

School, Family, and Community Dynamics: Challenges and Opportunities from Pandemic to Post-Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

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Two consecutive years have passed since educational institutions globally were closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In the first quarter of 2020, classes at all levels in the Philippines were suspended, and alternative means of completing the respective school year have been very challenging. Implementing Modular Distance Learning (MDL) was the best option for the Department of Education to continue learning. This phenomenological research described the school, family, and community dynamics, the challenges experienced, and the opportunities encountered in transitioning to face-to-face classes in Bislig City

Division. The researcher used an interview guide to gather the responses from individual interviews and focus group discussions. Word cloud applications for the categorization of themes were also used. Findings showed that the COVID-19 pandemic has snatched the students' significant mental, emotional, and physical health; challenges of infection, adjustment to the new normal, and learning



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gaps brought about by the distance learning modality were related. However, assurance of students' holistic preparedness and support to school were the major themes that emerged. Thus, the role of family, school, and community were interconnected and deemed essential in promoting better learning outcomes. Opportunities were also evident amidst the educational crisis. Its advantages were strong collaboration among stakeholders, promotion of economic activities, and a safe learning environment.

INTRODUCTION

Two consecutive years have passed since schools, colleges, and universities across the globe were closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In the first quarter of 2020, classes at all levels in the Philippines were suspended, and alternative means of completing the respective school year have been very challenging. Implementing Modular Distance Learning (MDL) was the best option for the Department of Education (DepEd) to continue learning amidst the rising cases of Covid-19 in the years 2020 and 2021. MDL is one of the types of distance learning where the learners purely rely on printed modules provided by the school, considering the socio-economic status of the majority (Rodriguez, 2020).

The literature revealed a vast of studies that dealt with the challenges behind the use of MDL. Dangle and Sumaoang (2020) asserted that though MDL was a better option, it could have promoted quality education among learners more effectively. Many students showed a lack of interest in studying independently because they were used to learning with the physical guidance of teachers and mentors (Castroverde, 2021). Lim et al. (2022) cited that the two school years of learning from home were coupled with mental health problems which negatively affected the student's academic performance. For compliance, parents intervened in the submission requirements of their children.

The plan for re-opening schools and face-to-face classes started to flourish in the last quarter of 2022, when vaccination coverage in the country had already reached seven (7) digits, including the elementary students. In effect, the Department of Education (DepEd) has piloted schools for the limited face-to-face classes in partnership with the Department of Health (DOH) and the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) for Covid-19. Because of the positive results in the pilot face-to-face modality, many schools have opened in the first quarter of 2022 as long as schools comply with the main protocols and standards in the DepEd-DOH Joint Memorandum Circular 001, s. 2021.

At the local scale, the Division of Bislig City has responded to DepEd's call. It has approved many public elementary and secondary schools

implementing face-to-face classes, provided that applicable requirements are complied with. Some elementary schools in District 8 have successfully secured permits to implement face-to-face classes in the school year 2022-2023. Hence, this study was timely to explore the challenges and opportunities of school, family and community dynamics. The information could be used as inputs for a better transition. Furthermore, the relevant findings may provide additional knowledge related to the topic that may serve as a basis for developing better plans towards better learning outcomes amidst the experienced educational crisis.

FRAMEWORK

The study was anchored on the general systems approach to school management by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968). It explains that organizations are composed of many subsystems that are not necessarily correlated to one another and eventually work together to form the whole. The theory helps us comprehend things like organizational behavior, organizational change, and organizational development. The general system aims to understand how organizations work. A system is an entity with all the elements essential to perform its functions. Over time, the purpose of examining organizations has shifted from a mere outsider perspective to a powerful means of gaining insight into their daily operations. A thorough understanding of an organization's operations is paramount for school or business managers when making strategic decisions. They need to comprehend how various departments collaborate and influence one another. It is where the systems theory of organization proves to be an invaluable tool. It empowers managers, leaders, and decision-makers to take a broader view of the organization's change and development. Adopting a holistic approach to comprehending an organization instead of concentrating solely on specific functions and aspects is advantageous for those looking to implement new initiatives or make changes within their businesses. With large, multi-stakeholder projects, a systems approach allows for transparent planning and delegation from the outset. It helps managers account for the interdependence between different organizational verticals and assign ownership to achieve collective goals. Systems theory is beneficial in understanding the dynamics of the interaction of the three social institutions, namely, school, family, and the community, towards a better transition from modular distance learning (MDL) to face-to-face.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to (1) describe the role of the family, school, and

community in the transition to face-to-face classes, (2) explore the challenges experienced by the three social institutions from the modular learning modality as inputs to the transition to face-to-face classes, (3) examine the opportunities encountered by the three social institutions from the modular learning modality as inputs to the transition to face-to-face classes, and (4) delve into the transition inputs that can be supplemented for the full-blast implementation of face-to-face instruction in the Bislig City Division.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The phenomenological research design was used in the study to explore the dynamics of the school, family, and community in the transition to face-to-face classes in the Bislig division. The use of the qualitative approach is justified by the fact that the problem statements of the study were answered by responses that are not objectively defined. The phenomenological research design indicated the lived experiences of the household heads, school principals, and community leaders as evidence to answer specific research objectives or problem statements.

