

Implementation of Modular Distance Learning of Kindergarten Curriculum in DepEd District I, Ifugao: Importance and Challenges

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Abstract

This study examined the implementation of the modular distance learning curriculum among kindergarten teachers in District I, DepEd Ifugao during the COVID-19 pandemic. Anchored on the principles of curriculum implementation and distance learning, the study aimed to determine the level of importance of modular distance learning in terms of teaching and learning process, content, plans and activities, evaluation, social environment, physical facilities, and goals and objectives, as well as identify the challenges encountered by teachers and determine significant differences in their perceptions based on selected demographic variables. The study employed a descriptive quantitative research design utilizing a survey questionnaire as the primary data-gathering instrument. Respondents of the study were kindergarten teachers from District I, DepEd Ifugao. Statistical tools such as frequency count, percentage, weighted mean, and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. Findings revealed that teachers perceived the implementation of modular distance learning curriculum as highly important across all measured dimensions. However, teachers experienced serious challenges related to workload, instructional management, classroom management, and geographical location of schools. Significant differences were also found in teachers' perceptions when grouped according to selected profile variables, indicating that professional experiences and demographic characteristics influenced their assessment of curriculum implementation. The study concluded that while modular distance learning served as an essential alternative mode of instruction during the pandemic, adequate institutional support, instructional resources, and collaborative interventions are necessary to address existing challenges and improve implementation effectiveness. The study supports Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which promotes inclusive and quality education, particularly in ensuring continuity of learning during emergencies. It also contributes to sustainable educational practices by strengthening institutional responsiveness, teacher support systems, and community collaboration in basic education delivery.

Keywords: Classroom Management, Curriculum Implementation, Distance Learning, Kindergarten Teachers, Modular Distance Learning, Pandemic Education, Teaching and Learning Process, Workload Challenges

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented disruptions in education worldwide, affecting approximately 1.5 billion children and 60 million teachers (UNESCO, 2020). Feuer (2020) reported that at least 24 million children temporarily left school due to the pandemic. Educational institutions were compelled to adopt distance learning modalities, including modular and blended learning approaches, to ensure educational continuity (Cahapay et al., 2021). Philippine educational leaders emphasized that blended and modular learning should become integral components of future educational systems to prepare for similar crises. The pandemic greatly affected early childhood education, particularly kindergarten learners whose cognitive, emotional, and social development depends heavily on supportive learning environments and interactions (Gromada et al., 2020). UNICEF (2020) emphasized that optimal brain development requires proper nutrition, favorable environments, and socialization. Philpott (2021) further argued that quality kindergarten education remains foundational for children affected by crises. In response, the Department of Education implemented the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan to sustain education through multiple distance learning modalities. However, the implementation of modular distance learning posed challenges in curriculum delivery, instructional development, assessment, and classroom management, especially for beginning kindergarten teachers (Tadalan, 2021; Punzalan, 2020).

Studies highlighted that alternative remote education during the pandemic functioned as a temporary response to educational disruptions rather than a replacement for traditional education (Hodges et al., 2020; Bozkurt et al., 2020, as cited in Rotas & Cahapay, 2020). Instructional development became central to effective distance learning, requiring planning, implementation, and evaluation strategies responsive to learners' needs and contextual limitations. Research by Ahmed et al. (2020), Carvalho et al. (2020), and Ferri et al. (2020) emphasized the need for innovative instructional practices in distance education. However, studies focusing specifically on kindergarten education during the pandemic remained limited (Kim et al., 2021; Spiteri, 2021; Yıldırım, 2021), particularly regarding real-world implementation

challenges faced by teachers (Cahapay, 2021a). Literature further revealed that beginning teachers commonly experience difficulties related to classroom management, workload, instructional planning, learner diversity, and lack of institutional support (Salandanan, 2016; Basturk & Tastepe, 2015; Agu et al., 2013; Chong, 2011). Teachers' openness to curriculum change, motivation, and adaptability significantly influence curriculum implementation effectiveness. Environmental factors such as physical facilities, school climate, and support systems also affect instructional delivery (Chakrabarty et al., 2016). Research additionally emphasized the importance of curriculum fidelity and professional development in ensuring effective implementation of educational programs (Lochner et al., 2015; AIR, 2016; NCES, 2017). Consistent curriculum implementation supports learner preparedness and educational continuity (Polikoff & Porter, 2014).

