

Challenges and Adjustment Strategies of Tertiary Teachers on Modular Distance Learning in Suburban Philippines

Rothsel T. Cabatac, Daniel P. Garcia, Mark M. Fernandez,
Kent C. Gatoc, Lenyl C. Sarol

West Visayas State University-Himamaylan City Campus, Philippines

ABSTRACT:- This qualitative-descriptive research explored the challenges and adjustment strategies of eight tertiary faculty members who were selected based on the criteria set. The data were collected using a validated researcher-made open-ended interview guide, and were supplemented through non-participant observations. The in-depth interview data were qualitatively analyzed using Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological technique. The findings showed that the challenges faced by the participants were being stressed and burnout due to workload preparations and deadlines, and physical attendance at school. The hardships in communicating well with students which resulted to lack of student-teacher interaction and insufficient teaching of skills and performances. Along with these challenges, these participants also employed some adjustment strategies to cope with the drastic change in education which included recognizing the value of time and utilizing different communication platforms to reach-out to students. This pandemic has provided them many opportunities to improve and become more productive and motivated, who would presumably accomplish the specified tasks and obligations. Participants' experiences with modular distance learning influenced their roles as educators. Due to the participants' experiences, the education sector may examine and assess which parts of the modular distance learning implementation need modification and strengthening. Because of these well-documented experiences, the educators may carefully consider all alternatives and outcomes in the new learning delivery mode, specifically the modular distance learning.

Keywords: Challenges, Adjustment Strategies, Tertiary Teachers, Modular Distance Learning, Suburban

I. INTRODUCTION

During the new normal, almost all schools worldwide shifted their face-to-face classes to other learning modalities, such as online learning and modular distance learning. The varied learner's background also prompt educational institutions to customize the teaching and learning delivery modes to offer high-quality education even in times of pandemic (Unnumbered CHED Memorandum Order, Series of 2020).

The Modular Distance Learning (MDL) in particular has been utilized by many schools located in rural areas in the Philippines. Studies conducted on the implementation of this modality showed that the sudden shift of teaching modality in basic education had created challenges and struggles among teachers. (Felicisimo and Acala, 2021). The implementation of the said modality also had varying degree of advantages and disadvantages so teachers have also roles to perform especially in implementing assessment procedures to the students (Anzaldo, 2021).

As MDL has been extensively studied on the lens of basic education in the country, it was not widely explored in tertiary education as most university's resort to online learning in the midst of the pandemic. In addition, tertiary education students' and parents' experiences during MDL were put at the forefront of research. For instance, most students faced various problems and challenges in submitting their assigned tasks and assignments at school (Bustillo and Aguilos, 2022), making their learning experiences difficult and ineffective (Barror, Llenares, and Del Rosario, 2021). Most parents were also affected by the changes in education set-up. Both students and parents had the same experiences in the novel mode of learning especially in the online setting such as the insufficient delivery of instruction, unmet outcomes of learning, difficulties in finances during lockdowns, struggles in lack of internet connectivity, and even problems on motivation, physical health, and mental stress (Agaton and Cueto, 2021) were mostly underscored.

This study therefore aimed to explore the experiences of tertiary teachers in the implementation of Modular Distance Learning at West Visayas State University-Himamaylan City Campus, located in the rural area of Negros Occidental, Philippines. Like students and parents, teachers who are expected to deliver quality tertiary education amidst the pandemic are also having unique experiences and views that are significant in the educational arena. This phenomenon could be a significant source of information for further development and programs for the improvement of the teachers' delivery of instruction and performance in the university.

Review of Related Literature

This research undertaking was based on constructivism or social constructivism.

The ideas came from Mannheim and from works such as Berger and Luckmann's (1967) *The Social Construction of Reality* and Lincoln and Guba's (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry*. More recent writers who have summarized this position are Lincoln and colleagues (2011), Mertens (2010), and Crotty (1998), among others. Social constructivists believe that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work and that develop subjective meanings of their experiences—meanings directed toward certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas. Thus, the researchers in this study focused on the contexts in which the participants live and work in order to understand their lived experiences. The researchers recognized that their own backgrounds shape their interpretation and they position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their personal, cultural, and historical experiences. The researchers made sense of or interpret the meanings the participants have about their experiences on the implementation of Modular Distance Learning (MDL) rather than starting with a theory (as in postpositivism), inquirers generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning.

