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MODULAR DISTANCE LEARNING: A BLUEPRINT TO ENGLISH WRITING PROFICIENCY

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ABSTRACT

Face-to-face learning engagement has been suspended due to the health crisis that affected the whole world. This led to the adaptation of modular distance learning to continue delivering quality education. As the transition continues, its effectiveness has been frequently assessed. The key purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between the level of implementation of modular distance learning and English Writing Proficiency among the senior high school students in Saint Joseph College Maasin City School year 2021-2022. The study employed a descriptive correlational design with 39 purposively chosen respondents. The main tools used in gathering the data were questionnaires, learning modules, and rubrics. Findings revealed that the implementation of modular distance learning (MDL) has an overall very satisfactory rating based on the perception of the students. The student's perception of the implementation of modular distance learning and their writing proficiency is significantly related. Moreover, it revealed that students had difficulties in finding supplementary learning materials and educational support from home. The researcher recommends a set of guidelines for the successful and effective implementation of modular distance learning as the output of the study.

Keywords: *Modular, Distance Learning, Writing Proficiency*

INTRODUCTION

The urgency for safety has paved the way for the implementation of Modular Distance Learning as an urgent response to ensure continuity of education amidst the pandemic. To address these extraordinary challenges, the schools in the Philippines shifted the traditional face-to-face way of teaching to a distance learning approach. This is a learning delivery mode in which teachers and students who are geographically separated communicate during instruction and the lesson is properly delivered outdoors. Students learned in the comfort of their own homes, with limited contact with teachers, and their parents or guardians serving as their learning facilitators.

This learning modality is currently used by all public schools in the Philippines because, according to a survey conducted by the Department of Education (DepEd), learning through printed and digital modules emerged as the most preferred distance learning method of parents with children enrolled in this academic year (Bernardo, J). This also takes into account learners in rural areas where the internet is not available for online learning. It is also an option for parents who do not want their children to spend too much time on screens.

Furthermore, modular distance learning is a learning form of individualized instruction that allows learners to utilize self-learning modules. The modules are either printed or digital format /electronic

copy for which learners could access the copies of learning materials on a computer, tablet PC, or Smartphone, USB storage, computer-based including offline E-Books. With these learners may ask assistance from the teacher via e-mail, telephone, text message/instant messaging, and messenger.

Some teachers and parents stood opposing how modular distance modality worsens the learner's performance in many domains. One of the skills that have been affected the most as observed is writing proficiency among the students. Students' writing proficiency is the adequate ability to compose words, form words into meaningful phrases, and construct coherent paragraphs. It has been observed that students who struggle with writing English are unable to communicate their thoughts and rarely express themselves in class. This writing problem can have a substantial impact on students' performance in a variety of subjects, particularly in English writing. Many pupils struggle to recognize and understand printed symbols, or even complex oral and written tasks. This issue has an impact on their academic achievement. Furthermore, they are unable to complete their studies satisfactorily, if not outstandingly.

Teaching writing has become challenging because of the barriers encountered by the students in learning writing skills. Some of the challenges continuously encountered met by the students are lack of vocabulary, poor grammar, poor spelling, and students' readiness including lack of exposure to books and reading materials. Regardless of the reasons, the bottom line is that majority of students do not possess the necessary skills to effectively communicate in a written format that will enable them to become successful upon graduation.

It is noteworthy that developing students' English language writing skills can be a challenging task for any teacher. In today's new normal set-up, most teachers encountered hindrances in facilitating and checking the authenticity of the students' output. Some students would have the possibility to copy answers from the internet or ask parents to answer their modules and that could be an outcome of how their writing may be unsatisfactory in multiple ways – from poor grammar and syntax to unclear organization and weak arguments. There is also a lack of feedback. Once modules have been answered and retrieved by the teacher, students would only have to worry about the next module. Without a knowledgeable person around who can explain complex and confusing concepts written in the module, the student would never understand it.

The interaction between teachers and learners is essential in the part of the learning process. The modules also differ from school to school. In addition, their contents depend on the teachers who made them. Some students may struggle to understand their lectures as a result of poorly explained or constructed modules. With the lack of standardized books used, the level of learning varies. Learners' incompetence to write adequately may affect their opportunities to secure a job in the future. Therefore, this issue needs to be tackled seriously.

It is with these premises that the researcher as an English teacher would like to investigate if there is a relationship between Modular Distance Learning on English Writing Proficiency among students. Furthermore, the researcher would like to determine the possible challenges student's encountered in this mode of learning to come up with possible interventions or activities that could improve students' writing performance.

