Strategies in Building Learners' Authentic Mastery in Blended Learning

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ABSTRACT

:The Corona-virus (Covid-19) pandemic brought many challenges to the whole world and educationhas been hit hard. The way of teaching and learning suddenly changed from pure face-to-face learning to blended learning modality. Thus, different teaching strategies are needed to ensure that learners really mastered the lesson. This qualitative research was conducted througha unstructured interview. The participants are Basic Education Teachers of DepEd Baguioand Benguet, Philippines. The teachers were asked about their general observations regarding learners' authentic mastery of the lesson during blended learning, the difficulties they encountered and how they managed these difficulties in building students' authentic mastery of the lesson during blended learning. The study revealed that there are many difficulties encountered by educators in building students' authentic mastery but teachers are indeed creative enough to handle these problems. They managed to create strategies and address the problems in building learners' authentic mastery of the lesson. Home visitations, tutorial, modification and accommodation of the lesson, conferences, and the use of video-lesson were done to address the gaps. Truly, this pandemic affected the educational system which became more challenging but this did not stop the educators to work hard for the benefit of the learners.

Keywords: Strategies, Authentic Mastery, Blended Learning

Introduction

Mastery of learning focuses on ensuring a student's grasp of a given concept is complete regardless of the time and resources needed to achieve mastery, or total understanding (Kampen,2019). As we have entered the new world of teaching and learning process, the teachers, students, and parents are in doubt if students really learned something from their classes or if they have mastered their lessons well. With our current situation, blended learning became known as a learning modality. Here, teachers can't really see the whole progress and behavior of students when accomplishing their activities especially those who are using modular distance learning. With this, making sure that learners mastered the key concepts is indeed challenging. Before the pandemic started, teachers can monitor and assist the students whenever they need help, they can assure that their students are doing the tasks or activities and they can see the progress and mastery level ofthe learners. During this pandemic, educators are doing their very best to help and monitor the progress of their learnersso that quality education will not be sacrificed.

According to Victoria (n.d), "Monitoring student progress on a regular basis also enables the teacher to analyze a student's current performance level for a specific skill. As a result, teachers can provide students with assistance in achieving their personal academic goals. With information from assessments and samples of work, the teacher can work with the student to establish achievable learning goals and help each student to stay on track. With ongoing monitoring of the students, teachers can establish an achievable and individual rate of progress for each student, or conversely intervene when required." Monitoring learners progress during this pandemic is quiet challenging but nothing is impossible for an educator who is passionate in teaching.

There are computer-based programs that allow students to speed their requirements without truly mastering the content or skills which they need to succeed. We knew, these approaches hasthe potential to increase learning gaps and expose students to too much screen time.With the continuous improvement and booming of technology, different applications, websites, and software are also popping out which allows students to make their activities in school easier with just one tap. That is why the mastery level of students now a days is a question for everyone.According to the study by Belafi et.al., 2020; Gordon et.al,2019 (as cited in Hwa et.al.,2020)children do not master foundational skills like literacy and numeracy early on, but the curriculum continues progressing, then they will not be able to engage in more advanced topics in later grades. With this, learners need to be reminded of the proper use of technology because this would be a great help to their studies if properly used.

This study intends tofind strategies that willbuild learners' authentic mastery of the lessons during blendedlearning especially that there are many challenges in the educational setting in the new normal in the Philippines. The result of this study can also help other educators and researchers to improve and enhance the strategies that they will use to ensure learners'authentic mastery of the lesson.

Methodology

The researchers used qualitativeresearch design to address the purpose of this study. The study aimed to discover the strategies used by educators to make sure that there is authentic mastery of the lesson on the part of the learners especially during blended learning in this new normal.

Unstructured interview was used as an instrument to collect data. 15 Basic Education Teachers from DepEd Baguio and Benguet were asked to participate in this study. The participants were teachers from Guisad Valley National High School, SPED Center, PacdayQuinio Elementary School,Lucban Elementary School, and Tublay School Home Industries. All the participants are from different grade levels and are teaching different subjects.

Unstructured questionnaire interview was used by the researchers as an instrument to gather the data needed in this study. Interviewees were asked to answer the following questions:

1.   What are your general observations regarding learners' authentic mastery of the lesson in blended learning?
2.   What difficulties have you encountered in building students' authentic mastery of the lesson during blended learning?
3.   How do you handle the difficulties in building students' authentic mastery of the lesson during blended learning?

Letter of permission were sent out to the School Heads and to the participants regarding the data gathering for this research. The interview was conducted for five days since interviewees are from different schools and their availability was also considered.

