

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Difficulties of parents with low educational attainment in assisting their children in modular distance learning during pandemic

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ABSTRACT

A significant role was played by the parents of the students, who had to become homeschoolers within a few days without prior training upon the suspension of face-to-face education. This study investigated the difficulties of Filipino parents ($n = 90$) with low educational attainment in assisting their children in modular distance learning. In-depth analysis and survey were employed as research instruments to extract responses on the difficulties of parents with low educational attainment and how government should aid them during a global crisis. The study was conducted in Zamboanga City, Philippines from July 2022 to December 2022. Parents struggled to explain, elaborate, and understand the lessons in the self-learning modules. Simulated teacher roles were another difficulty where parents were clueless on facilitating homeschooling and addressing learners' needs. Gender roles difficulties were prominent where women assume that homeschooling responsibilities added to their roles in child and home care. Most of the families belong to low-income households and experienced economic difficulties on added expenses incurred in assisting their children in implementing modular distance learning. Results dictated that the government could support the parents by equipping them to be effective collaborative partners in the new modality through developing skillset on learner's management, strategies on administering learning modules, remote instructional support to bridge the gap in learning and intensify programs venturing in livelihood and entrepreneurial opportunities. This study is vital to map out the difficulties of parents with low educational attainment in modular distance learning. It initiates responses by providing them concrete homeschooling manuals, module guides, training, and programs, establishing effective partners in the collaborative process of continuous learning at home.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic; educational attainment; difficulties; intellectual; parents; Philippines

1. Introduction

The Philippines' Department of Education (DepEd) dismissed calls for a nationwide academic break or the suspension of classes for a certain period due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The data issued by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)^[1] affected more than 800 million

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learners worldwide. One of these measures was to suspend face-to-face education in schools and universities temporarily. In this situation, a significant role was played by the parents of the students, who had to become homeschoolers within a few days without prior training, where parental involvement has previously been analyzed as necessary but often insufficient. This gives a more significant impact to students to decrease their learning, most especially students having parents with low educational attainment who experience difficulties in helping them in their studies. This study investigated the difficulties of parents with low educational attainment in assisting their children in modular distance learning.

The global outbreak of COVID-19 continues to pose unprecedented challenges, especially in the education sector. Education shifted to distance education formats^[2], where all forms of instructions were delivered remotely^[3]. In the Philippines, the Department of Education issued DepEd Order No. 12, s. 2020 “Adoption of the basic education learning continuity plan (BE-LCP) for school year 2020–2021 in the light of COVID-19 public health emergency” to protect the health, safety, and well-being of learners, teachers, and personnel, and to prevent the further transmission of the virus. Distance learning, specifically modular distance learning (MDL), was pivoted due to canceled face-to-face classes where individualized instruction permits learners to utilize self-learning modules (SLMs) in print or computerized format, and other learning materials such as textbooks, activity sheets, and study guides and any member of the family or other stakeholders in the community need to serve as para-teachers^[4]. The school as the sole responsible for child’s educational outcomes and parents’ passive role^[5] who because of child’s impossibility to independently carry out duties, have taken on the part of a substitute teacher overnight, which consequently resulted in encountered difficulties and overload^[6].

Distance learning necessitates the parents’ active involvement in the implementation of child education at home during pandemic^[7]. Parents are having difficulties balancing responsibilities, learner motivation, accessibility, and learning outcomes^[8], adding up to children’s inadequate self-regulation and lack of time and professional knowledge^[9]. Parents have limited abilities in providing distance learning facilities for children^[10]. Taking care of children while staying at home caused the parents’ economic productivity to decline^[11]. When households are locked up, parents may be very anxious about their economic future, so learning at home is not easy, especially for low-motivation children^[12].

In the Philippines, all schools were closed when the COVID-19 pandemic strikes, and the government implemented nationwide lockdown on 16 March 2020. In line with the DepEd memorandum, the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BELCP) is a framework developed to address the delivery of education in times of crises, with a primary focus on the safety, well-being, and health of learners, teachers, and DepEd employees^[13]. This framework serves as a guidance tool for the country’s education system, providing a structured approach to ensure the continuity of learning amidst challenging circumstances. By implementing the BELCP, DepEd aims to effectively navigate the difficulties of crisis situations while upholding the educational needs of all stakeholders involved^[14]. Meanwhile, the framework also permits different distance learning methods such as self-learning modules, television/radio-based teaching, online distance learning^[13].

