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The Challenges and Opportunities Experienced by Sports Track Students During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Michelle M. Layao

College of Sports, Physical Education and Recreation

Mindanao State University, Marawi City, Philippines

A B S T R A C T

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected how people think, feel, and do things. In the Philippines, the whole nation experienced the "new normal" ways, such as on the context of education. The Mindanao State University System (MSUS), particularly, created Flexible Learning Options where lectures may be done either: (a) synchronous event where online live lectures through streaming is applied using video conferencing platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet, or (b) asynchronous event where online lecture is prepared using screen recorder apps. Course books and modules were also prepared to be used by the students. The MSU-Marawi Senior High School followed these guidelines in the delivery of teaching-learning experiences. In this study, the problems/challenges, opportunities, and recommendations associated with the delivery of lessons specifically experienced by the Sports Track students were investigated. Based on their first-hand experiences, recommendations straight from the students were also listed. It was found out that students experienced: (1) Difficulties acclimating to new learning methods and demands, (2) Poor/insufficient internet connection, and (3) Financial constraints. However, because of the pandemic, they were able to have: (1) More family time and bonding, and (2) Self-discovery and self-motivation to learn. They then made recommendations such as: (1) Free internet connectivity and improved internet speed, (2) Sponsored gadgets, (3) Resumption of face-to-face classes, and (4) Consultation and consideration from teachers.

A R T I C L E I N F O

1. Introduction

 All over the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected the way people think, feel, and do things. In the Philippines, the whole nation experienced doing things the "new normal" way. According to Romero (2020), the government defines "new normal" as the "emerging behavior, situations, and minimum public health standards that are institutionalized in common or routine practices and remain while the disease is not totally eradicated through such means as widespread immunization."

 Particularly, the COVID-19 pandemic hugely made an impact on the context of Philippine education. Classes were postponed due to lockdown. President Rodrigo R. Duterte declared during a public address in May 2020 that he could not allow students to go to school until he is sure they are safe from the COVID-19 virus. This prompted members of the Senate of the Philippines to state that "education stakeholders should not be stopped from fine-tuning the ways which will allow students to learn amid the pandemic without making them sick," (Romero, 2020). Accordingly, education can continue by customizing the alternatives – distance learning, television or radio-based instruction, home schooling, modular distance learning, online courses, alternative learning systems – into one blend that will meet a learner's socioeconomic profile. The Department of Education (DepEd) Secretary Leonor M. Briones, as cited in the online CNN news article (2020) said that "online classes are tapped if gadgets and a stable internet connection are available. Areas with slow internet connection and lack of personal gadgets, the delivery of lessons could be done using television, radio, and learning modules and packets both in print and digital format."

 The Mindanao State University System (MSUS), in response to the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) advisories to adopt Flexible Learning Options (FLOs), created the MSU Flexible Learning Options Committee (S.O. #344, s. 2020) tasked to formulate guidelines in the implementation of FLOs. As such, the MSUS is determined to continue to provide quality innovative education, amidst the pandemic, with access and equity for all students.

 According to the Guidelines for Flexible Learning Options (2020), classroom lectures in MSU may be done either; (a) synchronous event where online live lectures through streaming is applied using video conferencing platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet, or (b) asynchronous event where online lecture (i.e. pre-recorded video) is prepared using screen recorder apps (e.g. MS Powerpoint and other forms of social media). Other than these, course books and modules were also prepared to be used by the students. The MSU-Marawi Senior High School administration adapted these guidelines in the delivery of teaching-learning experiences.

 Tria (2020) said that the implementation of online learning posed different risks, problems, and challenges to both teachers and students. Song et al (2004) as cited by Dhawan (2020) enumerated problems associated with online as well as modular teaching and learning, such as downloading errors, installation and login problems, issues with audio and video, and so on. Sometimes, students find online learning to be boring and unengaging. Mediocre course content is also a major issue.

