Research Article

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The Impact of Blended Distance Learning Implementation in Apayao: Preliminary Evidence and Implications

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Article Information

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Abstract

The study aimed at providing preliminary evidence on the first-year implementation of blended distance learning (BDL) in the province of Apayao by utilizing a self-made questionnaire with predetermined positive and negative experiences focusing on the content to be learned, the skills to be mastered, the instructional strategy of the teachers, the assessment procedures undertaken, and the platforms used to ensure the transfer of learning provided, accessed, and answered online. With 343 respondents across the 6 schools that adopted the modality, 63.8% of the respondents experienced stress and difficulties learning the required content, and 52.2% agreed with the need for the physical presence of the teacher to facilitate the learning process. With this need, 60.6% use social media tools to contact their teachers whenever they have problems with their learning activities. Beyond these, however, 44.3% of the respondents experienced less pressure because of the extended time to finish the given learning task, often done through online research (62.4%). Aside from the demographic profile possibly affecting the experiences of the students, acclimatization of the students, teachers, and school played a big role in delivering quality remote learning and ensuring learning continuity at the height of the pandemic.

Keywords

blended learning, distance learning, experience

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic has completely changed how students learn and how they should learn. In the overly familiar four-walled classroom, schools were forced to do remote instruction, and the students were presumed to learn in the comforts of their homes. In response to this, the Department of Education designed various distance learning schemes to ensure learning continuity amidst the pandemic. One of which is the use of blended distance learning (BDL), where students are taught using various means, including online, television, radio, digital, and printed materials, without the need to have face-to-face interaction with the learners.

There should not be so many issues with blended distance learning since, as emphasized by Secretary Briones in the report (Ballano, 2022), the department has been doing blended learning "for decades", and that blended distance learning should not be vastly different. However, Deperin (2021) of the Philippine Star has noted that 89% of Filipino families find blended learning difficult. Further, Bernardo (2021) of ABS-CBN News stated that 54.7% of students "said that distance learning activities have negative impacts on their physical and mental health" and 42% of the 1,395 teacher respondents "said that an indefinite segment of their students could not keep pace". Moreover, a huge 71 to 72% of students and parents also said that they experienced "failing to attend online classes due to problems with gadgets, internet connection, and distance learning expenses."

With these issues surrounding the implementation of blended distance learning, there is a need to explore the learning experiences of the students and consequently provide preliminary evidence for comprehensive educational decisions and build new knowledge and strategic actions appropriate for acclimatization and adaptation of distance learning, especially in remote provinces like Apayao, where poverty incidence is quite high, resulting in issues of accessibility and reliability of learning resources such as gadgets and the internet.

With a handful of research studies that discuss learning experiences during the pandemic, this study aims to provide new insights on the development of literature about blended distance learning approaches in education. Lastly, this study hopes to provide a glimpse of what transpired, what needs to be done, and what needs to be improved when remote instruction using blended distance learning is the only choice left to ensure learning continuity.

Theoretical Framework

This research posits the experiential learning theory of David Kolb, taking on how experiences, including cognition, environmental factors, and emotions, influence the learning process. Blended distance learning is an approach in education where traditional classroom-based instruction is combined with online or virtual opportunities. Combining these two approaches can provide a huge insight into how to enhance learning outcomes, especially in distance learning schemes.

With this theory in mind, the theoretical framework for blended distance learning includes the following four key components:

Concrete Experience: This component involves providing students with real-world experiences that are relevant to their learning objectives. In a blended distance learning environment, this could include opportunities to participate in online activities such as virtual games, simulations, and real-life applications from the comfort of their homes.

Reflective Observation: After experiencing a new activity or concept, students need to reflect on what they have learned. In a blended distance learning environment, this could involve online discussions, answering modules, or other independent activities with less or no supervision from teachers that encourage students to think deeply about these new experiences.

