



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN ONLINE DISTANCE LEARNING MODALITY IN ONE PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL IN THE PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT

The Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan of the Department of Education highlights the use of different learning delivery modalities to assure that education continues amidst COVID-19 pandemic. Online distance learning modality (ODLM) has become increasingly available to provide new pathways of learning experiences during emergency remote education. This study was conducted to determine the students' perceived challenges and opportunities in ODLM at a public secondary school in the Division of San Pablo City. Convergent parallel mixed methods research design was employed; survey questionnaires were administered to 300 respondents who were selected from Grades 7 to 12 learners through stratified random sampling. To analyze the data, mean and standard deviation were computed. To verify the results, in-depth interview was conducted among 12 purposively selected participants. Thematic analysis was then used to interpret these responses. Results proved that majority of the students did not perceive motivation, learning resources, support system, and digital self-efficacy as challenges. Despite these satisfactory results, there are still students who encounter challenges such as lack of motivation, unstable internet connection, and voluminous tasks. Moreover, majority of them perceived self-directed learning, learning outcomes, convenience and ease, and accessibility as opportunities. Students take responsibility of their own learning, develop digital literacy, and improve time management skills. Opportunities are evident; however, challenges are inevitable. School administrators, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders should work together to deliver quality education among learners despite the change in learning modality. An action plan is proposed to lessen the challenges and strengthen the opportunities in ODLM.

Keywords: Convergent parallel mixed methods research, challenges, opportunities, online distance learning modality, Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan, action plan, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Schools have migrated to emergency remote education due to the drastic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation has transformed the Philippine education scenario (Tria, 2020; Alzueta et al., 2020) triggering problems and challenges and eliciting possibilities and opportunities (Arrieta et al., 2020; Gonzales, 2020). The Department of Education (DepEd) has formulated the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) for

immediate operationalization among schools to respond to the basic education challenges amidst the COVID-19 pandemic (DepEd, 2020). Different learning delivery modalities are designed and implemented to cater to the unique situations of schools, teachers, and learners. However, DepEd pursues distance learning as the topmost preferred learning modality. And to further build a resilient educational system, DepEd accentuated the four pillars of its education rally called *Sulong*

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EduKalidad (DepEd, 2019) in the implementation of BE-LCP. These include K to 12 curriculum review and update, improving the learning environment, teachers' upskilling and reskilling, and engagement of stakeholders for support and collaboration. These policies and frameworks have been developed to uphold the right of Filipino learners to quality, accessible, and inclusive education towards lifelong learning.

The adoption of emergency remote education has opened channels of different learning modalities (Hodges et al., 2020). One of which is the online distance learning modality (ODLM) which highlights the use of open educational resources, modern technologies, and online platforms and tools that can be accessed through the internet (DepEd, 2020). This modality provides a platform to conduct live interaction among teachers and learners through synchronous instruction. In addition, ODLM gains popularity in providing instructional support (Toquero, 2020) as it ensures access to learning experiences relevant to 21st-century education. Learners favor ODLM because it provides flexible options (Hewson, 2012) and positive learning outcomes (Basilaia & Kavadze, 2020). In the same vein, ODLM enhances digital literacy among learners. As globalization and advanced technology continuously shape the modern world, it is deemed relevant to embrace Education 4.0 in which learning experiences and instructional practices are innovatively assembled (Bakia, 2012) to respond to the fourth industrial revolution. This gives rise to new learning environment that increases learners' potential to develop new skills to promote lifelong (Dhawan, 2020), learner-centered, and self-directed learning (Mukhtar, 2020).

Despite its advantages, the digital divide becomes evident due to erratic failure of signal and technical malfunctions (De Villa & Manalo, 2020) resulting to less engagement, low attendance, and poor participation among students. Teachers reinvent their pedagogy and assessment, but students' difficulty in understanding instructional goals in the new learning environment poses a major threat to the effective learning process. Students were found to have low-preparedness in terms of e-learning competencies (Parkes et al.,

2014) resulting in a lack of creativity, resourcefulness, and innovation out of available tools and skills (Doucet et al., 2020). Though information has become readily available and learning gains have become broader, ODLM has restricted the overall learning experiences of learners such as interaction with peers and teachers, practical and hands-on activities, and access to more learning spaces and facilities. This impacted the quality of teaching and learning and the students mental health (Barrot et al, 2020). As COVID-19 elevates feelings of anxiety and unease (Copeland et al., 2021), unfamiliarity with new learning environments and platforms, technical issues, and unavailability of resources in ODLM (Barrot et al, 2020) make learners unengaged and unmotivated (Turner, 2020), and mentally and emotionally distressed (Fawaz et al, 2021).