Research Site

Bislig is a coastal component city in the province of Surigao del Sur. The city has a land area of 331.80 square kilometers or 128.11 square miles, constituting 6.73% of Surigao del Sur's total area. Its population, as determined by the 2020 Census, was 99,290, representing 15.46% of the total population of Surigao del Sur province or 3.54% of the overall population of the Caraga region. These figures compute the population density at 299 inhabitants per square kilometer or 775 inhabitants per square mile. Bislig City Division is composed of 70 schools that include 20 secondary and 50 schools for the elementary. However, the study was conducted in selected public elementary schools in Bislig City. Therefore, the school is discussed as follows:

Bislig City Division Special Education Center. It is the last school created in Mangagoy I District and is part of Bislig 6 District. It is the only Special Education (SPED) School in the locality of Mangagoy, Bislig City, situated in the heart of the city, and it caters to differently-abled children as well as gifted/talented or fast learners.

Mangagoy Central Elementary School. It belongs to Bislig District 6, located on Andres Soriano Avenue, Barangay Mangagoy, Bislig City. It has exhibited proof of its transformation from physical features to functional, innovative programs and projects throughout the many decades it has delivered

quality education to learners. The school improved its operating procedures and created practical teaching and learning innovations.

Mangagoy Hilltop Elementary School. It belongs to Bislig District 7, located on Andres Soriano Avenue, Barangay Mangagoy, Bislig City. It continues to engage with its internal and external stakeholders in delivering quality, meaningful, timely, empowering, and inclusive K to 12 Basic education in a secure environment to its learners.

Mangagoy South Elementary School. It belongs to Bislig District 6, located on Andres Soriano Avenue, Barangay Mangagoy, Bislig City. It continuously delivers quality education to its learners amidst trying times and challenges. The school always considers various initiatives through activities, projects, and programs to uplift education quality and better serve its clientele and stakeholders.

Mangagoy North Elementary School. It belongs to District Bislig 6 and is on Andres Soriano Avenue, Barangay Mangagoy, Bislig City. It is a medium elementary school offering complete primary elementary education. Established in 1985, the school is strategically located along the national highway at Mangagoy Elementary School compound, Andres Soriano Avenue, Mangagoy, Bislig City.

Plaza Central Elementary School. It belongs to District Bislig 9 and is in Plaza St. Barangay Tabon, Bislig City. It was named after the donor, the late Brigido Plaza Jr., who donated a portion of the school lot. It was opened in 1960 through the effort of the Brgy Tabon Officials and the DepEd family. It is a complete public elementary school.

Requina Central Elementary School. It belongs to District Bislig 8 and is located in Post 23, Purok 7, Barangay Tabon, Bislig City. It was established decades ago and marked the beginning of the educational development and progress in the community in response to the request of parents to have public schools in the area to cater to the needs of low-income families.

San Roque Central Elementary School. It belongs to District Bislig 3, located in Barangay San Roque, Bislig City. The school continuously accommodates and delivers quality primary education to its Bisliganon learners. Of its 360 enrollees this school year 2022-2023, 184 are male, and 176 are female. However, the current enrolment is lower by 3.49% (13) than in the previous school year, 2021-2022, which is 373 due to the enrolment of some learners to private schools and some transient families.

Moreover, the number of male enrollees decreases from 188 to 184, and the number of female enrollees decreases from 185 to 176. However, among the current Grade levels, Grade 2 prevails to be the highest in number while Grade 1 is the least. Therefore, the scenario calls for a mechanism that would be observed

and practiced by the entire school community to uplift the declining retention rate of the school.

San Fernando Elementary School. It belongs to District Bislig 3, located in Barangay San Fernando, Bislig City. The school has less than a hectare, and a land titling is in process since the school is categorized as a timber / swampy area – the titling process is still in operation with technical assistance from the Division Focal and Barangay officials.

