PARENTING AMIDST THE PANDEMIC: THE CASE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN ADOLESCENTS' READING ENGAGEMENT AND MODULAR DISTANCE LEARNING

DENARD V. BUDAO
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5441-7272
denard.budao@gmail.com
Palawan State University[1], Palawan National School[2]
Puerto Princesa City, Philippines

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study was aimed at understanding and analyzing the roles of parents in the reading engagement and modular distance learning of their children, the challenges met, and the approaches employed in their children's learning activities in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. To gain a profound understanding of the phenomenon, a case study method was used. Eight parents of Junior High School students served as the respondents, majority of whom attained high school education and were from low-income families. Semi-structured interviews were personally carried out to gather valuable information. Thematic analysis was applied in dealing with the data obtained from personal dialogues. Generated themes revealed that parents carried out roles such as rule-setter, monitor, giver of attention, encouragement and inspiration, and provider. However, parental involvement in these trying times was tough because of limited vocabulary, scarce knowledge about the lessons, and inadequate English communication and comprehension skills. Prevalence of poverty hampered the parents in intellectually assisting their children, which eventually led them to utilize dispensed parenting approaches like relying on Google Translate to interpret unfamiliar words, using the Internet to look for needed information, consulting the dictionary to unlock vocabulary issues, and seeking the help of more knowledgeable relatives. This study established that parenting amidst the pandemic is an arduous task, especially in the economically disadvantaged families. Incidences of low self-efficacy and weak parental motivation trigger children's poor regard for learning and hamper their drive to engage in reading activities that are deemed helpful in their literacy advancement. It is therefore suggested that a family literacy program be developed and be introduced to bolster a solid home-school partnership. Through this, appreciation for reading and learning will be inculcated in the minds of the adolescent learners.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, parental involvement, reading engagement and distance learning, adolescent learners, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Problems about reading education and reading achievement still arise despite the different actions being carried out at the local, regional, and national levels. Several concerns have surfaced in relation to these areas in the past years.

One is the result of the Programme for International Student Assessment or PISA 2018 where the Philippines ranked lowest among the 79 participating countries in terms of reading comprehension. The outcome of the said assessment revealed that in the Overall Reading Literacy scale, 15-year-old Filipino students received a mean score of 340 points, much lower

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than the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development or OECD average of 487 points. (Department of Education, 2019).

Another report was the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Matrix or SEA-PLM published in December of 2020 by the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) with the support of the Australian Council for Educational Research. According to the findings of that study, majority of the fifth-grade Filipino students had a reading competency level that can be compared with that of the first-year primary school learners, with 27% of these fifth graders still at bottommost level where they could only "match single words to an image of a familiar object or concept" (Balinlin, 2020).

In addition to the aforementioned concerns were the results of the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory or Phil-IRI reported in many regions in the country. Some of the reported ones included those in the Cordillera Administrative Region as well as in the Bicol Region, where thousands of students were found to be struggling when it comes to reading comprehension.

Then, here came the COVID-19 pandemic, where the education department became among the significantly affected sectors. The big test was how to deal with the challenges that brought about poor results in terms of reading and literacy, especially that the Philippines is still under a national health crisis. Homeschooling or distance learning became the trend in response to "The New Normal" system of education. Here, parental involvement is underscored in carrying out scholastic activities of students following the new framework and plan of action in conformity with the learning continuity plans of various educational institutions.

As the Department of Education (DepEd) commits itself to delivering accessible, quality, liberating, and safe basic education services in the midst of this crucial period, the parents are enjoined to become active partners of teachers and school administrators in ensuring sustained transfer of learning in spite of the health emergency everyone is facing.

In view of the current setup of education, it was observed that there were students who obtained low grades in the first two quarters of the school year 2020-2021. The English teacher of these students had an assumption that learners were possibly having trouble in understanding the reading materials because of the common sections of the self-learning modules or SLMs where they had shown low or even poor comprehension. The worse part of this had to do with portions of these learning materials that had incomplete answers and responses to questions that were unintelligible. And disturbingly, at times, the items were left completely unanswered. The teacher-researcher assumed whether the parents of these students involved themselves in the reading engagements of the learners and in the accomplishment of their SLMs. The researcher, being a teacher of English in the junior high school, drew inspiration from these scenarios and found parental involvement in the adolescents' reading engagements and accomplishment of SLMs worth conducting a case study on.