Findings and Discussion

This pandemic showed us that there are lots of things that are more difficult but not impossible to do. Teaching and learning process is just one of these difficulties.

The researchers asked the interviewees about their general observations regarding learners' authentic mastery of the lesson in blended learning, difficulties they encountered in building students' authentic mastery of the lesson during blended learning, and how they handled the difficulties in building students' authentic mastery of the lesson during blended learning.

Here are the **findings.**

Table 1. General observations regarding learners' authentic mastery of the lesson in blended learning

Codes	Category/Theme
• Complexity of topic (need in-depth discussion to be understood by which is only possible during a face-to-face set-up). • There are some learners rely on the key answers, internet-based answers, classmates/group answers, hence they did not answer on their own resulting to questionable results, scores, and grades. • One of my observations regarding learners' authentic mastery of the lessons in technology and Livelihood Education during the blended learning is that they skip or miss the performance task part of their modules which is 70% of their grade. • Learners lack the drive to learn and understand their lessons because of the "new normal" in which their biological clock drastically changed. Their night became day and vice versa. • Only a few read beyond the lesson content as manifested in their outputs. Many students have difficulty answering analytical questions in their modules. Students, when well-guided, can master the lesson content. • The level of mastery is difficult to gauge since there is no summative exam to test retention of the content or seeing the connection among the lessons in the subject.	Difficulty understanding content words
• Since we are a social being, learners need to be with peers to be more engaged in learning. Due to the restrictions, learners are deprived of mingling with others,and this somehow has an effect in their academic performance.	Poor peer communication
• You can't really tell if there's mastery for those who are using modular learning since you can't see the learners answering their modules and there are cases when parents, relatives, or guardian are the ones who is answering.	Parents/guardian do the activities of their child
• Authentic mastery requires varied activities to see how the students had been acquiring skills. This time of pandemic, may it be online, asynchronous, or modular, it is difficult to say there is mastery because of the limitations on how teachers can assess. The actual performance, the process can't be observed. The bases of grading are the students' submitted output. The authenticity and reliability is uncertain. • The curriculum of the class I am handling focuses on practical skills which are best learned/taught through molding, immersion, and hand-over-hand assistance. During the blended learning, I observed that my learners' authentic mastery of the lessons is affected by the amount of time and level of assistance they get from me and their parents. • As a teacher teaching learner with disabilities, mastery of their skills takes longer time due to varied reason: availability of family members, strengths and weaknesses of the pupils and educational background of the family.	Limitations of assessment and adults supervision

Table 1 shows the general observation of teachers regarding learners' authentic mastery of the lesson during blended learning. Most of the interviewees said that it is difficult to measure learners' authenticmastery of the lessons because of the following factors.

First, learners are having difficulty understanding the content of the lessons since there is no interaction between the teacher and the learner. As Teacher 6 said in the interview,"Only a few read beyond the lesson content as manifested in their outputs. Many students have difficulty answering analytical questions in their modules. Students, when well-guided, can actually master the lesson content". Since there are students who do not understand the lesson, they will just search answers from the internet which is sometimes not related to questions they need to answer. They just copy answers without realizing its content ("There are some learners who rely on the key answers, internet-based answers, classmates/group answers, hence they did not answer on their own resulting to questionable results, scores, and grades"-Teacher 2). Roomi(2021) mentioned in his article that even for a student's education, internet can be misused to promote laziness. Unlike a library where information could just be read, internet allows contents to be copied. In case of a university assignment or a school homework, some students simply copy paste information from the internet. From such an action students will never learn the key concepts behind the internet information. He also said that, not every content posted on the internet is from reliable sources. The information posted on the internet could be fake or exaggerating. Some contents are just created purely for the sake of misguiding visitors. Hence, it is the responsibility of the teachers to guide students to find reliable and trusted information on the internet.

Peer communicationis the second factor that affects the way a student learns. ("Since we are a social being, learners need to be with peers to be more engaged in learning. Due to the restrictions, learners are deprived of mingling with others, and this somehow has an effect in their academic performance"-Teacher 4). Just like what Gupta (2020) said **"**With peer-to-peer learning in action, students get to learn by explaining their ideas and active participation in multiple activities. Since they collaboratively learn from their peers, it enhances other crucial soft skills along with the knowledge of the curricula".

Third, learners' authentic mastery of the lesson is hard to say since it is also observed that **parents and/or guardians are the ones answering the activities of their child** ("You can't really tell if there's mastery for those who are using modular learning since you can't see the learners answering their modules and there are cases when parents, relatives, or guardian are the ones who is answering"-Teacher 8).
This proves the result of the study of Anzaldo (2021) on the disadvantage of modular distance learning wherein she mentioned that some parents pamper their children and do their task instead of them. There are parents who are the ones answering the modules in place of their children for different reasons. There are some who are doing their work from home in an online working set-up, some are busy with the chores and other household tasks that instead of teaching their children with the modules, because they don't have the time to do so, they are the one answering it.