Abstract Conceptualization: This component involves helping students understand the underlying concepts and theories that are relevant to their learning. In a blended distance learning environment, this could include participating in online lectures, independent readings, online research, watching videos, and other resources that provide students with a basic and advanced foundation for their learning.

Active Experimentation: Finally, students need opportunities to apply what they have learned in new and different situations. In a blended distance learning environment, this could involve individual and group projects, research, or other collaborative activities with their families that allow students to put their learning into practice.

Thus, in the implementation of blended distance learning, the students have repeatedly undergone the experiential learning cycle where there is a new experience (unrestrictive use of learning technologies such as smartphones, laptops, radio, and television) and are able to reflect on such experiences (whether they enjoyed it and whether they have learned something about it). Abstract conceptualization happens when the students create innovative ideas from such experiences (strategies to employ to use technology effectively) and are able to apply such ideas to solve their problem or finish their learning task. The experiential theory of David Kolb provides a useful framework for designing and understanding blended distance learning experiences that are engaging, interactive, and effective.

The incorporation of real-life experiences, reflective activities, theoretical foundations, and opportunities for active experimentation, will allow the researchers to acquire the necessary evidence to use in improving remote learning experiences.

Conceptual Framework

With this theory, the researchers conceived that to be able to understand the experiences of the students in the implementation of BDL during the pandemic, exploration of four key components must be done. Hence, a study on student experience must not only be centered on the content but also on other factors deemed equally important, such as the skills that the students are expected to demonstrate, the instructional strategy employed by the teacher, the assessment procedures, and the technology used to facilitate learning. The given framework is then established:

Figure 1
Paradigm of the Study
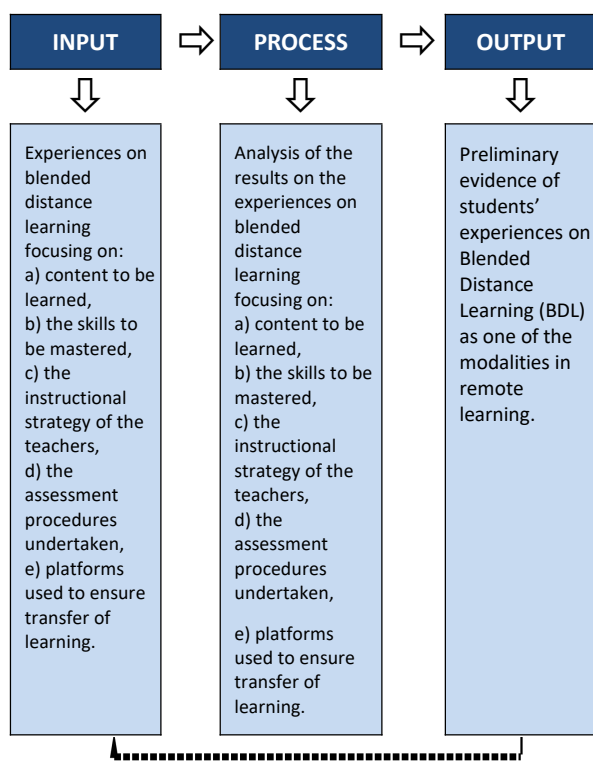
The input, processing, and output components of the study's given paradigm served as the researchers' guide. The input and process include the demographic profile of the respondents and their experiences with blended distance learning, focusing on the content to be learned, the skills to be mastered, the instructional strategy of the teachers, the assessment procedures undertaken, and the platforms used to ensure the transfer of learning. The output is the preliminary evidence of students' experiences with blended distance learning (BDL) as one of the modalities conceptualized, presented, and adopted in remote learning at the height of the pandemic.

Statement of the Problem

The study aimed to provide preliminary evidence of students' experiences with blended distance learning (BDL), focusing on the content to be learned, the skills to be mastered, the instructional strategy of the teachers, the assessment procedures undertaken, and the platforms used to ensure the transfer of learning. This study was conducted among the grade 11 and 12 students of the division of Apayao, regardless of the track or strand enrolled for the school year 2020-2021. The results will be used to improve the delivery of blended distance learning.