UNESCO identifies an exacerbation of learning inequality during the pandemic and estimates that about 40% of low and lower-middle-income countries failed to support the underprivileged learners during temporary school shutdown. The challenge will be dealing with learners not capable of independent learning and parents with low educational attainment and accomplishing activities in the modules were left under the guidance of the parents. Parents worry that they might spend less time on their vegetable farms^[15]. Pulse Asia survey^[16] shows the poor quality of distance learning where twenty-five percent or 1 out of 4 parents said that their children were not learning, and three out of 10 could not tell if their children were learning or not. Difficulty in answering modules is one of the common problems encountered during this new educational

system^[17].

The present study aims to determine and build on programs addressing the difficulties of parents with low educational attainment in assisting their children in modular distance learning.

2. Research questions

1) What is the profile of the respondents in terms of

- a. Age
- b. Number of children
- c. Family monthly income

2) What are the difficulties encountered among parents with low educational attainment in assisting their children in modular distance learning in terms of

- a. Intellectual
- b. Simulated teaching roles
- c. Gender roles
- d. Economic

3) Is there a significant difference in the difficulties of parents with low educational attainment in assisting their children in modular distance learning when the respondents are grouped based on their profile?

4) What program can be developed to address the difficulties of parents with low educational attainment in assisting their children in modular distance learning?

3. Literature

Recent events from the COVID-19 pandemic have affected people's health and how they live, earn, and learn. A challenging result from this pandemic is the transition and adaptation of the educational system operated in a physical school into remote education. Children from low-income families suffer by being deprived of learning opportunities and are likely to lose the most learning outcomes^[18]. Households' major concerns are health, money, and especially their children's education^[1].

Using modular distance learning (MDL) was permitted in BE-LCP. Unprepared parents have taken on the role of educating their children overnight^[6], which consequently faces various difficulties from professional knowledge and pedagogy on the delivery of instruction; unsatisfactory learning outcomes; juggling roles and responsibilities; and financial challenges^[14].

3.1. Experiences of parents with low educational attainment on modular distance learning during COVID-19

In a traditional school setting, parents' participation and support contribute to the learner's achievement^[10,19-21]. However, the new modality necessitates parents to take on new and unfamiliar roles and responsibilities in assisting their children, resulting in balancing responsibilities, lack of content knowledge and pedagogy, non-positive learner motivation, and academic outcomes^[8,10].

3.2. Intellectual difficulties in assisting learners on modular distance learning

Parents who did not have academic success may have a poor perception of school^[10,22]. A need for instructive achievement as boundaries to parental inclusion in school^[23]. Parents with low educational attainment have low self-esteem; therefore, they lack the knowledge and confidence to aid their children^[10]. Parents believe that they cannot adequately assist their children in remote learning because they do not fully

understand education principles, lack specific subject knowledge, and feel isolated^[24].

3.3. Unpreparedness of parents assumed teaching roles

Less-educated parents have been less supportive of their children's efforts during the lockdown, partly due to a lack of confidence in their ability to aid them^[25]. Parents with a low level of education may have negative attitudes toward learning, underestimating the value of their support for their children's skill development and, as a result, assisting them less than parents with a higher level of education. The fact that, in certain circumstances, the efficacy of distance modular learning may have been hampered leaving them unprepared to adjust to the new situation^[18].

3.4. Balancing household roles and academic

The split of household chores was rarely a source of substantial stress. Parents did express fatigue and dissatisfaction over their disproportionate share of homeschooling. Surprisingly, they enlisted the help of their children to help with domestic duties to relieve parental stress^[26]. Other parents are too preoccupied with the chores and household responsibilities instead of teaching and assisting their children. Women provide more childcare and household chores, which worsens existing inequalities in parent roles.

