

## Modular Distance Learning in the New Normal: Challenges on its Implementation

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### ABSTRACT

*This basic research was conducted to determine the challenges of teachers in the implementation of modular distance learning in the new normal of the public elementary and secondary schools in the District of Gitagum, Division of Misamis Oriental. Specifically, it sought to: a) describe the characteristics of the respondents; b) determine the challenges encountered by the teachers in terms of accessibility, availability of resources, support to learners, teachers' competence and teaching strategies, assessment, and health and safety measures; c) determine the significant relationship between the respondents' challenges and their characteristics; and d) come up with an intervention plan based on the results of the study. The respondents of the study were the one hundred five (144) public school teachers in the District of Gitagum, Division of Misamis Oriental. A researcher-made survey questionnaire was employed to obtain specific information about the study. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counting of data, percentage, mean and standard deviation. Pearson Product Moment of Correlation was employed to test the significant relationship between the respondent's challenges and their characteristics. An intervention plan was designed to help teachers in finding solutions to the challenges they are facing in the implementation of modular distance learning. The teachers' challenges were low in the implementation of modular distance learning. It suggests that teachers faced few challenges or that the challenges they encountered were of low intensity. In other words, it implies that teachers found it relatively manageable to implement modular distance learning, and the difficulties they encountered were not severe. Teachers' challenges were significant to sex, position, teaching experience and attitudes towards modular distance learning in the new normal. It is recommended that teachers seek support from stakeholders and the local government to acquire funds for better implementation.*

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### KEYWORDS

Challenges; Modular Distance Learning; New Normal.

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### 1. Introduction

The present COVID-19 pandemic has affected the educational sectors and has brought extraordinary challenges and no one knows when it will end. Some countries around the world have temporarily closed educational institutions to contain the spread of the COVID -19 pandemic and reduce infections. This closure has affected more than 1.2 billion learners worldwide with more than 28 million learners in the Philippines (UNESCO, 2020).

In the face of this continuing health threat, the Department of Education (DepEd) formulated the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (LCP) to put into motion the marching orders of the Secretary, that is to ensure that learning continues while guaranteeing the health, safety, and well-being of all learners, teachers, and other DepEd employees. The opening of classes during this pandemic time was supposed to be August but since the Department of Education needed more time for the preparation that is why it has been moved to October 5, 2020 based on the recommendation of Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) which was in charged to oversee the general welfare of all sectors of society especially concerning health issues. President Rodrigo Roa Duterte then instructed DepEd to ensure that all preparations have been made for the smooth and successful virtual opening of classes for Academic Year 2020-2021. On the other hand private schools were allowed to open classes earlier than August 24, 2020 provided that they have properly laid down their LCPs.

Pursuant to DepEd Memorandum No. 7, series of 2020, the agency has adopted the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan as an alternative delivery mode amid the continuing health crisis. It consists of the following learning modalities: distance learning via modular/ printed instruction, online learning, radio and TV-based learning and blended learning which is a combination of any of the three modalities (Calipay, 2020). Based on the partial results of the Learner Enrollment and Survey Forms (LESFs) distributed during the enrollment period, it showed 7.2 million enrollees prefer to use modular distance learning, TV & radio based instructions and other modalities while only 2 million enrollees prefer online for school year 2020-2021 (Manila Bulletin, 2020).

Certainly, in the Philippines, COVID-19 pandemic affected education in which school closures disrupted education, leading to various distance learning methods. The digital divide widened inequalities in access to education. Teachers needed training to adapt to new teaching formats. Mental health support became crucial for students and educators. In addition, in a global perspective, the pandemic disrupted education for over 1.5 billion students worldwide. It accelerated digital transformation in education. Concerns arose about learning loss and catching up on missed education. Global cooperation and innovation played key roles in addressing challenges.