The Significance of Parental Involvement in Students' Academic Engagements: A Quick Look

Parental engagement has a favorable effect on children's academic achievement; thus, good parent-child relationships are essential for children's healthy development and learning. (Jeynes, 2007; Swick, 2008). Conforming to the findings of Schunk and Zimmerman's (2007) study, adults and peers serve as important role models in the lives of youngsters. They furthered, "seeing a successful model may lead observers (the learners) to believe that if the model can learn they can as well. As students perform actions and note their learning progress their sense of self-efficacy is strengthened, which maintains their motivation for learning."

Tekin (2011) cited the work of Jean Piaget concerning the theory regarding children's cognitive development. This highlights the importance of children's interactions with their peers and their family members. The main premise of Piaget's theory is that children are active learners who have persistent drive to align their own view of the real world and the external realities in the surroundings that they encounter.

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Lev Vygotsky in 1978 hypothesized that at one stage, children might learn and succeed on their own. He then went on to discuss another level, which refers to children's abilities when interacting socially with skilled tutors, who may model behaviors as well as give verbal guidance to the children. Vygotsky referred to this as "cooperative or collaborative dialogue." The concept of "More Knowledgeable Other" or MKO is connected to this, where – in relation to certain tasks, processes, or concepts – MKO refers to a person who has a better comprehension or ability level than the learner (Mcleod, 2018).

For many years, the importance of communication between parents and teachers has been researched and emphasized, as evidenced by study completed decades ago. The work of Urie Bronfenbrenner, as cited by Tan (2012), underscored that because parents are part of the "microsystem," parental involvement can have a tremendous impact on students' academic progress. Here, microsystem refers to the immediate environment of the learners as reflected in the Ecological Systems Theory of Bronfenbrenner.

Another model stresses the importance of the participation of parents in the academic endeavors of the children. The Epstein Model for Parental Involvement aims to assist families with parenting skills, family support, understanding of child and adolescent development, and creating home environments that encourage learning at each age and grade level (Epstein et al., 2018).

In keeping with the psychological viewpoint, Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, and Hoover-Dempsey (2005) explained that the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model of the Parental Involvement Process spells out the reasons why parents engage themselves in their children's education and how their participation creates impact on children's learning progress. Likewise, Manzon, Miller, Hong, and Khong (2015), included in their book the graphical design of the said model to explain parent engagement in education. The model includes five levels, namely: (A.1) Personal motivators of parents, their perceptions of the invitations to be involved, and life context variables; (A.2) Forms of parent involvement; (B) Learning mechanisms used by parents during involvement activities; (C) [mediated by] Student perceptions of learning mechanisms used by parents; (D) Attributes of students which are conducive to achievement; and (E) Achievement of student.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study was aimed at understanding and analyzing the involvement of parents in the reading engagement of adolescent junior high school students who studied under the distance learning delivery modalities, specifically those who opted printed modular distance learning.

In particular, this study sought to: 1) point out the roles that the parents played in their adolescent children's reading engagement and modular distance learning; 2) identify the difficulties they encountered in their children's reading engagements and accomplishment of self-learning modules for distance learning; and 3) determine the approaches they employed in involving themselves in the learning activities of their children as well as their modular learning in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

To gain information-rich responses from the participants, the researcher utilized a qualitative research study design, specifically a case study. A case study is an empirical method that investigates a current phenomenon in depth and within its real-world environment, especially when the lines between the phenomenon and context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2009). In this research, the "why" and "how" of the parental involvement process in the reading engagement and modular distance learning of the adolescent junior high school students were sought.

Creswell (2007) suggested "there should be no more than four to five cases in a single study." He held the belief that this number could provide plenty of opportunities to uncover case themes and undertake cross-case theme analysis Wa-Mbaleka (2018), on the other hand, recommended that a minimum of eight participants in a case study would be enough as data saturation

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level could be reached with this number of research partakers.

