| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Challenges and Prospects in Teaching Grammar using the Modular Distance Learning in Marawi City, Philippines

Oranggaga, Saliha Dicasaran

Master of Arts in English Language Teaching/ Teacher 1, Masiu Community Highschool External Unit, Mindanao State University, Marawi City, Philippines

Corresponding Author: Oranggaga, Saliha Dicasaran, **E-mail**: saloranggaga@gmail.com

| **ABSTRACT**

Modular Distance Learning is introduced in the country as an individualized instruction that allows learners to use self-learning modules (SLMs) in print or digital format/electronic copy in response to the health crisis around the world. This study was conducted to determine and analyse the challenges and prospects of the English teachers in the schools of Marawi City in teaching grammar using modular distance learning in terms of students' understanding of concepts, assessments, pedagogies, phasing diversified learners' level. This study employed the descriptive research design with the use of Survey Questionnaires, actual in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. The findings of the study showed that the challenges encountered by the respondents are: a. the attitude of students towards understanding grammar and the time allotment as differed from face-to-face instruction b. the credibility issues in answering activities in the worksheets, c. problems on poor access to an internet connection, d.lack of exposure to social media platforms, e. defiance of assessment's purpose due to module formats, f. the negative perception of students towards teachers' feedback, g. the issue on too many workloads affecting the consistency of systematic release and retrieval of the module; and lastly, h. the maintenance of attention span versus many disturbances. Additionally, the prospects gathered from the responses of the participants which are implied to be advantageous to grammar teaching are: a. the use of explicit approach, b. the offering of other learning activities/channels to cater to different skills of the students, c. the giving of feedbacks in a different manner such as written or face-to-face consultation and progress reports, d. the setting of consultation schedules and meeting deadline of submissions, and lastly, e. the use of online platforms. In conclusion, the researcher recommends the meditation of the advancement of technological tools among the schools. Teaching approaches, as well, which are useful in modular distance learning, namely, the use of step-by-step presentation of concepts in the format of the module, and the practice of other modes of giving feedback to students such as counselling rather than massive written feedback, which demotivates students.

| **KEYWORDS**

Modular Distance Learning, Challenges, Prospects

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1. Introduction

Grammar has always been taught face-to-face. Despite the rise of the digital age, language teaching in the country has been mostly focused on physical class settings. Now that the education system is confronted with modular distance learning, it opens a vast opportunity of things to study; hence, by studying what the schools have done, missteps and problems which may arise in a modularized instruction might be avoided as this study aimed to analyze the actual functional use of modular distance learning Evidence suggests that Modular instruction meets the needs of today's students more adequately than traditional instruction, both with respect to the quality of learning and the content. However, certain problems may arise in implementing Modular instruction. These are present from the perspective of the student, instructor and administrator. Rodeiro and Nadas (2012) mentioned the following drawbacks in modular distance learning: danger of fragmentation of learning and lack of coherence in learning programs due to both the methods of curriculum delivery and the assessment practices; poorly developed overview of subjects and an

inability to connect discrete areas of knowledge; disruption of the provision of a coherent and developmental course; the assessment becoming dominant throughout the course, rather than towards the end of it; deadlines on units that limit a teacher's ability to teach important topics in the way that he or she would choose; short-term targets often dominating over longer-term goals; and lastly, when re-sits are not well managed, students re-sit too many modules which increase pressure on school resources and on students" workload."

Grammar teaching is an essential part of language teaching to assist students to comprehend and applying the correct language structure of a language. Zhang (2009) gave a simple analogy that grammar is the product and also the process. In knowing how exactly to get the product, the learners need to understand the process of how to get the product. In order to accomplish communicative competence (product), grammar teaching is essential in learning English. Thus, grammar teaching is definitely relevant in learning English. Knowledge of grammar helps the student correct mistakes and improve not only in communication but also in written work. Debata, Phil, & Ph, (2013) stated that a person could learn a second or foreign language accurately only through a process of unconscious assimilation. This also has led to the discovery that grammar is not acquired naturally; it needs to be taught, especially for second language learners who do not condone English-speaking surroundings. Research suggests that learners who receive no instruction seem to be at risk of fossilizing sooner than those who do receive instruction.