As such, this study aims to answer the question: What are the learning experiences of senior high school students on blended distance learning in terms of content to be learned, skills to be mastered, the instructional strategy of the teachers, the assessment procedures undertaken, and platforms used to ensure transfer of learning?

METHODS

Research Design

This study used a descriptive research design to answer the question. It involved the use of quantitative approaches in describing the experiences of the students in blended distance learning (BDL).

Sample and Sampling Technique

In the province of Apayao, only six high schools adopted blended distance learning (BDL), while most of the schools had modular distance learning (MDL). Out of 1093 senior high school students enrolled in these six schools, 343 (31.38%) participated in the online survey conducted. From these numbers, 33.2% are from Flora National High School, 58% are grade 12 students, 69.1% received the highest grade of at least 90 for a particular subject, 70.9% belong to an income group of poor, 48.1% are confident in the use of relevant technologies for learning, 39.9% often attend online classes and activities, 44.3% were accommodated for learning support, and 56.7% had very supportive families.

Research Instrument

A self–made survey questionnaire is used to gather the necessary data of the study. Due to covid restrictions, the data were gathered using Google forms which can be accessed through this link: https://forms.gle/YbDwNXBrQHC1BJgaA The questionnaire contains two parts. The first part of the survey questionnaire or Google Form was used to gather the demographic profile of the respondents. Names will be optional, but all other items will be required to be answered before they can proceed to the next section.

The second part was composed of 50 statements, divided into 5 for each learning experience indicator: content to be learned, skills to be mastered, instructional strategy of the teachers, assessment procedures undertaken, and platforms used to ensure transfer of learning. For each learning indicator, a balance of positive and negative experiences is likewise provided. Further, the questionnaire was submitted for review and validation by the division's technical working research committee, headed by the Assistant Schools Division Superintendent.

Data Gathering Procedure

Following the research process guidelines set by the Department of Education, the researchers passed the proposal for review and approval and sought permission to gather the necessary data from the Schools Division Superintendent through the research and planning officer. After that, permission was also sought from the school heads of the participating schools and coordinated with their respective senior high school coordinators before the link was shared in the Messenger group chats of the students. The respondents were given 20 days, from July 26 to August 14, to access the provided link.

Data Analysis

Ranking based on frequency and percentage was used in analyzing the learning experience of the senior high school students using blended distance learning modalities.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers duly exercised care for the rights of individuals and the institution. A statement of informed consent was provided in the survey questionnaire, informing the respondents of the purpose of the study and their right to decide whether to participate or not. By proceeding to the next section of the survey questionnaire, they have automatically provided consent to be a respondent. The researchers were guided by the Data Privacy Act of 2012; hence, confidentiality and anonymity were maintained since the names of the respondents were made optional. Further, only the variables stated in the statement of the problem were asked; none have been added.

RESULTS

Learning Experiences of Senior High School Students on Blended Distance Learning

Table 1 presents the experiences of the students in terms of the content to be learned in blended distance learning. Results indicate that 63.8% agree that they experience stress because they do not understand the lesson well, and 52.2% struggle while learning the lesson's concepts

and principles. Although they have difficulties learning because of less interaction with teachers and friends (51.3%), 51.6% of the respondents use chats like the Messenger app to discuss their lessons.

Table 1
Top 5 Experiences with Regards to the Content to be Learned

Rank	Experience	Type	Frequency	%
1	Being stressed as I do not understand the lesson well	Negative	219	63.80
2	Struggles while learning the lesson's concepts and principles	Negative	179	52.20
3	Discussing the lessons with friends through chats like messenger	Positive	177	51.60
4	Difficulties because of lesser personal interaction with the teachers and peers	Negative	176	51.30
5	Being confused because there is too much information to learn	Negative	162	47.20

Table 2 provides the experiences of the senior high school students with blended distance learning with regards to the skills to be mastered. As indicated, 62.4% of the students have done online research to answer the learning activities, probably with search engines like Google or Yahoo (51.6%). Some positive results also include students experiences with the use of social media tools to collaborate with their friends (58.3%), the use of computers, laptops, or smartphones for online learning (57.7%), and scheduling to manage time doing the activities (55.1%).