In the context of Modular Distance Learning, modules promote self-directed learning. One of the benefits of employing modules in instruction is that pupils develop improved self-study or learning skills. Students take an active role in comprehending the module's concepts. They create a sense of responsibility as they complete the module's tasks. The learners progress on their own with little or no assistance from others. They are developing their learning capacity; they are becoming empowered (Nardo, M.T.B, 2017). According to Ossiannilsson (2012) and Ossiannilsson et al. (2015), the efficiency of distance learning platforms is determined by their level of engagement, not by the lecturer's ability to deliver an understandable lesson. Students must develop new behaviors, attitudes, and skills to complete distance education courses (Hart, 2014). These abilities enable individuals to adjust to this new educational paradigm more efficiently, i.e., with more minor discomfort. Thus, the presenter of higher education, the lecturer, and the student collectively drive the DL platform's effectiveness, a platform in the coming "New Normal" in which successful business and social life require deep knowledge and continuous learning (Coymak, 2019).

According to Hornby, as referenced in Yoseph and Mekuwanint (2015) and Malik (2012), a module is a virtually self-contained unit of work within a course of instruction and a teaching approach centered on developing skills and knowledge in discrete units. Thus, a module is a collection of related classes that form a particular specialization area. Each unit or module is a quantifiable component of an extended learning experience that leads to a stated qualification(s) "for which a predetermined number and, in most cases, sequence of units or modules is required."

The modular teaching method empowers learners to take control of their education and assume greater responsibility for their education. It requires a higher level of maturity on the learner's side; the modules are more suited to mature pupils. All of the necessary capabilities to accomplish this are closely associated in a modular fashion.

While modular academic programs come in various forms and employ a variety of vocabulary, they all have an underlying premise that learning can be broken down into quantifiable units of information. In contrast to a standard linear degree program composed of a series of subjects, modularized degrees are comprised of self-contained, independent units that can be completed in any order and at any pace. Modularization of the curriculum relates primarily to the decomposition of the curriculum's content rather than to a chronological meter. It entails a transition away from a time-based structure toward a credit-based one. On the other hand, modularization is connected with the distribution of knowledge in 'bite-sized' chunks and hence lends itself to time-constrained and intense modalities of delivery. Modularization's ability to give on-demand learning and certification in compact packages contributes to the success of online modular courses (French, 2015)

As opposed to most traditional curriculum designs, modular design gives greater student autonomy in constructing the programs and greater range of entry gates and exit points (Ali et al., 2010). These authors further explained that modularity enables the design of the curriculum to meet students' needs, thus moving the curriculum from the supply side (what universities want to deliver) to the demand side (what students and their employers identify as what they want). Modular instruction meets the needs of today's students more adequately than traditional instruction both with respect to the quality of learning and the content.

French (2015) also postulated that one of the key motivations behind modular course designs relates to the changing nature of the student population. Universities no longer cater solely to school leavers and curriculum development now needs to consider a range of relatively new student stakeholders with differing educational needs. These include an increasing number of students who are mature professionals (mostly undertaking study on a part-time basis), who require flexibility to balance study with employment and family life, and an increasing number of international students who seek mobility between their home countries and educational institutions.

Distance Learning on the other hand is a mode of instruction in which learning occurs between the teacher and learners who are physically separated during instruction. There are three types of distance education: Modular Distance Learning (MDL), online distance learning (ODL), and television/radio-based instruction. (2020, Quinones). Modular learning is the most common type of distance education. In the Philippines, this mode of teaching is currently used by all public schools because, according to a survey conducted by the Department of Education (DepEd), learning via printed and digital modules was identified as the most preferred method of distance learning by parents of children enrolled this academic year (Bernardo, 2020). This also considers learners in rural locations where online learning is not possible due to a lack of internet connectivity. The teacher assumes responsibility for monitoring the students' progress. The teacher can be contacted via e-mail, telephone, text message, or instant messaging, among other methods. The teacher will visit students who require remediation or support at their homes (Llego, 2020). Faculty members or Local Government Officials will provide printed Modules to students, parents, or guardians. Because education is no longer confined to the school setting, parents work alongside faculty members to educate their children. Parents play a critical role as facilitators in the family. In modular learning, their principal duty is to develop a connection and guide the child. (Flip Science, 2020).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges and adjustment strategies of tertiary teachers in the implementation of Modular Distance Learning.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized Qualitative-descriptive research design with an overtone of phenomenology. This research design generates data that describe the 'who, what, and where of events or experiences' from a subjective perspective. From a philosophical perspective, this approach to research is best aligned with constructionism and critical theories that use interpretative and naturalistic methods (Doyle, McCabe, Keogh, Brady (2020). This design was used to vividly investigate the experiences of faculty members in the implementation of Modular Distance Learning in a rural university. This method was utilized as faculty members had unique phenomenon to be uncovered and that they had lived the experience in delivering the Modular Distance Learning. In-depth interviews were used to gather necessary data. Colazzai's data analysis procedure was used to analyze the participants' answers in order to arrive at several themes.