This study, therefore, involved eight purposively chosen parents of students who belonged to the twenty-ninth and forty-fourth sections of the ninth-grade level of Palawan National School's Junior High School. The study took place in Puerto Princesa City.

The identification and selection of participants were purposive to gain responses that were rich in information coupled with observations that helped in the phenomenon of interest. The selection of the research participants was done by means of identifying the students who got low grades in the English subject for the first and second quarters of the School Year 2020-2021. These students were also the ones observed to have shown low or poor comprehension with regard to the learning tasks in the self-learning modules (SLMs) that they needed to accomplish. The observed portions of the SLMs contained incomplete answers to the learning tasks, incomprehensible responses to some comprehension questions, and the worse, unanswered items.

Interview guide questions were utilized in obtaining relevant information that helped in achieving the goal of this study. The interview guide questions were set in semi-structured discussion format in which the researcher did follow-up queries. To ensure the effectiveness of the interview guide questions, these underwent validation and translation by experts which comprised four college professors handling language arts, reading, literature and translation courses, and three high school teachers teaching English and Filipino.

The interview guide questions, initially written in English by the researcher, were translated into Filipino so that the interviewees could comfortably answer in their first language and the researcher could gain exhaustive and information-rich responses. To test the effectiveness of this translation, the material underwent the following phases: First, the 'Back Translation' technique where the material translated into Filipino went through another translation, this time into English. This was done by a language teacher who had never seen the

original material. The product of the Back Translation was analyzed if the framed questions were identical in meaning to the original one. Subsequently, the interview guide questions translated into Filipino were administered to non-participants in this study. This was done for readability test and comprehension check, all aimed at clarity, accuracy, and naturalness of the material. Here, their feedback and suggestions were considered to make further refinement in the research instrument.
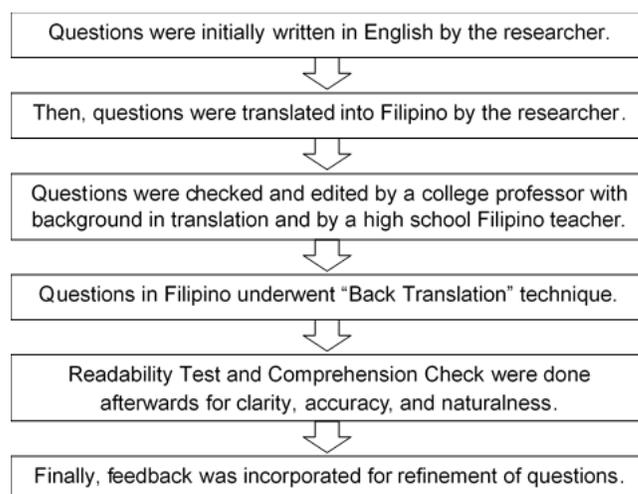

Figure 1. Phases of Validation of the Interview Guide Questions

Oliver-Hoyo & Allen (2006) specified that the use of varied data sources would help in guiding the researcher to investigate the topic in wider and deeper perspectives. Thus, this study incorporated thematic analysis, content analysis and observations.

When the planning and the development of the design of the study as well as the preparation of the research instrument were done, identification of prospects through collection of data in the self-learning modules (SLMs) was conducted next. Also, the grades the students obtained in previous grading periods for the school year were considered. Those who got low grades were the subjects in choosing the partakers in this research work.

After these, the parents of the students were identified. The parent-participants were reached through the contact numbers which were

gotten from the class advisers. The parents were informed about the objectives of the study. Once they learned the rationale for conducting this research, the informed consent forms were given to them to let them know of the parameters of the study. They were assured that their identity and the information that they shared would be dealt with utmost confidentiality, where their names would be substituted with corresponding codes.

The researcher then visited the houses of the parent-participants to conduct the interviews with them by means of voice recording. In the interviews, the researcher made use of the semi-structured interview guide questions to further ask probing questions. The semi-structured interviews and observations were conducted in consideration of the minimum public health standards that the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases has set. Throughout the conduct of the study, the following health and safety procedures were followed: face masks and face shields were worn, social distancing was observed, and washing/sanitizing of hands was done.