The term "new normal" refers to a concept that gained prominence during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. It signifies a significant and lasting shift in societal norms, behaviors, and practices, typically in response to a major event or crisis. In the context of education, the "new normal" describes the transformed and evolving landscape of teaching and learning resulting from the pandemic and its aftermath. In the study or discussion of the challenges faced by teachers in this new normal, it's essential to consider the following key factors: remote and hybrid learning, technological literacy, student engagement, mental health and well-being, assessment and evaluation, inclusion and equity, professional development (Cahapay, 2020; Alea et al., 2020; Sukmawaty et al., 2022)

In summary, the "new normal" in education refers to the enduring changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, including remote and hybrid learning, increased reliance on technology, and the need to address the mental health and equity challenges faced by both teachers and students. Understanding and addressing these challenges is essential for ensuring a successful and inclusive education system in this transformed landscape.

Indeed, the implementation of modular distance learning as one of the alternative delivery modalities in the new normal is a proactive decision and prerogative of the unceasing commitment of the Department of Education to find ways to make learning happen despite the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is disheartening to note that teachers are encountering several challenges in this endeavor (Toquero, 2020; Cahapay, 2020). Firstly, there are issues surrounding the availability of resources for printing and distributing modules, as well as concerns about accessibility to remote communities where teachers must personally deliver the materials. Moreover, teachers grapple with the development of effective teaching strategies and the necessary support to ensure that every learner, regardless of their circumstances, has an equal opportunity to learn and is properly monitored.

Furthermore, teachers find themselves needing to participate in online courses, attend a series of webinars, and engage in Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions focused on Learning Delivery Modalities. These initiatives are vital for them to gain a holistic understanding and the confidence needed for distance learning delivery. Additionally, there is the pressing issue of how to assess learners effectively in this context. Lastly, teachers must juggle all these challenges while adhering to health and safety protocols during the implementation of modular distance learning (Culajara, 2023; Pedroso et al., 2021). These are the formidable challenges that this study seeks to address, aiming to uncover the subjective responses of teachers regarding how to enhance the implementation of modular distance learning in the new normal education landscape.

Thus, this study attempted to determine the challenges of teachers in the implementation of modular distance learning in the new normal of the public schools of the District of Gitagum in the Division of Misamis Oriental, SY 2021-2022. This paper attempted to answer the following questions: (1) What are the characteristics of the respondents in terms of: sex, position, teaching experience, and attitude towards the challenges?; (2) What is the respondents' level of challenges in the modular distance learning in the new normal in terms of: accessibility, availability of resources, support to learners, teachers' competence, teaching strategies, assessment, and health and safety measures?; and (3) Is there a significant relationship in the challenges of the implementation of modular distance learning when grouped according to: sex, position, teaching experience, and attitude towards the challenges?

## **2. Methodology**

The type of research method used by the proponent in this basic research is descriptive research method. The survey questionnaire for determining the challenges encountered by teachers in the implementation of modular distance learning in the new normal was used to collect data and information. Before the sampling and gathering of data was done, the researcher determined the population of public school teachers in the District of Gitagum, to get the number of samples among teacher respondents. From the list, the total number of one hundred five (105) public school teachers was determined. Proportionate sampling through Slovin's formula was used in determining the sample size of the respondents.

Before the research questionnaire was administered to the respective respondents, the questionnaire was tried to ten (10) teachers for them to answer. These teachers are not the respondents of the study. After they have responded the questionnaire given, they are asked by the researcher to find out judgment, comments and suggestions of the questionnaire. They are asked if all the items were appropriate enough to determine the respondents' challenges in the implementation of modular distance learning in the new normal. Respondents' individual profile and their responses to the questionnaire do not in any way affect their performance and the information they gave will be kept with high confidence.

