

THE ROLE OF ENHANCED “FOLLOW-UP” AND SIMPLIFIED VIDEO TUTORIAL IN BLENDED LEARNING DURING THE PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

Nearly everyone involved in the education system is new to blended learning. While teachers have to navigate around the new environment, they have to ensure that their learners are not left behind. Teachers' awareness of students' experiences during the pandemic, be it school-related or personal helps them adjust their approaches to the teaching-learning process. This study employed the qualitative research, specifically the multiple case study design. Informal interview transcripts, school documents, call transcripts, and validation statements were the main source of data for the study. The result of the study revealed three themes in the pursuit to answer the research questions presented in this research. These themes were student experiences in the new normal modality of education, factors that affect student participation rate in blended learning, and school and teacher interventions that learners seek. In this research, the videos were simplified by the teacher through explaining the lesson in a simpler language without compromising the substantial content. Students' consistent response that simplified lesson videos helped them learn in their own pace must encourage teachers to include such support in planning for their synchronous and asynchronous classes. Another vital support that teachers and the school can provide during these challenging times is to look after the well-being of their students. Constant and enhanced follow-up of learners done in a subtle and encouraging manner will increase learner motivation to continue their studies despite the challenges and struggles they encounter in their life and in their studies.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Simplified Video Lessons, Student Experiences During the Pandemic, School and Teacher Interventions

INTRODUCTION

The school is not only an institution of learning. The school is a social structure where learners seek more than cognitive support but emotional and moral guidance as well. This research validates this claim especially during educational disruptions such as the CoVid-19 pandemic. The school plays a vital role in establishing normalcy in the lives of learners even if the school set-up is far from the modality they are used to.

The School Year 2020-2021 is a historical event in the educational system of the Philippines.

In fact, it is not only in the Philippines, but all countries affected by the lockdowns brought about by the CoVid-19 pandemic that schools have to stop altogether the face-to-face modality. There was no other way but to transition to blended learning modality to ensure the continuity of education even during the closing of the physical school (Aras Bozkurt and Ramesh Sharma, 2020; Purwanto et al., 2020) Thus, the Department of Education took all measures to ensure that the school year will open and that education must continue at all cost (DepEd, 2020)

In education, teachers play the most vital role in the teaching-learning process (Yao et al.,

2020). While teachers were also making adjustments to the new education modality, they have the critical responsibility of making their students ready, if not well-versed with blended learning (Ferdig et al., 2020). Teachers indeed carry the burden of not only assisting in the academic needs of their learners during these difficult times. They might even need to extend a little of their time to look after the mental and emotional welfare of the learners entrusted them.

Research found out that enhanced attention, feedback and communication of the teacher with the students can significantly increase the participation rate of the learners (Yao et al., 2020). The usual interventions in the face-to-face modality to motivate and encourage students to work on their education might not be enough during the pandemic (Karalis, 2020). It is important now for teachers to understand the underlying factors why a significant number of students intended to enroll but eventually lose interest in learning with the new education modality, as evident with their low attendance rate and high percentage of failing students during the first grading period.

Education research during the pandemic needs to seek the authentic response of learners about their experiences in the new modality of education. While it is understandable that everyone is adjusting to this “new normal,” the learners, being young and vulnerable might not easily understand and process what is happening and might not have full grasp of the uncertainties of the times. Consequently, it can have a great impact on the way they see things, which includes their manner of learning in terms of their education. There may be no substantial solution that is available to address such concerns, yet it is vital to have a deeper and wider perspective on the part of the educators about the challenges of learners in their new normal modality of education. In this way, they will know how to approach their teaching and their students. Educators are now facing the challenge to deliver quality education in difficult times such as the pandemic that caused major disruptions in the system (Tria, 2020). The educational outcomes refer not only to how teachers deliver the content but how they also provided emotional support to their learners in the process.

This study looked into interventions that the teacher, especially the class adviser can do to motivate and encourage learners to pursue their education in the blended learning modality—that is in asynchronous and synchronous learning. In addition, there might be a need to extend their role, and change their perspectives about the usual way to approach the teaching and learning process. Specifically, the interventions that will be provided to the respondents were simplified video lessons and constant ad enhanced follow-up to them.

