

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY: APPLIED BUSINESS AND EDUCATION RESEARCH

2025, Vol. 6, No. 2, 953 – 959

<http://dx.doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.06.02.36>

Research Article

The Lived Experiences of Parents of Traditional Low-income Households in the Shift from Modular to Blended Learning: A Phenomenological Study in the Philippines during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Article history:

Submission 31 January 2025

Revised 07 February 2025

Accepted 23 February 2025

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a shift in educational modalities, notably from modular to blended learning, creating unique challenges for low-income households in the Philippines. This study examines the lived experiences of 11 Barangay Manggahan, Pasig City parents during this transition. A qualitative phenomenological approach was utilized to capture the complexities of their adaptation, focusing on access to technology, economic pressures, and the home learning environment. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. Participants were purposively selected to represent traditional low-income households with school-aged children engaged in blended learning. The findings revealed significant barriers, including limited access to devices and internet connectivity, compounded by financial instability. These constraints strained parents' abilities to support their children's education, although many adopted strategies like promoting independence, leveraging community resources, and reorganizing household routines. Despite the challenges, parents generally perceived blended learning as an improvement over modular learning due to increased teacher interaction and enhanced learning opportu-

How to cite:

Lumba, D. N. J. V., Abella, F. M., Andaya III, R., Bea, W. V., Pel, J. M., & Tanchuling, N. A. (2025). The Lived Experiences of Parents of Traditional Low-income Households in the Shift from Modular to Blended Learning: A Phenomenological Study in the Philippines during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*. 6(2), 953 – 959. doi: 10.11594/ijmaber.06.02.36

nities. However, issues such as inconsistent schedules and the financial burden of the hybrid format persisted. The study underscores the digital divide as a critical factor exacerbating educational inequities, highlighting the need for systemic interventions. In addition to this, targeted efforts to improve digital access, provide economic support, and enhance parent-teacher collaboration are vital for fostering inclusive and effective education. These findings contribute to policy discussions on addressing socio-economic disparities in education, particularly in post-pandemic recovery planning.

Keywords: *Educational modalities, Blended learning, Modular learning, Education, Low-income Households, Pandemic Education*

Introduction

The sudden onset of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted education systems globally, necessitating rapid shifts to alternative learning formats. In the Philippines, the Department of Education adopted modular and blended learning modalities to ensure the continuity of education while adhering to health protocols. Modular learning, characterized by self-learning materials distributed in printed or digital formats, posed challenges for families lacking access to technology. Blended learning, integrating online and face-to-face instruction, was introduced as a progressive alternative to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. However, the transition revealed significant inequities, particularly among low-income households. The "digital divide," referring to the disparity in access to technology and the internet, disproportionately affected marginalized communities (Villanueva et al., 2023). Parents, often unprepared for the dual roles of breadwinner and educator, faced additional stress balancing economic pressures and educational responsibilities (Carreon, 2018). Previous studies have documented these challenges but seldom explored the nuanced experiences of low-income families in traditional setups in adapting to blended learning. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the lived experiences of parents in Barangay Manggahan, Pasig City, during the transition from modular to blended learning. By highlighting their challenges, coping strategies, and perceptions, this research seeks to inform

policies that promote equitable and inclusive education.

This study situates itself within this context, aiming to explore the nuanced experiences of parents in Barangay Manggahan, Pasig City, during their transition from modular to blended learning. By examining their challenges, coping strategies, and perceptions, the research seeks to inform policies that promote equitable and inclusive education in the Philippines.

Methods Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of parents navigating the transition from modular to blended learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The phenomenological approach was chosen to capture the subjective experiences of participants, emphasizing their challenges, coping mechanisms, and overall perceptions of the new learning modality.

Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure a focused examination of low-income households with school-aged children engaged in blended learning. The study was conducted in Barangay Manggahan, Pasig City, a community identified for its prominence as the second-largest barangay in Pasig City. Eligibility criteria included parents or guardians who had direct involvement in their children's education during the shift to blended learning.

