

**OPALS (Online Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy):
A Pedagogical Intervention Addressing Student at Risk of Failing in Grade 11**



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ABSTRACT

Even in the first weeks of the school year, there is a significant number who were identified as Student-at-Risk of Failing. These are students who can't manage to pass their outputs regularly or no outputs at all. Some obviously did not take the learning tasks seriously and pass output only for compliance. These are evident to Grade 11 Students of Southville 5A Integrated National High School for the first semester of SY 2021-2022. The Online Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy or OPALS offers an ease to struggling students during this pandemic which evidently get exhausted with the modular learning modality. It gives assistance to the deficient students or students at - risk of failing to improve their academic performance by a deeper understanding of the lessons through the help of proficient students as their mentor.

A mixed-method research design using descriptive approach was applied in the study. Triangulation of data was utilized through a focus group discussion and unstructured interview to participants, which were purposively selected.

From an average mean value of **6.98** on the pre-test garnered by 15 deficient students identified as mentees, the post-test mean value increased to **12.38** which suggests an improvement in the performance of the students after the conduct of OPALS. This showed a significant mean difference of **5.4** which supports the findings. In general, the evident improvement was **27%**.

Participants noted that the OPALS is a learning intervention that adapts to the new normal of education. This addressed the needs of students in coping up with the modalities of learning introduced due to pandemic, though there were limitations in the conduct of research initiatives.

This implied that OPALS is an effective intervention to students at-risk of failing to improve self-learning independence with the aid of reliability and accessibility to the internet connection, and academic motivation of their fellow students.

Keywords: *Student at-Risk of Failing, Intervention, Peer-assisted Learning*

INTRODUCTION

Since the Covid 19 pandemic was declared, all aspect of the society was turned around and vastly affected all educational systems. The traditional classroom set-up was instantly altered. Face-to face learning was halted, and online, blended, flexible, homeschooling, modular, asynchronous, synchronous, and technology-aided learning became the trend in an instant. COVID-19 forced the teachers and academic institutions to revolutionize and prepare their classrooms set-up to support online and distance learning or known as 'new normal of teaching' (Avila and Genio, 2020).

Distance learning entered the mainstream of the Philippine educational system to heed the learning needs of the students that is suspended since the pandemic.

As to Department of Education Order No. 12 s., 2020 or Adoption of The Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan for School Year 2020-2021 In Light of The Covid-19 Public Health Emergency, the department laid different learning modalities to ensure learning continuity through K-12 curriculum adjustments, alignment of learning materials, provision of corresponding training for teachers and school leaders, and proper orientation of parents or guardians of learners.

Moreover, the Basic Education - Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) of the school then identify two major distance learning modality that is fitted to the learners which are Online Distance Learning (ODL) and Modular Distance Learning (MDL).

However, distance learning, like all learning models, does have some innate problems, especially in the areas of isolation, support, technology, and discipline (Tutordocor,2015).

Dangle & Sumaoang (2020), identified the disadvantages of modular instruction that include greater self-

discipline and self-motivation required for students, increased preparation time and lack of concrete rewards for teachers and staff, and greater administrative resources needed to track students and operate multiple modules.

Moreover, Avila and Genio (2020) discovered that the motivation and learning strategies of the students participating distance learning particularly online distance learning is affected by the availability of learning equipment and devices as well parental and family support.

The focus and concentration of the learners are not fully served on their studies since there is not enough supervision at home. Students tend to avert their attention instead of focusing on and prioritizing their homeschooling first. They are often distracted and sometimes have no interest in answering their modules especially if they didn't understand its content of the lesson written there. In this case, the academic performance of the learners will be affected. In addition, not all parents are well educated and well equipped with proper education (Mañalac,2021).

Hence, the Senior High School students of Southville 5A Integrated National High School are experiencing these challenges in Modular Distance Learning both in Print and Online.

In the absence of actual classroom discussion, authentic learning was sacrificed because students still learned best through face-to -face discussion. Donnelly (2020) affirmed in her study that there is a need for teachers to foster relationships with students when they return to the classroom as it was missed. As for now, teachers need to provide collaborative learning online. And this may still be achieved through constant virtual communication of teachers and students.