Research Questions
1. What is the level of implementation of modular distance learning modality?
2. What is the level of the student's writing proficiency?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the level of the implementation of modular distance learning and their English writing proficiency?
4. What are the challenges for the students toward modular distance learning modality?
5. What output could be proposed from the findings of the study?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

On Modular Distance Learning Approach

Face-to-face learning classes, which have been the norm of education, have been temporarily canceled for learners' safety due to the risk of being infected with CoVid 19. This pandemic has paved the way for the implementation of   Modular Distance learning as an immediate response to ensure the continuity of education. Modular distance learning is the use of self-learning modules with different learning activities and tasks based on essential learning competencies.

Magsambol (2020) stressed that to make sure that learning remains unhampered, DepEd implemented a distance learning approach, a learning delivery mode where interaction takes place between the teacher and the students who geographically remain from each other during instruction, this means lessons will be delivered outside the traditional face-to-face setup. (Manlangit, Paglumotan, & Sapera (n.d) opined that modular learning does DepEd provide a form of distance learning that uses self-learning modules (SLM) based on the most essential learning competencies (MELCS).

Llego (2020) described modular distance learning as learning in the form of individualized instruction that allows learners to use self-learning modules (SLM) in print or digital format/electronic copy whichever is applicable in the context of the learner, and other learning resources like learners' materials, textbook, activity sheets, study guides, and other study materials. Learners access electronic copies of learning materials on a computer, tablet PC, or Smartphone, CD/DVDs /USB storage, and computer-based application can all be used to deliver e-learning materials, including offline E-Books. The learners may ask assistance from the teacher via E-mail or telephone, and other means.

Nardo (2017) claimed modular instruction is an alternative instructional design that uses developed instructional materials which are based on the needs of the students. Students are encouraged to work on various activities that are interesting and challenging to maintain focus and attention, thereby encouraging independent study. Students engaged themselves in learning concepts presented in the module. They developed a sense of responsibility in accomplishing the tasks provided in the module. With little or no assistance from the teacher, the learners progressed on their own, they learned how to learn; they were empowered.

Martin & Furey (2018) established that the limitations of the modular approach are mostly related to its short duration- there is only so much that can be accomplished with only one week of instruction. Moreover, they agreed that a modular approach would be more effective. In addition, Abramovitz, et.al. (2012) opined that the self-learning method permits one to overcome some challenges like the lack of student-teacher interaction. Magsambol (2020) stressed that there is insufficient budget allocation and supplies of bond paper. He also cited its expensive cost and negative impact on the environment. Education Secretary hoped schools would eventually reduce dependence on modular learning as the country shifts to a distance learning approach during the pandemic. Despite its effectiveness, many families have experienced challenges because numerous parents have difficulties in terms of their abilities and availability to support their children in their learning (Deslandes-Martineau et.al, 2020).

Estrada (2021) opined that modular learning might not work at all. Additionally, she said that there is a lack of feedback and there are a lot more challenges concerning modular learning, but because its implementation is still in the middle of the pandemic, it is not the students' or the teachers' fault. Even they would have a harder time adjusting to the new normal. She also mentioned that it is hard to absorb new information when no one is there to guide you when the lessons become too much. This contributes to anxiety and depression.

Students engage themselves in learning the concepts presented in the module. They develop a sense of responsibility in accomplishing the tasks provided in the module. With little or no assistance from others, the learners progress on their own. They are learning how to learn; they are empowered (Nardo, M.T.B, 2017).

In addition, Dr. Sepals (2013) enumerated some advantages such as learning becoming more effective, the establishment of a system of assessment other than marks or grades, the creation of own working environment, and a flexible schedule for studying. Accordingly, modules are flexible so that implementation can be made by a variety of patterns and can be administered to a single-use small group or large group; it is more appropriate to mature students. It enables the learners to have control over their learning; accept greater responsibility for learning; is already economical in their use; appropriate only for mature students and this method demands a smart classroom. Moreover, he enumerates the following disadvantages: Modules are economical in their use; appropriate only for mature students, and this method demands smart classrooms. Nevertheless, modules are not substitutes for teachers (Estrada, 2021).

Since education is no longer held within the school, parents serve as partners of teachers in education. Parents play a significant role as home facilitators. Their primary role in modular learning is

to motivate and guide the child. The teacher also takes the responsibility of monitoring the progress of the learners. By conducting home visits could be a great way to check on each student's progress and performance.