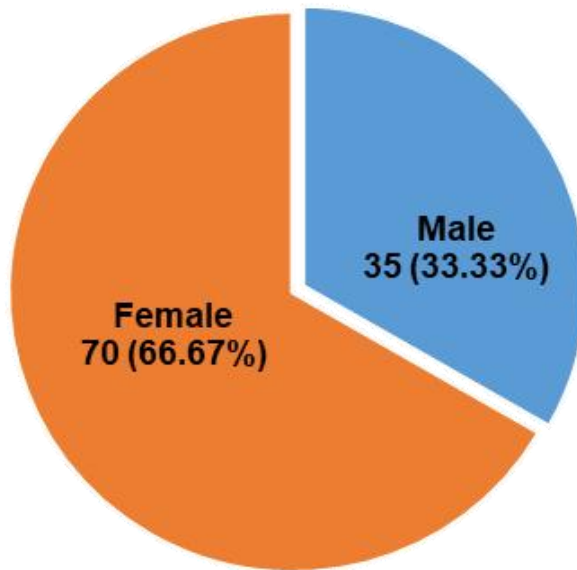
The study used test questionnaires in gathering data. The research instrument that was used to gather necessary information for this study had two parts. Part 1 dealt with the profile of teacher-respondents in terms of sex, position, teaching experience, and attitude towards the challenges. Part 2 delved into the challenges in the implementation of modular distance learning in the new normal. The researcher-made questionnaire follows a Likert scale with the following options: for the attitude towards the Challenges, 1) strongly disagree; 2) disagree; 3) agree; and 4) strongly agree; and for the challenges in the implementation of modular distance learning in the new normal, 1) never; 2) sometimes; 3) most of the time; 4) at all times. The survey questionnaires consisted of fifty-six (56) challenges statement which composed of seven parts: accessibility, availability of resources, support to learners, teachers' competence, teaching strategies, assessment, and health and safety measures.

Before the researcher will personally administered the test questionnaire to the respondents, an approval from the Schools Division Superintendent of Misamis Oriental was sought. The principals and the teachers involved are also consulted. The researcher administered the test questionnaire to the respondents and provided them with clear instructions on how to answer through Google Forms. The respondents answered the questionnaire at their convenient time and place. Data that has been extracted from the questionnaire were classified, organized and tabulated accordingly. The researcher tabulated the data gathered from the answered questionnaire. Analyses and interpretation of data helped to formulate findings, conclusions and recommendations.

## **3. Result and Discussion**

The data gathered were drawn from the survey questionnaire and presented and analyzed accordingly. The frequency and percentage of teachers' profile in terms of sex, position, teaching experience, and attitudes towards challenges were determined and presented through pie chart and graph for analysis, respectively. To determine the challenges encountered by the teachers towards the implementation of modular distance learning, the mean scores and standard deviation of each factor considered was determined. To test the significant relationship between the respondents' challenges in the implementation of modular distance learning in the new normal when impact on their characteristics, Pearson Product Moment of Correlation was treated.

### 3.1. Characteristics of the teacher-respondents in terms of sex, position, teaching experience, and their attitudes towards the challenges

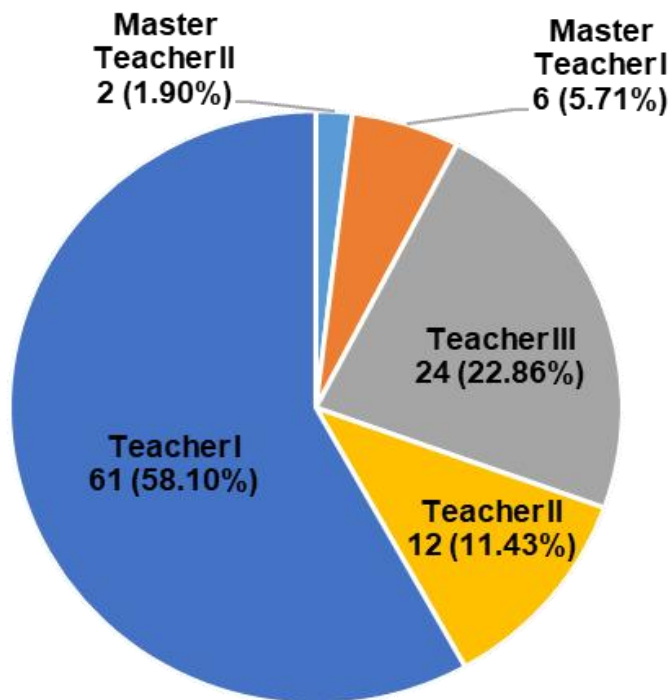


**Figure 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Teacher-respondents' Sex**

Figure 1 shows the percentage distribution of teacher-respondents sex. It detects that 70 (66.67%) of the respondents were female and 35 (33.33%) were male. This means that majority of the respondents were female. This signifies female teachers evidently dominate the teaching profession in the public schools and that their population is really of great number compared to male teachers. This further illustrates that the female teachers occupy a bigger population in the public schools compared to male teachers.