Though Modular Distance Learning is the dominant learning delivery offered, teachers continuously communicate and attend to students in online platforms like Facebook Messenger and other applications such as Google Meet and Zoom. These

became the safest and accessible way to deliver learning needs in all aspects to the learners.

Moreover, another way to provide learning assistance to struggling learners is through peer tutoring. The process of peer tutoring as the acquisition of knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions. Marieswari & Prema (2016) confirmed that both the tutors and tutees of experimental group students learned wonderfully than the control group students who were taught by traditional way of teaching. In this case, peer tutoring or mentoring can provide more learning opportunities than self-directed modular learning.

Online Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy or **OPALS** is an online-teaching strategy that provided intervention to student-participants who are under modular distance learning. The proponents assigned students to pairs in which one student is deficient and the other is proficient (initially, the former serves as the mentee and the latter as the mentor). Mentors and mentees underwent assessment and deliberation.

The Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy offers a solution or an ease to struggling students during this pandemic which evidently get exhausted with the modular learning modality. It gives assistance to the deficient students or students at - risk of failing to improve their academic performance by a deeper understanding of the lessons through the help of proficient students as their mentor.

Hence, the proponents executed this instructional strategy across three Senior High School core subject areas under the modular distance learning such as Reading and Writing Skills, Pagbasa at Pagsusuri ng Iba't Ibang Teksto Tungo sa Pananaliksik and Statistics and Probability.

The Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy is originally developed to enhance the reading and arithmetic skills of students which is usually executed to primary to

secondary learners. As to this study, the nature of PALS will hit the main competencies of the subjects involved. However, the implementation of PALS will be competency-based instead of skill-based. An intervention catered to Students-At-Risk of Failing adapting the Peer- Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS) developed by Dr. Lynn Fuchs and Dr. Douglas Fuchs with Dr. Deborah Simmons (2001) modified to be online or virtual in execution.

METHODOLOGY

Bearing the intention to seek answers and solution to the identified problem, which is the poor academic performance of Grade 11 students who are under Modular Distance Learning and identified as Students- at- risk of Failing (SARF), the proponents conducted this study.

From the total number of 110 Grade 11 – Academic Track-Humanities and Social Sciences Strand students of School year 2021-2022, 15 Students-at- Risk of Failing (SARF) were identified as Mentees and 15 proficient students as Mentors. These students qualified following these criteria: regular grade 11 students who chose modular distance learning as the learning modality; enrolled in Academic Track – Humanities and Social Sciences Strand taking the core subjects Reading and Writing Skills, Pagbasa at Pagsusuri ng Iba't Ibang Teksto Tungo sa Pananaliksik and Statistics and Probability; got low scores in summative test, and who can't managed to pass their outputs regularly or no outputs at all in the said subjects for the mentees and belongs to top academic performers for the mentors; and have access to stable internet connection and or able to communicate in online messaging applications. Proponents assigned students to pairs in which one student is deficient and the other is proficient (initially, the former serves as the mentee and the latter as the mentor). Purposive sampling technique was used in this study.

After identifying the participants of the study, the proponents proceed to the

data gathering procedure phases. Initially, in the preparation phase, proponents conducted series of focused group discussions from the planning to the execution and deliberation. Since the proponents were also the subject teachers of the three concern core subjects, respectively, pre-tests were crafted to be administered before the actual peer mentoring sessions and posttest as assessment materials. These test materials were validated by content experts along with the instructional materials used.

After securing the instructional materials and other learning resources, data gathering phase started as the participants attended the orientation. The mentors then were trained with the lessons to be taught to their mentees based on the identified least learned competencies through the pre-test results. Along the process, the proponents provided the instructional materials and learning resources, and closely monitored each session while the mentors facilitated the learning. Deliberation through post conferences were also observed every end of the session.

The proponents performed the comparative analysis of students' summative assessment results before and after the implementation for the data analysis phase. While formative (during the mentoring) assessment results were also considered as supplemental references for improvement of instruction. Data sets are in a form of written or objective assessment based on DepEd Order No. 31, Series of 2020 – "Interim Guidelines for Assessment and Grading in Light of the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan". Results were recorded as quantitative data. For the qualitative data, the proponents conducted interviews and collected responses from an open-ended questionnaire. Through these, the proponents considered possible pedagogical implications of OPALS.