Lastly, **Limitations of assessment and adults supervision**. ("Authentic mastery requires varied activities to see how the students had been acquiring skills. This time of pandemic, may it be online, asynchronous, or modular, it is difficult to say there is mastery because of the limitations on how teachers can assess. The actual performance, the process can't be observed. The bases of grading are the students' submitted output. The authenticity and reliability is uncertain"- Teacher 9). ("The curriculum of the class I am handling focuses on practical skills which are best learned/taught through molding, immersion, and hand-over-hand assistance. During the blended learning, I observed that my learners' authentic mastery of the lessons is affected by the amount of time and level of assistance they get from me and their parents"- Teacher 14). Kalani (2021) also mentioned that one of the cons of blended learning is Lack of supervision – Teachers are worried about students' motivation levels while switching to blended learning as there is lesser supervision as compared to face-to-face learning, and many students' performance might degrade due to self-management – the flexibility of setting one's own pace may lead to students falling behind in syllabus.

Authentic mastery of lessons is indeed uncertain to learners specially to those with special educational needs because of lack of supervision from both parents and teachers.Sending messages through messenger or a phone call can be done to ask or monitor learners on how they are doing in their tasks. Also, teachers should see to it that activities are aligned to the competencies that learners should master.

Table 2. Difficulties encountered in building students' authentic mastery of the lesson during blended learning.

Codes	Category/Theme
• Some students do not understand the lessons even if given their printed modules because they have no access to the posts or announcements, we post on the group chat. • Some learners cannot join the synchronous class due to unavailability of gadgets and poor internet connection. • Only very few participate in online or virtual classes where lesson content is elaborated and exemplified; hence, very few can reach the mastery level of a certain lesson.	Lack of gadgets and/or unstable internet connectivity
• Many students do not ask questions on topics they have difficulty understanding; thus, most of their outputs are answered carelessly and often do not reach the score for mastery level. • Learners do not bother to really read the contents of the modules. • In self-learning modules, many of the learners have difficulty understanding the lessons because there is no interaction between the teacher and the learner. • Answers are copied, forwarded or shared by their classmates. • Some students would say that they can't understand the lesson even if they keep reading it. • The competencies appear to be isolated from each other since the modules do not seem to refer or build upon the previous module.	Difficulty understanding content words/poor comprehension
• Parents are busy at work. They have no time to come to school and get the modules of their children. • In self-learning modules, many of the learners have difficulty understanding the lessons because of no interaction between the teacher and the learner. • Learners do not bother to really read the contents of the modules.	Lack adults supervision
• Other learners have limited attention span they are not focused during online classes. • Learners with special educational needs has a very short focus and attention.	Limited attention span

Category 1. Lack of gadgets and/or unstable internet connectivity. In the new normal, the use of technological devices and internet access is very important especially in blended learning. This is one recurring difficulty experienced by learners since not everyone has gadget and internet connectivity especially in the rural areas. ("Some learners cannot join the synchronous class due to unavailability of gadgets and poor internet connection"-Teacher 5). ("Only very few participate in online or virtual classes where lesson content is elaborated and exemplified; hence, very few can reach the mastery level of a certain lesson"). In an article written by Chatterjee et.al (2020), it was mentioned that "Teaching online is better than regular sessions as one can focus on their family and mental peace. On the other hand, poor internet connectivity, power supply, lack of smartphones and other gadgets hinder educational opportunities for the students in rural areas". In the same article, they also said that "half the total number of learners or 826 million students across the world did not have access to a household computer and 43 per cent (706 million) had no internet at home, according to UNESCO".

Category 2. Difficulty understanding content words/poor comprehension. Interviewees mentioned that not all learners have the capability to understand what they read. ("Some students would say that they can't understand the lesson even if they keep reading it"- Teacher 9). Also, learners will just do things on their own. ("Many students do not ask questions on topics they have difficulty understanding; thus, most of their outputs are answered carelessly and often do not reach the score for mastery level"- Teacher 6). Anzaldo (2021) mentioned in her research that "not all learners do their modules committedly. Yes, this is 100% true as per survey. Most students and learners do their modules for formality purposes only and just to simply comply with the requirements. It is very devastating in the part of the teacher to know that students are taking modules for granted. Teachers can only monitor their learners' academic progress through text messaging and phone calls, unlike, the usual face to face classes that they can supervise and facilitate their learning".