3.5. Economic struggles in supporting modular distance learning

Parents' difficulty in assisting their children in modular distance learning indicates overload among these parents. Inadequate support to learning outcomes, navigating on an assumed teacher role, adjustment on the household responsibilities, and unstable finances impact the parent's ability to supervise their children effectively^[8]. If this continues, UNESCO^[1] revealed that children from low-income families most likely to have parents with low educational attainment would experience severe inequality in learning outcomes.

4. Methodology

This chapter systematically demonstrates the research design, research instruments, population and sampling techniques, research procedures and statistical treatment of data that will be used in order to conduct the study.

4.1. Population and sampling design

Purposive sampling was used to elicit data for the difficulties of parents with low educational attainment. Purposive sampling is effective in studies that deal with specific characteristics of participants^[27-29] because it can provide valuable insights that are applicable to some demographics specified^[30-33]. The study purposively sampled 90 parents from Zamboanga City with low educational attainment, i.e., did not finish college. The lowest educational attainment observed in the study was parent who did not finished 2nd grade and the highest was 3rd year college dropout. The 55 respondents were from ages 37–50 years old and the other half were 20–36 years old. The 63 respondents have 3 or more children and the remaining have 1–2 children. Sixty-four (64) respondents earn less than 10,000 PHP monthly income and others earn 10,000 PHP above monthly income.

4.2. Instruments

The study was quantitative research where the researchers utilized an original instrument. **Table 1** presents the questionnaire used in this study. Survey on the difficulties of parents with low educational attainment in assisting their children in modular distance learning during pandemic with 4 categories and 20 statements. The 1–4 scale was the basis of the researchers in determining the results of the survey. The statements can be rated as strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3), and strongly agree (4). The researchers conducted a reliability test ($n = 20$) prior to the full-blown data collection and processing, resulting in a

Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.878 for the questionnaire.

Table 1. Survey questionnaire.

Intellectual

I have difficulty in sharing ideas to my child about his/her lessons.

I have difficulty in guiding my child through demonstrating and explaining verbally.

I have difficulty in giving my own example to elaborate the lessons to my child.

I have difficulty in clearly understanding the lessons in the modules as well as the teacher's instructions.

I have difficulty in rephrasing instructions understandable to my child.

Simulated teaching roles

I have difficulty in applying motivational strategies to my children on his or her studies.

I have difficulty in encouraging my child to finish the modules.

I have difficulty in managing my child with regards to his/her study behavior.

I have difficulty in encouraging my child to accomplish his/her modules independently.

I have difficulty in guiding my child in answering the modules.

Gender roles

I have difficulty in managing my time between doing household chores and guiding my child's module.

I have difficulty in providing assistance to my children in different grade levels in accomplishing their modules.

I have difficulty in assisting my child in complying his/her modules from all the subjects.

I have difficulty in making myself available during the distribution and retrieval of modules.

I have difficulty in realigning my household responsibilities to be able to spend adequate time dedicated to assisting my child on his or her modules.

Economic

I have difficulty in balancing my budget between our daily needs and my child's academic needs like printing, photocopying and school supplies.

I have difficulty in purchasing cellphone load in order to communicate with my child's teacher with regards to the modules.

I have difficulty in generating income to financially supported my child's academic needs.

I have difficulty in allocating budget for cellphone load for data or internet connectivity usage.

I have difficulty in attending between our livelihood and my child's modular activities.

4.3. Data gathering procedure

The researchers ethically asked permission from the respondents to answer the survey. All participants were given a letter of consent and agreed to take part in this study. Respondents were given clear instructions before the conduct of the survey. They were asked whether they have understood the instructions and were allowed to ask questions for clarification. Instruments were administered in the second week of August. Ethical guidelines were put into place for the research period. Participants were fully informed regarding the objectives of the study while reassured that the data collected are entirely confidential. There will be no physical harm that may endanger the respondents for the entire duration of the study.

4.4. Data analysis

Data gathered were analyzed using frequency distribution, percentage, and mean, for all descriptive results. T-Test was used for the significant differences of the responses according to the respondents' profiles as grouped.

For computing the mean (\bar{x}), the researchers used a point system in Likert scale (1 for strongly disagree to 4 for strongly agree). The researchers summated all respondent mean in each category (i.e., intellectual,

simulated teaching roles, gender roles, and economic) then divided by the total number of respondents.