According to Jones & Tzekaki (2016), it has become more popular for women to work as teachers than men. Female teachers, accordingly, are more emotionally intelligent than male teachers and are well equipped to deal with students' increasing emotional needs. It clearly means that females are the "nurturers" and males are more inclined to be the "providers."

Looking into the lowest frequency of 35 (33.33%), it was occupied by male teachers. This suggests that few male teachers are passionate in choosing teaching as a profession and that they prefer other careers in earning a living. In a news analysis by Rich (2016), she claimed that while teaching was once a profession for men, women started to join the workforce in significant numbers in the 1960s, teaching was one of the very few careers left to them. However, despite women making inroads into formerly male-dominated fields, there has been no corresponding flow of men into teaching. Since there are very few men in the teaching profession, some men may be less likely to see it as a suitable career option for them.

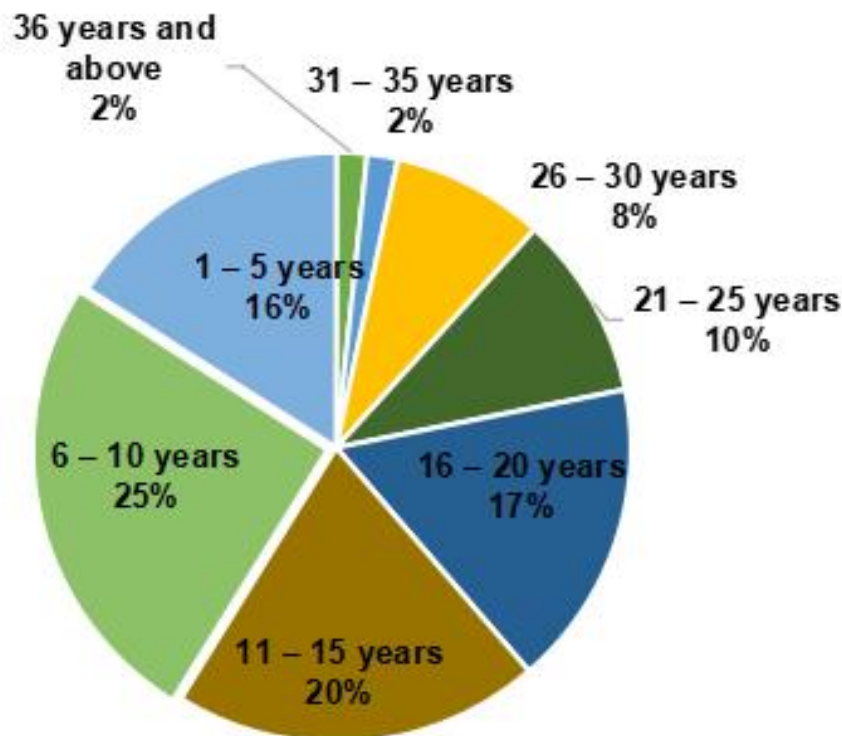


**Figure 2. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Teacher-respondents' position**

Figure 2 discloses the frequency and percentage distribution of teacher-respondents' position. It shows that among the teachers' position in the Department of Education, the Teacher I position gained the highest frequency of 61 (58.00%). This indicates that schools are dominantly occupied by newly hired teachers, and some, are those teachers who are not new to the service but are not promoted to the next level position due to ineligibility for position and qualification standards. Since the Teacher I position is the starting plantilla position for newly hired teachers, this would mean that a greater population of public teachers are dominantly accumulated in Teacher I position. In the calendar year 2019, the Philippines had 436,275 filled plantilla items for Teacher 1 positions in public schools, with a monthly salary of Php 20, 754 (Department of Education, 2019).

On the other hand, the Master Teacher II position got the lowest mean of 2 (1.90%). This means that there are only a few teachers are promoted to Master Teacher II. Also, since the plantilla positions for Master teachers are limited only in every school, it is expected that a smaller number of teachers are promoted to this higher plantilla position among teachers. To note, In the Philippines, there a total of 15,828 Master Teachers in the public schools in the calendar year 2019 (Department of Education, 2019).

