

THE PHILIPPINE DISTANCE LEARNING SCENARIO

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The Coronavirus Disease, also known as COVID-19, has been in the Philippines for more than three years now. The disease sparked a series of community lockdowns throughout the country beginning last year (CNN Philippines, 2021). Due to the virus's capacity to spread by airborne particles or being in close contact with an infected individual, schools and other essential establishments have no option but to discontinue face-to-face activities and transactions (Gutierrez & Bilefsky, 2021).

Even though other establishments such as malls and restaurants have recently opened, a significant percentage of schools have remained closed for face-to-face instruction. More than 27 million Filipino students were impacted by the school closure and as of August 2020, we are one of the remaining five nations in the world that have not resumed face-to-face lessons since the arrival of the COVID-19 (Unicef.Org, 2021).

The country's education sector, the teaching force, the students, and their parents have struggled and endured a lot due to the pandemic. Teachers were and are continuously being pushed to adapt to the "New Normal" means of teaching which includes either modular or online mode. They have been forced and pressured by the pandemic to learn the new technologies and methods needed to keep up with the challenges of distance learning.

The students and their parents are also struggling. Gadgets and internet connections cannot be afforded or are not a priority for most Filipino families especially those minimum wage earners and those who lost their jobs due to the pandemic. Their main priority now is to survive, to have food on their tables, and to pay for their basic utilities

such as electricity and water. This makes online learning, especially synchronous classes, unfair for the poor.

With modular learning, printouts called “modules” containing learning instructions and activities for the students to follow and perform are being utilized. It is designed to teach them what they are supposed to be learning from school without requiring the use of certain gadgets and internet connections on their end. These may appear as a better option than online learning, especially for those who are less privileged. Yet, the problem with this is not every student can teach themselves just by reading the module, and not every parent is equipped with the knowledge as well as the time to help their children in instances they are having hard times learning the module. In times of the pandemic where survival is the main priority of the families especially those within or below the poverty line, parents are opting to spend their time looking and doing ways to earn a living over guiding the children with their modules if ever the parents have the educational capability which is not the case most of the time.

Additionally, assuming that online and modular modes of learning are efficient and assuming that problems with internet connection and speed, utilization of online platforms and modules, availability of gadgets along with other problems associated with distance learning did not exist (which is not true in the real-world scenario), students will still be lacking the experience of hands-on learning. There are practical lessons that can only be taught or can be learned effectively through personal hands-on involvement. Some subjects and topics are designed to be performed face to face. There are resources such as laboratory instruments among others which are not available in each of the students' homes.

In today's time, the hope of the resumption of face-to-face classes amid the pandemic is gaining traction although there is still a lot to be considered as it is an issue that involves complex considerations and can only be safe and possible through strict sets of measures and policies from the national level. Yet, one thing is for sure now, the pandemic affected

our educational system and who knows what chaos it may bring to the future of our country before it leaves.

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