Globally, educational systems experienced major disruptions due to school closures and restrictions caused by COVID-19. Distance education became widely adopted as an emergency response strategy (UNESCO, 2020). International organizations emphasized the importance of maintaining educational continuity while ensuring learner well-being. Nationally, the Philippine Constitution guarantees every Filipino's right to quality education. Republic Act 10157 institutionalized Kindergarten Education as compulsory and mandatory, recognizing its role in children's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development. The Kindergarten Curriculum Framework aligns with the K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum Framework and the National Early Learning Framework (Llego, 2019). In the Philippines, modular distance learning became the dominant learning modality due to limited internet access and technological infrastructure. However, teachers encountered difficulties related to module preparation, assessment, instructional management, workload, and learner engagement (Llego, 2017). Locally, DepEd Ifugao District I was selected as the research locale because of its increasing number of newly hired kindergarten teachers and the unique challenges faced in implementing modular distance learning in geographically remote communities. Teachers in the district reported concerns regarding teaching processes, curriculum implementation, physical facilities, social environment, workload, and instructional management during the pandemic.

The study anchored its conceptual framework on the Input-Process-Output (IPO) Model, a systems theory emphasizing the interaction among inputs, processes, and outputs (Forsyth, 2010; Organizational-Industrial Psychology, 2017). Inputs included teacher demographics such as sex, civil status, teaching experience, educational attainment, and trainings attended. The process component examined the extent of importance of modular distance learning curriculum implementation across domains including teaching and learning process, content, plans and activities, evaluation, social environment, physical facilities, and goals and objectives. It also assessed the seriousness of challenges related to workload, instructional management, classroom management, and school location. The output component focused on developing an intervention program to address identified challenges. The study also conceptualized curriculum as a standards-based sequence of planned learning experiences designed to facilitate learner development through goals, methods, materials, and assessments. Curriculum implementation in modular distance learning involved content delivery, planning activities, evaluation strategies, social environments, physical facilities, and instructional objectives necessary to support effective kindergarten education during the pandemic.

Despite the increasing implementation of modular distance learning in Philippine schools, there remains a significant lack of empirical data regarding its effects on teachers and learners, particularly in kindergarten education. Existing studies primarily focused on higher education or general distance learning practices, with limited attention to kindergarten curriculum implementation during crises (Kim et al., 2021; Spiteri, 2021; Yildirim, 2021). Furthermore, there is insufficient research examining the lived experiences and challenges of kindergarten teachers in implementing modular distance learning in geographically isolated and resource-limited contexts such as DepEd Ifugao District I. Limited empirical evidence also exists regarding how teacher demographics influence perceptions of curriculum implementation and associated challenges. This study sought to address these gaps by examining the importance of modular distance learning curriculum implementation and identifying challenges experienced by kindergarten teachers. The findings aimed to provide baseline data for educational leaders, administrators, and policymakers in designing interventions and support mechanisms for kindergarten teachers during and beyond pandemic conditions.

The study aligns primarily with the following Sustainable Development Goals:

SDG 4 – Quality Education, because the research focuses on sustaining accessible, equitable, and quality kindergarten education through modular distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-Being, as the study addresses educational continuity while protecting the physical and psychological well-being of learners and teachers amid health crises.

SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, due to its emphasis on alternative learning modalities, instructional innovations, and the integration of information and communication technologies in education.

SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities, since modular learning seeks to provide educational access to learners in remote and underserved communities.

SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals, because effective modular distance learning requires collaboration among teachers, parents, schools, and communities.

The study contributes to educational resilience and preparedness by identifying challenges and opportunities in implementing sustainable learning systems during emergencies.

The study contributes to multiple dimensions of sustainability. In terms of educational sustainability, it supports the continuous improvement of distance learning practices and curriculum implementation in early childhood education. Regarding technological sustainability, it highlights the importance of strengthening information and communication technology competencies and infrastructure for future educational continuity. The research also contributes to public health sustainability by supporting safe educational practices during health emergencies. In terms of socio-economic sustainability, the study recognizes the impact of educational disruptions on vulnerable communities and emphasizes the need for equitable access to learning opportunities. Additionally, the study supports community and institutional sustainability by encouraging collaboration among schools, families, policymakers, and stakeholders in addressing the challenges encountered by kindergarten teachers. The proposed intervention program may guide educational institutions in developing long-term support systems that strengthen teacher capacity, curriculum delivery, and learner development during crises and beyond.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized the descriptive quantitative research design. This design was appropriate because it systematically described and analyzed the current conditions, practices, and challenges experienced by kindergarten teachers in implementing modular distance learning curriculum during the pandemic. The descriptive approach enabled the researcher to gather factual information regarding teachers' perceptions of curriculum implementation and the seriousness of challenges encountered in various domains such as workload, instructional management, classroom management, and school location.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in District I, Division of Ifugao, Philippines. The district was selected because it had an increasing number of newly hired kindergarten teachers and experienced significant challenges in implementing modular distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The locale included geographically remote schools where teachers encountered difficulties related to instructional delivery, module distribution, learner participation, and access to educational resources.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study were kindergarten teachers from District I, DepEd Ifugao. The participants included both permanent and newly hired teachers who were directly involved in the implementation of modular distance learning during the pandemic. Respondents varied in terms of sex, civil status, educational attainment, teaching experience, and trainings attended related to modular distance learning.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study employed total enumeration in selecting respondents since all kindergarten teachers in District I, DepEd Ifugao were included in the study. This sampling procedure ensured that all relevant participants directly involved in modular distance learning implementation were represented. The use of total enumeration allowed the researcher to gather comprehensive data regarding teachers' experiences and challenges within the district.