Hence, this study was conducted to determine the students' perceived challenges and opportunities in ODLM. Moreover, it aimed to explore their lived experiences to strengthen the acquired perception and insights. These provided fundamental bases to create an action plan towards improved implementation of ODLM.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study was facilitated to investigate students' perceived challenges and opportunities in ODLM in one public secondary school in the Philippines.

More specifically, this sought answers to the following:

1. Determine the students' perceived challenges in ODLM in terms of:
 - 1.1 motivation,
 - 1.2 support system,
 - 1.3 learning resources, and
 - 1.4 digital self-efficacy
2. Ascertain the students' perceived opportunities in ODLM in terms of:
 - 2.1 self-directed learning,
 - 2.2 learning outcomes,
 - 2.3 convenience and ease of learning,
 - 2.4. accessibility
3. Explore the students' lived experiences in ODLM
4. Develop an action plan to improve the implementation of ODLM



METHODOLOGY

This study made use of Convergent Parallel Research Design which integrates and links qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The quantitative part involved 300 respondents who were selected from Grade 7 to 12 students using stratified random sampling. Researchers-developed survey questionnaire called “Challenges and Opportunities in Online Distance Learning Questionnaire” was used. It underwent expert validation and obtained an excellent reliability index ($\alpha=0.93$). The instrument was encoded in Google Forms, and it was administered online. Mean and standard deviation was computed to analyze the responses. The qualitative part involved 12 participants who were chosen using purposive sampling. A semi-structured interview guide was used as an instrument. In-depth interviews were conducted via an online platform. Recorded interviews were transcribed. Data were coded, categorized, and thematically analyzed. Results were subjected to member checking via correspondence to confirm its truthfulness. Permission from higher officers was obtained prior to data collection. Informed consent was secured.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Students’ Perceived Challenges in ODLM

1.1. In terms of Motivation

Table 1
Perceived Challenges in ODLM as to Motivation

	Indicators	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	initiative to study	1.68	0.78	SD
2.	motivated to attend classes	2.10	0.92	D
3.	willing to carry out tasks	1.68	0.75	SD
4.	interact actively	2.00	0.88	D
5.	finish tasks on time	1.48	0.71	SD
6.	feel a sense of belongingness	1.95	0.95	D
7.	competent to perform	1.93	0.91	D

One of the challenges encountered in ODLM is the lack of motivation (Daugherty, 2020). However, Table 1 shows favorable results. Most

students are eager to pursue studies, willing to participate in activities, and feel a sense of belongingness even in ODLM. Motivation serves as the fundamental drive to sustain learning. Achievement cannot be attained if students are not motivated regardless of how brilliant the teacher, curriculum, or school is (Usher & Kober, 2012). Furthermore, the change in learning conditions has a radical impact on students’ motivation and engagement (Daniels et al., 2021). Thus, the findings imply that students should maintain their motivation despite the change in learning modality.

1.2. In terms of Support System

Table 2
Perceived Challenges in ODLM as to Support System

	Indicators	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	help to understand the lessons (teachers)	1.50	0.68	SD
2.	facilitate on how to utilize learning resources (teachers)	1.50	0.65	SD
3.	provide academic monitoring, counseling, and/or remediation (teacher)	1.49	0.66	SD
4.	assist to set schedules (family)	2.13	1.01	D
5.	provide needs (family)	1.16	0.43	SD
6.	supply nutritious food (family)	1.30	0.55	SD
7.	provide conducive space at home (family)	1.51	0.75	SD
8.	help to accomplish school tasks (peers)	1.49	0.71	SD
9.	assist during group works (peers)	1.47	0.64	SD
10.	provide moral and emotional support	2.04	1.04	D

Students need support to succeed (Zuhairi et al., 2020). Table 2 indicates that most students receive support from their teachers, family, and peers. However, there are responses that vary widely, particularly on schedules of home-related and school-related tasks and mental and emotional support. ODLM is undeniably not ideal for some students. Other students struggle and suffer from anxiety (Sabo, 2020). Schools should make programs that would maintain students’ engagement (Hodge, 2020). Other contexts of support system should be widely explored to fit in the changing needs of learners in ODLM.

