

## GEARING TOWARDS HYBRID EDUCATIONAL SETUP FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE

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Filipinos have always been known for their resiliency regardless of adversity. In recent years, nothing could be more challenging than battling a contagious enemy one's eyes couldn't even see - COVID-19.

One of those that greatly suffered from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is the education sector. In fact, in 2020, the Department of Education (DepEd) has explored the different Learning Delivery Modalities (LDM) as part of its Learning Continuity Plan (LCP). The modalities offered include modular learning using printed or digitized self-learning modules (SLMs), online learning through video conferencing, radio and television-based instruction, and blended learning, a combination of the modalities mentioned above. Of all of these, most learners and parents preferred modular learning using printed SLMs.

Come November 2021, it was a different story. Based on data released by DepEd from the Learner Information System (LIS), Filipino learners once again proved their resiliency by recording 27,232,095 enrollees for the formal basic education for the School Year 2021-2022. This number translates into a 3.83% increase in enrollment, or 1,005,073 more learners compared to the previous school year, which recorded a total of 26,227,022.

These numbers prove that more and more students from the public and private sectors have decided to return to school, but that doesn't mean they want to experience face-to-face classes immediately. The COVID-19 fear is still around, and DepEd

acknowledges that by continuously offering the modalities mentioned above onto the next school year. Enter hybrid learning.

A document released by UNESCO in July 2020 defined hybrid learning as a learning approach that combines both in-person and remote learning approaches that will improve student experiences and ensure learning continuity. This is in line with the reopening of schools and the gradual slowdown of COVID-19 cases around the world.

To put it into context, in the Philippines, we use the term blended learning which means a combination of face-to-face classes and online education. The words 'blended' and 'hybrid' learning can be used interchangeably; however, there is a subtle difference between them.

Singh (2021) defined blended learning as face-to-face classes accompanied by online resources and tasks. This means that these online resources will act as supplementary learning materials to augment the limited face-to-face classes.

On the other hand, the online components of hybrid learning substitute in-person class time. In the hybrid learning setup, teachers may deliver instruction synchronously through real-time video conferencing. Alternatively, they can also provide asynchronous online courses from which students can interact at different times (Siegelman, 2019).

Having a hybrid educational setup ensures that learning continues while providing tremendous flexibility on the part of the primary stakeholders such as the parents and students to choose between remote learning or face-to-face classes or to explore the best of both worlds by opting for hybrid learning.

The problem, however, is that a digital divide among students still exists and that the challenge of internet connectivity, especially in remote areas, remains in question. But on a positive note, DepEd has already addressed these problems by providing 93 percent

of public schools in the country with learning tablets and data sim cards for teachers and learners alike.

While it is not a one-size-fits-all solution, shifting towards hybrid learning introduces an equal opportunity for all learners while making education more accessible.

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