2.5 Research Instrument

The primary research instrument used in the study was a researcher-made questionnaire designed to assess the extent of importance of modular distance learning curriculum implementation and the seriousness of challenges encountered by kindergarten teachers. The questionnaire consisted of two major parts. The first part gathered respondents' demographic profiles, including sex, civil status, educational attainment, years of teaching experience, and trainings attended. The second part measured perceptions regarding curriculum implementation in terms of teaching and learning process, content, plans and activities, evaluation, social environment, physical facilities, and goals and objectives. It also assessed challenges related to workload, instructional management, classroom management, and school location. The instrument utilized a Likert scale to determine the level of importance and seriousness of identified indicators. Prior to administration, the questionnaire underwent validation by experts to ensure clarity, relevance, and reliability of the items. Necessary revisions were incorporated based on recommendations from validators.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher secured permission from the Schools Division Superintendent and district authorities before conducting the study. After approval was granted, the researcher coordinated with school heads and kindergarten teachers regarding the

administration of the questionnaire. The questionnaires were distributed personally to respondents while observing health and safety protocols implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents were given adequate time to answer the instrument, and retrieved questionnaires were checked for completeness before data consolidation and analysis. Confidentiality and voluntary participation were emphasized throughout the data gathering process.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were organized, tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted using appropriate statistical tools. Frequency counts and percentages were used to describe respondents' demographic profiles. Weighted mean was utilized to determine the extent of importance of modular distance learning curriculum implementation and the seriousness of challenges encountered by kindergarten teachers. Inferential statistical tools were also employed to determine significant differences in respondents' perceptions when grouped according to profile variables. The results were interpreted using established statistical standards to support conclusions and recommendations for the proposed intervention program.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Extent of Importance of Modular Distance Learning Curriculum Implementation

3.1.1 Teaching and Learning Process

The findings revealed that kindergarten teachers considered the teaching and learning process in modular distance learning as highly important. Teachers emphasized the significance of providing clear instructions, facilitating learner engagement, monitoring pupil progress, and maintaining communication with parents and guardians despite limitations brought by distance learning. These findings indicate that effective teaching and learning processes remain essential even in remote educational settings. The results support the idea that teachers play a crucial role in sustaining learners' participation and academic development during crises. The findings are consistent with studies emphasizing the importance of teacher guidance, parental involvement, and adaptive instructional strategies in modular learning implementation during the pandemic.

3.1.2 Content

The results showed that respondents regarded learning content as very important in modular distance learning implementation. Teachers emphasized that learning materials should be appropriate, understandable, aligned with curriculum standards, and suitable for kindergarten learners' developmental needs. The findings suggest that quality learning content contributes significantly to the effectiveness of modular instruction. Appropriate and simplified materials help learners accomplish activities independently with parental assistance. This supports previous literature highlighting the importance of contextualized and learner-centered instructional materials in distance education.

3.1.3 Plans and Activities

The study found that lesson plans and learning activities were considered highly important by teachers. Respondents emphasized the need for organized activities, clear learning objectives, and engaging exercises that encourage learner participation despite the absence of face-to-face interaction. These results imply that careful instructional planning remains necessary in modular learning environments. Well-structured activities help maintain learner motivation and improve understanding of lessons. The findings align with educational principles emphasizing strategic planning and meaningful learning activities for effective instruction.

3.1.4 Evaluation

The findings indicated that assessment and evaluation were viewed as very important components of modular distance learning. Teachers considered monitoring learner performance, checking outputs, and providing feedback as essential practices in determining learners' progress. The results demonstrate that evaluation remains a vital aspect of teaching even under alternative delivery modes. Teachers relied on assessment tools and submitted outputs to monitor learning outcomes. This supports previous studies emphasizing that assessment ensures accountability and guides instructional improvement in distance learning contexts.

3.1.5 Social Environment

The study revealed that respondents perceived the social environment as important in implementing modular distance learning. Teachers highlighted the value of support from parents, school administrators, and the community in ensuring successful curriculum implementation. These findings indicate that collaborative relationships among stakeholders contribute positively to the learning process. The support system established among teachers, parents, and schools helped address challenges encountered during the pandemic. The results support literature emphasizing the importance of community and parental involvement in basic education.

