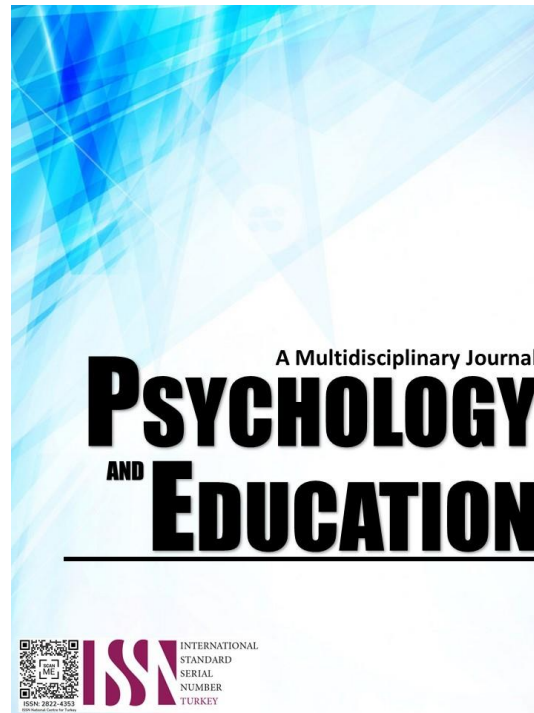


# **MODULAR DISTANCE LEARNING: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON STUDENTS' CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES DURING PANDEMIC**



**PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL**

2022  
Volume: 6  
Pages: 995-999  
Document ID: 2022PEMJ395  
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.7394182  
Manuscript Accepted: 2022-02-12

## Modular Distance Learning: a Phenomenological Study on Students' Challenges and Opportunities During Pandemic

Mona Allea L. Matolo\*

*For affiliations and correspondence, see the last page.*

### Abstract

Learning remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic is challenging. As educational institutions have been closed to cope with the pandemic, modular distance learning was adopted and implemented as an alternative mode of learning which led students to experience learning challenges and opportunities. This study aimed to determine the learning challenges faced by students and the learning opportunities gained by them on modular distance learning during the pandemic. This phenomenological- qualitative research design was conducted on the College of Education students at Mindanao State University – Tawi-Tawi College of Technology and Oceanography, Bongao, Tawi-Tawi, Philippines. The respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on the judgment of the researcher who is best qualified to achieve the objectives of the study. An Interview Guide was utilized to gather information about their views on their learning experiences during the pandemic. Recorded conversation was preserved, and the transcript was utilized to treat the data through thematic analysis. Based on the findings of the study, students commonly experienced learning challenges such as poor/unstable internet connection; understanding the lesson/content comprehensively; time management, financial constraints; students' well-being; and insufficient learning resources. Meanwhile, the common learning opportunities gained by them were an opportunity to become a responsible and independent learner; to become digitally literate; to learn from home; to enhance writing, reading comprehension, and critical thinking skills; and to value time. Consequently, these students of MSU-TCTO experienced several learning challenges and opportunities with modular distance learning during the pandemic. These learning challenges have stilted their time, health, money, and overall learning. On the other hand, the learning opportunities have contributed positively to enhancing their skills and potential in different facets of learning. However, though these students have coped with the challenges of modular distance learning during the pandemic, teachers should not forget their vital role in developing more creative initiatives to deliver quality education to students similar to face-to-face learning. As such, they should develop a self-learning module that is appropriate to the context of the learners. Learning activities should be lessened and time should be flexible for students to elude all the challenges they experienced. In like manner, students should also take part in achieving authentic and meaningful learning whether in school or at home.

**Keywords:** *modular distance learning, learning challenges, learning opportunities, pandemic*

### Introduction

In the past, distance learning, also known as e-learning or online learning, is a form of learning that is only prevalent to those who do not have time to go to school, those who are working students, and those who cannot travel to a specific location to educate themselves. But now, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, distance learning became more popular as an alternative mode of learning to everyone, worldwide.

During the pandemic, educational institutions instantly suspend face-to-face instruction and shifted to distance learning in response to UNESCO's recommendation to use distance learning programmes and open educational applications and platforms so as to subsist education. Accordingly, distance learning is a learning delivery modality where learning takes place between the teacher and the learners who are geographically remote from each other during instruction, (Department of Education, 2022). There are three types of distance learning: Modular Distance Learning

(MDL), Online Distance Learning (ODL), and TV/Radio-Based Instruction.

In the context of Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), Philippines, modular distance learning is the most preferred learning modality by learners in public schools and SUCs/LUCs, with 82.0% and 39.3% usage (DepEd, 2022).