The results of the study might inform practices and policies that can be crafted to equip teachers of the new roles they assumed in the new normal modality of education, necessary interventions for student motivation and academic assistance, and trainings to capacitate parents/guardians, and the community as a whole about the new and possibly extended roles they play in the synchronous and asynchronous learning of school children.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to determine the interventions that can be employed to increase the participation rate of students who might be having difficulty in the new modality of education during the closed-down of schools due to the CoVid-19 pandemic. Specifically, the study sought to attain the following objectives:

1. To identify students’ educational and related experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms in blended learning during the pandemic.
2. To determine how closed follow-up affects students’ participation rate in blended learning
3. To determine how the asynchronous tutorial using simplified lesson videos help in the academic performance of student participants
4. To document the needs that students seek to be provided by the school and their teachers in navigating their education in the new normal

METHODOLOGY

This study employed the qualitative research, specifically the multiple case study

design. Qualitative research is a process of research that involves data analysis from an inductive perspective of specific to general themes, and the researcher is the inquirer that generates meaning from the data (Creswell, 2014). Case studies are a 'design of inquiry found in many fields, especially evaluation, in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals' (Creswell, 2014 p43). A multiple case study is that which involves two or more cases of individuals involved in the study, in order to have a collective and wider perspective about a topic of interest.

The study involved 29 Grade 10 students who have four or more failing grades in the first grading period of S.Y. 2020-2021. Thus, the study employed purposive sampling technique in the selection of the participants. The students were made aware that their responses about the questions they answered will be documented for research purposes. They were also briefed that their identity will be strictly guarded and that their honest response will not have an effect to their academic standing, particularly in their grades.

Informal interview transcripts, school documents, call transcripts, and validation statements were the main source of data for the study. For the first quarter, the researcher made an observation of students' attitude, attendance and level of participation during synchronous sessions, engagement in asynchronous requirements and general overall behavior. During the second quarter, monitoring by enhanced follow-up with participants were conducted and documented. For the third quarter, a comparative analysis of student-participants' general behavior and overall class standing from the previous first and second quarter grading period were conducted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Students' educational and related experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms in blended learning during the pandemic

1.1. A focus on Learners during the Pandemic

The result of the study revealed three themes in the pursuit to answer the research questions presented in this research. Because it is qualitative research, all themes that emerged were included in the results and discussion because it provided a rich data about learners' experiences and expectations to the school and to teachers in the blended learning modality. These themes were student experiences in the new normal modality of education, factors that affect student participation rate in blended learning, and school and teacher interventions that learners seek.

1.2. Student Experiences in the New Normal Modality of Education

Students described their experiences in the online and modular learning, the things that they do to be able to adjust to their new learning environment, and their motivation to continue despite the difficulties of their condition. Students encountered challenges in blended learning because they were not used to the study-at home set up, especially at the beginning of the school year. They also agreed that the difficult part of online learning was the slow and unstable internet connection. Some of them do not have gadgets that were needed to attend synchronous online class and to work on asynchronous class requirements. Most of the time, they had to juggle between household chores and school tasks. Thus, they must employ good time management skills. Student respondents stated how they managed their schedule:

I do household chores first before doing school requirements, and do it immediately so that they will not pile up. (Student 14)

I limit my time in social media and adjust the time in playing online games. (Student 6).

Others noted that they intentionally set aside enough time to finish school tasks and find the need to even distance themselves from other family members to get focused on the tasks. Part of the routines of time management was to make a to-do list and urgent school tasks that need to be completed. Being organized, physically and mentally needs to be practiced to be able to adjust

both in asynchronous and synchronous modes of learning. They took note of their online schedules, online links, group chat updates and relevant communication means to be reminded of deadlines of tasks.

As time passes, students somehow acquired the routines and rigors of the online class. Student responded to the way they have adjusted themselves:

I just go with the flow and do the usual study habits that I do before. (Student 21).

Simply accept the new reality (Student 3)

Students, being part of the generation of digital natives, find the online lessons easy because they can access any content which were already in the internet. They searched video lessons to have a better understanding of the previous lessons. Some of them approached their teachers directly for queries and clarifications.

Students faced difficulties in their studies during the pandemic but despite such challenges, they expressed the motivation to continue because of their loved ones, their personal goals and their current economic condition. Students said that:

I still want to finish my studies because I see my parents are having so much difficulty during the pandemic (student 10)

Online class itself is not motivating but I don't want to waste the time this school year because my goal is to become a chef someday (student)

2. Factors that Affect Student Participation Rate in Blended Learning

The specific intervention that the researcher employed in the research was the simplified video lesson sent to learners and the intentional and constant enhanced follow-up to them. Simplified video lessons have advantages and disadvantages. Because it is recorded, students can review it anytime. It is especially beneficial to those who were absent and to those who were not able to understand the lesson because of distractions in the online class like

unpleasant noise and intermittent internet connection. One student plainly said that:

Not all students learn fast just like me so the simplified video lesson can be of great help because it is easier to understand when viewed again and again. (Student 1).