Participants of the Study

This study involved eight faculty members of West Visayas State University-Himamaylan City Campus who were purposively selected based on the following criteria:

- They must be a permanent faculty members of the campus;
- They must be serving the school for three to five years; and
- Each one should represent each program that the campus is offering.

To maintain the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms were used.

Data Gathering Instrument

An open-ended interview guide questions based on the theory of constructivism which states that participants construct knowledge on how they interpret the world around them (Kurt, 2021). The instrument also adopted Creswell's recommendations by including the title of the study, the study's guiding research question, and other follow-up questions on a sample questions document that was provided to both the interviewee and

researchers during the interview (Creswell, 2007). The validity of the instrument was validated by the three experts in the field of research. To establish the reliability of the results, member checking was utilized by returning the transcribed data based on their responses during the interview.

Data Gathering Procedure

After permission to conduct the study in the campus was granted, the interviews were conducted in the most preferred venue, time, and date of the participants. Face to face interviews were done with adherence to the safety health protocols such as wearing of face mask and face shield, maintaining 1-meter distance, having a temperature check, and logbook for contact tracing purposes. Prior to the scheduled interview, each participant was asked to sign the informed consent for participation and videotaping of the interview. After demographical data were collected, each participant was asked to respond to the questions from the interview guide. Follow-up questions relied on the replies to the central question to clarify and probe their experiences. The researchers made sure that they asked the participants everything and anything related to the phenomenon in order to grasp the real essence. To ensure that ethical standards were carried out, the participants of this research endeavor were not involved in any situation in which they may be harmful. Any individual participating in this research study has a reasonable expectation that privacy was guaranteed. Consequently, no identifying information about the individual was revealed in written or other communication. The participants' information that was provided to the researchers was treated in a confidential manner. Pseudonyms were assigned to the participants in order to protect their identity. The participants were informed of the nature of the study and may choose whether or not to participate. Informed Consent was signed by the participants in order to assure that they permit participation. They have a reasonable expectation that they were not be coerced into participation. The participants' given data vis-à-vis to the study was critically analyzed in a confidential manner. In the event that participants agree to be a part of the study, the researchers developed rapport and eventually trust to freely share information between the former and the latter.

Data Analysis Procedure

This study utilized Colaizzi's (1978) Descriptive Phenomenological Method procedures of data analysis.

Data analysis was done by familiarizing themselves with the data, by reading through all the participants accounts several times. Thereafter, all statements in the accounts that were of direct relevance to the phenomenon under investigation were identified. Recognized meanings relevant to the phenomenon that arouse from a careful consideration of the significant statements were then considered. The researchers then reflexively "bracket" their pre-suppositions to stick closely to the phenomenon as experienced. Next, the identified meanings were turned into themes that were common across all accounts. After that, the researchers wrote a full and inclusive description of the phenomenon, incorporating all the themes produced. Then, the exhaustive description were lessen down to a short, dense statement that captured just those aspects deemed to be essential to the structure of the phenomenon. Lastly, the researchers returned the fundamental structure statement to all participants (or sometimes a subsample in larger studies) to ask whether it captures their experience. The researchers went back and modified earlier steps in the analysis in the light of this feedback.