Modular Distance Learning (MDL) involves individualized instruction that allows learners to use self-learning modules (SLMs) in print or digital format, whichever is applicable in the context of the learner, and other learning resources like learner's materials, textbooks, activity sheets, study guides, and other study materials, (DepEd, 2022). In like manner, modular distance learning as the word connotes, uses learning modules that facilitate students learning by themselves. It is also a form of a distance learning that uses self-learning modules (SLM) based on the most essential learning competencies (MELC) developed by the teachers with the aid of curriculum developers,

(Regoniel, 2021). Further, it is a learning method where students can use printed self-learning modules and modules that can be accessed digitally or through electronic devices such as laptops, computers, tablets, and smartphones (Yes, 2022). The teacher takes the responsibility of monitoring the progress of the learners. Likewise, learners may ask for assistance from the teacher via email, telephone, text message, messenger, etc. Parents or any member of the family may serve as a guide or para-teachers to learners at home (DepEd, 2022)

In Bongao, Tawi-Tawi, Philippines, modular distance learning through self-learning module is commonly prepared by teachers to students either in print or digital format. This self-learning module is carefully designed by teachers according to the context of the students. The content includes different learning activities that allow students to learn and answer in their most convenient time and place. Learning outputs are submitted either in print or digital format.

However, while the implementation of modular distance learning during the pandemic is helpful for everybody to prevent the spread of the virus, several studies have claimed that modular distance learning led students to experience challenges or problems adapting to this alternative method of learning, hence, affect their learning. On the other hand, there were also students who gained opportunities that made them experience better learning with the implementation of modular distance learning. Thus, the researcher found interest in examining the lived experiences of the students in order to provide a clear lens on whether modular distance learning is a challenge, an opportunity, or both during the pandemic.

### Research Questions

This study aimed to determine the learning challenges and opportunities experienced by students in modular distance learning during the pandemic. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the learning challenges faced by students on modular distance learning during the pandemic?
2. What are the learning opportunities gained by students on modular distance learning during the pandemic?
3. Is modular distance learning a challenge or opportunity during the pandemic?

## Methodology

This study employed the phenomenological-qualitative research design to determine the learning challenges and opportunities experienced by students on modular distance learning during Covid-19 pandemic. It was conducted to the selected College of Education students at Mindanao State University – Tawi-Tawi College of Technology and Oceanography located at Barangay Boheh Sallang, Sanga-Sanga, Bongao, Tawi-Tawi, Philippines. The respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on the judgement of the researcher who are best qualified to achieve the objectives of the study. An Interview Guide was utilized to gather information and was validated by experts in terms of relevance and appropriateness of the questions. The researcher interviewed the respondents to express their views on their learning experiences during the pandemic. Minimum health protocol was observed to ensure safety of everybody. Recorded conversation was preserved, and the transcript was utilized to treat the data through thematic analysis.

## Results and Discussion

### The common learning challenges faced by students on modular distance learning during pandemic

Based on the responses of the student-respondents, there were six (6) common learning challenges faced by them on modular distance learning during pandemic, to wit:

**A challenge on poor/unstable internet connection.** Living in the southernmost part of the Philippines – Tawi-Tawi – where internet connection is limited became a challenge for these students to engage in modular distance learning during the pandemic. These students experienced having a hard time to connect to Facebook Messenger or Gmail since teachers used these online platforms to send e-copy of self-learning modules, link of videos, post announcements and updates. They needed to wait for a couple of days around 1:00 to 4:00 in the morning just to download modules, pictures, videos, and other documents, hence, the reason for some students to procrastinate submission of their course requirement or learning activities. In like manner, students found difficulty to search on Google or Youtube for lessons

or activities that are vague or fragmented. Further, they needed to reach out to their teachers online for queries and updates so as not to disrupt their learning.

**A challenge on understanding the lesson/content comprehensively.** Shifting from face-to-face mode of instruction to modular distance learning during the pandemic deprived these students of an interactive class discussion resulting to face challenges in dealing with the content/lesson. Voluminous content and learning activities became a problem for these students since it requires more time for students to read and comprehend. They had a hard time to internalize or thoroughly grasp the concept with limited discussion and examples of the lesson provided by the teacher. The depth and breadth of the content made it difficult for them to move forward to the next topic. Further, they were complaining that instructions of learning activities were unclear, and some questions were extremely hard to understand, another reason for students to delay submission of their outputs to their teachers. Hence, they demand the presence of a teacher to come up with a clear discussion of the lesson/content.

