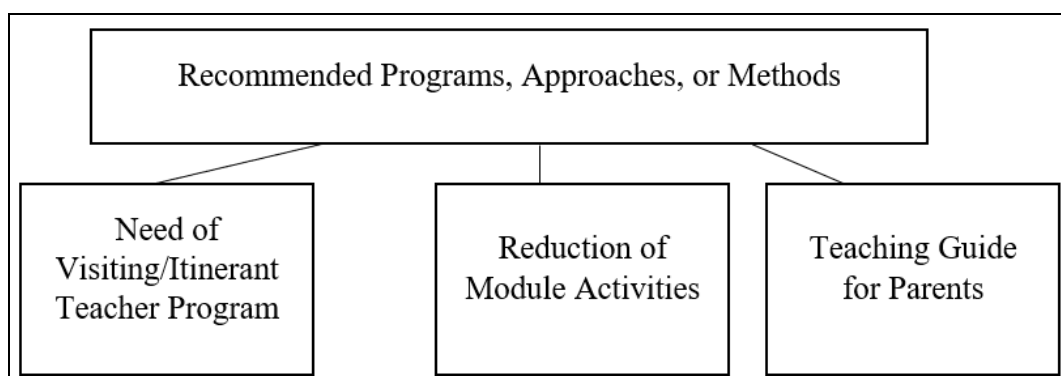


Fig 3: Thematic map showing the extracted themes on the recommended programs, approaches, or methods.

Need of Visiting/Itinerant Teacher Program: The informants were asked about the possible approaches, methods or programs that should be employed or implemented. It was proposed that there must be a visiting teacher who will assist in teaching the children, as stated by a key informant:

“I suggest that the teachers should come here with us to help and teach for at least an hour or two” (personal communication KI-1, November 2021).

The initial statement is supported by other key informants as suggested:

“Maybe the teachers could go to every house” (personal communication KI-2, November 2021).

“Hopefully, teachers will visit the children. They should at least teach the module so the children can understand” (personal communication KI-4, November 2021).

Moreover, the majority of the special education teachers suggested the same solution, as stated:

“Possible programs I would suggest is to conduct home visitation. It should be home visitation with teaching. A visit with instruction. I don’t know what the right term for that is” (personal communication SPEDT-2, November 2021).

“Our parents are not trained so we need to visit the pupils” (personal communication SPEDT-3, November 2021).

“For now, the best thing we can do is to visit the house of our pupils since the instruction the primary problem” (personal communication SPEDT-4, November 2021).

It is coherent on the accounts of the families that teachers must visit each family’s home to deliver instruction to the learners. It was requested that teachers should visit and lecture for no more than one or two hours if at all possible. Teachers were also convinced to conduct a visitation since effective instruction is evidently disrupted throughout modular distance learning.

The uncertainty on the concept of home visitation was asserted by the SPED teacher 2. In her statement, she is not definite on the correct term to be used on the said program. She suggested that an instruction must be included in the home visit. The Department of Education (DepEd) categorized home visitation as a program where teachers will visit learners in their homes and converse with the parents to determine the problems of their children’s absenteeism and to gather more about the students and their family background. It is explicitly stated in the definition that home visitation is a service that is limited to recognizing children’s educational issues and intervention, as well as acquiring the students’ and family’s situations and conditions; accordingly, no teaching activity or instruction was incorporated into the program. Thus, it was profoundly examined and reviewed that the appropriate plan of action that the participants refer to is the imposition of an itinerant or visiting teacher program.

Itinerant or visiting teachers are educators who travel to provide one-on-one assistance to a student who has a learning disability, behavioral issue, or needs special education assistance. Itinerants see children on their caseloads in various venues, including homes, early childhood centers, schools, community-based programs, and hospitals, rather than working as typical classroom teachers (Meers, 2013) ^[21]. Regarding the difficulty of parents in teaching their children with special educational needs through distance learning, it is evident that the need for a visiting or itinerant teacher is distinctly imperative and necessary.