 The study of Moawad (2020) also revealed that internet speed and cost are problems encountered by students in online learning, while others had problems and concerns regarding their ability to use online platforms. In addition, some students found learning and taking lectures at home inconvenient.

 In this study, the problems, challenges, opportunities, and recommendations associated with online and modular learning specifically experienced by the Sports Track students of MSU-Marawi Senior High are being investigated. Based on their first-hand experiences and

knowing that the "new normal" way of teaching and learning is here for a while; possible solutions straight from the students are also listed.

2. Methods

2.1   Research Design

The research is conducted of quantitative-qualitative descriptive methods. The quantitative-descriptive method sought information such as the respondents' age, sex, grade level, current location, family monthly income, gadgets used, connectivity used, and average monthly expenses on connectivity. Furthermore, the qualitative-descriptive method aimed to find out the problems, challenges, and opportunities of online and modular classes that were experienced by the respondents during the 1st semester, A.Y. 2020 – 2021.

2.2   Research Respondents

The respondents of this study were Sports Track students of the MSU-Marawi Senior High School. Irrespective of sex and grade level, all students were eligible to take part in this study. However, only 25 students responded by returning the questionnaire.

2.3   Instrument

There were two parts of the research questionnaire used in this study. Part 1 was the demographic profile and background survey and was used to collect demographic information and background information on all the respondents. This collected information on the respondents' age (*number of years*), sex (*male or female*), grade level (*Grade 11 or Grade 12*), current location (*inside MSU-Marawi campus, within Marawi City, within Lanao del Sur, or others*), family monthly income (*the total amount of money earned by the whole family in a month*), gadgets used (*smart TV, laptop/tablet, or desktop computer*), connectivity used (*Wi-Fi connection or mobile data*), and average monthly expenses on connectivity (*the amount of money spent for Wi-Fi or mobile data*). Part 2 elicited open-ended responses on the problems, challenges, and opportunities of online and modular classes that were experienced by the respondents. Specifically, the respondents provided answers on: (1) *write down specific problems/challenges that you have encountered during the course of the online/modular classes. You may include challenges experienced to your personal well-being*; (2) *what are the positive things that are brought about by the online/modular classes*; and (3) *The COVID-19 pandemic may still be present for the next year or more. Write down specific suggestions or recommendations to further improve the online/modular classes, for the MSU/MSU-Marawi Senior High administration, for the MSU-Marawi Senior High teachers, and for you as learners.*

2.4   Procedure

The researcher collected the data in the following order:

1.   As the Chairperson of the Sports Track of the MSU-Marawi Senior High School, letters were sent to the two section advisers of Sports Track Grade 11 and Grade 12 sections, requesting for their assistance and help in gathering data from their students;

2.   Request-letters with attached questionnaires were sent to the respondents through an online platform called Google forms;

3.   Follow-ups were done to the respondents, and gathering of data commenced after two weeks;

4.   Coding of answers and data analysis followed after tallying the responses of the respondents.

2.5   Data Analysis

The quantitative descriptive data were analyzed by frequency and percentage distribution, while for the qualitative responses, coding was done to identify the most common concerns and experiences among Sports Track students during the online/modular classes.

3. Results
3.1   *Profile of the Respondents*

As shown in Table 1, majority of the respondents are 17 years old to 19 years old, which implies that they are within the right age of a Senior High School student.

Table 1. Frequency and percentage distribution in terms of respondents' age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
17 years old	4	16.0
18 years old	8	32.0
19 years old	10	40.0
20 years old	3	12.0
Total	25	100.0

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage Distribution in terms of Respondents' Sex

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	9	36.0
Female	16	64.0
Total	25	100.0

The table reveals that majority of the respondents are female, which also implies that there are more female students than male students in the MSU-Marawi Senior High School.