The Summary and Interpretation phase came next when summary of results and interpretation of data collected were completed.

Finally, finalizing the paper including the results and recommendations of the study and presentation of results through focus group discussion and conference as part of Reporting Phase, concluded the process.

RESULTS

The study proved that OPALS or Online Peer- Assisted Learning Strategy is an effective means to improve the performance Grade 11 Students- at- risk of Failing (SARF) in the three Senior High School Core Subjects during the school year 2020-2021. This was verified by the following results gathered:

NO. OF ITEMS	PRE-TEST MEAN	%	POST-TEST MEAN	%	MEAN DIFFERENCE	% DIFFERENCE
20	6.98	34.9	12.38	61.9	5.4	27

Table 1. Comparison of the Mean Scores of Participants' Pre-test and Posttest

The table above shows the Comparison of the Mean Scores of Participants Pre-test and Posttest results. As can be seen, the mean value of **6.98** on the pre-test was relatively low. On the fourth column of the table, the post-test mean value of **12.38** suggests an improvement in the performance of the students after the conduct of OPALS. A mean difference of **5.4** supports the findings. In general, the evident improvement was **27%**.

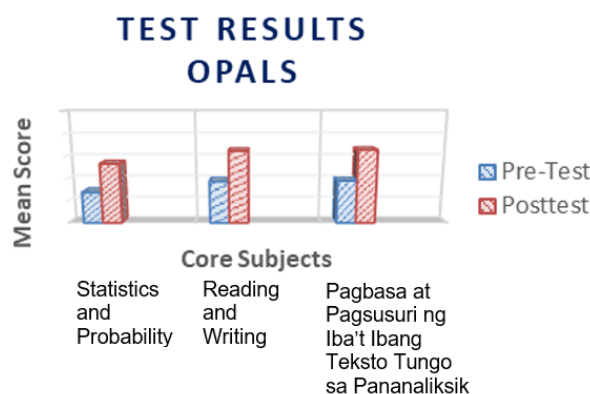


Figure 1. Pre-test and Post-test Results in respective core subjects.

Furthermore, Figure 1 shows the graphical presentation of the improvement of participants' test results relative to the implementation of OPALS.

Meanwhile, the results of interview and open-ended questionnaires to the mentors or proficient learners showed that their tasks in facilitating learning and closely monitoring their mentees during the peer mentoring gave relevant experience that enhances their social aptitude.

This is supported by the study of Marieswari & Prema (2016) which confirmed that in peer tutoring, both the tutors and tutees of experimental group students learned wonderfully than the control group students who were taught by traditional way of teaching.

DISCUSSION

Education in the new normal presents an unexpected challenge to teachers, students, and stakeholders. Several students struggle to learn in the modular distance learning modality, especially those who need scaffolding to understand the content well. Accessibility to the internet connection, for families, not having access can mean missing out on information.

OPALS provided intervention to Students-at-Risk of Failing adapting the Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS) developed by Dr. Lynn Fuchs and Dr. Douglas Fuchs with Dr. Deborah Simmons (2001). However, the implementation of PALS will be competency-based instead of skill-based while the execution is modified to be online or virtual.

The significant findings of the study are as follows:

The implementation of PALS in virtual execution was possible and effective especially during the pandemic when access internet and to social networking platform is probable.

The nature of peer-assisted learning strategy which is close facilitation, monitoring and supervision of learning tasks helped the mentees to cope with their learning difficulties.

It has been shown that there is a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores of the students.

Thus, OPALS helped the students deepen their understanding and clarify the knowledge that they have already gained. Students showed a more positive attitude toward learning and develop self-confidence.

In conclusion, this research is effective to cope with the changes that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought such as distance learning and teaching approaches; Online Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy or OPALS worked well for students with low self-learning independence with the aid of reliability and accessibility to the internet connection, and academic motivation of their fellow students.

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