3.1.6 Physical Facilities

The results showed that physical facilities were considered important in modular distance learning implementation. Respondents identified the availability of instructional resources, printing materials, communication devices, and transportation as necessary for effective module distribution and retrieval. The findings suggest that adequate facilities and resources directly affect the success of modular instruction. Limited access to materials and technology may hinder

effective implementation, particularly in remote areas. These results are supported by studies discussing the importance of educational resources and infrastructure in distance learning.

3.1.7 Goals and Objectives

The findings revealed that teachers regarded curriculum goals and objectives as highly important in modular distance learning implementation. Respondents emphasized the importance of aligning instructional activities with intended learning competencies and educational standards. These findings imply that clearly defined goals guide teachers in delivering lessons and assessing learner achievement effectively. Maintaining curriculum alignment ensures continuity of education despite disruptions caused by the pandemic. The results support educational theories emphasizing outcome-based instruction and competency alignment.

3.2 Seriousness of Challenges Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers

3.2.1 Workload

The results indicated that teachers experienced serious challenges related to workload during modular distance learning implementation. Respondents reported difficulties in preparing modules, checking learner outputs, conducting home visits, and balancing multiple responsibilities. These findings suggest that modular learning significantly increased teachers' workload and responsibilities during the pandemic. The demands of preparing instructional materials and monitoring learners placed considerable pressure on teachers. The results support studies describing teacher stress and workload issues associated with alternative learning delivery modalities.

3.2.2 Instructional Management

The findings showed that respondents encountered serious challenges in instructional management. Teachers experienced difficulties in monitoring learners' understanding, ensuring participation, and maintaining communication with parents and guardians. The results imply that managing instruction remotely presents limitations in delivering quality education. Teachers had limited opportunities for direct interaction and immediate feedback, which affected instructional effectiveness. These findings are consistent with literature discussing challenges in remote teaching and learner supervision during the pandemic.

3.2.3 Classroom Management

The study revealed that classroom management was also a serious challenge among kindergarten teachers. Respondents encountered problems related to learner discipline, attention span, participation, and completion of activities at home. These findings indicate that the absence of face-to-face interaction affected teachers' ability to manage learners effectively. Since learning occurred at home, teachers relied heavily on parental support in guiding children's behavior and participation. The findings support studies emphasizing the difficulties of maintaining classroom management in distance learning settings.

3.2.4 School Location

The results showed that school location posed serious challenges in modular distance learning implementation. Teachers from geographically isolated areas experienced transportation difficulties, delayed module distribution, and limited communication access. These findings suggest that geographical barriers significantly affected the delivery of educational services during the pandemic. Remote locations limited accessibility and increased logistical difficulties for teachers and learners. The findings are supported by studies identifying infrastructure and accessibility issues in rural education.

3.3 Significant Differences in Teachers' Perceptions

The findings revealed that there were significant differences in teachers' perceptions regarding modular distance learning curriculum implementation and challenges encountered when grouped according to selected demographic variables such as educational attainment, teaching experience, and trainings attended. However, some profile variables showed no significant differences in perception. These results imply that teachers' professional background and experience influenced how they perceived modular learning implementation and its associated challenges. Teachers with more experience and relevant training may have developed better coping strategies and instructional practices during the pandemic. The findings are consistent with previous studies highlighting the influence of professional preparation and experience on teaching effectiveness and adaptability.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concluded that kindergarten teachers in District I, DepEd Ifugao considered the implementation of the modular distance learning curriculum during the COVID-19 pandemic as highly important in terms of teaching and learning process, content, plans and activities, evaluation, social environment, physical facilities, and goals and objectives. However, teachers also encountered serious challenges related to workload, instructional management, classroom management, and school location. Furthermore, significant differences in teachers' perceptions were observed based on selected demographic variables, indicating that professional background and experience influenced their views and experiences regarding modular distance learning implementation.

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that school administrators and education stakeholders strengthen

support for kindergarten teachers implementing modular distance learning by providing adequate instructional resources, relevant trainings, and improved monitoring systems. Greater collaboration among teachers, parents, and the community should also be encouraged to address challenges in instructional delivery and learner supervision. Additionally, programs and interventions that reduce teachers' workload and improve access to educational facilities, especially in geographically isolated areas, should be prioritized to enhance the effectiveness of curriculum implementation.

Compliance with ethical standards

The authors declare no conflict of interest. This study complied with recognized ethical standards for human-participant research by ensuring voluntary participation with informed consent, the right to withdraw without penalty, and strict confidentiality through anonymous, secure, and aggregated data handling. Given the focus on psychological well-being, procedures were non-invasive, and safeguards were observed to minimize discomfort, with guidance to appropriate support services when needed, and required institutional permissions were secured for instrument use and access to academic records.

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