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Table 3. Frequency and Percentage Distribution in terms of Respondents' Grade Level

Grade Level	Frequency	Percentage
Grade 11	10	40.0
Grade 12	15	60.0
Total	25	100.0

The table shows that 15 of the respondents are Grade 12 students, while 10 respondents are Grade 11 students. This number actually represents 50% of the total population of Sports Track students, since there are 28 Grade 12 and 22 Grade 11 students, for a total of 50 students.

Table 4. Frequency and Percentage Distribution in terms of Respondents' Current Location

Current Location	Frequency	Percentage
Inside MSU-Marawi Campus	17	68.0
Within Marawi City	3	12.0
Within Lanao del Sur	3	12.0
Others	2	8.0
Total	25	100.0

As seen in the table, the majority of the respondents are currently located inside the MSU-Marawi campus. Some respondents are currently stationed within Marawi City, while a few are currently staying within Lanao del Sur. Others are most probably staying in nearby cities such as Iligan City or Cagayan de Oro City.

Since the start of the pandemic and when MSU-Marawi campus declared a lockdown on March 12, 2020, its constituents were ordered to just "stay at home." Face-to-face classes were suspended, movements of people were restricted, and those living in boarding houses inside MSU-Marawi Campus went home to the comforts of their family, wanting to be together at the height of the pandemic.

Table 5. Frequency and Percentage Distribution in terms of Respondents' Family Monthly Income

Family Monthly Income	Frequency	Percentage
Below Php 10,000	16	64.0
Php 10,000 – Php 20,000	4	16.0
Php 20,001 – Php 30,000	4	16.0
Php 30,001 – Php 40,000	0	0
Above Php 40,000	1	4.0
Total	25	100.0

As seen in the table, the majority of the respondents have a family monthly income of below Php 10,000, while most respondents' family earnings range from Php 10,000 – Php 20,000 up to Php 20,001 – Php 30,000. Only 1 respondent has a family earning of above Php 40,000 per month.

The data show that the majority of the respondents' families are considered belonging to the lower-income class, while only 1 respondent's family is in the middle class.

This is where the MSU-Marawi campus becomes a life-saver for these lower-income families, as parents can still afford to send their children to Senior high school and college. The MSU-Marawi is a prestigious university which offers quality education at a low cost compared to other universities in the country. That is why it is called as the "melting pot of the South."

Table 6. Frequency and Percentage Distribution in terms of Respondents' Gadget Used

Gadgets Used	Frequency	Percentage
Laptop/Tablet	6	24.0
Smart Television	0	0
Cellphone	25	100.00
Desktop Computer	1	4.0

As observed from the table, cellular phones are the most commonly used gadget of the respondents, when it comes to their online/modular classes. At this time of the pandemic and because of online/modular classes, the cellular phone is completely a necessity, being the most affordable and the most mobile among all gadgets used for learning. Only 6 respondents make use of a laptop/tablet, while only 1 respondent uses a desktop computer.

The table further shows that owning a smart television, which would in some ways ease the burden of eye strains due to prolonged and close exposure to cellular phones and laptop/tablet screens, is not a priority in the times of the online/modular classes. This further supports the findings in Table 5 that majority of the respondents' families are lower-income families.

Table 7. Frequency and Percentage Distribution in terms of Respondents' connectivity Used

Connectivity Used	Frequency	Percentage
Wi-Fi connection	7	28.0
Mobile Data	23	92.0
Internet Café	5	20.0

Table 7 shows that a large percentage of the respondents are using mobile data for them to keep abreast with online/modular learning. This would mean that they are always buying loads from Smart, Globe, Touch Mobile, and other networks. There are 7 respondents who have a little bit of a "luxury" since they avail of Wi-Fi connectivity, which in MSU-Main Campus, are provided by Excellink, Wise-to-go, or PLDT connections. As mentioned by the respondents, the internet speed of these internet providers are from 2 mbps – 5 mbps, which is a lot slower compared to other cities nearby, for example, in Iligan City which boasts of internet speed as high as 50 mbps – 80 mbps.