The video lesson also has a disadvantage because learners might not listen intently to the teacher during class discussion knowing that they can review the lesson anytime. Students recounted that:

The simplified video lesson only works if you listen carefully to the teachers' explanation. (Student 8)

Teacher explanation is still effective in explaining the lesson (Student 2).

In the same way, enhanced follow-up to the learners has advantages and disadvantages. It was helpful in making updates and reminders to learners. Some students' opinions were:

It helps a lot because most students forget their requirements because there are so many things to do. (Student 9)

It helps a lot especially in motivating us to study even if the situation is difficult. (Student 22)

However, some students thought that sometimes, constant reminders gave them more pressure to do their tasks and it becomes annoying.

3. School and Teacher Interventions

Students identified four needs that the school and the teachers can provide them to be able to navigate in the new modality of their education. These were in terms of their teaching approaches, school requirements, emotional support, and technology provisions.

In the online synchronous class, students expressed those teachers can help encourage participation by putting more energy and enthusiasm into the lesson, explain the lesson thoroughly, be more specific in giving instructions before assigning tasks, and discuss the lesson in a

slower pace. They also sought practical advice about studying in the new normal and prompted reply to their queries. In modular learning, students thought that teachers should visit students' homes to distribute the modules and personally see their living condition. They observed that different subject areas gave difficult tasks and set almost the same schedule for the submission. Thus, they suggested that subject areas should give out the modules early and set different deadlines for its submission to lighten student loads. One student specifically recommended a time frame:

Teachers must give enough time, about two weeks for students to complete answering the modules. (Student 29)

Students said that teachers can help them with their module by explaining the lesson well first before letting them answer the module and if possible, include less tasks required in the module.

Students do not only seek academic guide from their teachers, but emotional support as well. They look forward to the advice and deep life thoughts that they integrate in the lesson. When their interest gets low, students feel motivated when teachers remind them about their personal goals. Modelling happiness in the way they teach also sparked interest in attending their class. They felt more comfortable with teachers who were more caring, patient, considerate, and understanding. For them, it was important that teachers establish rapport and good relationship with students. One student said that:

Teachers must sincerely ask students how they are doing and what they are feeling because some students do not know how to express their feelings. (Student 26)

Surprisingly, students expected more from their teachers and although some may be way too demanding, these responses somehow gave teachers a deeper perspective about students' personal struggles during these difficult times. Some students expressed in a straightforward manner that teachers must not set too high expectations on students during the pandemic. In

their own words, they address teachers when they said:

Please don't give up on students (Student 7)

Don't give students failing grades, especially when they are trying their best. (Student 19)

Just continue to give the help you are providing to students (Student 22)

Finally, students expect the school to give provisions such as gadgets, learning material for online class and load allowance or free wi-fi if possible. They even thought of projects like fund-raising program for poor students. They expressed concern not only about their welfare but their classmates as well.

Nearly everyone involved in the education system is new to blended learning. While teachers have to navigate around the new environment, they have to ensure that their learners are not left behind. Teachers must be made aware of students' overall experiences in blended learning because it affects how they learn (Nambiar, 2020). Teachers during these uncertain times play a vital role in the continuity of education and more importantly in making sure that their learners cope with them. All plans in the transition from face-to-face to blended learning must take into consideration the welfare of the learners.

Teachers need to be in the frontline of the adaptation and transition to the new learning modality of education. Their role is even more highlighted in the current context of CoVid-19 pandemic, more importantly in countries that has no readily available infrastructures and where teachers have no sufficient pedagogical and technical skills to integrate digital tools into learning (Schleicher, 2020). Now that educators are also navigating the new modality of education, as there was an essential shift in teacher-learner interaction, and teaching approaches. Their role extends beyond the academic dimension of education because they also provide emotional support to their students during the pandemic. This study validated the role of teachers in providing scaffolding as a guide to students learning practices both in the synchronous and



asynchronous class. To reiterate, this support is not only in terms of academic but moral and emotional support as well.

