Impacts and Adjustments: Life of Students in Universities in Times of COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Due to COVID-19 pandemic, online learning is adopted to continue the goal of education. All students, especially in higher education, experience many challenges and adjustments that affect their mental, social, and emotional well-being. This study aimed to describe the impacts of online learning on students as well as to identify the problems encountered and the coping strategies practiced by the students in studying at some of the universities in the country. This study used descriptive research. Purposive sampling was utilized to identify the respondents. As for the results of the study, online learning has a positive impact on students, especially on their school performance and the improvement of their skills and competencies. Moreover, comprehension of the lessons and practicing self-motivation were the topmost problem and coping strategies experienced by the student, respectively.

Subject Areas

Higher Education, Sociology

Keywords

Philippines, COVID-19, Students, Academic Life, Social Life, Emotional Life, Challenges, Coping Strategies

1. Introduction

This research addresses the academic, emotional, and social adjustments of students in universities during the SARS-COVID-19 pandemic. This study was selected by the researcher since a lot of students, especially from the universities in the Philippines were presently dealing with a lot of mental, emotional, and academic stress regarding the "new normal".

The students might be isolating themselves due to a lot of requirements and

school activities that are being conducted by the school. This can lead to some mental health problems including anxiety and depression. Unsurprisingly, this pandemic had a lot of impact on students because of online classes, extended closure of schools, lack of connection with their schoolmates and friends, and the pressure of adjusting to their academic, emotional, and social performances.

This study can help the readers and viewers to improve their understanding of the academic, emotional, and social adjustments of students during the COVID-19 crisis, especially those who are studying in universities in the country.

In a study conducted by the Asian Journal of Psychiatry on the impact of COVID-19 on Indian students, 68.7 percent of respondents displayed signs of mild anxiety and 61 percent showed signs of mild depression. A broader study conducted on the general population by the Indian Journal of Psychiatry found that two-fifths (40 percent) of the 1685 people surveyed were experiencing anxiety or depression due to the pandemic. More specifically, an assessment report released by Child Fund, a non-profit organization working towards child development, reveals that as many as 74 percent of 1725 students surveyed in different Indian states admitted to being sad or depressed because of missing classroom interaction with their classmates, friends, and teachers [1].

1.1. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the lived experiences, challenges, and problems encountered, as well as the coping strategies of university students during pandemic.

1.2. Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1) How does the academic, social, and emotional life of students be described in several universities during pandemic?

2) What are the impacts of online learning on student performance in terms of their adjustments to a new modality of teaching in a new environment?

3) What are the challenges encountered by the students enrolled in big universities during the pandemic?

4) What are the coping strategies that university students have employed to mitigate the COVID-19 impact?

2. Methodology

The study used a descriptive research method. According to Calderon and Gonzales (2018) [2], descriptive method or statistical research describes data and characteristics about a population or phenomenon being studied. Purposive sampling is used in the study.

The respondents of this study are students studying in several universities in the Philippines. The researchers determined how these individuals adjust and handle the circumstances amidst the pandemic. The criteria of the respondents

were the following: 1) must be a college student of a university in the Philippines, 2) must be a Senior High School graduate in Nueva Ecija, and 3) have experienced face-to-face classes. The respondents of the study were limited to Senior High School graduates in Nueva Ecija only due to the reason that they were the ones who have most likely experienced a harder time adjusting to the new learning environment as well as to the new mode of learning which was from face-to-face to online learning. After considering the criteria, twenty-one respondents were chosen to participate in the study. Purposive and snowball sampling were employed because of the difficulty of identifying respondents. Some respondents were referred by the respondents themselves.

To gather information, the researcher used the following as basis for formulating the survey questionnaire: 2014 University Experience Survey (UES) Sample Questionnaire of the University of New Castle in Australia and College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) Norms for the Fourth Edition. These questionnaires were modified to suit the context of the Philippine setting. To establish the validity of the survey questionnaire, the researcher consulted three experts to evaluate the content. Afterwards, a pilot testing was conducted to ensure the reliability of the questionnaires, resulting to a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87 indicating the instrument appropriate for administration.

To statistically analyze the data, the researchers utilized the Frequency Count, Percentage, and Weighted Mean. To measure the respondents' views or attitudes toward the questions in the questionnaires, Likert Scale was used.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Socio-Demographic Profile

Table 1 presents the distribution of the gender of the respondents. It shows that a higher number of female (57.14%) compared to male (42.86%).

Table 2 shows the various universities in the Philippines where the respondents of the study. Most of the respondents came from the Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology (42.86%) and followed by those who were enrolled at Far Eastern University (33.33%). 14.29% or three respondents were from the University of Santo Tomas. And the other two respondents were from Centro Escolar University and Saint Louis University, respectively.