Lawigan Elementary School. It belongs to District Bislig 7, located in Barangay Lawigan, Bislig City. It is situated along the coastline of the western side, facing the North of Hagonoy Island and Bislig Gulf. It can be reached through sea and land travel. It is accessed by a 19km road traversing Barangay Tabon and Labisma by any land transport. The school can be easily accessed since concreting of the farm-to-market road was completed last 2019. Hence, it could also be reached by boat from Mangagoy.

San Roque Central Elementary School. It belongs to District Bislig 3, located in Barangay San Roque, Bislig City. Presently, the school caters to 360 school children, where 184 are male and 176 are female. However, the current enrolment is lower by 3.49% (13) than in the previous school year, 2021-2022, which is 373 due to the enrolment of some learners to private schools and some transient families. Moreover, the number of male enrollees decreases from 188 to 184, and the number of female enrollees falls from 185 to 176. However, among the current Grade levels, Grade 2 prevails to be the highest in number while Grade 1 is the least. Therefore, the scenario calls for a mechanism that would be observed and practiced by the entire school community to uplift the declining retention rate of the school.

Mamparasan Elementary School. It belongs to District Bislig 4 and is located in Sitio Mamparasan, Barangay San Roque, Bislig City. The school's successful planning and implementation are factors essential to effective governance. A well-run school ensures that basic education services are delivered efficiently.

Pamanlinan Elementary School. It belongs to District Bislig 3, located in Purok 4, Barangay Pamanlinan, Bislig City. Some of the learners lived in San Juan, around 3 km from the barangay, and it can be traveled by boat or walking. That is why some of the learners came late because of the distance from their respective homes to school.

Patricio Macaranas Clar Elementary School. It belongs to District Bislig 7 and is located in Brgy. Labisma, Bislig City. The school site has a land area of 1,000 sq. meters on plain topography. Like most other schools, it has completed its elementary grades from Kinder to Grade 6 multi-grade classes. It has become

a stepping stone for the teachers, parents, and the community to strive more and achieve the quality of basic education available.

Isabelo Landeta Elementary School. It belongs to District Bislig 7 and is located in Purok 2 Panaghi-usa, Barangay Mangagoy, Bislig City. The school occupies an area of 5,000 sq. meters donated by the late Mr. Victor P. Landeta. The school enrolment is significantly decreasing in the previous three school years from 177 (SY. 2020-2021), then reduced to 173 in the last school year to 155 in the current school year of 2022-2023. It can be attributed to transient learners, transfer issues, the family finding a better source of income, and nearby schools within the community where the school was situated that decreased pupils' participation.

Participants

The study participants were 15 household heads, 15 school principals, and 15 community leaders from Bislig City, who were randomly selected. The participants were chosen based on the following criteria; Willfully participated in the interview by signing the consent form. The household head of the family (either the mother or the father). School principal for at least five years, and Incumbent Barangay officials.

Research Ethics Protocol

An interview guide was developed to explore the school, family, and community dynamics in transitioning to face-to-face classes in the Bislig division. The questions mostly covered the experiences of the participants relative to the variables in the study. For the detailed content of the guide questions, please see Appendix A. It was submitted to a principal and panel members for content validation. Their valuable comments and suggestions led to the refinement of the interview questions.

Participation in the study was voluntary, and no one was compelled nor influenced to answer the interview questions without their informed consent. The rights of the participants were always the concern of the researcher and were protected with a high level of prudence.

During the preliminary visit, all the possible benefits and risks associated with the study were discussed thoroughly with the identified participants. In addition, data management plans and mechanisms were presented to the participants to explain how confidentiality is achieved. Furthermore, to protect and exercise the rights of the persons involved in the study, the participants were informed so much that they could withdraw from the study at any time and that their responses would be used for research purposes only.

Data Collection

To ensure that maximum health protocols and high ethical standards were observed, pertinent documents were secured prior to data gathering, and the following steps were strictly followed.

The researcher prepared and sent a letter request for the conduct of the study to the Division Superintendent, District Supervisor, and concerned school heads. Upon its approval, the researcher conducted a preliminary visit to the homes or offices of the target participants and offered invitations for a scheduled interview. Maximum health and safety measures were observed during the first visit and the actual conduct of the interview.

The researcher then made the necessary communication and arrangements for the interview date. When all the required documents were in place, the actual conduct of the interview took place at a designated place. A one-on-one interview was conducted with the identified school heads and a focus group discussion for the parents and barangay officials.

Proper etiquette was observed at the start of the interview and focus group discussion. All participants were oriented as to the purpose and scope of the interview and were informed that their participation is voluntary and that all information provided would be kept confidential and used for research purposes only. All throughout the interview, the participants were asked to allow the researcher to record the conversation using a functional recorder.