In line with the above discussion, the module provides the following advantages to student performance. On the other hand, based on the other presented studies the module can be ineffective as it is not a substitute for a teacher. However, the module would be a greater tool to monitor learners' progress if it is made to meet learners' needs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-correlation research design. A descriptive correlational study is one in which the researcher is primarily interested in describing relationships between variables rather than attempting to establish a causal relationship. The study is descriptive as it would attempt to describe the level of the implementation of modular distance learning and their English Writing Proficiency. Furthermore, correlational as the study dealt with relationships between Modular Distance Learning and the student's English skills.

Research Respondents

The respondents of the study were thirty-nine (39) students who adopted Modular Distance Learning. Purposive sampling was used in the study. They were chosen following the criteria that they are grade 11 students who are currently taking English subjects and adapting purely the modular distance learning.

Research Instrument

This study made use of the learning modules, a form of individualized instruction that allows learners to use self-learning modules in print.   There are at least three (3) modules to be distributed and used for the study.

 The first questionnaire consisted of ten (10) questions to be answered by the learners. The 5-point Likert scale was used in this study.

Written outputs like academic papers and formal essays shall be examined to determine the learner's English writing proficiency. The students' writing was scored by using Jacobs's ESL composition profile. The rubric has five different rating categories of writing quality and a 100-point scale. They are content (30 points), organization (20 points), vocabulary (20 points), language use (25 points), and mechanics (5 points). Each element has a different way of scoring with the description attached to each category. After the raters rated all the students' compositions, the scores were grouped accordingly.

Data Analysis

The data were gathered carefully. They will be tabulated, treated, analyzed, and interpreted to arrive at a reliable solution. SPSS version 24 will be used to treat the data gathered. Specifically, the following statistical tools will be used for the rejection and acceptance of the null hypothesis.

Average Weighted Mean will be employed to determine the level of implementation of Modular Distance Learning.

MPS will be utilized to measure the level of English writing skills of the students in the 2nd Quarter.

Pearson r will be used to establish a relationship between the level of implementation of Modular Distance Learning and English writing skills.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Students' Perception of the Implementation of the Modular Distance Learning Modality

The level of implementation of modular distance learning was determined using a 5-point Likert questionnaire consisting of sixteen (16) indicators. The indicators were grouped into three (3) key areas,

i.e., distribution and retrieval of the module, organization of module content, and teacher-student communication. The outcome of the survey is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Average Weighted Mean of the Perception of Students on the Implementation of Modular Distance Learning

Indicators	Average Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Description
Distribution and Retrieval	4.18	0.600	Satisfactory
Organization of Module Content	4.20	0.573	Outstanding
Teacher-Student Communication	3.84	0.628	Very Satisfactory
Overall	4.08	0.513	Very Satisfactory

N=39

The data reveal that the implementation of modular distance learning (MDL) has an overall ***very satisfactory*** rating based on the assessment of the students. In addition, the data further show that the respondents have almost the same assessment of the implementation of MDL as revealed by the low values of the obtained standard deviation. The resulting mean suggests that students are aware of the schedule of the distribution and retrieval of the modules and that protocols and other guidelines pertaining to such activity are closely followed. Moreover, the students also perceived that the organization of the module content is appropriate to the discipline and that expectations and grading policies are well established. The students also perceived that there is very good teacher-student communication regarding issues and concerns that arise with the conduct of MDL.

The data further implies that students perceived the implementation of MDL as appropriate but with the need for some more improvements. These results are similar to the findings of Aksan (2021) in which it was revealed that the academic grades in Mathematics of the STEM students achieved very satisfactory in the school year 2019-2020. The study revealed the effectiveness of the modular distance learning approach in learning Math despite its challenges amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the contrary, modular learning, according to Estrada (2021), might not work at all as it is hard to absorb new information when no one is there to guide you when the lessons become too much. Learning is difficult when done by now and that may contribute to students' anxiety and depression.

Based on the results, it can be implied that the distribution and retrieval of modules, organization of module content, and teacher-student communication can all significantly help in the implementation of modular distance learning to help learners improve their English writing skills.

The Level of the Students' Writing Proficiency

The level of the writing proficiency of the students was determined using three (3) activities in three different modules. A rubric based on Jacob's ESL composition profile was used to rate their proficiency. Table 2 shows the gathered data.