3.2. Academic Aspect

Table 3 presents the number of class hours in a school day. It shows that 47.62%

Table 1. Gender of the respondents.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	9	42.86
Female	12	57.14
Total	21	100

Table 2. Universities from where the respondents enrolled.

Name of University	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology (NEUST)	9	42.86
Far Eastern University (FEU)	7	33.33
University of Santo Tomas (UST)	3	14.29
Centro Escolar University (CEU)	1	4.76
Saint Louis University (SLU)	1	4.76
Total	21	100

Table 3. Number of hours of class session in a day.

Number of Class Hours	Frequency	Percentage (%)
8 hours	10	47.62
7 hours	4	19.05
6 hours	5	23.81
5 hours	2	9.52
Total	21	100

of the respondents have class hours of 8 hours followed by 6 hours (23.81%). Four respondents have class hours of 7 hours (19.05%) and only two respondents with 5 hours (9.52%).

Table 4 presents the form of online lectures offered by the universities. 47.62% conducted online (in real-time) video conferencing whereas 23.81% sent presentations and lectures to students online. For asynchronous learning, 14.29% had provided video recordings online.

In online college courses, the social aspect of learning does not disappear entirely but only changes. Many universities and colleges are making courses interactive in a variety of ways, from implementing virtual laboratory projects for science classes to creating animated videos of course material.

3.3. Social Aspect

Table 5 shows how often the students communicated with people since the online classes have started. Since the students were studying at home during the pandemic, their social life involved spending most of their time with their families. Their communication and interaction with their friends, classmates and teachers happened several times a week. They hardly talk to their neighbors since they were confined in their homes. Going to other places such as malls, church was also limited, thus, there was no interaction with other people.

3.4. Emotional Aspect

Table 6 shows the various emotions that the students felt and experienced while

Table 4. Forms of online lectures.

Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Online in real-time (videoconference)	10	47.62
Online by sending presentations/lectures to students	5	23.81
Online with a video recording (not in real-time)	3	14.29
Online in real-time (video-conference) and online by sending presentations/lectures to students	2	9.52
Written communication (forums, chat, etc.)	1	4.76
Total	21	100

Table 5. Times of interaction with people.

Item	Weighted Average	Description
Family member/s	4.29	Several times a day
Friend/s	3.33	Several times a week
Neighbor/s	2.00	Once a week
Classmate/s	3.14	Several times a week
Professors/Teachers	2.71	Several times a week
Other people (ex. in the mall or other places)	1.67	Not at all

Legend: 5.00 - 4.21—Several times a day; 4.20 - 3.41—Once a day; 3.40 - 2.61—Several times a week; 2.60 - 1.81—Once a week; 1.80 - 1.00—Not at all.

Table 6. Emotions felt since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic.

Item	Weighted Average	Description
Joyful	3.48	Often
Hopeful	3.52	Often
Proud	3.67	Often
Frustrated	3.86	Often
Angry	3.10	Sometimes
Anxious	3.71	Often
Relieved	3.43	Often
Hopeless	3.00	Sometimes
Bored	4.10	Often
Belonginess	4.05	Sometimes

Legend: 5.00 - 4.21—Always; 4.20 - 3.41—Often; 3.40 - 2.61—Sometimes; 2.60 - 1.81—Rarely; 1.80 - 1.00—Never.

attending their online classes since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. Often times, the students felt being joyful, hopeful, proud and relieved. They even, frequently, experienced frustration, anxiety and being bored. But at times, they also had feelings of being angry, hopeless and lack of belongingness.

3.5. Impacts on Students of COVID-19 Pandemic

Table 7 shows the level of satisfaction of students regarding the various forms of online lectures provided by the universities. The respondents have favorable responses and show satisfaction with most of the forms of online lectures. Among the forms of online lectures, online with an audio recording is partially favored.

A growing number of students are now opting for online classes. They find the traditional classroom modality restrictive, inflexible, and impractical [3]. There are times that students find virtual discussion more fulfilling than face-to-face discussion since each student must contribute something substantial to the conversation [4]. Instructors may communicate with online students primarily through email and messages on the virtual learning environment and they can also engage students in a more social way. Some create videos explaining course material so that students can still see and hear the lecture. They may even communicate with students in less formal ways, such as through social media.

Table 8 presents the level of agreement of the respondents on school workload and assessment given in their universities. It also shows how their teachers or professors gave feedbacks and maintained an open communication in online learning setting. They have given positive responses as they agreed that they were satisfied on how their teachers managed to be real professionals in handling online classes and have shown support in their studies.