After conducting the individual interview and focus group discussion, all the necessary information was collated and used the Word Cloud application to categorize themes.

Data Analysis

The data collected in this study were purely qualitative. Hence, thematic analysis was employed. First, actual responses were categorized according to the nearest and appropriate categories. Relevant themes were then extracted from the categories.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the data gathered for interpretation and analysis from interviews and the findings.

Role of Family in the Transition to Face-to-Face Classes

Assurance of students' holistic preparedness and support to school are

the major themes that emerged from the actual responses of the parents. The role of parents is primarily devoted to the holistic preparation of their children for the re-opening of schools after being closed for almost two school years. Dangle and Sumaoang (2020) revealed that moral support is one of the essential needs of the students significantly affected by the MDL. Ambayon et al. (2020) further highlighted that moral support comes from parents because most learners view them as the primary source of inspiration and comfort.

For the holistic preparedness of students, Safira and Ifadah (2021) asserted that the emotional dimension should be stable. Many students are emotionally disturbed during the implementation of distance learning for various reasons (Handarini et al., 2020). Health and safety are essential aspects of living imprinted on humanity by the pandemic. Parents have the most significant role in ensuring their children are physically healthy against the Covid-19 virus. In the study of Handebo et al. (2021), vaccination for children depends on parents' decisions.

Role of School Principals in Transition to Face-to-Face Classes

Compliance with the requirements emerges from the actual responses of the school principals. Coherence to DepEd Order No. 34, Series of 2022 posits that the school administrators' primary role is to ensure high compliance with the requirements specified in the School Safety Assessment Tool (SSAT). Based on the DepEd-DOH Joint Memorandum Circular (JMC) No. 7, s. 2022 titled Operational Guidelines on the Implementation of Face-to-Face Learning Modality, signed by the Secretaries of DepEd and DOH, schools must meet specific criteria to be considered for the pilot phase. These include being in areas with minimal risk, obtaining approval from the local government unit, passing the School Safety Assessment Tool (SSAT), and obtaining consent from parents.

Role of the Community in the Transition to Face-to-Face Classes

The actual and physical presence of community leaders is evident in schools. They facilitate and guide parents and students to ensure the strict implementation of the minimum health standards and protocols. There are cases when community leaders send people to assist in the general cleaning of the schools. Hsiang et al. (2021) emphasized the critical role of the community in maintaining the cleanliness and order of the school and help in sustaining quality education. Besides the physical assistance to schools, the community extends its role in becoming part of the school planning process.

On the other hand, extension services are rendered by the local government that includes health and promotion campaign that emphasizes the

role of everyone complying with the minimum health standards and protocols. The community leaders also bestow legal and financial support to the schools where schools are mandated to secure the approval of the local government before declaring for a face-to-face modality.

Challenges Experienced by Parents in Transition to Face-to-Face Classes

While many students feel the excitement of returning to school after a long period of modular learning, parents are undeniably worried or fearful that the virus will infect their children. Khattab et al. (2020) mentioned that the reopening of classes brought severe changes to the daily routine of many households. Body adjustment is also adapting to the new environment where parents have to wake early to prepare for the basic needs of the school children.

Moreover, the financial burden has been encountered by parents. Parents experience an adjustment in their finances considering the expenses of sending children to school. Tria's (2020) study revealed that the economic crisis caused by the pandemic is significantly related to the financial pressure parents face when their children return to face-to-face classes.

Challenges Experienced by School Principal in Transition to face-to-face classes

Students and schools are expected to face severe adjustments in the transition to face-to-face classes because the fight against Covid has not yet ended, and the nation is fitting into the new normal (Kim, 2020). School principals observe learners manifest disruptive behaviors that affect the learning process. Difficulties during the pandemic include learning deficits or gaps from pure distance learning. Most parents need more time to help their children learn from home due to work-related reasons (Castroverde, 2021). As presented above, however, some parents felt it challenging to get back to face-to-face, considering the financial demands of sending their children to school after experiencing economic drawbacks during the pandemic.

Challenges Experienced by the Community Leaders in Transition to Face-to-Face Classes

Despite the limited funds, some community leaders can share resources with schools mainly intended to procure Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs). Challenging parental support is another problem experienced by community leaders during the pandemic and post-pandemic periods. Some parents need to be more active in the advocacies and programs of the Local Government Unit (LGU) regarding their role in their children's education. Since then, some parents

have not been involved in school and community-related activities because their time is devoted to livelihood activities for daily survival.