5. Results

Question 1: What is the demographic profile of the respondents?

In **Table 2**, 90 individuals responded to the survey. These responses are divided into several groups based on their age, number of children, and monthly family income.

Table 2. Demographic of the respondents.

Demographics		<i>n</i>	%
Age	20–36 years old	35	38.9%
	37–50 years old	55	61.1%
Number of children	1–2 children	27	30.0%
	3 or more children	63	70.0%
Monthly family income	< 10,000.00 PHP	64	71.1%
	> 10,000.00 PHP	26	28.9%

Age consisted of 35 (38.9%) respondents 20–36 years old and 55 (61.1%) respondents 37–50 years old. On the number of children, 27 (30.0%) respondents have 1–2 children, and 63 (70.0%) respondents have 3 or more children. 64 (71.1%) respondents have a monthly family income of less than 10,000.00 PHP, and 26 (28.9%) of the respondents have a monthly family income of more than 10,000.00 PHP.

Question 2: What are the difficulties of parents with low educational attainment in assisting their children in modular distance learning?

Table 3 presents the different difficulties of participants. Intellectual difficulties with a mean of 3.06 with high remarks show that respondents experienced difficulties on intellectual demands in assisting modular distance learning. Simulated teaching roles received a mean of 2.98 with high remarks means assuming a teacher role in the implemented modality was difficult for the parents. Gender roles received high responses with a mean of 2.81 from the respondents. It implies that performing roles at home was difficult when active involvement was needed to assist in the new modality. Economic difficulties elicit that utilization of the family’s financial resources received moderate remarks with a mean of 2.54.

Table 3. Results on the different difficulties of respondents.

Category	\bar{x}	Interpretation
Intellectual	3.06	High
Simulated teaching roles	2.98	High
Gender roles	2.81	High
Economic	2.54	Moderate

Range: 1.0–1.60 very low; 1.61–2.20 low; 2.21–2.80 moderate; 2.81–3.40 high; 3.41–4.00 very high.

Table 4 presents the data collected on difficulties based on the participants’ age. When grouped according to age, respondents with ages 20–36 years old has a mean of 3.19 or high remarks on intellectual difficulties; simulated teaching roles has high remarks or a mean of 3.05, gender roles with a mean of 2.85 or high remarks and a mean of 2.57 or moderate for economic difficulties. Respondents with ages 37–50 years old have a mean of 2.98 or high remarks on intellectual difficulties; simulated teaching roles have high remarks or a mean of 2.93, gender roles with a mean of 2.85 or high remarks and a mean of 2.57 or moderate remarks for economic difficulties.

Table 4. Results on the different difficulties of respondents when grouped according to age.

Category		\bar{x}	Interpretation
Intellectual	20–36 years old	3.19	High
	37–50 years old	2.98	High
Simulated teaching roles	20–36 years old	3.05	High
	37–50 years old	2.93	High
Gender roles	20–36 years old	2.85	High
	37–50 years old	2.79	Moderate
Economic	20–36 years old	2.57	Moderate
	37–50 years old	2.52	Moderate

Range: 1.0–1.60 very low; 1.61–2.20 low; 2.21–2.80 moderate; 2.81–3.40 high; 3.41–4.00 very high.

Table 5 indicates that when grouped according to the number of children, respondents with 1–2 children have a mean of 3.10 or high remarks on intellectual difficulties; simulated teaching roles has high remarks or a mean of 3.02, gender roles with a mean of 2.89 or high remarks and a mean of 2.71 or moderate for economic difficulties. Respondents with 3 or more children have a mean of 3.04 or high remarks on intellectual difficulties; simulated teaching roles have high remarks or a mean of 2.96, gender roles with a mean of 2.77 or moderate remarks and a mean of 2.47 or moderate remarks for economic difficulties.

Table 5. Results on the difficulties of respondents when grouped according to number of children.

Category		\bar{x}	Interpretation
Intellectual	1–2 children	3.10	High
	3 or more	3.04	High
Simulated teaching roles	1–2 children	3.02	High
	3 or more	2.96	High
Gender roles	1–2 children	2.89	High
	3 or more	2.77	Moderate
Economic	1–2 children	2.71	Moderate
	3 or more	2.47	Moderate

Range: 1.0–1.60 very low; 1.61–2.20 low; 2.21–2.80 moderate; 2.81–3.40 high; 3.41–4.00 very high.