Table 9 presents the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on student performance in terms of level of agreement. Since face-to-face or on-site classes were not possible during the pandemic, online classes were implemented. With this, the students strongly agreed that they have still gained mastery of needed skills and competencies even on-site classes were temporarily suspended. They also have

Table 7. Forms of online lectures.

Item	Weighted Average	Description
Online in real-time (video-conference)	4.0	Satisfied
Online with a video recording (not in real-time)	3.90	Satisfied
Online with an audio recording (not in real-time)	3.05	Neutral
Online by sending presentations/lectures to students	3.57	Satisfied
Written communication (forums, chat, etc.)	3.67	Satisfied

Legend: 5.00 - 4.21—Very satisfied; 4.20 - 3.41—Satisfied; 3.40 - 2.61—Neutral; 2.60 - 1.81—Dissatisfied; 1.80 - 1.00—Very dissatisfied.

Table 8. Assessment and workload.

Item	Weighted Average	Description
My teachers have provided course assignments (examples readings, homework, quizzes) on a regular basis	4.00	Agree
My teachers have provided feedback on my performance on given assignments	4.05	Agree
My teachers have responded to my questions in a timely manner	4.05	Agree
My teachers have been open to students' suggestions and adjustments of online classes	4.19	Agree
My teachers have informed me on what exams will look like in this new situation	4.00	Agree

Legend: 5.00 - 4.21—Strongly agree; 4.20 - 3.41—Agree; 3.40 - 2.61—Neutral; 2.60 - 1.81—Disagree; 1.80 - 1.00—Strongly disagree.

Table 9. Student performance.

Item	Weighted Average	Description
It is more difficult for me to focus during online teaching in comparison to on-site teaching	4.10	Agree
My performance as a student has improved since on-site classes were canceled	2.95	Neutral
My performance as a student has worsen since on-site classes were canceled	2.90	Neutral
I have adapted well to the new teaching and learning experience	3.62	Agree
I can master the skills taught in class this year even on-site classes were cancelled	4.48	Strongly Agree
I can figure out how to do the most difficult classwork since on-site classes were cancelled	3.52	Agree

Legend: 5.00 - 4.21—Strongly agree; 4.20 - 3.41—Agree; 3.40 - 2.61—Neutral; 2.60 - 1.81—Disagree; 1.80 - 1.00—Strongly disagree.

agreed that they have adapted well to the new environment in terms of new teaching and learning experience. They were able to figure out how to accomplish even the most difficult tasks or class works given to them. But it was not easy for them to focus during online teaching. In terms of their performance, the students were not able to distinguish if they have improved or not.

Table 10 shows some of the competencies and skills that need to be developed

Table 10. Ccompetencies and skills developed by the program.

Item	Weighted Average	Description
Critical thinking skills	3.62	Agree
Ability to solve complex problems	3.71	Agree
Ability to work with others	4.14	Agree
Confidence to learn independently	4.05	Agree
Written communication skills	3.95	Agree
Spoken communication skills	3.57	Agree
Knowledge of the field(s) you are studying	3.86	Agree
Development of work-related knowledge and skills	3.62	Agree

Legend: 5.00 - 4.21—Strongly agree; 4.20 - 3.41—Agree; 3.40 - 2.61—Neutral; 2.60 - 1.81—Disagree; 1.80 - 1.00—Strongly disagree.

by the programs in the various universities. Based on the table, the students have agreed that the skills such as critical thinking skills, written communication skills and spoken communication skills were developed and learned through online learning. Even their social skills by working with others were improved. They also learned to work independently and have gained enough knowledge regarding the fields they are studying.

3.6. Problems Experienced by Students during COVID-19 Pandemic

Table 11 presents the different challenges and problems encountered by the students studying in some of the big universities in the Philippines. Comprehension of the lessons was the topmost problem which was closely followed by access to and stability of the internet. Being accustomed to face-to-face mode of learning, the students found it difficult to adjust to the new mode of teaching and learning. Another burden for them is internet connection which is the basic requirement for online learning. Being in a new environment, the student social life was also affected. They found it hard to communicate and interact with their classmates and teachers virtually. Aside from social life, there was also a need to adjust to new standards and expectations offered by the universities they were enrolled.

The other problem the students have dealt with was having been given an excessive amount of school works and activities which have affected them mentally and emotionally. The mental health issues students experience during distance learning are due to an "interplay" of factors, said one of the country's top psychiatrists, who added that such issues cannot be solely attributed to the difficulties of the revamped education system [5]. They have encountered problems with time management, type and capabilities of gadgets used and environmental distractions. Lack of self-care was also a problem experienced by the students.

Table 11. Challenges encountered by the students in studying in big universities.