Table 2. Mean Percentage Scores of Student's Writing Proficiency

Module	Number of Cases	Mean Percentage Scores	Standard Deviation	Description
Module 1	39	75.77	13.07	Proficient/ Intermediate
Module 2	39	76.67	13.28	Advanced
Module 4	39	77.05	13.59	Advanced
Overall	39	76.50	13.07	Advanced

Legend:
Range   Descriptive Rating

85 – 100	Outstanding	Excellent
76 – 84	Very Satisfactory	Advanced
69 – 76	Satisfactory	Intermediate/Proficient
60 – 68	Fairly Satisfactory	Novice
Below 75	Did Not Meet Expectations	Basic

The figures above show that the students are at the ***proficient level or intermediate level*** in the first module for their writing skills. This implies that the students can complete their write-up on their own and with minimal guidance from the teacher. The data further reveal that there was an improvement in the writing skills of the students in the second and third modules. The students 'writing proficiency improved from the ***Intermediate level*** to the ***Advanced level***. The overall proficiency of the students after the three (3) modules is ***Advanced level***. The data indicate that the students can apply the basic concepts of writing and are able to coach others in the application of their proficiency.

This outcome conforms with the study of Nardo (2017) who claimed that modular distant learning fosters independent study. One advantage of using modules is that students improve their self-study or learning skills. Students actively participate in comprehending the module's concepts. As they complete the module's tasks, they gain a sense of responsibility. Students' progress on their own with little or no assistance from others, learning how to learn and become empowered. It collaborates with a study by Dhamija (2014) and Padmapriya (2015) whom both agreed that the use of self-learning modules was proved effective as they are free to learn at their own pace which boosts their confidence in their own learning.

The result suggests that the modules have improved the writing proficiency of the students. Self-learning modules must be engaging, well-designed, and effective in order to meet the diverse needs of learners, particularly in English writing areas.

The Significant Relationship between the Students' Level of Writing Proficiency and the Implementation of Modular Distance Learning

The researcher tries to establish the relationship between the level of Writing Proficiency of the students to implementation of modular distance learning in order to test the main assumption of the study. The researcher assumed before the conduct of the study that the level of implementation of MDL could affect the level of Writing Proficiency among students. In order to test the hypothesis, Pearson r was used. The result is shown in table 3.

Table 3. Pearson r of the Students' Writing Proficiency and the Implementation of Modular Distance Modality

Indicators		**r	Strength of Relationship	p-value	Remarks	Decision
Distribution and Retrieval	Level of Students' Writing Proficiency	.655	Strong Positive	.000	Significant	Reject H_0
Organization of Module Content		.552	Moderately Positive	.000	Significant	Reject H_0
Teacher-Student Communication		.289	Weak Positive	.074	Not Significant	Failed to Reject H_0
Overall		.610	Strong Positive	.000	Significant	Reject H_0

*Level of significance (α) = 0.05; degrees of freedom (df) = 37
** Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient
   .00-.19 "very weak" • .20-.39 "weak" • .40-.59 "moderate" • .60-.79 "strong" • .80-1.0 "very strong"

The data reveals that overall, the writing proficiency of the students is significantly related to the implementation of modular distance learning. This led to the rejection of the null hypothesis. There is a significant relationship between the level of implementation of modular distance learning and their

writing proficiency.   It also reveals that among the key areas assessed, teacher-student communication is not significantly related to the student's writing proficiency. On the other hand, the distribution and retrieval of modules and the organization of module content are significantly related to the student's writing proficiency. These data imply that the better the implementation of modular distance learning the better would be the proficiency of the students in writing. These results are in consonance with the study of Sadiq (2014) states in her study that modular teaching is more effective for university students in the teaching-learning process as compared to ordinary teaching methods. Because in this modular approach the students learn at their own pace.

Thus, in order to effectively implement the new learning modality, teachers and learning facilitators must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to assist students in accomplishing the activities in the modules. The teacher must be knowledgeable and observant of how students learn in order to employ effective teaching techniques and strategies (Lim, 2016). All of these factors play a role in developing and delivering lessons to students.

The relationship between the Implementation of Modular Distance Learning to the Student's Level of English Writing Proficiency implied that the implementation of the Modular Distance Learning Delivery is giving a positive impact on writing performance. In other words, if the learners will continue adopting the different learning modalities implemented by the school, there are tendencies that the performance of the learners will still be positively good in relation to their skills.

The Challenges the Students Encountered in Modular Distance Learning

The abrupt shift to the mode of learning posed a challenge for both teachers and students. In this study, an open-ended question was asked to determine the challenges the students encountered in modular distance learning. The answers of the respondents were arranged thematically in the table that follows.