Table 6 indicates that when grouped according to monthly family income, respondents earning less than 10,000.00 PHP has a mean of 3.06 or high remarks on intellectual difficulties; simulated teaching roles has high remarks or a mean of 3.00, gender roles with a mean of 2.77 or moderate remarks and a mean of 2.52 or moderate for economic difficulties. Respondents earning more than 10,000.00 PHP have a mean of 3.06 or high remarks on intellectual difficulties; simulated teaching roles have high remarks or a mean of 2.92, gender roles with a mean of 2.90 or high remarks and a mean of 2.61 or moderate remarks for economic difficulties.

Table 6. Results on the difficulties of respondents when grouped according to monthly family income.

Category		\bar{x}	Interpretation
Intellectual	< 10,000.00 PHP	3.06	High
	> 10,000.00 PHP	3.06	High
Simulated teaching roles	< 10,000.00 PHP	3.00	High
	> 10,000.00 PHP	2.92	High

Table 6. (Continued).

Category		\bar{x}	Interpretation
Gender roles	< 10,000.00 PHP	2.77	Moderate
	> 10,000.00 PHP	2.90	High
Economic	< 10,000.00 PHP	2.52	Moderate
	> 10,000.00 PHP	2.61	Moderate

Range: 1.0–1.60 very low; 1.61–2.20 low; 2.21–2.80 moderate; 2.81–3.40 high; 3.41–4.00 very high.

Question 3: Is there a significant difference in difficulties of parents with low educational attainment in assisting their children in modular distance learning when grouped based on the profile of the respondents?

Table 7 indicates there was a significant difference in the responses in economic difficulties when the respondents were grouped according to monthly family income. These differences mean that when it comes to monthly family income, it is considered that households experienced economic difficulties. It shows that financial resources were fundamental as a means to assist in modular distance learning.

Table 7. Demographic profile responses.

Demographics		Significant
Age	Intellectual	0.454
	Simulated teaching roles	0.667
	Gender roles	0.565
	Economic	0.834
Number of children	Intellectual	0.128
	Simulated teaching roles	0.523
	Gender roles	0.179
	Economic	0.124
Income	Intellectual	0.744
	Simulated teaching roles	0.181
	Gender roles	0.451
	Economic	0.024*

* Significant at $p < 0.05$.

Data also suggested no difference in the responses for intellectual, simulated teacher roles, and gender roles when the respondents were grouped according to age and number of children. It shows that these difficulties were all encountered regardless of the respondent's age and the number of children.

6. Discussion

There are three categories given for the demographics, the age, number of children, and monthly family income. Large proportion of respondents belongs to ages from 37–50 years old. 70% of them are mothers with 3 or more children. Respondents with less than 10,000.00 PHP monthly income are dominant. The research highlighted most of the respondents as middle-aged individuals with 3 or more children who lies within low-income households. The concentration of the respondents belonging within low-income households experienced discrepancies in the learning opportunity^[34].

Results suggest that intellectual, simulated teacher roles and gender roles are highly prevalent difficulties experienced among parents with low educational attainment. Contrary to the study on parents' engagement^[10]

where they provide positive praises and words of encouragement, helps their children understand concepts and lessons through examples and elaborations^[35], respondents struggle to make lessons understandable, doubtful about their capacity to assume the role of a teacher. This, therefore, supports the study that low formal education of parents hampered and causes hesitations to any academic activities and school agenda that involves a certain level of knowledge or ability^[36].

Additionally, the researchers' purposive selection of respondents revealed that women tend to assume the additional responsibilities on top of their motherly domestic sphere of duties at home^[37]. The results were aligned with the data on the increase in the disproportionate level of caregiving responsibility and burden to mothers^[38] and worsening of already existent inequalities in parent roles. The study shows that parents experienced difficulties in attending to the needs of their families. Disruptions on their livelihood when children stayed at home and their learnings are left in the hands of their parents, which is in consonance with the findings the pandemic has raised family stress, and parental resources lead to inadequate parenting^[39].

