The COVID-19 pandemic has widely infested all public and private educational institutions not only in the Philippines, but around the world. In this case, a shift in the paradigm of theory and practice gave birth to the so called “new normal.” This change is inevitable, and everyone must undergo stages of adjustment and adaptation. It is not surprising if some private schools are closing due to the depleting percentage of their enrollees enrolling in public schools. Furthermore, these transferees/learners must also enter the phase of curriculum change because it is a fact that private schools have a freedom to implement a diverse educational prospectus, i.e., Montessorian Standards.

The new normal clearly emphasizes the distance learning as an opportunity to modify and apply online classes (with synchronous and asynchronous features), modular modality of learning, and blended learning (a combination of different learning deliveries). All prime and secondary movers of education – the teachers, students, parents, and administrators – collaboratively work to achieve a common goal. Education must not stop in any crisis. There are problems, though, that linger in the field and at home. The Department of Education issued a memorandum stating that students who have no possessions of such gadgets and internet shall not be forced to attend online classes; an alternative is to learn the lessons through Self-Learning Modules and by utilizing Television and Radio. Though printed modules are free for those who opted them, the questions now are how will the students understand all the lessons? Will all the parents be able to fully support and guide their children?
Even in the regular face-to-face classes, there are students who struggle in comprehending texts and selections. Language plays a vital role in the learning process. In the Philippine K-12 curriculum, most subjects, such as English, Mathematics, Science, and MAPEH, are taught in the second language. The only chance where students have a higher opportunity to use the mother tongue is with the areas of Filipino, Araling Panlipunan, Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao, and Edukasyong Pantahanan at Pangkabuhayan. Almost all specializations in Senior High School (STEM, ABM, HUMSS, GAS, Industrial Arts, Sports Track, and Technical-Vocational Skills) use English as a medium of instruction. In primary and secondary education, DepEd restructured the function of the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) using a revised assessment tool. Its objectives are to identify the level of expectations among the learners regarding their reading comprehension and to ensure that all schools will be able to monitor and provide interventions to those who are below level reader.

Such case scenarios are present and prevalent to the public schools where pupils and students are still promoted even if the reading ability is basal. A problem remains a problem. Now that everybody is in the center stage of the new normal, it must be foreseen that many children and teenagers will typically find it arduous to understand other lessons. Imagine a student independently scrutinizing a module about Physics and Chemistry enclosed with many operations and equations concerning velocity, gravity, measurement, scale, vector, and so on. Imagine a student tirelessly reading a module that discusses the Modifiers and the Subject-Verb Agreement. Imagine a student descrying the meaning of the quotations once uttered by the ancient philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Alexander the Great, etc. in the subject, Introduction to the Philosophy of the Human Person. Imagine a student problematizing on how to create research questions that will serve as the makeshift of the introduction of a feasible problem. These things will always be present both in the face-to-face and distance learning modalities. Furthermore, all subjects have their own kinds of complexities that even teachers have difficulties in studying the day before teaching it.
By looking into this predicament, Head and Master Teachers must bear in mind to see the semi-status of the learners’ reading comprehension so that measures and interventions are provided. All schools should be prepared whenever students cry for help. Parents may do their job to support their children, but the thing is that they cannot give what they do not have. They are there to look for their children and to observe if they are still fine and kicking. It makes the learners frustrated if they are not able to decode an information coming from a textbook and a module. Some teacher-writers of the learning kits have already produced their versions with simplified language and with illustrations to help visual learners. Another key is to attach follow-up activities and instructions that are easier for the learners to decipher. Reading comprehension frustration has also an impact to the mental state of the children in that they are easily pressured due to time constraint. On this regard, teachers must allot longer and more flexible time in meeting the deadlines of the requirements given to the students. Furthermore, all educators must see to it that the grammatical structures of all the learning materials are properly considered. Since language is complex, one wrong statement leads to a different interpretation.

Today’s global pandemic has changed our perspectives in the field of education. It progressively teaches us to venture on a wider horizon of educational landscape and to turn threats into opportunities. We value all our clients, our learners. We do not want them to lose track of what they are pursuing. Their roads are also rocky, just like ours, but what we can often do for them is to give them a chance to learn on their own without sacrificing the quality level of educative continuity that is already upon them.

The English language is not meant for only one subject area. This time, the students deserve a better pedagogy. Reading comprehension matters even in this time of COVID-19. If the learners find it struggling to understand the topics, then we should have the act to understand their feelings. Comprehension does not only work with cognition; it also works with empathy.
References:

Republic Act 10533 – Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013