Table 4. Summary of the Challenges the Students Encountered in Modular Distance Learning

THEMES	SAMPLE OF VERBATIM LINES	RESEARCHER'S INSIGHTS
Lack of Resources 1. **no electricity/electric power interruptions** 2. **poor internet connection,** 3. **lack of mobile gadgets** 4. **lack of transportation** 5. **insufficient load**	• *Whenever there's a lesson that I don't understand, I chose to rely on and search for additional information from the internet, however, I find it difficult due to an unstable internet connection.* • *Its struggle when I'm getting the modules at school because of the lack of transportation* • *Difficult since there's still no electricity at home due to the devastation brought by Typhoon Odette*	The students are very much aware of the importance of learning resources that may aid them in their understanding of their lessons. They also recognized the significant contributions of the different open educational resources available online and technology in general to supplement distance modular learning. Moreover, the respondents had felt the difficulty of the lack of resources and the effect of the typhoon which disrupted the power supply.
Poor Time Management due to; • **distractions, poor learning environment, household chores, and social media)**	• *I find it hard to balance my studies and household chores* • *Because of the influence of social media, I find it hard to be productive*	While learning at home can mean learners have the freedom to choose their time to complete the modules. Some of the students find it hard to keep up with the pace due to the style of this

		learning setup. Children tend to be distracted at home especially when gadgets are available and household chores are assigned and routinary.
Mental Health Issues ➢ **(Anxiety, stress, breakdown, lack of focus & motivation loneliness & isolation)**	• *Lack of sleep due to activities that need to be submitted in a short period of time.* • *I can't concentrate and I'm still adjusting to this new mode of learning* • *I feel unmotivated when I see a lot of due dates* • *I lack motivation because I get bored with the same routine every day*	No interactive relationship between the teacher and learners will lead the learners not to be interested in learning. Students are not able to interact with their teacher and questions about the lesson could not be addressed. This new normal setup takes away the opportunity to interact with peers and may result in loneliness, stress, and anxiety. Students missed the old setup of learning. Mental health problems can affect a learner's energy levels, concentration, and optimism. As a teacher, it is important to give a hand and provide attention to the students who are suffering from mental issues. Through home visitation, immediate feedback and instant communication could be a great help to boost the learning power of students.
Lack of Academic Support and Difficulty in comprehending some of the lesson and instructions ➢ **No assistance in learning**	• *Every time I have difficulties in answering my modules, no one is there to help* • *I'm embarrassed to ask my teacher* • *My parents are too busy at work* • *It's hard to absorb new information when no one is there to guide me, compared to face-to-face classes.*	In modular distance learning, students need someone more knowledgeable they can seek help with regarding the lessons in their modules regardless of their year level. They recognize the relevance of home support.

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> - *Lack of immediate feedback from the teacher*

The data reveals that students are affected and have not adjusted well yet to the changes brought by the pandemic. They have not mastered dealing with the new educational setup. The sudden transition from face-to-face to modular distance learning has caused some difficulties among students. These difficulties challenged them. On the other hand, technology and social media had been helpful for the students in overcoming the dilemma they have been experiencing. Furthermore, parents and other home facilitators must be oriented or educated to support the educational needs of their children.

This outcome is comparable to the study of Dangle & Sumaoang (2020), the main challenges that emerged in the implementation of Modular Distance Learning, where a lack of school funding in the production and delivery of modules, students' struggles with self-studying, and parents' lack of knowledge to academically guide their child/children. The study was able to identify the participants' main issues in terms of resources, preparedness, and communication. These difficulties may have an impact on a student's academic achievement.

On the other hand, Matilov (2002) claimed that when parents are aware of and involved in their children's educational process, the outcome is more likely to be positive and inspiring. Parents in this study expressed fears, safety worries, and a sense of duty. Nonetheless, all of this is condensed to the place where they are completely aware of their "important" role as study-buddy in this new normal learning.

Since education is no longer held within the classroom, parents have become educators' collaborators. As home facilitators, parents play a critical role. Their key function in modular learning is to develop a connection with the child and to guide them.

CONCLUSION

From the findings of the study, it can be concluded that modular distance learning is an effective alternative to traditional face-to-face learning to develop the writing proficiency of the students. Modular distance learning will be more effective if there is an adequate supplementary learning resource complemented with technology. Moreover, parental support would be a great help for the successful implementation of modular distance learning. Moreover, it can also be concluded that partnership between schools and parents is important in a child's education.

From the findings of the study, the following are recommended: The teacher may orient the parents on the importance of observance of timeliness in the submission of worksheets or activity sheets and observance of the study schedule at home. The teacher may embed more writing activities in the modules for each subject area. The principal and the academic coordinators may review the modules for each subject area to improve the comprehensibility of the material. The school administration may conduct a program on the awareness that would address the mental issues of the students to support their social and emotional needs. The teachers may impose peer tutorials among students who are in more knowledgeable positions with those who are in a less favorable state.

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