Category 3. Lack adults supervision in answering students assignments or activities. Parents are also busy working and they do not have time to help their children.(" Parents are busy at work. They have no time to come to school and get the modules of their children"- Teacher 4.Ho (2009 as

cited in Đurišić and Bunijevac, 2017),) said that today's parents are often preoccupied with the distractions and demands of daily life. Burdened by low-income, inflexible work hours and language barriers, some parents are unable to attend school activities or participate in the schooling of their children on a regular basis.

Another thing is that students need supervision and help especially on the part they really don't understand. ("In self-learning modules, many of the learners have difficulty understanding the lessons because of no interaction between the teacher and the learner"- Teacher 5).Because of this, learners will just submit their modules wherein activities are unanswered, or they will write answers that is not related to the questions.

Category 4. Limited attention span. During the face-to-face classes, educators could easily see if learners are still into the lesson or not. Educators could easily do something to get the attention of learners for them to focus on the lesson. During this blended learning, there are some students who are easily distracted especially learners with special educational needs ("Other learners have limited attention span they are not focused during online classes"- teacher 12).

("Learners with special educational needs has a very short focus and attention"-Teacher 13).

Table 3. how educators handle the difficulties in building students' authentic mastery of the lesson during blended learning.

Codes	Category
- Home visitation - Home visitations are conducted to students who are failing to submit requirements or answer sheets and those who can't attend the limited face to face classes. - Empowering the parents as partners in the education increases the students' authentic mastery. - Communication with family members helps to assist the students to learn.	Home visitations
- We request the learners to come to school so we can guide or assist him/her in understanding the content of the modules. - Teaching learners in small groups or in one-on-one sessions. - Monitoring students' progress through their record of written and performance outputs. Addressing the competencies they have not mastered as reflected in their outputs. - I conduct tutoring	Tutorial
- We make an activity sheet or enhancement activity suited to the learner's capability or understanding. - Innovating teaching strategies. - I follow up individual students through messenger to ask them the difficulties they encounter. I also try to simplify tasks and instructions so that the students can be helped in understanding the lessons. - Teachers provide remediation, simplified activities for learners with educational needs, provide tutorials/further intervention in giving instructions to those students who come to school and by using messenger and text messaging. - I teach the lesson step by step and sometimes I give additional work. - During this limited face to face, I start with demonstration, then have guided activity and then have individual assessment. - Learners with autism mostly master lessons through patterns and routine. Providing them pattern will really do the trick.	Scaffolding(modification, accommodation)
- For those who do not have cellphones and gadgets, collaboration with parents was used wherein, I have to sit with the parent and explain how to do the task for her to be able to guide the learner in doing the activity. - Interviewing parents of the learners on their study habits. - Encouraging learners to attend synchronous sessions. - Conducting individual conferences to learners via platforms accessible to them.	Conference/meeting

• Follow up learners on how they are coping with the lesson.	
• To be able to meet the needs of the learners during blended learning, I Created mini-videos demonstrating the skills or tasks that the learners need to learn. It was posted in the class group chat for them to access anytime they will be needing a guide on how to perform the task given. The use of the Zoom platform also helped a lot in the teaching-learning process.	Use of mini-videolesson
• Conducting enrichment activities through activity sheets and video clips	

Category 1. Home visitations. Partnership between parents or guardian and teachers is indeed important for the benefit of the learners("Empowering the parents as partners in the education increases the students' authentic mastery"-Teacher 15). This proves what Terziev and Fitzwater (2018) stated that "Children's academic performance hinges largely on parents' involvement and engagement with their children's education. Visits by teachers to children's homes to meet with parents enable teachers and parents to create connections that can help foster parent involvement in their children's education". Home visit isalso one way of understanding the behavior of a learner towards his/her studies ("Home visitations are conducted to students who are failing to submit requirements or answer sheets and those who can't attend the limited face to face classes"- Teacher 9).

Category 2.Tutorial. Tutorials can help students improve their skills and master the lessons or boost their academic performance in class especially those who are having a hard time understanding the content of the lesson (" We request the learners to come to school so we can guide or assist him/her in understanding the content of the modules"- Teacher 4). Also, monitoring students' progress will help teachers address their weaknesses in their academics ("Monitoring students' progress through their record of written and performance outputs. Addressing the competencies they have not mastered as reflected in their outputs"- Teacher 6).