Table 2
Top 5 Experiences with Regards to the Skills to be Mastered

Rank	Experience	Type	Frequency	%
1	Online research to help me in answering the learning activities	Positive	214	62.40
2	Use social media tools (Facebook, Messenger) to collaborate with my friends while answering the learning modules and task	Positive	200	58.30
3	Using computers/ laptops/ smartphones for my online learning	Positive	198	57.70
4	Scheduling to manage my time in doing the activities	Positive	189	55.10
5	Use search engines (Google or Yahoo) to aid me in my lessons	Positive	177	51.60

Table 3 presents the experiences of senior high school students with blended distance learning with regards to the instructional strategy used by the teacher in delivering the lesson. As noted from the data, 52.2% of the students agree about the need for the physical presence of the teacher to guide them in their studies. Although they are pressured because there are many activities to answer (48.4%), 42.6% are grateful as they could reach their teacher easier (a messenger) if there are problems. An equal percentage (33.3%) is also noted for being bored because online classes are not as exciting as face-to-face classes and being motivated because of new and varied activities during online classes.

Table 3
Top 5 Experiences with Regards to the Instructional Strategy Used

Rank	Experience	Type	Frequency	%
1	Needing the physical presence of teacher to guide me with my studies	Negative	179	52.20
2	Being pressured because of tons of activities to do	Negative	166	48.40
3	Feeling grateful because I could approach my teacher easier (through messenger) if there are problems	Positive	146	42.60
4.5	Being bored because online class is not as exciting as face to face	Negative	114	33.30
4.5	Being motivated because of new and varied activities during online class	Positive	114	33.30

Table 4 presents the experience of the senior high school students with blended distance learning with regards to assessment and evaluation. As presented, 44.3% of the students experience less pressure since they could spend more time finishing the task, feel sure with their answers because of available references (42.9%), feel ease because examinations and activities are done at home (37.6%), and have better answers because of available resources (33.5%). Further, 41.1% say that they have experience answering quizzes and exams online.

Table 4
Top 5 Experiences with Regards to Assessment and Evaluation

Rank	Experience	Type	Frequency	%
1	Less pressure as I could spend more time finishing the task	Positive	152	44.30
2	Feeling sure with my answers because I have the module as reference	Positive	147	42.90
3	Answering online forms (Google/ Microsoft forms) for quizzes and exams	Positive	141	41.10
4	Feeling ease because examinations and activities are take home as I have enough references	Positive	129	37.60
5	Having better answers because of downloaded reference and materials	Positive	115	33.50

Table 5 presents the experiences of the senior high school students with blended distance learning with regards to the technology used for learning. As reflected in the given data, 60.6% of the students use social media tools (Messenger) for communication, 49.9% of them watch explanations from online videos, 47.8% use Messenger and YouTube as their main platforms to learn, and 44.3% use Google Classroom and Edmodo. With the restrictions on the use of mobile devices during face-to-face learning, 49.3% say that it felt great as they could use their smartphone while learning.