Many researchers now believe that grammar teaching should not be ignored in second language classrooms.
With its aim to determine and analyze the challenges in teaching grammar using modular distance learning, this study does not only give light to the concepts relevant to grammar teaching but also in the use of language- given the effect of societal advancement in consideration of distance education. A number of schools have successfully implemented modular courses, and increasing interest in this approach is developing in many academic channels. For this reason, the present paper has been conducted whose purpose is to review the principles, implementation, management, formats, problems and research in modular instruction.

2. Literature Review
Distance education is a form of education in which the participants in the educational process, teacher and learners, are physically separated and communicate by different means and at different times. The use of self-learning modules in teaching is a form of individual used instructions. This is called the modular approach of teaching and learning (Jayasree,2004). If self-learning modules are available on some topics, they can be given to the students as assignments for self-learning. Modules are increasingly being used in many countries as a way of organizing a language curriculum. As a consequence, many coursebooks are now structured on the basis of "modules" rather than "units".

Mañalac (2021) reported that during the implementation process of modular distance learning, different challenges had been encountered among teachers, learners and parents. First is the technical element. On the part of the teacher, formulating different modules is a difficult task, especially if the teacher has no training on how to create a quality type of learning module. Sometimes, there is a lack of availability of the printed modules and teachers are forced to print learning materials in order to have something to give to their learners, and these materials should meet the standard learning capacity of a student. Second, for the part of the learners, the focus and concentration of the learners are not hundred percent served on their studies since there is not enough supervision at home. Students tend to avert their attention instead of focusing on and prioritizing their homeschooling first. They are often distracted and sometimes have no interest in answering their modules, especially if they do not understand the content of the lesson written there. In this case, there is a possibility that the academic performance of the learners will be affected. Lastly, on the part of the parents, not all parents are well educated and well equipped with proper education. Parents who work from home will be given additional work because they are the ones who will provide tech support or guidance in their children's schoolwork. They have to schedule time for the distribution and retrieval of learning materials since children are not yet allowed to go to school to get their own modules. Such problems are bound for discovery as this present study goes on in exploration.

3. Methodology
The following sections below declares the methods and procedure done by the research for the conduct of the study :

3.1 Preparation of the Research Instruments Used
The following research instruments were used in this study:

Survey Checklist. The self-constructed Survey Checklist, which was validated by the panel members, was composed of items that determined the challenges encountered by the participants in teaching grammar using modular instruction and another set of items that determined the prospects of the participants on teaching grammar.

Interview Guide. Interview Guide Questions were used to elicit responses from the respondents of the study as used in the in-depth interview and in the Focus Group Discussion. The researcher prepared two questions for each corresponding variable of the study, both for determining the challenges and prospects in teaching grammar. Each question allocated for each variable were non-restricted, which means that the addition of follow-up questions was expected and allowed. If the participants failed to elaborate their point of view, the researcher could supply additional statements to prompt the participants while they relish similar experiences with the others during the focus group discussion. While in the in-depth interview, the benefit of the unstructured interview is the expansion of the participants' responses through a flowing conversation about each theme without restrictions.

Voice Recorder. In order to ensure the accurate transcription of the interview sessions, the researcher made use of a voice recorder. This instrument played a vital role in the data gathering procedure as it followed the notes written by the researcher.

3.2 Sampling the Participants of the Study
The dominant use of the modular teaching approach for this school year's mode of education is an exceptional opportunity to understand the context of modular distance learning as all of the private schools in Marawi City have been inclined with the Modular Distance Learning instruction for the school year 2020-2021. Therefore the participants of this study were ten Secondary English Teachers of the different private institutions in Marawi City. These participants were the source of the qualitative data. In addition, a total of thirty (30) Secondary English teachers of private institutions in Marawi City are also considered in gathering baseline information for enriching the data to be collected in the qualitative method.