Considerably, based on the general guidelines for Master Teacher promotion, there are four qualifications that must be met in order to be promoted to Master Teacher: (1) Only those who are actually teaching will be eligible for the rank of Master Teacher (Llego et al., 2020). This includes teachers who, in addition to special duties, have daily teaching loads; (2) Positions for Master Teacher (MT) shall be allotted proportionally based on the number of teachers. The number for the division shall also be allocated proportionally among all districts; (3) In the secondary school, an allotment of one (1) MT place per subject area for at least 5-7 teachers should be the basis; and (4) If there are few qualified teachers in the district to fill the number of MT positions allotted to it, the positions can be filled by a qualified teacher from another district; however, that teacher must serve in the district where the MT position has been allotted (Llego, 2019).

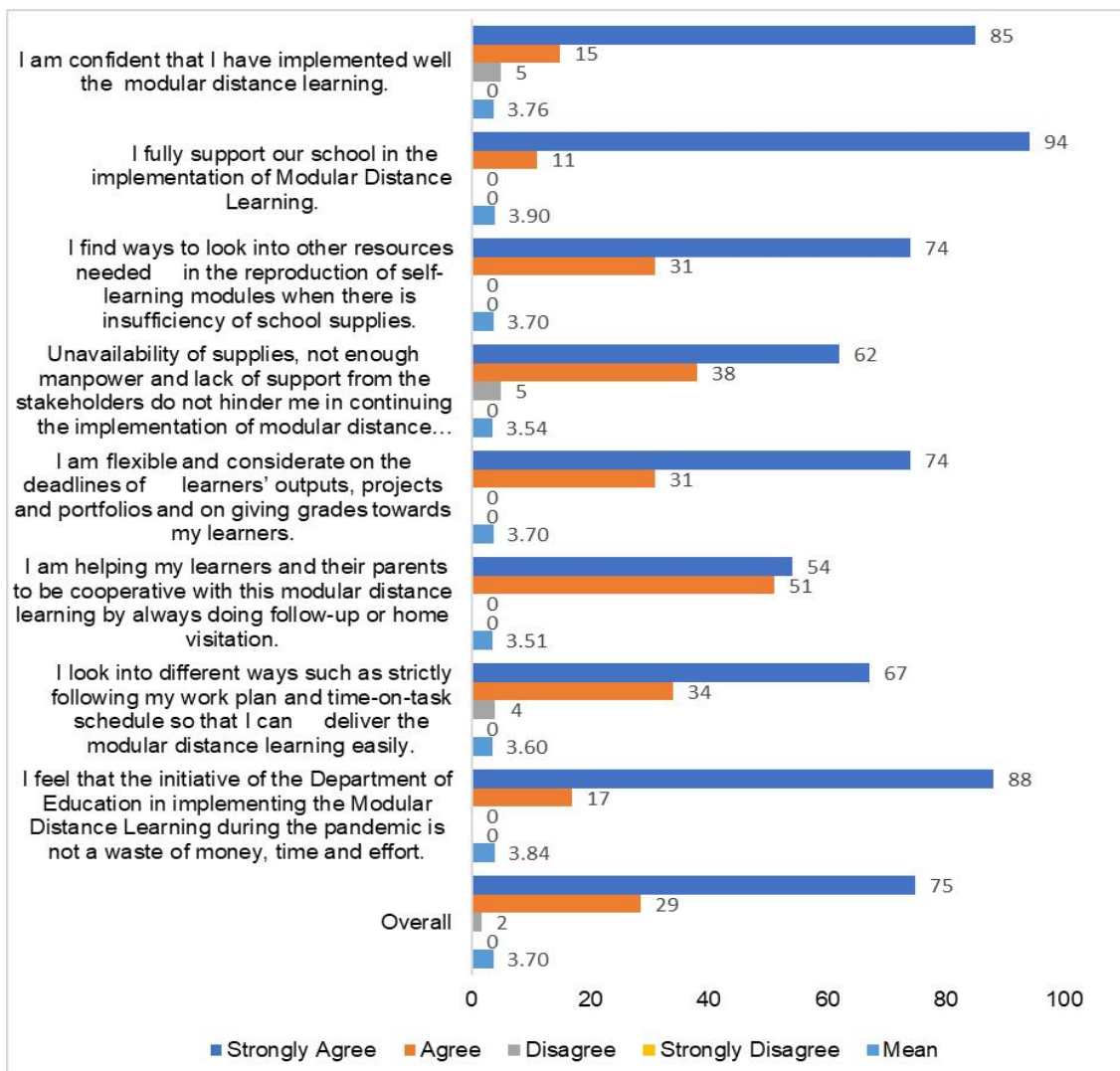


**Figure 3. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Teacher-respondents' Teaching Experience**

Figure 3 conveys the frequency distribution of respondents' teaching experience. The results divulge that teachers with 6-10 years of teaching experience got the highest mean of 30 (28.57%). Presumably, these huge number of teachers of this age bracket is due to the Mass hiring of K to 12 Curriculum. Teachers of these years of teaching experience are on their productive years and they are now building their full potentials, interests and capabilities and some are already promoted to higher teaching positions.

According to Kini and Podolsky (2016), teaching experience is favorably correlated with learner performance gains throughout a teacher's career. Improvements in teacher effectiveness correlated with experience are greatest in the early years of a teacher's career. Still, they appear to be important as teachers enter their second, and sometimes third, decades of teaching. Furthermore, more seasoned teachers promote greater student learning for their colleagues, the school as a whole, and their students.

On the other hand, teachers with 36 years and above of teaching experience got the lowest mean of 1 (0.95%). This conveys that it is very rare to see teachers of these years of teaching experience still remain working at school. Some are already bored, tired and wanted to free themselves from the load of the work such as preparing instructional materials, making lesson plans, correcting paper works, and dealing with learners. The value of experienced teachers reminds us that schools today are diverse institutions built on human participation and interactions: teachers are not disposable widgets on an automated assembly line. It also reminds us that educational progress is always gradual and slow. Our collective duty is to provide the best opportunities for teachers to learn, schools to expand, and systems to achieve on our high expectations (Avvisati, 2018).