**A challenge on time-management.** Ideally, these students are taking seven to eight subjects per semester. Due to pandemic, this ensued them to experience challenges in managing their time. Alongside personal duties and other obligations at home, these students need to attend to academic endeavor. Students were disrupted by the self-learning module having tons of activities or tasks to accomplish at home. They struggled in answering said activities with the limited time given to them. Baffled on what to do first, they tend to forget to do their task on time. Since it is home-schooling, some were not aware of the deadline due to distractions like social media and online games.

**A challenge on financial matter.** Since the lockdown due to pandemic, many have lost their source of income which is why financial support for these students became a challenge. First, they needed an internet load maintenance for their smartphones while some in the island need to visit an internet café to keep posted online. Second, there were teachers who require students to submit tons of requirements in print format, hence, they needed the money for printing. Third, self-supporting students struggled the most as they need to sustain their daily needs aside from their studies.

**A challenge on students' well-being.** Health is wealth as they say. However, aside from the virus per se, these students were distressed physically, mentally,

and emotionally with the modular distance learning. Students suffered from anxiety due to a number of learning activities to accomplish, lack of sleep, lost of appetite, no more time to socialize, duties and responsibilities at home, and pressure from the environment. They were less engaged and motivated to study their lesson as they felt alone or pressured with self-paced learning.

**A challenge on inadequate learning resources.** Students learn best with the aid of sufficient learning materials or resources. However, during the pandemic, students were advised to do home-schooling where learning resources are limited. This prompted them to experience scouting for reliable print materials like books and other relevant references to expand their insights in understanding concepts and to have a meaningful learning. Further, students' smartphones were not enough to encode learning activities, prepare PPT, edit videos, and other electronic illustrations, hence, they needed a personal laptop and a printer to do the task, save time and money, and keep safe.

### **The common learning opportunities gained by students on modular distance learning during pandemic**

Based on the responses of the student-respondents, there were five (5) common learning opportunities gained by them on modular distance learning during pandemic, to wit:

**An opportunity to become responsible and independent learner.** The realization that not all the time you will have someone to help you with your self-learning module during pandemic is very challenging. To them, their experiences had thought them to become responsible in studying their lesson, in enhancing and expanding their knowledge about the content, in accomplishing all course requirements with honesty and authenticity, in retrieving reliable online information from Google, Youtube, and other websites, and in finding alternatives to achieve meaningful learning. Further, they learn to be creative, resourceful, decisive, and independent in all the learning tasks.

**An opportunity to become digitally literate.** Using various social media platforms, websites, and Apps for educational purpose is of great advantage during pandemic. Aside from merely encoding, students have enhanced their skills in creating PowerPoint presentation, picture/video editing, sending reports and projects through Gmail and other social media

platforms, using Edmodo, google and other websites. They felt ecstatic to have gained technical skills that would be very useful for their future endeavor.

**An opportunity to learn from home.** Learning takes place anytime, anywhere – even at home. During the pandemic, everyone was advised to stay at home, hence, to learn from home. This opportunity made students experience to learn at their comfort zone. With this, they got the autonomy to learn on their own pace, the chance to manage their own time, and the opportunity to review lessons in advance and as often as needed. Modular distance learning gives them the comfort of waking up late and not worry of going to school early in the morning, bonding with and helping the family, and a time to reflect.

**An opportunity to enhance writing, reading comprehension and critical thinking skills.** Understanding the depth and breadth of a self-learning module entails a lot of reading for students. Answering all learning activities in a self-learning module demands technical writing and critical thinking skills. Thus, with the modular distance learning during the pandemic, students were able to enhance their writing, reading comprehension and critical thinking skills through reading the content of the module, writing, and thinking critically answers to various learning activities found in the self-learning module.

**An opportunity to value time.** To manage time wisely is what everyone needs during this time of pandemic. In every learning activity provided in a self-learning module, there is a time allotment. Students learned to value time in studying the content of the module, in answering or accomplishing all tasks and in meeting deadlines. Moreover, they learned to become flexible in planning their daily routines in terms of personal and academic endeavors.

### **Is modular distance learning a challenge or an opportunity during pandemic?**

Based on the responses of the students, modular distance learning is both a challenge and an opportunity during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is a challenge because they have experienced hardships and failures in various learning activities. They were physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and financially distressed. Further, they needed to adjust to limitations and accept the situation as it is the only alternative mode of learning. Nevertheless, these challenges made them strong, determined, and brave enough to face the battle. Modular distance learning is also an opportunity for them to experience new

challenges in learning. They were able to forge new skills in different learning areas despite the hardships. Further, they were able to explore new concepts and ideas as well as life lessons that made them a better person right now. Thus, modular distance learning is both a challenge and an opportunity for students to learn in an innovative way.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the results of the study, COED students of MSU-TCTO experienced several learning challenges and opportunities with modular distance learning during the pandemic. These learning challenges have stilted their time, health, money, and overall learning. On the other hand, the learning opportunities have contributed positively to enhancing their skills and potentials in different facets of learning. However, though these students have coped with the challenges on modular distance learning during the pandemic, teachers should not forget their vital role in developing more creative initiatives to deliver quality education to students similar with face-to-face learning. As such, they should develop a self-learning module that is appropriate to the context of the learners. Learning activities should be lessened and time should be flexible for students to elude all the challenges they experienced. In like manner, students should also take part in achieving an authentic and meaningful learning whether in school or at home.