Reduction of module activities

Another theme emerged from the participants’ remarks on the possible solutions to the challenges concerning modular distance learning. This study suggests that the number of activities in the self-learning module must be reduced, as articulated:

“They should reduce the number of activities in the module” (personal communication KI-5, November 2021).

A participant shared the same proposition as stated:

“I suggest that they should reduce the children’s tasks” (personal communication KI-6, November 2021).

Based on the key informants’ responses, it is clearly comprehensible that the activities or tasks imprinted in the self-learning modules must be reduced. This proposal is widely anticipated since it was previously mentioned in the result of this study that one of the challenges parents face in modular distance learning is the overloaded activities in the self-learning modules that must be submitted on time. The suggested means are not supported by any of the teachers from the other set of participants.

Similarly, the research conducted by Dangle and Samoang

(2020) ^[11] suggested that participants indicated that the school should remove extraneous content and minimize the activities in the module so that mastery will be gained as much as possible.

Teaching guide for parents

Finally, the last theme extracted based on the participants’ responses is the teaching guide for parents. Based on the responses, families must have a teaching guide to teach their children effectively. A key informant suggested the notion:

“I suggest that they provide us with a guide on how to teach the topic since we are now the teachers of our children” (personal communication KI-3, November 2021).

Key informant 6 shared the same proposition as stated:

“I also suggest that there should be an instruction given to us. An instruction for the parents to be read before teaching the child. They should provide us with our role or things to be done so we will be guided accordingly” (personal communication KI-6, November 2021).

It was suggested by the key informants that one possible solution to address their concerns about assisting their children in modular distance learning is to have a teaching guide provided along with the self-learning modules. Both parents shared the same idea that obtaining a teaching guide would assist them in teaching their children effectively. Unfortunately, this notion is not supported by any special education teachers from the other set of participants.

This study presented an initial result that difficulty in teaching is one of the challenges the parents of learners with special educational needs encounter. The result also revealed that the lack of knowledge and experience is the factor that gives rise to the recognizable issue. Hence, parents must be specifically well-informed about their role by giving them a clear teaching guide or instruction on how to deliver the self-learning module efficiently and effectively. Johnson (2020) ^[17] stated that to achieve learning for the children at home during distance learning, teachers must provide definite directions, instructional strategies, and ways to achieve the learning objectives.

Conclusion

It is evident from the findings of this study that the COVID-19 pandemic has a significant impact on the families of learners with special educational needs. Families faced various challenges in modular distance learning, specifically on delivering effective instruction at home. Modular distance learning will not be effective in our country unless the challenges encountered by the families of learners with special educational needs are addressed. Modular distance learning will be successful if the learner understands the meaning of the module contents on their own and their parents ensure ample support.

Implications

This study is beneficial to school administrators since the results of this study highlight the difficulties that parents encounter in modular distance learning. The result of the study serves as a helpful reference in identifying and solving problems that affect the performance and development of learners with special educational needs. This idea would guide them in developing rules, regulations, and programs that benefit parents and children. The output of the study is significant, especially for special education teachers. They would be aware of the current situation and provide

enhancement activities and teaching revisions. In this way, they would be able to address the needs of the parents and the learners. Various continuing studies regarding the pandemic's impact on education should be accessible through different learning resources. The majority of the studies analyzed how teachers and students interact with the new normal of education. This research contributes to the literature by focusing on parents of learners with special educational needs and their experiences as the children's home teachers in distance learning. This study could be used as a reference for future research on addressing the COVID-19 challenges in the educational sector, specifically, the problems parents encounter in modular distance learning.

Limitations

This study used non-random sampling, indicating that it lacks the representativeness of the participants. Because of the small sample size, this study should not apply to all parents. Future research may investigate a broader geographic scope. Due to the ongoing public health and social measures, the researcher encountered difficulties reaching out to the rest of the family members of learners with special educational needs. Hence, they were not included to share their insights for this study. This study only involved parents whose children were enrolled in modular distance learning. This study did not incorporate online distance learning, radio, and television-based distance learning and other learning modalities.

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