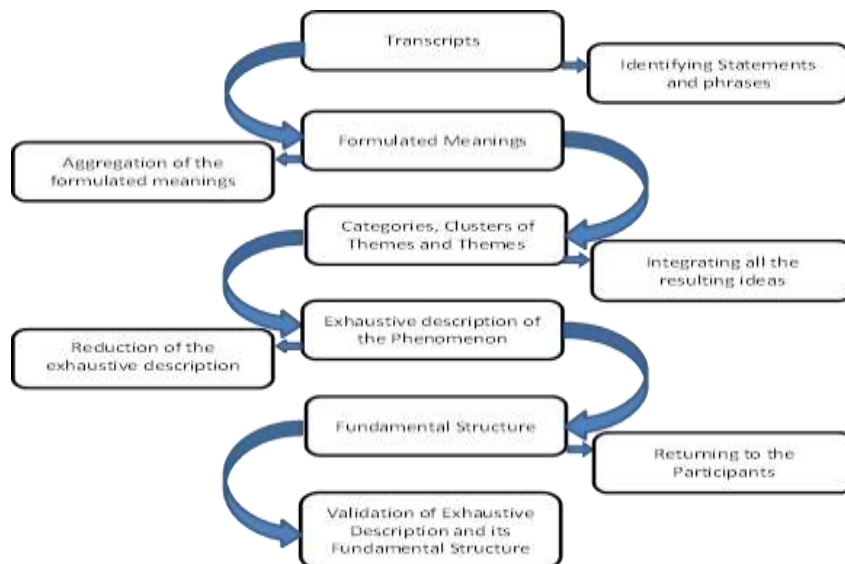


Figure 1. Illustration showing the process of Descriptive Phenomenological Data Analysis of Colaizzi (1978).

III. RESULTS

Challenges of Tertiary Teachers in the Implementation of Modular Distance Learning

There were two major themes culled out as the challenges of tertiary teachers in the implementation of MDL. These are (1) MDL as a source of stress and burnout for teachers; and (2) Hardships in Communicating with the students.

Having a Lot on My Plate: MDL as a Source of Stress and Burnout for Teachers.

Workload Preparations and Deadlines

The sudden shift of education from face-to-face to MDL upon the implementation of lockdown, had caught the campus and the teachers unprepared. At the onset of lockdown, the MDL was suddenly implemented to continue the delivery of instruction in the campus. Thus, workload preparations such as revision of syllabi, preparing of course guides, looking for instructional materials, making and printing of modules contributed to the burnout and stress of the teachers. Teachers were also having at least three to four number of subjects being handled every semester. Aside from teaching loads, they were as well designated to perform some administrative duties such as being the program head or coordinator. Due to the piled-up work to be done, teachers had to work overtime including night time, which resulted to at least one to hours of sleep every night.

"I am so stressed and burnout because of a lot of things to prepare. I suffer from lack of sleep because I have to prepare everything for my students, plus almost all of us here have many subject preparations...."

In addition, meeting-up deadlines for immediate distribution of modules contributed to their sleepless nights. They felt pressured in making quality learning materials and assessment procedures fitted for MDL in a very short span of time. Every task they has a deadline to beat because modules have to be delivered in every city and town where the students live. Thinking of these things that they have to accomplish elevated their stress during the implementation of MDL. The stress that they experienced was also due to the fact that they were oriented to deliver high quality education in spite of the situation. The need to intensify learning through the use of various learning resources added up to the concerns of the faculty members. Students must be given clear and vivid instructions through modules on what to do, what to search, and how to answer. The need to let the students understand the current set-up was seen as an emergent concern while giving them contents of the subject matter.

"The stress that I felt about how we can deliver our subject thoroughly given that we are given deadlines to pass our modules. How can our students understand the situation and how can I deliver my lessons well...)"

Physical Attendance at School

Additionally, the condition that faculty members needed to be physically present at school at the height of the pandemic also added to the stress they experienced. The risk of contracting the disease while they travel elevated their mental stress. The possibility of being tested positive in COVID-19 made them worried regarding their own safety, their family, friends, and colleagues. Moreover, following safety health protocols, processing necessary documents, and stopping at checkpoints on the way to school also raised their anxiety which added up to their stress and burn out.

"There comes that we're paranoid, why do we need to go to school to risk, as there were check points on the streets, so at 4 am in the morning I was already processing my medical certificate. I was paranoid that what if I'll be positive and my family will be affected and my fellow colleagues, I mean the faculty"

Lesser Time Connecting: The Hardships of Communicating with Students

Lack of Interaction

Participants remarkably shared that it took even a month without communications with their students. The only way to communicate with them was through Facebook. They reiterated that the learning modules being distributed to the learners are not enough and further stated that students need interaction with their teachers.

"It's been a month having no interaction with the students and the only way I can communicate with them is through Facebook group page, but I believe that the modules in soft copy distributed to them are not enough because students really need teacher's interaction.) - Michael, Lines 79-88"

Not being able to communicate with their students gave them a feeling of disappointment and frustrations. They felt the need to provide better learning opportunities for their students, but could not do so because of the situation. They further postulated that as a teacher, this was the time that they needed to be more sympathetic to

the conditions of the students because they were also suffering issues and problems that they need to deal with on a day-to-day basis.