Private schools were preferred by the researcher because of the aim of the researcher to smoothly conduct the research by the permission of an immediate supervisor of each institution especially given the mode of modular distance learning during this school year. Besides, the researcher believed that the preferred institutions were suitable locale for this study since they offered K to 12 based English curriculum, which is an integrated type that gives focus on language courses. It is noticeable that four of the participating schools have only one teacher for their entire secondary department. This was due to the fact that private schools do not actually have a massive student population. Aside from these, due to the current economic impact which the health crisis brought across the country, most guardians and parents prefer to send their children to public schools to save from spending too much amount of money on tuition fees and book allowances. This explained why very few participants of the study were determined to represent the entire population.

3.3 Conducting the Data Analysis
The core data of this study were the responses of the participants in the focus group discussion and in the in-depth interview. The data according to the variables, namely, students' understanding of concepts, assessments, pedagogies, phasing and diversified learners' levels, were analyzed according to emerging themes. These qualitative data were interpreted and analyzed thematically, wherein the responses in every question were analyzed and coded according to the main idea.

Thematic analysis was used in analyzing data from the interviews. This process is a way of coding information to enable categorization or themes to emerge. The first part of the data that was analyzed was the encountered challenges of the participants in teaching grammar using modular instruction. The second part dealt with the prospects of the participants in teaching grammar using modular instruction. Based on the data gathered from the two variables, thematic analysis was used as a research tool to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within the data. The researcher quantified and analyzed the presence, meanings and relationships of certain words, themes, or concepts. On the other hand, the data collected from the Survey instrument were considered as supporting data to validate and justify the findings generated from the themes found in the interview data.

Further, the responses of every participant in the focus group discussion and in the in-depth interview cited in the data analysis were coded P1 to P10. Discourse unit was also used to address the reference point of the participants' responses and researchers' questions.

4. Results and Discussion
The aim of this research is to determine and analyze the challenges and prospects of the English teachers in the private's schools of Marawi City in teaching grammar using modular distance learning in terms of students' understanding of concepts, assessments, pedagogies, phasing, and diversified learners' level resulted to the following :

The challenges encountered by the respondents in teaching grammar using modular distance learning as found out through the interview data and as supported by the survey data are: a. the attitude of students towards understanding grammar and the time allotment as differed from face-to-face instruction b. the credibility issues in answering activities in the worksheets, c. problems on poor access to an internet connection, d. lack of exposure to social media platforms, e. defiance of assessment's purpose due to

module formats, f. the negative perception of students towards teachers' feedback, g. the issue on too many workloads affecting the consistency of systematic release and retrieval of the module; and lastly, h. the maintenance of attention span versus many disturbances.

It is, though, expected that challenges must really have ascended with the new mode of education in the Philippines; as Mañalac (2021) stated, the country is facing a big challenge towards the educational system nowadays. Due to the threat of the Covid-19 pandemic, traditional face-to-face learning is not suitable and unsafe to be implemented. The Department of Education is forced to present its Basic Education Continuity plan to get the education of the country's learners going on despite the health crisis. It was supposed to guarantee that every student's learning progresses even amidst pandemics. However, this strategy faced and still actually faces hindrances created by the adversities through innovative means of teaching and learning.

During the implementation process of the said learning modality, different challenges have been encountered among teachers, learners and parents. These challenges are proven in this present study. Similar to what Mañalac (2021) claimed, challenges include the technical element firstly. On the part of the teacher, formulating different modules is a difficult task, especially if the teacher has no training on how to create a quality type of learning module. Sometimes, there is a lack of availability of the printed modules, and it is in strict compliance that these materials should meet the standard learning capacity of a student.