**Figure 4. Frequency Distribution and Mean of Teacher-respondents' Attitude towards the Challenges**

Legend: 3:25-4:00=Strongly agree 2:50-3:24=Agree 1.75-2.49=Disagree 1.00-1.74=Strongly disagree

Figure 4 discloses the distribution of respondents' attitude towards the challenges. It reveals the overall mean of 3.70 on teachers' attitude towards the implementation of modular distance learning with a description of Strongly agree. This simply signifies that teachers have a very positive attitude towards the implementation of modular distance learning in the new normal and that they strongly support the school to whatever programs and activities relating to its implementation. This also reflects that teachers are showing a very favorable response in the delivery of modular distance learning, which very important since they are the front liners of its implementation. Accordingly, a teacher with a positive attitude is always welcomed by society. A positive attitude still has a significant effect on the education of learners. If there is sweetness in teaching, it will still attract people of all ages (Gowder, 2016).

Among the indicators, I fully support our school in the implementation of self-learning modules accumulated the highest mean of 3.90 with a corresponding description of Strongly agree. This result denotes that teachers are very positive to support the school and very considerate and flexible in supporting their learners in the deadlines of their output and performance tasks in the implementation of modular distance learning. Teachers' support is very significant in the implementation of modular distance learning because it affects the way they cater and gives support to their learners. Accordingly, positive teacher-student relationships foster greater cooperation and engagement in the classroom. They also help to create a supportive, positive school environment that encourages diversity, social and emotional learning, and better student performance (Nishioka, 2023).

On the other hand, the indicator, Unavailability of supplies, not enough manpower and lack of support from the stakeholders do not hinder me in continuing the implementation of self-learning modules learning got the lowest mean of

3.54 with a corresponding description of Strongly Agree. This means that teachers are still very positive that even there are constraints in the implementation of modular distance learning in then new normal it will not hamper their full support on its implementation. In other words, the unavailability of supplies does not stop teachers from doing their work. Instead, it gives light on finding alternative solutions in overcoming the problems and challenges of its implementation.