Insufficient Teaching of skills and performances

During the pandemic, the most essential part of education is to ensure its quality. Rethinking how teachers educate has been required when students are engaged in self-learning modules. Interaction is in jeopardy because of this flaw. Teachers have lost the ability to question students if they are behind schedule and how many chores they must complete along the road. Teachers have lost the ability to accurately assess their students' levels of desire and interest in learning, and as a result, the latter are more likely to have difficulty.

For teachers who were handling more than just knowledge and concepts but, most importantly the industrial skills, it was hard for them to devise ways in teaching the students. They could not give instructions clearly especially during laboratory works as students are working on their outputs in their respective houses. Homes became the laboratory of the students for output based subjects such as in cooking, teaching demonstration, and information technology projects. They sadly expressed that they were in doubt as to what kind of students or graduates the university will have with the type of learning system they have. As reflected from the statement of one of the faculty members:

“Transferring the knowledge, especially skills that the industry needs from the students. It is somehow a big problem. Just like cooking, they could only use the availability of ingredients in their homes, because there were no other options. If it is prepared correctly, we cannot taste it as well.”

Participants further posited that it is very hard for them to teach especially in the field of Physical Education considering that performances were really needed in assessing the students. They explained that it was hard for them to transfer knowledge and ideas especially when it comes to dances knowing that they were implementing the Modular Distance Learning. Performance-based assessment was put at stake during this modality because of face-to-face restrictions.

“It is very hard for us especially in the field of Physical Education where performances are really needed. So, it is hard for us to transfer knowledge and ideas especially when it comes to dances, for our students, since we are having this, I mean we are using this kind of modality

They as well revealed their feelings of difficulty of not seeing their students and not being able to tell them what they should be doing. Furthermore, they became anxious when they could not ask questions, could not make follow-ups, and could not interact with their students.

Adjustment Strategies of the Tertiary Teachers in the Implementation of Modular Distance Learning

With the challenges that the teachers experienced, they had find ways to adjust and cope with the situations as well. The adjustment strategies of tertiary teachers in the implementation of MDL included two major themes, namely (1) Recognizing the Value of Time; (2) Utilizing Different Communication Platforms to Communicate with Students.

Every Second Counts: Recognizing the Value of Time Prioritizing

One of the positive things that happened to these teachers during the implementation of MDL was they were able to learn how to prioritize. They emphasized that with this pandemic they were able to make things that they thought were impossible for them to do because of limited time. They were able to set their priorities on what should be done first, what comes next, and what will be the last thing to do.

“I was able to make things that I think is impossible for me to do because of limited time. I was able to set time for my priorities. Another thing is accepting the reality that you cannot do something.”

Managing time effectively

As discussed by Effective time management involves making the most of the time one has in order to be more productive and achieve one's goals. In order to fulfill the personal and organizations' goals through the management of schedules of work, it is concerned with planning, organizing, and implementing the schedules in advance. The most precious asset accessible to individuals and organizations is the ability to comprehend the process of time management and the contribution of one's to the success of personal and professional life. However, just like any other asset, it may be wasted if it is not properly valued. The goal of time management is to identify and put into practice the most effective strategies for completing tasks of any length on time and to a

high standard while avoiding the waste of precious resources. Every organization has its share of time wasters who do things for the sake of convenience or to avoid doing the task they are supposed to be doing. Some people, on the other hand, have the ability to effectively manage their time in order to cultivate the habits necessary for long-term success. Others, on the other hand, have acquired bad habits when it comes to time management that aren't publicly acknowledged.

Participants remarkably mentioned that they were able to double their time during the implementation of MDL to cope with the demands of the new learning delivery system. They believed that because of the overlapping of activities in the university, managing their time well was the best ways to overcome such obstacle.

"Maybe in time management, although in face-to-face we also do time management, but maybe strategize more during this pandemic:

Opening Doors for Questions: Utilizing Different Communication Platforms to reach-out with Students

Group chats and Facebook messenger

Faculty members have emphasized the importance of internet connectivity in their descriptions of how instruction and evaluation are being carried out using various forms of information technology or communication platforms. In the case of a crisis, faculty members may gradually return to their normal teaching and learning activities outside of the classroom if this concern was made available to all participants. As reflected on the sentiments provided by the participants, the majority of students and some faculty members live outside of the city and have unreliable or no internet access.

The emergence of Modular Distance Learning paved a way for the usage of various communication platforms for them to be able to reach out to their students and answer all their queries to certain topics that were unclear. One of their innovations was to create group chats and conduct online learning sessions to provide assistance to the students who are struggling hard on their modules. They specifically articulated that they created individual group chats for specific subjects and courses and one group chat for the whole course for general instructions.