Opportunities experienced by parents in the transition to face-to-face classes

The pandemic has snatched students' significant mental, emotional, and physical health. Browning et al. (2021) found that students manifested mental health-related problems under modular distance learning. Returning to face-to-face classes is an effective means of restoring the holistic well-being of all learners. Socialization in school is one of the advantages of face-to-face classes. During the pandemic, the social life of the learners has been impeded by the unexpected closure of schools, colleges, and universities.

Nevertheless, better student academic achievement or performance is another opportunity parents see in implementing face-to-face classes. Teachers' assistance is constantly available and accessible, which expedites learning and facilitates better academic performance.

Opportunities Experienced by School Principal in transition to face-to-face classes

Like the parents, school principals also have opportunities to transition to face-to-face classes. Accordingly, school heads believed face-to-face classes promote a better student learning environment and elicit active support from internal and external stakeholders. The school principal views the quality of learning as a significant advantage of face-to-face compared to modular distance learning. It is coherent with the study of Kerr et al. (2021), which found that a better understanding of the lessons is mainly achieved within the classroom with guidance and sufficient teacher assistance.

School principals also perceive better well-being of students in face-to-face classes. Like the parent's responses, well-being covers the students' social, mental, emotional, and physical development. Face-to-face is the optimal remedy to the complex challenges brought on by the pandemic, mainly when dealing with students' overall well-being. The school principals and the teachers experience internal and external support. Teacher assistance is also improved in the face-to-face setup. It depicts the opportunity for school leaders can provide immediate instructional assistance to teachers whenever necessary. The school heads also perceive technical assistance to students. Students are the prime concern of face-to-face classes.

Opportunities experienced by the Community Leaders in the transition to face-to-face classes

Behind the challenges and difficulties encountered in the transition to face-to-face, opportunities are also observed that include; student development, economic alleviation, and collaboration and partnership as presented. The better learning outcome for students is commonly experienced by the three social institutions considered in this research. It is consistently exposed that face-to-face classes promote a better understanding of the lessons and, in effect, will result in a higher quality of education (Ambayon et al., 2020). Another particular category under student development is the elimination of child labor. The opening of classes will make the students busier at school than engaged in child labor, eventually losing better life opportunities.

The re-opening of schools has also resulted in the active operations of small businesses, thereby providing economic activities, particularly to the micro vendors and stores. In the study of Cobo et al. (2021), it was highlighted that the country could not anymore afford to implement distance education in 2022 because of its significant effect on the local and national economies.

Parents and school principals' responses further agree with the community leaders' statements regarding solid partnerships and collaboration. It only manifests that the three social institutions have exerted efforts and contributions toward successfully transitioning to face-to-face classes. Having played their roles, several opportunities emerge, most notably the active involvement in school activities to ensure quality education amidst the crisis.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of this study, the role of family, school, and barangays are interconnected and deemed essential in promoting better learning outcomes and the highest quality of education. Especially during the experienced crises, the dynamics of these primary social institutions are portrayed in the execution of their obligations and services linked to a common goal of achieving better learning for all learners. Hence, it is concluded explicitly that the role of the three social institutions is commonly bonded on the welfare of the learners.

The transition to face-to-face has imprinted challenges that must be considered in the school improvement plans and brought to the higher authorities attention. Theoretically, the major challenge is heavily attributed to the students' competencies greatly affected by modular distance learning. Hence, a need for intervention must be recognized, and appropriate actions must be implemented.

Opportunities are also evident amidst the educational crisis. Strong collaboration among stakeholders, promotion of economic activities, and a better learning environment are advantages that need to be sustained and preserved. In the long run, these opportunities will result in attaining the highest quality of education for all Filipino learners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are suggested in light of the findings and conclusions presented.

DepEd. The Department of Education (DepEd) may continue to work with the stakeholders by adopting effective strategies that benefit all involved parties. Significant findings of the study may also serve as inputs to the different school improvement plans. DepEd may propose remedial or appropriate interventions to recover the learning deficits and promote better learning outcomes, particularly regarding the learning gaps and deficits during the pandemic.

Parents. The study also recommends that parents may continue to support their children physically and emotionally as they face the massive adjustment to the new normal of learning. It is also recommended that parents and the community will be continuously involved in the transition to face-to-face, considering their expedient role in promoting quality education.

School. The learnings marked by the pandemic may also be used by the school in transitioning to face-to-face and sustaining quality education amidst the crisis.

Future Researchers. Future researchers may also work on the limitations of the study, including the collection of quantitative evidence that will supplement the information already captured in qualitative evidence as presented.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

The findings of this study could investigate how the pandemic has affected various aspects of school dynamics, such as academic performance, student engagement, and mental health. This also aim to bridge the gap between research findings and practical implementation, helping to improve educational outcomes and support the well-being of students, families, and the community.

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