Wolpert-Gawron (2013) provides guidance to teachers about how to preserve happiness even in tough times, such as: (1) recognizing what you enjoy about teaching and surviving in it; (2) seeking someone who can provide solutions, not just an ear; (3) selecting and choosing the news you read; (4) understanding your limits; (5) never shutting the door to collaboration; (6) being respectful of one another; and (7) picking your fights. She also noted that we must find ways to be happy with our everyday lives, as well as continue to support one another and be positive.

**3.2. Level of challenges encountered by teacher-respondents on the implementation of modular distance learning in the new normal. in terms of: accessibility, availability of resources, support to learners, teachers' competence, teaching strategies, assessment, and health and safety measures**

**Table 1. Summary of the Challenges Encountered by the Teachers in the Implementation of Modular Distance Learning in the New Normal**

Challenges on the Implementation of Modular Distance Learning in the New Normal	Mean	Standard Deviation	Description
Accessibility	2.67	1.043	Most of the time
Availability of resources	2.50	0.874	Sometimes
Support to learners	3.34	0.759	At all times
Teachers' Competence	3.36	0.673	At all times
Teaching Strategies	3.29	0.813	At all times
Assessment	3.21	1.021	Most of the time
Health and Safety Measures	3.32	0.928	At all times
Overall	3.10	0.873	Most of the time

Legend: 3:25-4:00=At all times 2:50-3:24=Most of the time 1.75-2.49=Sometimes 1.00-1.74=Never

Table 1 draws the summary of the challenges encountered by the teachers in the implementation of modular distance learning considering the following: accessibility, availability of resources, support to learners, teachers' competence, teaching strategies, assessment, health and safety measures. The overall summary of the mean rating of teacher respondents on the challenges they have encountered in the implementation of modular distance learning was 3.10 (SD=0.873) with a corresponding description of Most of the time. The result exposes that teachers have low challenges on the implementation of modular distance learning in the new normal. This would also mean that teachers have already cope up and adjust to challenges encountered in the delivery of MDL.

However, in a case study conducted by SEAMEO INNOTECH (2017) on the delivery of self-learning modules, it was discovered that there are areas in the delivery of self-learning modules that face the most challenges and need the most improvement, such as: 1) funding – insufficient long-term budgetary support for program implementation 2) curriculum and learning materials – incomplete sets and the need to realign modules; 3) advocacy – lack of program information, the need to strengthen links with stakeholders, and dissemination strategies; and 4) capacity building – related training and seminars required for relevant implementing guidelines, class management, blended learning delivery, learner assessment, teachers' role and others.

Among the factors investigated teachers' competence has the highest mean rating of 3.36 (SD=0.673) with a corresponding description of At all times. This implies that teachers have very low challenges in the implementation of modular distance learning in the new normal. This would denote that teachers are highly competent and are able to help the learners, no matter their academic abilities, skills, talents, learning abilities and weaknesses in successful



implementation of MDL. Competent teachers are the most important factor in increasing students' performance and narrowing the achievement gap. The teacher makes a significant difference between the most and least successful classrooms. The single most influential factor influencing learners' learning is the quality of teaching. If teachers are not given opportunities to strengthen their practices in the classroom or even at home, student performance can suffer as a result (Liaquat & Naz, 2016).

However, availability of resources got the lowest mean rating of 2.50 (SD=0.874) with a corresponding description of Sometimes. This reveals that teachers have low challenges in terms of availability of resources in the implementation of modular distance learning in the new normal. This would also mean that teachers have minimal challenges in the constraints of resources to be used in the delivery of MDL. In a study by Esongo (2017), there is a connection between the availability of resources and school system efficiency. Inadequate resource availability has negative consequences, such as high repetition and failure rates.