However, there are still respondents who frequent the internet cafes to research, encode requirements, download electronic modules, upload submissions, receive and send emails, among others. This is because MSU-Main is located in a somewhat remote part of the country; almost all people experience an intermittent internet connection.

Table 8. Frequency and Percentage Distribution in terms of Respondents' Average Monthly Expenses on Connectivity

Average Monthly Expenses on Connectivity	Frequency	Percentage
Below Php 500	8	32.0
Php 500 – Php 1,000	12	48.0
Php 1,001 – Php 1,500	4	16.0
Php 1,501 – Php 2,000	1	4.0
Total	25	100.0

Table 8 shows that there are 8 respondents who spend below Php 500 per month for connectivity. This can be inferred as a real "budget-wise" expense, for example, the Smart

offers a Php 99 All-out-surf promo per week which includes (a) 1 gigabit of data which can be used for Google classroom; (b) 100-minute airtime for calls which can be used for communicating with instructors and classmates; and (c) unlimited texts and unlimited messenger which can also be used for communicating with instructors and classmates.

Most of the respondents spend Php 500 – Php 1,000 for connectivity, probably spending extra for extra effort in browsing the internet to compensate for the contents of learning guides and modules sent by the instructors in the Google classroom. In addition, there are also respondents who spend Php 1,000 – Php 2,000 for connectivity. These are those who are probably connected with Wi-Fi provided by Excellink or Wise-to-Go.

4. Discussion

4.1 On the question *"Write down specific problems/challenges that you have encountered during the course of the online/modular classes. You may include challenges experienced to your personal well-being."*

The following themes emerged from the coding process: (a) Difficulties acclimating to new learning methods and demands, (b) Poor/insufficient internet connection, and (c) Financial constraints.

4.2 Difficulties Acclimating to New Learning Methods and Demands

Students are so used to having face-to-face classroom instructions and experiences. When the sudden turn of events changed the way the students learn, many were caught off guard and unprepared. Teachers and learners communicated with each other through the Google classroom, Zoom, Messenger, emails, calls or texts. Students from the MSU-Marawi Senior High School, particularly the Sports Track students, mentioned that with this kind of set-up, they were "struggling to learn and to deliver." Because these students were expected to carry out sports, dance, and recreational activities, the performances required by their instructors were just video recorded, which made them a bit uneasy and unaccustomed to. For them, "submitting videos through Google class attachments" or "passing an activity through Google forms and Google classroom especially if it is a video or an image" proved to be difficult.

These online/modular classes also caused miscommunication and misunderstanding between teachers and students. The tendency was that learners did not fully understand the modules shared to them by their teachers. When they asked their teachers for some explanation, sometimes the answers proved not enough. A particular respondent called it as "lack of teaching" since even if there were instructional videos provided by teachers, they cannot have interaction and "question and answer" portions.

Because the students were just stationed at home, their focus, attention, and concentration to study the lessons and perform different exercises were also tested in a "noisy environment" and the "added household tasks as a son/daughter or as a brother/sister" is also a factor.

4.3 Poor/Insufficient Internet Connection

One of the challenges in the country's telecommunications industry is the slow internet connection. According to the 2016 Q4 State of the Internet Report of Akamai as cited by the Department of Information and Communications Technology (2018), the Philippines has the lowest average internet speed in the world with 4.5 Mbps. According to Marcelo (2018) in an online article of Business World, "the recorded speed of internet in Cagayan de Oro is 2.4

megabits per second (Mbps), compared to 3.6 Mbps in Makati. In Marawi City, the recorded speed is a very low kbps." The article further stated that for Cagayan de Oro internet users to get the same speed as Makati users, they have to pay 1.5 times more. Marawi users must pay 26 times more.