Both thematic analysis and content analysis were utilized in dealing with the data derived from personal interviews and available documents. Thematic coding allowed the researcher to arrange the texts according to categories, therefore, establishing a "framework of thematic ideas" about the phenomenon (Gibbs, 2007). The researcher specifically followed the 10-step data analysis model and coding procedure in qualitative research proposed by Wa-Mbaleka (2018) with the following coding process: 1st Level - assigning of codes; 2nd Level - categorizing the codes; and 3rd Level - classifying the categories into themes (Wa-Mbaleka, 2018). After the coding procedure, the researcher organized all the emerging themes and set them for the discussion and interpretation of the results. Recurring concepts or ideas were considered in this study, signifying that the data were of high relevance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The themes generated from the data analysis were used to address the research questions in this study.

The results of the thematic analysis were based entirely on how the participants assumed their tasks as "para-teachers." DepEd BE-LCP mentioned that "Any member of the family or other stakeholders in the community need to serve as para-teachers" (DepEd, 2020, p. 37) since the "actual teachers" could not carry out a face-to-face instruction.

Table 1
Demographics

Variables	Responses	F
Gender	Female	7
	Male	1
Parenting Status	Joint Parenting - Biological	5
	Solo Parenting - Biological	1
	Joint Parenting - Surrogate	2
Age Range	30 to 39	3
	40 to 49	3
	50 to 59	1
	60 to 69	1
Levels of Education	Elementary Graduate	1
	High School Graduate	4
	With Years/Units in College	1
	Completed College Degree	2
Source of Income	Working as Minimum Wage Earner	3
	None/No Work (Housewife)	4
	Pension (Retired Government Official)	1

Of the eight participants, seven were female and one was male. Five of them were in joint biological parenting, meaning they still lived with their spouses, while there was one who took care of the responsibilities as a solo (widow) parent. Two of them served as surrogate parents because, for long, the biological parents were working – one outside the city and the other one was employed as overseas worker. Three of the participants aged between 30-39, three between 40-49, while one was in 50s, and another one in the 60s. Regarding their levels of education, one finished elementary, four finished high school, one earned two-year college units, and two completed baccalaureate studies. Three of these participants worked as minimum wage earners, four were housewives and had no work, and one was a retired government personnel.

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1. Roles that the parents played in their adolescent children's reading engagement and modular distance learning

Table 2
Parents' roles in the adolescents' reading engagements and modular distance learning

Themes	Categories
1. Parent as a rule-setter and monitor	A. Gives sanction - No SLMs no cellphone B. Sets time for the accomplishment of SLMs C. Parent keeps track of child's accomplishment of SLMs D. Gives the child constant reminder to answer SLMs E. Forces the child to answer SLMs
2. Parent as a source of attention	A. Allots time for the accomplishment of SLMs B. Asks the child if he has questions then the parent helps C. Gives time to sit, read, and help in answering SLM D. Parent does constant follow-up if child's SLMs are done E. Parent helps in explaining parts that are difficult
3. Parent as a fount of encouragement and inspiration	A. Always tells the child that reading is important, that it will help him learn many things B. Encourages the child by saying positive words C. Parent says "If parent loses hope, child loses hope too" D. Parent encourages the child to maintain or even get higher scores in tests E. Parent praises the child when getting correct answers F. Prompts the child that reading is important to understand the lessons, one will not understand the lesson when it is not read G. Tells the child to read and not be like their parents who find it difficult to understand English
4. Parent as a provider	A. Provides the child with the load for the internet use B. Do not have a collection of books and reading materials at home due to: (1) Lack of interest in reading, (2) Financial constraints – no budget or inadequate income to buy reading materials, not a priority to purchase these materials, and (3) Unavailability of time for reading (time is devoted to working and other household chores)

The first set of themes under the first research objective had to do with the roles that the parents played in their adolescent children's reading engagement and SLM accomplishment.