1.3. In terms of Learning Resources



Table 3
Perceived Challenges in ODLM as to Learning Resources

Indicators	Mean	SD	Remarks
1. textbooks and modules	1.47	0.65	SD
2. stable internet connection	2.21	0.85	D
3. device or equipment for synchronous classes	1.27	0.49	SD
4. supplementary materials and references	1.90	0.91	D
5. online libraries and digital repositories	1.55	0.73	SD
6. basic materials (pen, paper, ruler, etc.)	1.27	0.55	SD
7. support materials (printer, camera, scanner)	1.88	0.95	D
8. audiovisual technology	1.65	0.84	SD

Parallel to support system, it can be gleaned from Table 3 that learning resources were provided among learners. The school and stakeholders ensure the availability of learning resources to support online learning (Adjei et al., 2015). However, results reveal that internet connection poses a challenge. Poor internet connection is due to geographical location and socio-economic status of learners, respectively. Economic and social challenges may affect student performance (Choi & Chiu, 2021). Hence, sustainable assistance on educational technologies, online learning resources, and internet connection should be assured to attain success in ODLM.

1.4. In terms of Digital Self- Efficacy

Table 4
Perceived Challenges in ODLM as to Digital Self-Efficacy

Indicators	Mean	SD	Remarks
1. utilize virtual classroom	1.32	0.58	SD
2. interact using social media and messaging tools	1.44	0.67	SD
3. engage in online discussion	1.60	0.78	SD
4. adapt with the advanced technologies	1.65	0.74	SD
5. use video and photo editing applications	1.60	0.80	SD
6. do tasks using office productivity tools	1.49	0.67	SD
7. select, evaluate, and use online resources	1.60	0.69	SD
8. familiarize with cyber ethics and issues	1.42	0.62	SD
9. apply minimum troubleshooting skills	1.89	0.79	SD

Students with higher digital self-efficacy tend to maximize the use technology (Shakarami et al., 2013; Pumptow & Brahm, 2020). Table 4 illustrates that most students are not challenged when it comes to digital self-efficacy. They are equipped with digital skills and digital resilience which are crucial factors to thrive in the fourth industrial revolution (Tran et al., 2020).

2. Students’ perceived Opportunities in ODLM

2.1. In terms of Self-Directed Learning

Table 5
Perceived Opportunities in ODLM as to Self-Directed Learning

Indicators	Mean	SD	Remarks
1. set learning goals	3.08	0.79	A
2. look for learning resources	3.29	0.68	SA
3. manage time	3.08	0.86	A
4. find ways to simplify tasks	3.24	0.73	A
5. evaluate my own performance	3.20	0.80	A
6. seek assistance	3.12	0.85	A
7. respond positively on learning experiences	3.13	0.81	A
8. apply knowledge and skills in real life context	2.95	0.88	A
9. consider peers’ and teachers’ feedback	3.17	0.83	A

ODLM allows students to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning. Table 5 reveals that most students are responsible for their own learning. The majority of the students strongly agreed that they look for learning resources on their own. They become resourceful and adaptive. Moreover, students create learning goals, manage time, and monitor their own learning. Readiness in ODLM can be predicted significantly through self-directed learning skills (Karatas & Arpacı, 2021).

2.2. In terms of Learning Outcomes

Studies mentioned that online learning provides better learning outcomes compared to face-to-face learning (Choe et al., 2019). Table 6 reveals that students attain high scores in tests and develop relevant skills. Resourcefulness, self-discipline, creativity, collaboration etc. support personal learning outcomes, satisfaction, and well-being (Eynon & Malmberg, 2021).



Table 6
Perceived Opportunities in ODLM as to Learning Outcomes

Indicators	Mean	SD	Remarks
1. get high scores	3.11	0.75	A
2. accomplish tasks productively	2.99	0.89	A
3. develop effective communication skills	2.78	0.97	A
4. manifest creativity and resourcefulness	3.19	0.80	A
5. develop self-discipline	3.08	0.87	A
6. work cooperatively	3.08	0.90	A
7. make sound decisions	3.19	0.71	A
8. utilize technology responsibly	3.42	0.64	SA

This entails that ODLM helps students to acquire lifelong learning skills and essential competencies.