## **References**

- Abdulhamit et al. (2020). Challenges of Higher Education Institutions Against COVID-19: The Case of Turkey. On the Journal of Pedagogical Research Volume 4, Issue 4, 2020. Retrieved in August 2022; <http://dx.doi.org/10.33902/JPR.2020063574>
- Atmojo, A. E. P., & Nugroho, A. (2020). EFL Classes Must Go Online! Teaching Activities and Challenges during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia. Register Journal, 13(1), 49–76. Retrieved in August 2022; <https://doi.org/10.18326/rgt.v13i1.49-76>
- Chua, E.R., Sibbaluca, B.G., Mack, M.R., & Militante, S.V. (2020). “Technological Strategies in Teaching: The Design of Virtual Learning Environment.” Emilio Aguinaldo College – Cavite. Retrieved in August 2022; [www.jcreview.com>fulltext](http://www.jcreview.com>fulltext)
- Dangle, Y. & Sumaoang, J. (2020). The Implementation of Modular Distance Learning in the Philippine Secondary Public Schools. On the Journal page 102106. Retrieved in July 2022, <http://www.icate.org>
- De Guzman, M.J. and Pastor, C.K. (2020). “Business Administration Students’ Skills and Capability on Synchronous and Asynchronous Alternative Delivery of Learning.” *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* 3 (1). Retrieved in July 2022, [asianjournal.org>online>index>.php>ajms>article>view](http://asianjournal.org>online>index>.php>ajms>article>view)



DepEd (2020). "DepEd Prepares Self-Learning Modules for Education's New Normal." Retrieved in July 2022, <https://www.deped.gov.ph/2020/07/02/deped-prepares-self-learning-modules-for-educations-new-normal/>

DepEd (2022). Planning Service Education Management Information System Division. Retrieved in August 2022, [ps.emisd@deped.gov.ph](mailto:ps.emisd@deped.gov.ph). Ferri, F., et. al (2020). Online Learning and Emergency Remote Teaching: Opportunities and Challenges in Emergency Situations. Retrieved in July 2022, <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. Gueta, M. F., Janer, S. S. (2021). "Distance Learning Challenges on the Use of Self-Learning Modules." Retrieved in August 2022, <https://uijrt.com/paper/distance-learning-challenges-use-self-learning-module>

Lindog, E. (2020) Modular Distance Learning Amidst of Covid-19 Pandemic: Challenges and Opportunity. On the journal, E – ISSN 2651 – 771X | P ISSN 2651 – 771X I. Retrieved in August 2022, <https://www.ioer-imrj.com/>

Mpungose, C. (2020). Emergent Transition from Face-to-Face to Online Learning in a South African University in the Context of the Coronavirus Pandemic. Humanities and Social Sciences Communications volume 7, Article number: 113. Retrieved in July 2022, <http://www.nature.com>

Petrie, C. (2020). Spotlight: Quality Education for All during COVID-19 Crisis. Retrieved in July 2022, <https://hundred.org/en/collections/qualityeducation%C2%A0%C2%A0for-all-during-coronavirus>

Regoniell, P. (2021). Modular Learning: 8 Tips for Effective Online Teaching. Retrieved in August 2022, <https://www.simplyeducate.me/>

Sintema, E. J. (2020, April 7). Effect of COVID-19 on the Performance of Grade 12 Students: Implications for STEM Education. EURASIA Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology. Retrieved in July 2022, <https://doi.org/10.29333/ejmste/7893>

Son, Changwon et al (2020). "Effects of COVID-19 on College Students' Mental Health in the United States: Interview Survey Study." Journal of medical internet research 22 (9), e21279. Retrieved in August 2022, [www.jmir.org](http://www.jmir.org)>2020

Yes, A., (2022). Modular Distance Learning in the Philippines – DepEd's Alternative Learning Method. Retrieved in August 2022, <https://www.itacloban.com/>

### Affiliations and Corresponding Information

**Mona Allea L. Matolo, EdD**

Mindanao State University –

Tawi-Tawi College of Technology and Oceanography  
Philippines