Item	Number of Responses
Comprehension of the lessons	10
Internet stability and connection	9
Communication and interaction (with classmates and teachers)	6
New standards and expectations in new environment	5
School works and activities overload	5
Emotional problems	5
Time management	5
Limited gadgets	4
Environmental distractions	3
Self-care	1

Table 12. Ways to cope with challenges and problems.

Item	Number of Responses
Practicing self-motivation	8
Being optimistic	7
Seeking help and support from family	5
Doing proper time management	4
Being resourceful	3
Praying	2
Doing self-care	1

3.7. Coping Strategies of Students during COVID-19 Pandemic

Table 12 shows the coping mechanisms used by the students in handling the challenges and problems they have encountered during the pandemic. Practicing self-motivation was the topmost strategy they used which was closely followed by being optimistic. The students preferred to become positive and motivated themselves to do their best in their studies. Seeking help and support from their family was also their way of dealing with their problems. Family is an important support system. It provides emotional support such as love and care for each member. Students find strength and determination in their families.

To do and accomplish their tasks in school, the students learned to organize and schedule their activities by doing proper time management. Doing self-care and being resourceful were also practiced. And lastly, the most important strategy is praying. Praying provides strength and hope for those who need it.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This present study aimed to explore and understand the lived experiences of uni-

versity students during the time of COVID-19 pandemic. Regardless of the gender and the university where they study, the respondents have encountered almost the same challenges and adjustments, especially to the new environment and educational system.

The academic, social, and emotional life of the respondents was also described since the outbreak happened. Most of the universities offered online videoconferencing in real-time while others provided video recordings of lectures and presentations. The majority of the class schedule was conducted eight hours per school day. This might be the reason why many students feel anxious and physically unhealthy because it is very tedious for the students to conduct online classes, especially online discussions for long periods of hours. As for the social aspect, since there was a restriction on going out, the respondents mingled with their families most of the time. They also have a hard time dealing with their friends, classmates, and teachers since only virtual interaction was possible. They rarely associate with other people outside. This could really affect their social well-being. Their emotional life was also influenced by the pandemic. But since they chose to be optimistic, they had feelings of being joyful, hopeful, and relieved. But not all the time, they also experienced frustration, anxiety and were bored. Since they were in a new environment, sometimes, the feelings of hopelessness and lack of belongingness were experienced. It is very important that there are programs offered by the universities that could be addressed the emotional well-being of the students.

Since the respondents were studying in prestigious universities, the methods and strategies of teaching used can be attested to provide quality education. Regarding the forms of online lectures, they have met the students' expectations and provided a positive impact on them.

Being in a new environment, one of the factors that could influence the motivation of the students is the professors or teachers. If the teachers are supportive, responsive, and open to suggestions, students become determined and inspired to do more and be good in their studies. It is also very important for the students to know their progress. That is why teachers need to be diligent in providing substantial feedback on students' performance. There must also be programs offered by the universities to strengthen and improve the tie, not only for the student-teacher relationship, but among students. Students should feel like they are still part of the class even though they are still learning from home [6].

During face-to-face learning, the main focus of the education system is the development and improvement of the skills and competencies of the students. This is also true with online learning. Educators should design activities that could hone the needed skills that the students must acquire to be globally competitive.

Comprehension of the lesson is the topmost challenge encountered by most students nowadays. They are only provided with soft copies of modules and recorded video discussions of the lessons. Online discussions are difficult for them since there are many distractions that could affect their concentration like unst-

able internet connection and environmental factors such as noise. In higher education, high expectations are anticipated for college students since they are capable of doing independent learning. Blended learning is an appropriate flexible learning style in this time of pandemic.

Internet stability and connection are also a big concern of the education system. Since the internet is the main key to make learning possible through online learning. Many students have lost their interest and hope to continue their studies due to a lack of resources and capabilities. A student could not experience continuous learning if there is no stable and accessible internet connection. With this problem, there must be a program provided by the government for students to have stronger internet access. All students have the right to education.

As for the coping strategies, practicing self-motivation is really of the essence. This could help you to think positive thoughts and make good things happen. Seeking the help and support of the family gains confidence and hope that despite the challenges encountered by the students in their new environment, they have enough support and power to move on. Time management is also an important practice to organize and prioritize things. But most importantly, praying provides divine help and strength in troubling times.

The study's results can be useful to explore topics beyond the scope of this research. It will also promote awareness of the condition and lived experiences of the students studying in higher education institutions. And as for the educational system, there is a need to prepare everyone to be flexible and adapt quickly to various learning platforms during a time of crisis [7].

5. Limitations of the Study

The limitation of research relates to the lack of uneven number of respondents in various universities in the Philippines. Hence, the sampling technique was found to be a limitation as well.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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