In the first and second themes, majority of parent-participants indicated that they set rules and monitor their children by setting the schedule for the accomplishment of these materials, giving constant reminders to answer their SLMs, and keeping track of the children's homework. Some of them signified that they gave the children sanctions when the SLMs were not regularly accomplished. As for the giving of attention, the participants mentioned that they allotted time with their youngsters in answering the SLMs in English and checking on them if there were parts that they had difficulty with. Parents and other members of the family, being the older ones who could supervise the learners at home, assumed the authority to lay down rules that would be followed by the children. Corresponding monitoring schemes were also required in the process.

In the third theme, the participants indicated that they gave their children encouragement in doing their SLMs by saying positive words, praising them when they got good scores in the activities, and prompting the adolescents to keep on reading materials in English to hone their skills in understanding and using the language.

As for the fourth theme, the participants mentioned that they provided the children load for internet which was needed in doing research. Other than that, the parents indicated nothing more. When they were asked about the provision of learning materials at home, a category surfaced worth highlighting because the participants apparently missed a very important role – which is that of a provider of educational and other learning needs. This is an indication that the participants, as gleaned from observation notes, were experiencing poverty which led them to putting the provision of reading materials at home at the bottom of their priority list. This category also generated information that reading is not given huge importance in the households because of, aside from financial limitations, lack of interest in reading and time constraints.

As conveyed by the participants, it is viewed that parents play roles that are pivotal in their children's education, especially now that the globe is in the midst of a health crisis. Now more

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than ever, children need parental involvement to be functional members of the community of learners.

2. Difficulties encountered in children's reading engagements and accomplishment of self-learning modules for distance learning

Table 3
Challenges that confronted the participants in helping the children with their SLMs

Themes	Categories
1. Difficulty with vocabulary and structure	A. Difficult words B. Hard-to-understand sentences and questions C. English: A tough language to comprehend D. Required writing activities
2. Limited knowledge on the topic	A. Unaccustomed to topics B. Parents do not know the topic C. Prior knowledge about the topic
3. Other parent-related concerns	A. Before VS present lessons: Gaps between parent-child generations B. Deems that lessons now are advance C. Level of education affects knowledge about the topic

To shed light on the first theme under the second research objective, it was noted from the personal conversations with the parents that assisting the learners with the accomplishment of the SLMs in the English subject was a difficult task for them. They underscored that the primary problem that confronted them was understanding the materials in English. According to them, dealing with difficult words is the main reason among the several ones that they encountered. They made mention that hard-to-understand sentences and questions just furthered the challenge in their roles as para-teachers. In addition, the participants cited that the writing activities which required construction of sentences and paragraphs became an additional burden. All these boiled down to, again according to their responses, the perception that English language is difficult to understand.

In view of the second theme under this research objective, the participants further shared that another aspect that became burdensome on their part as they assisted their children with their SLMs and reading engagements was the unfamiliarity with the lessons and sparse knowledge about the topics in their modules in Grade 9 English.

The third theme under the second research objective revealed this claim of the parents: The gap between the parents' generation and children's generation drew the dichotomy in the lessons that they learned from school. This gap is a hindrance to parental involvement in the academic endeavors of the learners. The parents stated that the current lessons of their children were highly advance compared with the lessons that they had during their time.

3. Approaches employed in the learning activities of children as well as their modular learning in light of the COVID-19 pandemic

The third research objective yielded two essential themes in line with parental involvement in the children's modular distance learning – the dispensed involvement approach and direct assistive involvement approach.

Parents' responses that led to the theme, "dispensed involvement approach" revealed that the parents could not understand the lessons themselves, thus they looked for alternatives such as the use of online translation service, use of search engines to be connected to the World Wide Web or the internet, utilization of print reference materials such as dictionaries, and directing the children to seek the assistance of relatives, the "More Knowledgeable Others" or MKOs. Meanwhile, the theme, "direct assistive involvement approach" was more on the direct involvement of parents which consisted mainly of commanding the children to do repeated reading of the materials and encouraging them to read other materials set in English to better hone their English skills. This also included reminders and monitoring if the SLMs were finished before the submission schedules.