"...what we did, make group chats for their queries and if they have something to say, which is accessible for all of them, not just for the department but for the school as a whole, we do have actually individual group chat for the subject and general group chat for general instructions"

They expressed that even if they are busy, they always give time opening their messenger and cater the students' needs. There were times that they need to call them one by one to explain the concepts and ideas of the topics under study to their students because he firmly believe that there are students who do not just merely rely on instructions on chats.

"I am helping them of course through GC if ever they will ask something I am trying to open those messages to cater their needs even though there's a lot of work to do in school. So, whenever they ask me, I will give them response that at least help them. "

Google Classroom

Other teachers also found innovations in providing several ways in making sure that they reached out to students and be responsive to their pressing needs. They created Google Classroom, a free blended learning platform that aims to simplify creating, distributing, and grading assignments. They expressed that it became more convenient on their part to see if their students submitted their outputs or retrieved some instructional materials from this platform. They also sent recorded videos for their classes to help students understand the lessons.

"...that's why I create google classroom to communicate, and it is convenient for my part and to see if they really submit, and I send recorded videos for my class."

Town/City Visitation

As the campus is situated in the part of the region where most students come from rural areas, the campus took initiative to deliver modules to every town and city where the students live. Upon delivery of the modules, teachers took time visit and talk to some of the students to determine the students' situations, receive feedback, and even assess their learning through short conversations while following strictly the health and safety protocols. This initiative enabled teachers to at least communicate with some of the students to check not only their academic status but their overall welfare as well.

“...I like the move of the campus that we had time to deliver modules to our students to a certain area so that we can talk to them, ask how are they, and make some questions....”