2.3. In terms of convenience and ease of learning

Table 7
Perceived Opportunities in ODLM as to Convenience and Ease of Learning

Indicators	Mean	SD	Remarks
1. save time	2.51	0.99	A
2. can be implemented even when the school is closed	2.95	0.91	A
3. do not require to leave the place	3.43	0.77	SA
4. get important announcements instantly	3.12	0.82	A
5. provide clear and understandable lessons	2.70	0.89	A
6. has no hassles	1.88	0.92	D
7. can do school tasks at own pace	3.03	0.91	A

Learning becomes manageable and adaptable in ODLM. Table 7 displays that the ODLM fits into the schedule, gives comfort and is suitable to home-based learners. However, several studies mentioned that convenience can be a negative factor as it may diminish the level of motivation (Jin et al., 2021). Consequently, learners disagreed that ODLM has no hassles. The situation is true to both learners and teachers. This may be attributed to digital divide due to inaccessible technologies and unstable internet signal connection (De Villa & Manalo, 2020) which can hamper online learning.

2.4. In terms of Accessibility

Worldwide information, collaboration, variety of resources, communities of practice, and

digital environments (McAlvage & Rice, 2018) become completely accessible in ODLM. Table 8 indicates that ODLM provides access to information, collaboration, discussion, and resources.

Table 8
Perceived Opportunities in ODLM as to Accessibility

Indicators	Mean	SD	Remarks
1. access information easily	3.34	0.69	SA
2. collaborate with peers anytime	2.92	0.89	A
3. participate in classes anytime/anywhere	3.18	0.79	A
4. use multimedia resources readily	3.27	0.73	SA
5. enter the virtual classroom anytime	3.16	0.80	A

The power of modern technologies connects people and provides access to education greatly and quickly (Foley & Ferri, 2012). It has expanded educational opportunities that can be reached through one's fingertips.

3. Students' Lived Experiences in ODLM

3.1. Students take responsibility for their own learning

ODLM promotes independence and autonomy. This allows learners to cultivate their self-reliance, decision-making, and self-regulation to accomplish the given tasks. The shift to ODLM engages students to capitalize on their learning experiences and to take the full responsibility of their own learning, hence, achieving favorable learning outcomes (Dougherty & Schantz, 2020) and improving their independent learning skills (Wahyuni, 2018).

"I learned to do things on my own. I became more self-reliant, independent, and flexible." (P2)

I managed to do the tasks with my own understanding and realization. It helped me to make good decisions and allowed me to become more confident." (P7)

3.2. Digital literacy is an essential skill to thrive in online learning

Digital literacy has become a necessity to gain success in ODLM (Tang & Chaw, 2016). The use of digital technologies allows students to create, adopt, and share information which are relevant to their educational needs. As students gain high digital literacy, they can improve their self-efficacy towards improved engagement and interaction during online instruction (Prior et al., 2016).

“ODLM pushed me to develop my skills in utilizing technologies. I think this is beneficial since online classes require us to access information from different websites and get resources which online.” (P9)

“As I immersed myself in ODLM and embrace the use of technology, I gain skills to perform better in my studies.” (P5)

3.3. Time management is a crucial factor to create balance

Among the leading issues in ODLM, poor time management sets in. ODLM promotes self-directed learning. However, lack of schedule, interruptions, and distractions, and the absence of a conducive learning space led to poor time management (Sellers, 2021). Time management skills have become increasingly important so students can complete the tasks ahead of time, stay connected with the lesson, and still have spare time for relaxation and rejuvenation for hobbies, organizations, families, and friends. Indeed, time management promotes balance in one's well-being which is also a desirable skill in the labor force (Auld, 2021).

“I learn to manage my time and control my routines. I do ideal practices which help me to improve myself as a responsible student.” (P3)

“I have learned how to discipline myself and set goals following my plan. I handled my own time and spent it justly to my tasks in school and home.” (P8)

3.4. Unstable internet connection hinders constant communication and accessibility

ODLM requires a reliable internet connection so students can attend online classes, communicate with peers and teachers, and utilize

online tools platforms. However, unstable internet connection is one of the topmost challenges in ODLM (Calixto et al., 2021). This problem leads to a lack of student engagement and collaboration, anxiety and frustration, delayed feedback, and poor performance.