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Table 4
Involvement approaches that the parents employed in helping with children's distance learning

Theme	Categories
1. Dispensed involvement approach	A. Use of free service feature "Google Translate" for translation of terms from English into Filipino B. Use of search engines for topics in English subject that are difficult for the child and parent to understand C. Directs the child to use a dictionary to know the meaning of unfamiliar words D. Seeking the assistance of relatives
2. Direct assistive involvement approach	A. Commands the child to do reading of passages or parts of SLMs again and again when child could not understand immediately the lesson B. Encourages the child to read materials in English to hone skill in understanding English C. Talks to child to know if he or she has problems with regard to SLMs D. Assists the child by explaining only what is within the reach of parent's knowledge E. Reminds the schedule allotted for the SLM in English F. Parent checks SLMs if finished before submission G. Tells child to answer only what he knows

Parent-participants, especially those who came from low-income family group, were inclined to rely on external support that would help the children with their distance learning activities instead of doing hands-on involvement acts.

Taken altogether, the data culled from this research work convey a key idea that parental involvement in the reading engagements and other school-related tasks of the adolescent children is truly indispensable. However, carrying out their roles with respect to the various academic undertakings could be challenging especially now that children's education has been transformed into a distance learning landscape.

Because of the current setup of education in the country brought about by the spread of the COVID-19 virus, problems continue to confront learners and their parents even if remedies are given. Prevalence of poverty, inadequate knowledge on topics in SLMs, limited vocabulary, struggles with the English language, and home reading views, beliefs, and motivation are strong determinants that affect the quality of parental involvement, which turn out as impediment to children's literacy achievements.

CONCLUSIONS

On the findings yielded from the analysis of the data provided by the parent-participants in this study, the following conclusions are outlined:

1. Parents, as children's first and best teachers, play immense roles in the education of the children, especially now that children's schooling has been placed in the comfort of their homes because of the global health emergency.
2. The various roles of parents in children's distance education consist of setting and monitoring of rules, giving attention, encouragement, and inspiration, and providing the needs of the children.
3. Parents employ various involvement approaches in assisting the children with the accomplishment of their SLMs. However, the approaches of those who come from low-income families do not include application of academically inclined strategies, like they should supposedly be the source of information or they themselves should teach the children in their learning tasks. Hence, dispensed involvement strategies, such as use of online translation service and search engines, use of dictionaries, and dependence on more knowledgeable relatives, were resorted to.
4. Poverty derails the parents' role of providing the needs of the children, especially of the reading materials that are necessary in the enhancement of their literacy skills. Also, economically disadvantaged parents often lack in the know-how when it comes to helping

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their struggling children with their learning activities.

5. Parents' levels of education, their low self-efficacy level, reading views, beliefs, and motivation, and their time allotment due to work affect their involvement in the reading engagements and learning tasks of the children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The succeeding recommendations are proposed in consideration of the results of this case study:

1. The school should inculcate in the parents a profound knowledge of the significance of parental involvement in the reading engagements and academic activities of their children towards their literacy achievement. This will become possible by introducing a family literacy program that would necessitate a solid home-school partnership for the learning development of the adolescent learners.

2. Parents shall be provided the strategies, skills, and resources needed in the enhancement of the literacy development of the children through establishment of a family literacy program. This will be done through an open communication between the teachers and the parents.

3. Children should be encouraged to devote time to reading by engaging in home reading sessions with their parents. Leisure reading which will foster high regard for reading and its benefits to the studies and other non-academic engagements of the learners should also be promoted.

4. To better understand the situations of the learners, their parents, and their home environments, particularly of the economically disadvantaged families, further studies in line with this phenomenon must be done. Hence, an effective family literacy program that is aimed at addressing the reading literacy difficulties of the children, especially in the time of pandemic, can be developed.

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AUTHOR'S PROFILE

Denard V. Budao is a licensed professional teacher. He obtained in 2009 his Bachelor's Degree in Secondary Education major in English from Palawan State University, Puerto Princesa City, Philippines. In 2021, he finished Master of Arts in Teaching with Area of Concentration in Language Studies – English Stream at the same University. He taught at PSU College of Teacher Education from June 2009 to December 2011. On December 26, 2011, he joined the Department of Education and handled Grade 9 and Grade 10 English subjects. His interests include teaching reading, literature, language arts, and campus journalism, and writing news, and feature articles.

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