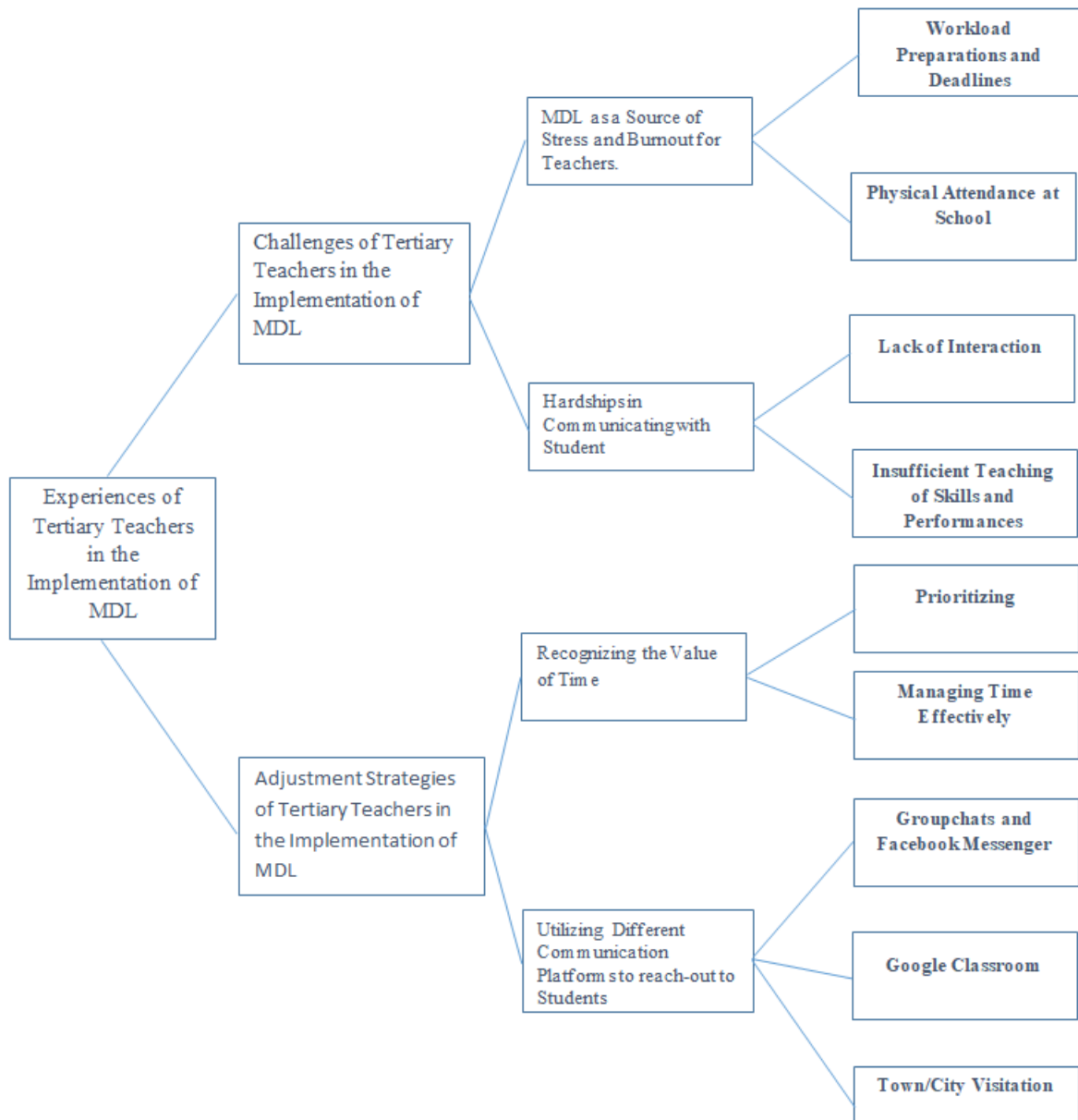


Figure 2. Illustration showing the meaningful categories and themes of challenges and adjustment strategies of tertiary teachers in the implementation of Modular Distance Learning in the midst of the pandemic

IV. DISCUSSIONS

Tertiary teachers in this study experienced challenges in the implementation of MDL in the university. In fact in the study of Cachón-Zagalaz et al., (2020), teachers, like pupils, have been affected by the pandemic and their stress levels have skyrocketed since the outbreak of the crisis. Teachers' stress levels have been found to be higher during lockdowns, according to recent research, because of the need to adapt to online classes in record time (Besser et al., 2020). While others, experienced stress in implementing online classes, this group of participants faced challenges in implementing MDL. Some of the things that contributed to the stress level of teachers were the number of workload preparations, meeting-up deadlines, and being physically present at school in spite of the situations. While high education needs to be delivered to students even in times of pandemic, teachers are made to work double in order to comply and meet the demands of time. While the workload preparations were seen as a challenge by most teachers, Reynolds, Cai, Choi, Faller, Hu, Kozhumam, Schwartzman, Vohra (2020) suggested strategies for managing the workload such as utilizing peer review for written assignments, limiting grades, collaborating with experts, and being flexible. Beating the deadlines also contributed to the stress and burnout of tertiary teachers. While

deadlines are usually framed within higher education as tools that prepare students for the unforgiving world “out there” Thierauf (2021), teachers themselves experienced beating the deadlines to cater the students’ needs during the sudden shift of educational set-up in times of pandemic. As a result however of passing the instructional materials by teachers to comply within the set deadlines, many factors such as the quality of the outputs with the negative drawback to the teachers’ work may happen. Theobald, Bellhäuser, Imhof (2021), emphasized that deadlines do not even prevent cramming on the part of the person who is given deadlines. In addition, one of the challenges experienced by this group of participants were going to school in spite of the situation, risking their own health and safety. The reason for this is the continuity of learning even in the most adverse circumstances. That is why, recognizing and supporting teacher’s wellbeing should be a key priority even before, during, and after the pandemic (Dabrowski, 2020). As teachers were expected to deliver high quality education in spite of the pandemic, they were as well faced into stressful scenarios. Rubilar and Oros (2021) emphasized that the predominant stressors were uncertainty about the consequences of the pandemic, work overload and inadequate working environment. The more stress they perceived, the higher the manifestation of unwanted psychophysical symptoms. Professional burnout was higher for teachers with a higher load of stress and with more psychophysical indicators of discomfort. Thus, the psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education staff is higher, and the development of intervention measures to preserve the health of professionals is encouraged.

Another challenge that the teachers encountered during the implementation of MDL was the hardships in communicating with students. Abante, Cruz, Guevarra, Lanada, Macale, Roque, Salonga, Santos, and Cabrera (2021) identified reasons why most teachers had difficulty communicating with students, these are: poor internet connection of both teachers and students, parents’ financial status, unresponsive students and parents, coping mechanism of students in terms of modular modalities and the lack of students’ resources, specifically gadgets that can be used for online learning or Modular Distance Learning. These reasons were also apparent in the phenomenon being studied. Aside from these reasons, students were also confronted with various barriers in learning during MDL that teachers could not monitor, such as inevitable home distractions, poor comprehension, and lack of parents’ assistance (Sonza, Protacio, Padojinog, Peñafiel, Javier, Dolojo, Magtulis, and Barcelona (2022). In some instances though, the teaching of skills and performances were also sacrificed during the MDL. Some of the challenges of teachers were identified based on how they plan, prepare and distribute modules, monitor students’ learning, check, evaluate outputs, and provide feedback on students’ performance (Castroverde and Acala, 2021).