Especially during the times of the pandemic, one hundred percent (100%) of the respondents highlighted poor/insufficient internet connection as a major problem they encountered during the online/modular classes. This was a hindrance, indeed, when the respondents said, "cannot understand well the discussion of the teacher during synchronous classes because of intermittent connection," "late in saving and attaching files due to network struggles," "not easy to submit requirements because of big/heavy megabytes, sometimes it takes hours," "slow to download and upload videos," or "not easy to access other needed platform like Google Meet."

Sometimes, in a class of 28 students, only half, or worse, even lesser than half, of the students can attend a synchronous class. What was even worst was when synchronous classes were suspended because both teachers and students experienced unstable connectivity.

4.4 Financial Constraints

For the students to learn properly and comfortably during the online/modular classes, they should have the right gadgets to be used, with laptop/tablet, desktop computer, and smart television as somewhat ideal. In addition, a fast internet speed connection is also very important.

Specifically, the respondents mentioned "lack of budget for buying load for mobile data," "old gadget used for online/modular class because no budget to buy a new gadget" and "financial problems of the family." These made it a little bit more difficult for the students to learn during the pandemic.

4.5 On the question "*What are the positive things that are brought about by the online/modular classes?*"

The following themes emerged from the coding process: (a) Family time and bonding, and (b) Self-discovery and self-motivation to learn.

4.6 Family Time and Bonding

Although a very low percentage of the respondents said that there was nothing positive brought about by the online/modular classes, almost all agreed that they had more family time and bonding when compared with conducting classes the traditional way.

Commonly, they felt happy and contented upon seeing their families safely working or studying at home and "protected from the virus" and vice versa. In addition, studying at home gave them the opportunity of more quality time with parents and siblings, thus, giving them another opportunity of a deeper discovery about each other. Other than that, even if sometimes they cannot understand fully the lessons and the learning guides, they said, they can always ask their family to explain. In short, they can share their "struggles with their parents."

4.7 Self-discovery and Self-motivation to Learn

The development of new hobbies was one positive thing that happened to the respondents. Many claimed that they have learned how to cook a certain dish, or improved their dance or guitar skills, or simply learning and experiencing new things because of

online/modular classes. One respondent mentioned that "I discovered some things I never imagined I am capable of doing," one of which is discovering and learning the how's of doing things with educational applications and platforms, to keep abreast with technology. Since they are Sports Track students, a lot of the requirements entailed that they would video-record their activities, thus they discovered and used a lot of applications available in Google Play.

Even with the struggles and difficulties the students faced while being involved in the online/modular classes, the motivation to learn was still present amongst them. Although it was very hard without the physical presence of the teacher, the students claimed to slowly learn independence in terms of understanding the concepts and theories about their lessons.

4.8 **On the question "***The COVID-19 pandemic may still be present for the next year or more. Write down specific suggestions or recommendations to further improve the online/modular classes, for the MSU/MSU-Marawi Senior High administration, for the MSU-Marawi Senior High teachers, and for you as learners***."**

The following themes emerged from the coding process: (a) Free internet connectivity and improved internet speed, (b) Sponsored gadgets, (c) Resumption of a scheduled face-to-face classes, (d) Consultation and consideration from teachers, and (d) More motivated to study harder.

4.9 Free Internet Connectivity and Improved Internet Speed

One hundred percent (100%) of the respondents believed that if free internet connectivity and improved internet speed were being provided by the government, particularly by the province and city governments, and the Mindanao State University-Marawi Campus and MSU-Marawi Senior High School administration, the problems and difficulties initially experienced by both teachers and students were solved. Uploading of files, downloading of modules and learning guides, submission of requirements, the conduct of quizzes and exams, and the conduct of synchronous classes would be easier, faster, and stress-free. This would create a better and two-way communication between and among teachers and students. In addition, this would help ease the financial burdens of the lower-income families.

The respondents were actually banking on the Department of Information and Communication's (DICT) pronouncement in 2018 that a free Wi-Fi access with a speed of 10 Mbps - 55 Mbps would be available to the public very soon, as announced by DICT Secretary Rodolfo Salalima. Accordingly, the plan was to build 250,000 Wi-Fi access points nationwide before the end of Pres. Duterte's term in 2022, in accordance with Republic Act No. 10929 governing the Free Internet Access Program.