Second, for the part of the learners, the focus and concentration of the learners are not hundred percent served on their studies since there is not enough supervision at home. Students tend to avert their attention instead of focusing on and prioritizing their homeschooling first. They are often distracted and sometimes have no interest in answering their modules, especially if they don't understand the content of the lesson written there. In this case, the academic performance of the learners is affected.

Lastly, on the part of the parents, it is well understood that not all parents are well educated and well equipped with proper education. Parents who work from home are given additional work because they are the one who provides technical support or guidance in their children's schoolwork. They have to the scheduled time for the distribution and retrieval of learning materials since middle school students are not yet allowed to go to school to get their own modules.

Competing priorities at work and home, ubiquitous technology, and life's daily pressures contribute to the many distractions students face while learning. In modular instruction, the best way in combatting such a problem is to come up with a chronological timetable either made by the students themselves or the teachers as directed in the modules. The students must employ self-directed learning to be independent and disciplined in performing activities in the modules. The teacher plays a key role in helping students make a smooth transition from teacher-directed to self-directed learning. The teacher can assess the students' readiness for the method, establish the boundaries of the student's decisions about their learning and teach about the methodology. These alternatives can be best taught if the teachers themselves are competent in being skilful, self-directed learners as well.

Further, the prospects gathered from the responses of the participants which are implied to be advantageous to grammar teaching using modular distance learning are: a. the use of explicit approach, b. the offering of other learning activities/channels to cater to different skills of the students, c. the giving of feedbacks in a different manner such as written or face-to-face consultation and progress reports, d. the setting of consultation schedules and meeting deadline of submissions, and lastly, e. the use of online platforms such as Google forms and Facebook.

It is public knowledge that students' needs vary. Therefore, the approach of the teachers, especially in modular distance learning, must not only end to written-based activities without accommodating the other macro skills of learning. However, Lalley & Gentile (2009) claimed that matching instruction to students' learning preferences has proven to have little educative value because tailoring instruction in response to students' prior knowledge has consistently been found to have a more powerful factor for improving learning outcomes. For instance, students with little prior knowledge of a topic will benefit substantially from instructional scaffolding that helps them connect pre-existing ideas with novel material (Zull, 2002).

The use of technological channels can improve the quality of education in many ways. It opens doorways to a wealth of information, knowledge and educational resources, increasing opportunities for learning in and beyond the classroom. As found out in this study, online resources may increase efficiency and course productivity if developed properly. To supplement lectures, teachers can provide access to tools that facilitate discussion and active participation. In an online environment, teachers can reach students with different learning styles more easily.

5. Conclusion

It can be inferred from the analysis and findings in this study that with the interview and survey data of the challenges encountered by the participants, the private institutions in Marawi City can be categorized as one of the educational institutions that are not

prepared enough to be engaged in distance education for a wider scoop of academic levels. In terms of students' understanding of concepts, assessments, pedagogies, phasing, and diversified learners' levels, the sample population needs utmost consideration in coping with the advent of the fast-paced educational trends. The participants viewed teaching grammar in the face-to-face classroom to have provided better academic performance and higher self-discipline and motivation for achieving the learning goals than the Modular instruction because it is evident that students and teachers were met with many obstacles and hurdles. The participants' favor of modular distance learning is low.

In the findings of this study, the determined prospects suggested that the successful integration of technology into the learning environment will depend on the ability of teachers to structure learning in new ways, to merge technology appropriately with a pedagogy, develop socially active classrooms, and encourage cooperative interaction and collaborative learning and group work. The use of detailed step-by-step instruction in presenting grammar concepts in a module is encouraged because, unlike in a traditional class where it's generally quite simple to talk to the instructor before or after class at a different time, learners in modular distance learning have more difficulty getting in touch with their instructor. Teachers may explore communications via e-mails, use the web in researching and locating resources, create online groups and build wikis, participate in online collaborative activities, and apply technology-enhanced/web-based lessons in the instruction. Consequently, active participation of students, teachers, parents, stakeholders and the government is needed for the better teaching-learning process because modular distance learning is actually a good alternative to traditional teaching methods, after all, if given support.

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