Economic difficulties indicate added struggles of parents to support the new modality financially. Responses were different from families earning more than 10,000.00 PHP and those earning below 10,000.00 PHP. Families belonging to the latter were anxious as the children stayed at home, giving them fewer chances to allocate their time in seeking livelihood and income. Allocating financial resources is difficult with the added incurred expenses in homeschooling while providing their daily need in the family. Therefore, this supports the study that policies must consider families with children from low- to middle-income households on access to technology, food, health, and security^[44].

The study has presented the different undertakings on parents' difficulties that can consider developing practical and appropriate programs to address these experiences and equip them to become effective and collaborative partners in the new modality. Government should have or at least have available training events contextualized to parents and communicated thoroughly. Training must tackle developing skillset on learner management, administering learning modules, coping strategies, and entrepreneurial skills. Government must intensify programs venturing in livelihood opportunities for parents and consider tapping other agencies. The study^[40] of revealed that teachers should help parents to build a meaningful assessment process and strategies to their children. Duhaylungsod and Chavez^[41] also encouraged students to use some of technological resources they have to learn something new and assist with their learning. The instructional strategies should also represent even those families living in poverty where access to technology is very limited^[42]. Strategizing remote parent-teacher collaboration for instructional support to bridge the gap in learning.

7. Limitations of the study

One significant limitation of the present study pertains to the constrained size of the sample population. This limitation underscores the necessity for caution when interpreting and generalizing the findings. Given the relatively small sample size, questions regarding the broader applicability and generalizability of the results inevitably arise, thereby showing the need to expand the study into larger group of people.

Furthermore, an additional limitation emanates from the utilization of the Likert scale as the instrument for self-assessment. The application of Likert scales may introduce inherent biases and potentially engender information loss. Some methods of data collection and data frameworks can be used to improve the quality of data collected without mainly relying on self-perception.

8. Conclusion

Learning opportunities should continue to be inclusive to all learners. Parents, especially those with low

educational attainment unprepared for the sudden shift to homeschooling, face difficulties in terms of intellectual, simulated teacher roles, gender roles, and economic as modular distance learning requires more of their involvement. In the same manner, focusing on the difficulties experienced by parents with low educational attainment to foster learning at home while performing family responsibilities will serve as a contribution to the literature on parents. These findings considering the parents' perspective, especially women who tend to assume these responsibilities, will serve as a basis for providing inclusive and comprehensive education policies for them during the pandemic and so on.

9. Suggestions

1) Homeschooling manual contextualize for parents: Content of the manual must be comprehensible and relatable to parents that will give them a clear grasp of what they will do. This manual will be a descriptive illustration of how learning takes place and a reference to what action should be done to a particular situation when assisting their children.

2) Parents' guide on self-learning module: This guide will be a reference for proper usage, and administration of the SLM. It will let the parents understand the purpose of each part of the module, and the flow of the learning process. The guide is intended to present essential learning principles in facilitating the SLM comprehensible to parents.

3) Livelihood and entrepreneurial register: Setting up new means of income generation and livelihood, the government must have a list of welfare-related agencies, programs, and services to offer sustainable economic and livelihood aid. These can be in skill set training for entrepreneurial pursuits such as marketing, branding, sales, operations, and costings. Different assistance programs may be diversified, such as capital aid, equipment, tools, service-related skills, or product-related commodity.

4) Trainings on re-strategizing remote parent-teacher collaboration: The training must tackle ways for teachers to effectively collaborate with parents, provide support and assistance in the facilitation of modules. This will offer ICT skills integration for the remote collaborative interaction between the parents and teachers.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, RAM, JGL, ARCI and JVC; methodology, RAM, JGL, ARCI and JVC; software, RAM, JGL, ARCI; validation, JGL and JVC; formal analysis, RAM, JGL, ARCI and JVC; investigation, RAM, JGL, ARCI and JVC; resources, RAM, JGL and ARCI; data curation, RAM and JVC; writing—original draft preparation, RAM, JGL and ARCI; writing—review and editing, RAM and ARCI; visualization, RAM, ARCI and JVC; supervision, RAM; project administration, RAM; funding acquisition, RAM, JGL, ARCI and JVC. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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