4.10 Sponsored Gadgets

Again, one hundred percent (100%) of the respondents were clamoring for gadgets to be sponsored by government, particularly by the province and city governments, and the Mindanao State University-Marawi Campus MSU-Marawi Senior High School administration. These respondents were well-aware that other cities and municipalities in the Philippines were quick to respond to calls for a new delivery of learning. If other cities and municipalities can allocate funds to help their constituency, they believed that their own province and city can do it, too.

According to Maderazo (2020), Quezon City and Manila allocated budget to give teachers and students free gadgets for online classes. Accordingly, the Quezon City administration passed a supplementary budget of Php 2.9 billion for learning materials, including gadgets specifically tablets, and even internet and connectivity allowance. For the Manila administration, appropriated Php 994 million for 110,000 tablets with SIM cards for students and 11,000 laptops with pocket devices for teachers to help prepare them for online classes. The SIM cards come with a 10 gigabyte monthly load with free 2 GB data for YouTube.

The DepEd was also convincing the private sector to donate gadgets rather than the usual school bag and supplies during the annual Brigada Eskwela 2020.

4.11   Resumption of Scheduled Face-to-Face Classes

Sports Track students and teachers alike would want to gradually go back to face-to-face classes. They suggested that they be given a chance to use the Dimaporo Gymnasium for courses such as Fitness, Sports, and Recreational Leadership, Sports Officiating and Activity Management, Human Movement, and even their In-Campus Practicum, for these are practical and activity courses, better learned and applied through performed activities. One respondent even suggested that "the class be divided into two groups" with one group attending face-to-face classes while the other group studies at home. Then the next day, they switch their roles. Of course, they said, minimum health protocols such as wearing of face mask, social distancing, and frequent hand washing should be observed by all, when allowed by the proper authorities to resume face-to-face classes.

4.12   Consultation and Consideration from Teachers

Utmost patience and understanding from teachers were asked by the learners. The respondents asked that their teachers just give an activity at a time and must not rush them for submission. Furthermore, they requested that teachers must explain and teach the lesson in an easy way. They called their teachers "to guide them, especially the slow learners and give specific instructions to avoid confusion." There should also be consultation hours scheduled by the class advisers. This simply means that these class advisers reach out to their advisees, especially to "those most vulnerable to negative elements."

The MSU-Marawi Senior High should even have online competitions to exhibit the talents of the students. In this way, "we can actually bring back the fighting spirit of the students" to overcome odds.

4.13   More Motivated to Study Harder

Having been exposed to unfavorable situations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the respondents were still poised in overcoming this kind of difficult and challenging mode of delivery of learning. Particularly, the respondents claimed that they intend "to study harder," "to be not lazy and eliminate procrastination," "to put extra effort to learn by themselves," "to read, read, and read the lectures to gain knowledge," and "to motivate themselves to do their best every single day." To copy the words of 2018 Ms. Universe Catriona Gray, "to look for the beauty in it, to be grateful, to see situations with a silver lining."

4.14   Conclusions

Based on the results of the study, the following conclusions are made:

1. Specifically for most of the Mindanao State University students, and generally for schools/universities where students and their families are not privileged enough to enjoy the newest and highest technological innovations when it comes to teaching-learning experiences, face-to-face classes are still considered as more effective.
2. In courses which require practical application of knowledge and skills, such as those in Physical Education and sports activities wherein Sports Track students are enrolled, and with goals of physical, mental, emotional, and social development of the learners, face-to-face classes are still considered as more effective.
3. The COVID-19 pandemic has produced a new world full of challenges, dilemmas, as well as opportunities. It is up to us to adapt and transform these challenges and dilemmas into opportunities for growth and development for the nation and the global community.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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