First, the household had to fall under the traditional set-up where a mother and father are both actively present and living together in the household. Second, at least one of the two parents has to be present during the interview. Third, they have to be classified under the low-income but not poor bracket produced by the Philippine Institute of Development Studies (PIDS, 2022). To accomplish this, coordination with local barangay officials facilitated the identification and recruitment of 11 participants.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted face-to-face while adhering to health and safety protocols. A researcher-developed interview guide was used, comprising open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about participants' experiences. Questions addressed key areas such as technological access, socio-economic pressures, and strategies for educational support. Each interview lasted approximately 20–25 minutes and was audio-

recorded with the informed consent of participants. Follow-up questions were included to clarify and deepen responses where necessary.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was employed to systematically analyze the data. The process began with the transcription and familiarization of interview recordings. Then, initial coding identified recurring patterns and themes, which were then reviewed and refined to ensure alignment with the study's objectives. After, themes were categorized into broader domains such as digital access, parental roles, and socio-economic challenges, providing a structured framework for presenting the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Participants provided informed consent, ensuring their voluntary participation and understanding of the study's purpose. Along with this, anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by using pseudonyms and secure data storage practices.

Result and Discussion

Table 1. Demographic Data

Characteristic	Category	Frequency
Age	30-39	1
	40-49	4
	50-59	5
	60+	1
Educational Attainment	Elementary	2
	High School	6
	College (Undergraduate)	2
	College (Graduate)	1
Employment Status (during the pandemic)	Employed	4
	Unemployed	4
	Self-Employed	2
	Homemaker	1
Number of Children	1	3
	2	5
	3 or more	3
Children's Current Grade Levels	Elementary	3
	Highschool	6
	College	2

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Participants from traditional households primarily belong to the 40–59 age group (9 participants), indicating a focus on families with school-aged children. The educational backgrounds of these parents show that high school graduates form the largest group (6 participants), while fewer have acquired at least some college education (2 participants) or completed college (1 participant). Notably, 2 participants only achieved an elementary-level education, which may have impacted their ability to support their children in modular and blended learning formats. Employment status varied among participants: 4 were employed, 4 were unemployed, 2 were self-employed or engaged in informal work, and 1 was a homemaker. This

reflects the economic challenges faced during the pandemic, with many relying on informal work or coping with unemployment. Most traditional households had 2 children (5 households), while 3 households had 3 or more children, and another 3 had 1 child. Families with multiple children likely encountered greater difficulties managing resources like time, finances, and technology for learning. Most children from these households were in high school (6 children), followed by elementary school (3 children) and college (2 children). Parents of high school students faced unique challenges related to academic rigor and self-directed learning, while those with elementary-aged children required more hands-on support.

Table 2. Recurring Themes

Theme	Scenarios	Frequency
Household’s Access to Technology and the Internet	Households only had cellular phones, only city-owned tablets; no Wi-Fi, only mobile data.	6
	Households connected to the Wi-Fi of neighbors; had weak signal.	4
	Households installed Wi-Fi at home because of deep necessity.	1
Educational Support and Home Environment	Parents guided children but didn’t always teach because they were solving things on their own; helped whenever there were questions.	5
	For parents, modular learning was tough because they had to work.	3
	Children had to share a tablet, which made it difficult when they needed it at the same time.	3
The Impact of Blended Learning on Academic Performance	For parents, blended learning was harder because sometimes there was no schedule consistency, and it was difficult to determine if it was online or face-to-face.	5
	Parents prefer blended learning because children can learn more compared to modular.	4
	Parents adjusted well to blended learning because it was better for their dynamic.	2
Socio-Economic Pressures and Education	Parents didn’t have much income during the pandemic; it was difficult to provide fare and other needs for school.”	4
	Parents had to rely on informal work or small businesses to make ends meet.	3
	Parents relied on government food packs and vouchers for children’s welfare.	4

Theme	Scenarios	Frequency
Parental Adaptation and Coping Strategies	Parents adjusted by letting the kids study on their own, but we monitored their grades.	5
	Parents managed through teamwork and perseverance.	3
	Parents focused on making sure children were attending classes and doing their work on time	3

Access to Technology and the Internet

The results highlighted significant disparities in access to technology, impacting students' learning experiences. Some households were equipped with government-provided tablets, but these devices were often limited or insufficient, requiring multiple children to share them. Many families had to rely on mobile data or Wi-Fi from neighbors, which was often unstable and insufficient for consistent learning. One participant shared, "We only had a cell phone; the tablet was from the mayor," which emphasized the reliance on local government support. Others mentioned using mobile data, with one parent commenting, "We had no Wi-Fi, just mobile data," further illustrating the challenges posed by limited connectivity. These disparities led to varying levels of educational engagement, as more financially stable families were able to afford better internet connectivity, as noted by one parent: "We installed Wi-Fi because my child needed it for college." This reflects the digital divide that has exacerbated educational inequalities during the pandemic.