“I always experience poor internet connection so no matter how good the discussion is, it is still frustrating because I cannot participate well.” (P2)

“It is so hard to access resources available online such as the live quizzes, videos, reading materials, etc. due to intermittent internet connection.” (P12)

3.5. Voluminous tasks lead to mental and emotional distress

Excessive tasks have always been an issue in ODLM. In the end, what they produce are rushed outputs that impede quality. Overwhelming tasks add to the mental and emotional distress, given that we are still in the COVID-19 pandemic. This may further lead to severe health complications (Sanchez, 2020). Consideration, understanding, and kindness help to diminish the students' burden, stress, and pressure through scheduled assessments and submission of outputs, and integrated tasks. Empathetic practices help to maintain students' motivation and interest and relieve the feelings of depression and unpleasant actions (Wang et al., 2010).

“There are times when many tasks are given at the same time. This gives me anxiety and I experience a mental breakdown.” (P12)

“There are requirements with unreasonable deadlines. I cannot fully concentrate since there are also other tasks in other subject areas. The tasks pile up, so I just rush them to comply.” (P3)

3.6. Lack of motivation results to unclear goals

Motivation is the drive that makes the students hooked and interested in the lesson despite the tough circumstances. However, a lack of motivation in ODLM is evident (Calixto et al., 2021) due to isolation, lack of interaction, and



personal problems (Mese & Seliven, 2021). This makes students procrastinate. They tend to get perplexed with their goals to the point of not doing the tasks, delaying the submissions, and stop attending online classes. Motivation is essential to achieve higher goals. This keeps the students engaged regardless of the learning context (Dörnyei, 2020).

“I lack motivation to the point that I procrastinate. I know this is not a good habit, but this is what I usually feel.” (P7).

“I felt lonely and isolated. Though we communicate through chat and e-mail, it is still different. This gives me no drive to finish the school tasks.” (P4)

“We have problems at home already because of the present situation. Before, school is my comfort zone. Now, this becomes another problem. I totally lose motivation.” (P11)

4. Proposed Action Plan

BE-LCP Framework	Projects, Program, and Activities	Objectives
K-12 Curriculum Review and Updates	Promoting Integrated Assessment	To foster integrative learning within and across learning areas to lessen the tasks in ODLM
Improvement of the Learning Environment	Standardized and Harmonized Online Learning Environment	To improve the implementation of ODLM creating a standardized and harmonized online learning environment
	Provision of Learning Resources for Synchronous and Asynchronous Classes	To provide learners with learning resources for online classes
Teachers' Upskilling and Reskilling	Webinar-Workshop on Digital Literacy and Efficacy	To enhance teachers' and learners' competence through digital literacy and efficacy training and programs
	Goal Setting, Time Management, and Well-Being Programs	To enrich teachers' and learners' understanding of goal setting, time management, and mental health
Engagement of Stakeholders for Support and Collaboration	Adopt-a-Student Program	To assist students who are in dire need of resources for online classes
	Promoting Parental Engagement	To foster parental support in students' curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities in ODLM

An action plan is proposed grounded on the significant findings of the study. Projects, programs, and activities aligned to the thrust of the BE-LCP Framework are proposed to serve as inputs in enhancing the implementation of ODLM

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the study, the following conclusion was drawn.

- Challenges are expected to occur in ODLM. However, these were not totally experienced by the learners but have become opportunities instead. The majority of the students are still motivated to learn. Support systems and learning resources are readily available. And since they are digital natives, digital self-efficacy has not become a challenge.
- Opportunities also come across with students' experiences in ODLM. The majority of the students become self-directed individuals. Convenience and ease are felt since learning opportunities have become increasingly accessible and available. Hence, the learning outcomes are achieved indispensably.
- ODLM has become the most preferred distance learning modality. This gives way to students' responsibility for learning, digital literacy, and time management. However, it cannot be denied that there are still students who face challenges such as lack of motivation, unstable internet connection, and voluminous tasks. Opportunities are clear, but challenges are inevitable due to differences in situational context.
- An action plan can help schools to implement ODLM. Students' experiences provide valuable input to lessen the challenges and strengthen the opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light with the results of the study, the following recommendations were hereby suggested:

- Teachers may revisit the opportunities and challenges encountered by learners so they



- may be able to develop possible enrichment and/or intervention programs in ODLM.
- The proposed action plan may be utilized and adopted by schools to further enhance the delivery of teaching and learning process in ODLM.
 - Similar research studies may be conducted to explore other domains of opportunities and challenges in different learning delivery modalities.

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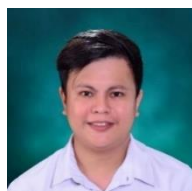
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