Category 3. Scaffolding. Not all learners are expected to do tasks on their ownespecially if they don't understand the subject matter. Some are even shy to ask their teachers for help. With this, scaffolding will help them improve and work on their own. Modification and accommodation is also important to learners especially to those with learning difficulties. Activities should be modified or simplified. It is also better to identify the needs of the learners first so that it is easy to cater their needs ("Teachers provide remediation, simplified activities for learners with educational needs, provide tutorials/further intervention in giving instructions to those students who come to school and by using messenger and text messaging"-Teacher 9).
Vygotsky (as cited in Caruana, 2012) stated that "Vygotsky's zone of proximal development proposes that it's important to determine the area (zone) between what a student can accomplish unaided and what that same student can accomplish with assistance". Doing so will help the teachers identify the competency or area that needs focus in helping learner master what needs to be mastered.

Category 4. Conference/meeting. Conducting conference with learners and their parents and or guardian is a strategy that can ultimately benefit every student especially this pandemic ("For those who do not have cellphones and gadgets, collaboration with parents was used wherein I have to sit with the parent and explain how to do the task for her to be able to guide the learner in doing the activity "-Teacher 3). Teacher and learner conference is also needed. This is an opportunity for the teacher to understand the behavior of the learnerstowards their studies. Monk (2018) stated in his article that historically, parent-teacher conferences have been the main forum for communication between teachers and parents. These conferences are crucial for strong relationships between the two parties who are chiefly concerned with a child's academic and personal development. For parents, these conversations can provide greater details about challenges occurring in the classroom and will allow them to understand how they may be able to address these issues outside of school. In addition, the majority of teachers believe conferences can help them better understand their students' needs and home environments, and how this translates into the classroom. Ultimately, these important interactions give teachers an opportunity to create the best environments and use the most effective strategies in their teaching, while providing parents with information on how to support their children academically at home. Although parent-teacher conferences may be only one way in which parents and teachers communicate, they are often a good starting point and provide an initial encounter in which parents can get engaged.

Category 5. Mini- videolessons. Today's education scenario, mini-video lesson is a great help to those who are not independent learners. Videos can help them understand the content of the lesson. Learners can re-play the video if they did not understand the lesson. ("To be able to meet the needs of the learners during blended learning, I created mini-videos demonstrating the skills or tasks that the learners need to learn. It was posted in the class group chat for them to access anytime they will be needing a guide on how to perform the task given. The use of the Zoom platform also helped a lot in the teaching-learning process"-Teacher 3). According to Bevan (2020), studies have shown that the use of short video clips allows for more efficient processing and memory recall. The visual and auditory nature of videos appeals to a wide audience and allows each user to process information in a way that's natural to them. The following are the benefits of the use of video to students which he enumerated:

Videos create a more engaging sensory experience than using print materials alone. Learners actually get to see and hear the concept being taught, and they can process it in the same way they process their everyday interactions. **They provide a go-to resource that can be watched from anywhere** with an internet connection. Videos are accessible on a multitude of devices including laptops, tablets, and smartphones. This allows for viewing at the student's convenience and from wherever they are. **Videos increase knowledge retention**, since they can be stopped and replayed as many times as needed. They can also be reviewed long after the initial lesson was taught. **They greatly assist in the learning of all subjects**, but particularly those topics that are complex and/or highly visual, such as step-by-step procedures, problem-solving, or science and math formulas. **They increase proficiency in digital literacy and communication**, which are important 21st-century skills.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The COVID-19 pandemiccaused crisis in many aspects, most especially in the field of education.There are challenges that students, teachers, and parents are going through, but this did not stop them from learning, teaching, and working. With the implementation of blended learning and children must have a proper education in mind, blended learning became possible with lots of strategies and concerns which needed to consider. Indeed, we can see that this pandemic greatly affected the way we live and it gave us a lot of realization which helped us improve and continue with our daily routines despite the situation we are in.

The experiences and observations of the teachers who were interviewed, became an eye opener not only for teachers, students, parents, but also the whole public. The researchers therefore conclude that there are still a lot to consider if the Department of Education will reallywant to pursue the implementation of blended learning here in the Philippines, most especially if we're talking about the authenticity to master lesson. We all know that building authentic mastery will not be a success without the motivation of students to learn, the support of both parents and teachers, which is why parent, student and teacher collaboration is vital most especially in blended learning, in order for us to know what support we need to suffice for our learners to have authentic mastery in their lessons. The availability of technology and a stable connection is now a necessity because without this, we can't do our daily routines as most of us use this to study and make a living.

For the next researchers, we recommend that they look into the point of view of parents, students, school heads or even officials from the DepEd for us to also see what they have in mind regarding the authenticity of mastery of lessons in blended learning.

Acknowledgement

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