Table 5
Top 5 Experiences with Regards to Technology Used for Learning

Rank	Experience	Type	Frequency	%
1	Using social media tools such as messenger and online platforms that helped me communicate the teacher if there are problems on my studies	Positive	208	60.60
2	Watching explanations through online videos and references	Positive	171	49.90
3	Being great because I could use my smartphone while learning	Positive	169	49.30
4	Using messenger and you tube as main platform for learning	Positive	164	47.80
5	Using learning management systems such as Google Classroom and Edmodo	Positive	152	44.30

DISCUSSION

Blended distance learning is quite different from blended learning as the former combines various learning experiences such as online classes, watching videos and television, reading modules, and online activities without the need for the physical presence of the teacher. Although the main advantage is flexibility on the learning task, without the physical presence of teachers facilitating the learning process, many students find their lesson difficult to understand because there is too much information to learn, leading to pressure, stress, and boredom, especially if there is insufficient support from teachers (Ching Lam, 2015) or they cannot find the information in the provided material (Meyer, Marshall, & Wohlers, 2014). Many students (44.3%), however, feel grateful because they could approach their teachers online at any given time (Adel & Dayan 2021) or discuss their lesson with their classmates through messengers.

Further, because of forceful remote instruction, it is expected that acquiring some crucial skills will not function well (Ma, Li, & Liang, 2019), such as expository writing skills, but it is good to note that several skills have been developed by the students, such as online research, technological competence, deep learning, collaborative learning because of interaction with peers virtually (Ching Lam, 2015), and time management. It is also noted that students perform well in the examinations (Ching Lam, 2015) because they take home examinations and activities that they can do at their own pace. Lastly, while many students (48.1%) whose confidence in the use of technology is unquestionable (Meyer, Marshall, & Wohlers, 2014) and that they could adapt to any digital learning resources such as social media, the digital divide became apparent as there is a huge number of students that belong to poor families (70.9%) who do not have access to available learning technologies or are not reliable, which may result in abandonment (Kintu et al., 2017).

Finally, there is an adverse effect of remote learning on educating students due to a lack of contact hours and a lack of available e-learning facilities (Sintema, 2020). With this, the school needs to step up their preparedness to contain the negative effects through effective pedagogical approaches, strengthening online platforms, and research and development (Tria, 2020).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has indeed changed the way education is delivered, and this sudden flip of educational delivery brings about a whole new level of experience in learning. With the implementation of blended distance learning at the height of the pandemic, many students were stressed about learning the required content because of the lack of a teacher's presence to facilitate the learning process. Though many agreed to experience less pressure because of the extended time to finish the learning task and the use of online research to answer the given learning activities, Many are also grateful for teachers who extended guidance using social media tools like Messenger. With these results, it could be concluded that there is a balance of positive and negative experiences with the implementation of blended distance learning, highlighting the various skills developed, more flexible assessments, and ICT integrations. Some improvements could still be made, however, on the content and strategies to be employed since acclimatization of school, teachers, and students is playing a key role in the first-year implementation of blended distance learning.

Recommendations

Master teachers, as instructional leaders of the schools, are called to provide technical assistance and support to teachers to lessen the students' negative experiences with the content to be learned. Decongestion of the topics might be a good strategy to employ. Extensive use of the internet, which includes online research and social media, has been observed among the students enrolled in blended distance learning. It is suggested that the schools that adopt such a mode create a partnership with the local government unit to provide free access to such a service. Lastly, more than half of the respondents say that they still need the physical presence of the teacher while learning. Teachers should be reminded and trained to bridge the gap between physical and virtual interaction and to create actions to do so, so that regardless of which is feasible and allowed, their presence can still be felt.

Implications

This study describes the experiences of the students based on the predetermined positive and negative experiences provided based on observations, informal interviews, and literature, limiting the determination and thick descriptions of the authentic experiences of the students. Further, the study also failed to create a balanced number of indicators with regards to physical, mental, and digital experiences in relation to the theory presented.

However, beyond these limitations, various implications have still been identified, such as the design of various training programs to create more flexible teachers ready for online, onsite, or blended learning delivery; revisiting and restructuring educational policies, strategies, and frameworks to include distance learning as one of the modes, not just an option, in educating the students; and lastly, the continuous support of the local government in establishing community learning centers across the different barangays to support students' needs, which otherwise the school cannot provide.

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