In the synchronous online lessons, learners compete their attention with the surrounding noise and other distractions at home. Video lessons that were simplified can be provided to learners so that they can access and study anytime, in any place and at their own pace. Consistent with the result of this study, Ou et al., (2019) strongly claimed that video lessons are a tool to achieve success in an online class. In this research, the videos were simplified by the teacher through explaining the lesson in a simpler language without compromising the substantial content. Students' consistent response that video lessons helped them learn in their own pace must encourage teachers to include such support in planning for their synchronous and asynchronous classes. Video lessons can be a cognitive scaffolding that was useful especially to learners who were not able to understand the lesson fully while attending in the online synchronous class. Learners encountered inevitable distractions like environmental noise or signal lags in online class. The teacher must review the lesson and make sure that its content is age and ability appropriate, and just enough length to maximize engagement and attention, It is also important that the teacher gives two to three guide questions and require learners to answer it briefly according to how they have understood the content. In this way, the students will be guided and know which part of the lesson is most important to learn and focus on. Also, students are expecting more interactive learning opportunities when attending online classes. In the online class, simplified video lessons had become the extension of the teachers academic support to the learners.

Another vital support that teachers and the school can provide during these challenging times is to look after the well-being of their students through guidance and counseling. Home visitation is impossible and risky during these times, yet there are other strategic ways that can be done to connect with the learners. In following-up with students' school tasks, it must be made on a more subtle manner so as not to create undue pressure or decrease their motivation to learn. While the common response to the interview question is to

be given the “enhanced follow-up”, the teacher must employ strategic approaches that sound more encouraging than putting pressure on them. In addition, the constant follow-up to the learners creates the connection between the learners and the teacher in the asynchronous classes. In a way, focusing on these specific interventions for the blended learning during the pandemic closes the gap of distance and connectivity between the learners and the teachers.

Technology became the bridge in blended learning. Because the digital divide becomes the major barrier to education, authorities must conduct rapid assessment of students and create task force to highlight gaps and coordinate support. Evaluations must be conducted to objectively gauge the efficacy of online teaching towards the aim of developing standards for online or distance teaching (Wyman, 2020). Technology infrastructures then must not only be a stop gap solution but a permanent option as to the available delivery of education now and even in the future. As such, teachers must be equipped not only in handling the technological aspect of blended learning but more importantly in the proper management of the teaching-learning process and the learners themselves.

The pandemic is a call to renew the commitment to provide quality education and help the youth succeed at school and develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will allow them to contribute to society at the heart of the global agenda and education's promise to the future society. (Schleicher, 2020). There is no other way to approach the new learning delivery but to address the gaps, solve the prevailing problems, and plan for a better response. It is important to listen to the most important clients- the students, and prepare for their front liners in the delivery of educational products-the teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

Age and ability-appropriate simplified video lessons with proper guide questions provide cognitive scaffold to learners. Teachers must include them in planning for their synchronous lessons. Accordingly, teachers must be trained in making simplified videos and in video editing. It is

also important that teachers must undergo professional development and see best practices of online classes that manifest enthusiastic, energetic and engaging teaching practices. Modules must also be revised to make them in a sense more self-learning. As learners need simplified video lessons, so there is also a need for more simplified modules.

Constant and enhanced follow-up of learners done in a subtle and encouraging manner will increase learner motivation to continue their studies despite the challenges and struggles they encounter in their life and in their studies. Teachers must establish rapport and good relationship with their learners even remotely so that learners feel comfortable in expressing their concerns about their studies, even their personal lives. Student experiences matter during these times because it will give educators a wider perspective about the realities that they are facing in blended learning. By understanding them, the teachers may be able to properly adjust and modify their teaching strategies to better serve the interest and needs of their learners. The school must heed the learners' immediate needs of technology and connectivity affordances. The teachers must be empowered to play their extended roles in the education of students during these difficult times. As such, their needs must also be provided by our educational institution to assume their multiple roles efficiently.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations can be considered for crafting better policies or education response guides in the planning and delivery of blended learning:

1. Needs assessment of learners may be done.
2. Professional development of teachers responsive to their context and to the times may be made part of the in-service trainings for teachers.
3. Better and faster response to students and teachers' immediate needs may be given great considerations.

4. Benchmark of best practices in blended learning may be conducted for best practices.
5. Short-term and medium-term response to the current situation may be given a thought to address concerns.
6. Long-term plan of action to address educational disruptions now and in anticipation of similar or even worse case scenarios in the future may be conducted.

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College. His research interests include education during the pandemic and pedagogical approaches in science. He aims to collaborate with teacher-researchers on the efficient teaching practices in distance learning.

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