Educational Support and Home Environment

Parental involvement in supporting education during the pandemic was shaped by the pressures of work and the home environment. Many parents found it difficult to balance their work responsibilities with helping their children. For instance, one participant stated, "It was tough during modular learning because I had to work and was already a full-time mom." In these cases, parents often guided their children without directly teaching, encouraging independence. However, this independence was sometimes limited, as one parent explained, "They had to share a tablet, which made it difficult when both needed it at the same time." Despite these challenges, some parents indicated that children often managed their learning on

their own, relying on tools like Google to search for answers.

Impact of Blended Learning on Academic Performance

Parents' views on blended learning were mixed. Many parents expressed frustration with the inconsistent schedules, saying it was difficult to determine whether lessons were online or face-to-face, which added stress to their already burdened routines. One participant shared, "Blended learning was harder because there was no consistency in the schedule, and we didn't know if it was online or face-to-face." Conversely, other parents appreciated the advantages of blended learning. As one parent noted, "Blended learning is better because children learn more compared to modular learning." This sentiment was echoed by others who valued the increased interaction with teachers and classmates. However, the transition to this new learning format was not without its difficulties, as some families struggled to adjust to the shift from modular learning.

Socio-Economic Pressures and Education

The economic challenges during the pandemic placed additional stress on parents' ability to support their children's education. Several parents highlighted financial strain, with one stating, "We didn't have much income during the pandemic; it was difficult to provide transportation and other school needs." Many relied on informal work or small businesses to make ends meet, while others received government aid such as food packs and vouchers to support their children's education. The financial limitations often hindered access to technology and educational resources, further exacerbating educational inequalities.

Parental Adaptation and Coping Strategies

Parents displayed resilience in the face of adversity, employing various strategies to support their children's learning. Some parents allowed their children to study independently, while others emphasized teamwork within the family. One parent noted, "We adjusted, it was hard, but we managed together," reflecting the collaborative efforts to overcome challenges. Parents also monitored their children's grades but provided limited direct help, focusing on ensuring that their children attended classes and completed assignments on time. Despite the challenges, many parents adapted well, drawing on their perseverance and resourcefulness to support their children's education.

Conclusion

The study highlights the multifaceted challenges faced by parents from low-income households during the transition from modular to blended learning amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Limited access to technology, unreliable internet connectivity, and economic instability significantly impacted their ability to support their children's education. Despite these barriers, parents demonstrated remarkable resilience, adopting strategies such as fostering children's independence, reorganizing household routines, and leveraging community and government resources. Key findings underscore the interdependence of digital access, family dynamics, and socio-economic pressures in shaping educational experiences. The digital divide emerged as a critical factor, amplifying educational inequalities and emphasizing the need for systemic solutions. Blended learning, while offering greater engagement than modular formats, required substantial adjustments from parents, revealing the necessity for clear communication and robust support from schools. To address these challenges, targeted interventions are essential. Improving access to digital tools, providing consistent internet connectivity, and offering economic assistance can help bridge gaps in educational equity. Additionally, fostering stronger partnerships between schools and families through regular communication and guidance will better equip parents to navigate educational transitions. By addressing these systemic issues, stakeholders

can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment, ensuring that students from all socio-economic backgrounds have equal opportunities to succeed. This study underscores the unique resilience of low-income families and the importance of comprehensive support systems in mitigating the adverse effects of educational disruptions.

Acknowledgement

First, the researchers would like to express their heartfelt gratitude and honor the Almighty God for granting them the necessary graces to finish this research.

Second, they would like to thank Hon. Quin Cruz, the Barangay Captain of Barangay Manggahan, Pasig City, his Sangguniang Kabataan Councilors, and the Barangay Council for the Protection of Children.

Last but certainly not least, they would like to thank their parents and mentors for guiding them in the completion of this study.

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