Alongside with the challenges, teachers employed various strategies to cope with the current set-up of education. Teachers used various ways to cope with the challenges encountered in modular distance learning modality such as time management, innovating teaching strategies, adapting to the changes brought by the new normal trend in education, being flexible, providing alternative plans, being optimistic, patient, and equipping oneself with the necessary skills for the new normal ways of education (Castroverde and Acala, 2021). In this context, time management was also seen as a necessity to cope with the demands during the implementation of MDL. In order to effectively utilize their time and give people a sense of control over their lives, time management encompasses goal setting, prioritization and planning as well as hesitancy and ways to deal with it, studying and learning tactics, note keeping, stress management (Kader and Elisa, 2015). Studies have shown that time management skills may be learned. According to MacCann & et al. (2012), time management may be affected by cognition (e.g., goal setting and intention) and circumstance (e.g. role of the study environment). Prioritizing what should be done first, before the other is the best strategy that work in their situation. Specifically, they identified the most urgent task to be done, while they set aside the less urgent task at the moment. When it comes to cope with the lack of communications to students, teachers used various means in order to reach out with their students. As a rural university, though internet connectivity is limited, teachers found ways to make the communication with their students possible. Creation of facebook group chats was done by almost all faculty in each of their subjects. Mabuan and Ebron (2017) found that even before the pandemic, students view and respond positively to the use of Facebook as an alternative platform for learning and as an innovative and strategic tool in enhancing lesson delivery, engaging students with the material, and creating a discourse space for self-expression. Aside from utilizing various communication platforms, teachers made ways of visiting tertiary students to their particular cities and towns where they are mostly residing. Schools that cannot implement online education well during school closures may have to think outside the box to keep their students from falling behind, for example, some schools are reaching children using television (Morgan, 2020). Education during the pandemic had undergone sudden shift, with both students and teachers put into forefront of educational challenges and adjustment. As the study elucidated challenges and adjustment strategies, education sector may make adjustment plans in cases of sudden shift in education. Teachers, like students may as well need some strong support from the government in order to keep up with the demands of education amidst the pandemic.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Challenges and adversities are genuinely inevitable. All sorts of processes tend to go slow and sometimes turn the opposite of what was planned because of the hindrances that arise in times which is least expected. All aspects of life have been affected and are still affected by this pandemic. One aspect that is greatly affected is the modalities of teachers both in teaching and learning. Some teachers handled this current situation smoothly and efficiently in delivering their lessons despite the quick changes in learning and teaching modalities. But maybe most of the teachers of all ages in this generation can't escape the wrath of this pandemic. The participants are mentally and physically exhausted, maybe because COVID-19 pandemic brought drastic and immediate change to educational setting to have lapses in their daily school and office routines. A new system of teaching and learning delivery might not properly established when the pandemic strikes. MDL as a mock teaching was not practiced at the university before the pandemic, which makes the transition more difficult for students and teachers.

Teachers faced different challenges in implementing MDL amidst COVID-19 Pandemic, yet, they happened to make way and adjustment strategies to cope with the situation and deliver quality education to every learner. As the teacher during this pandemic, they became more flexible in addressing the needs of learners and the lessened some activities they included on SLMs. They can connect learners through different online platforms, connect learners and check on them, and make use of their time effectively. They happened to make a strategy to communicate with learners to ask about their situation to check their physical and emotional well-being. Teachers insert a lot of effort into doing learning modules, and they create concise instructional materials that lessen the learners' activity. Teachers happen to integrate new strategies in teaching and learning that are more suitable and appropriate for learners' needs by using different online platforms. As time continuously ticks, they can find ways to use their time effectively to make productive outcomes to fulfill their tasks and all paper works. Teachers showed their greatness in finding different strategies to ensure that learners can learn despite the situation. They make sure that without face-to-face, they can deliver quality education as one of the university goals. The teacher showed bravery in handling the situation and facing the challenge even though they were risking their health. Indeed, teachers are heroes.

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Rothsel T. Cabata,
West Visayas State University-Himamaylan City Campus, Philippines