**Table 2. Result of the Test on Relationship between the Respondents' Challenges in the Implementation of Modular Distance Learning in the New Normal and each of their Characteristics**

Respondents Characteristic	Challenges in the Implementation of Self-learning Modules			
	R	Description	Sig. Level	Interpretation
Sex	0.217	Weak Correlation	0.033	Significant
Position	0.267	Weak Correlation	0.045	Significant
Teaching experience	0.214	Weak Correlation	0.004	Significant
Attitude towards Challenges	0.294	Weak Correlation	0.000*	Significant

Legend: \*Significant at 0.05 level

Table 2 demonstrates the result of the test on relationship between the respondents' challenges in the implementation of modular distance learning in the new normal and each of their characteristics. The table exemplifies that the profile of teachers as to sex with computed  $r = 0.217$  described as "weak correlation", position with computed  $r = 0.267$  described as "weak correlation", teaching experience with with computed  $r = 0.214$  described as "weak correlation", and attitude towards self-learning modules with computer  $r = 0.294$  described as "weak correlation" were significantly relevant to the respondents' problems in the implementation of modular distance learning in the new normal. This signifies that the null hypothesis was rejected because the obtained probability values were lesser than the level set at 0.05. This further denotes that sex, position, teaching experience, and attitude towards the challenges affect the challenges encountered by the teachers in the implementation of modular distance learning.

Accordingly, sex of the respondents matter on how they respond to challenges they have encountered in the implementation of modular distance learning. This explains that a male teacher would have a different problem faced or encountered than a female teacher. In a study conducted by Tran (2015) on the impact of sex on teachers' perceptions of school environment, teaching effectiveness, stress, and work satisfaction, it was discovered that teachers' sex has a significant influence on student outcomes at the middle-school level. Researchers have identified that a variety of teacher characteristics or variables can inhibit or impede successful subject delivery. Abe & Adu (2014) discovered that one of the teachers' characteristics that influence effective subject delivery is the teachers' sex in a study on the impact of teachers' qualifications on students' performance in mathematics.

Regarding the teachers' position, it has also impact on how teachers respond to the challenges they encountered in the delivery of modular distance learning. This implies that teachers holding Teacher 1 positions would have a different challenges experienced to teachers holding a different teaching position like Master Teacher II. The result is also true to the study by Chu et al., (2015), in which it was found out that teachers' position affects students' achievement. Teachers of the highest position are more positively affect students' achievement than teachers of lower rank.

When respondents' characteristics are considered as to teaching experience, it reveals that number of years of teaching affects their challenges in the implementation of modular distance learning in the new normal. So, teachers with

different number of years of teaching experience have also different challenges encountered in the implementation of modular distance learning.

Taking into consideration the teachers' attitude towards the challenges, it also has an effect on their challenges in the implementation of MDL. This interprets that attitude of teachers, whether positive or negative, correlates to their challenges in the delivery of MDL. This would also mean that when a teacher has a positive attitude, more or likely, he or she would take it as a little problem. However, when a teacher is negative, he or she would consider it as a big problem. This supports the findings in a study conducted by Ulug et al., (2011) on the effects of teachers' attitudes on students' personality and performance where it showed that while positive attitudes of teachers have a positive impact on students' achievement and personality development, negative attitudes have a negative effect on both students' performance levels and personality development.

#### 4. Conclusion

Teachers have exerted their efforts and shared their struggles and experiences while overcoming their challenges in the Modular Distance Learning in the new normal delivery. Indeed, it is very relevant to address this prevalent concurrence and to share the responsibility to the right people who can help and support schools for the betterment of its endeavor and for a productive implementation as a whole.

Based on the results of this basic research, the following are recommended: (1) school administrators through the school's division superintendent, should proactively respond to the challenges faced by the teachers in the delivery of modular distance learning in the new normal particularly in providing enough resources and by tapping other stakeholders and local officials to acquire funds for better implementation; (2) school administrators and teachers should come up with an effective intervention plan and alternative solutions to make the implementation of MDL more accessible to the learners and the whole community; (3) teachers should embrace parental involvement in all school activities to encourage parents in guiding and monitoring their children towards academic success and endeavor and find ways for professional growth, especially with the current trends in education, for them to be effective in their fields; and (4) future researchers should replicate and consider looking other variables on challenges encountered by teachers in the implementation of modular distance learning in the new normal such as no face to face interaction and lack of inputs from teachers, and involving school administrators and learners as respondents of the study.

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