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ABSTRACT

During the Covid-19 Pandemic, schools worldwide were forced to close due to the spread of this deadly virus. Institutions resolved to deliver classes remotely using online platforms, tools, and resources. Nevertheless, intervening factors in the smooth learning delivery using these technologies still exist. Hence, this study would like to tell the respondents' lived experiences in remote learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic, focusing on their challenges, coping strategies, and realisations. This Phenomenological study utilised a structured interview guide to gather data from the thirteen respondents. Results revealed that, indeed, the respondents experienced difficulties, yet they were able to survive the pandemic crises. The study concludes with the thought that the new normal requires new ways of resolving issues. Life must go on despite problems and difficulties.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Lived Experiences, Covid-19 Pandemic, Remote Learning, Resiliency, Coping Strategy, Challenges

1. INTRODUCTION

Every Filipino in the Philippines had access to education, as guaranteed by RA 9155. It is against the law to deny this right to any citizen of this nation because the law specifically states that "It is with this declared the policy of the State to protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality basic education and to make such education accessible to all by providing all Filipino children with a free and compulsory education in the elementary level and free education in the high school level." The government has expanded the scope of a free college education. According to Republic Act 10931, often known as the Universal Access to Excellent Tertiary Education Law, college-age students can now enrol in public universities. The Philippine government has now provided free education to all, from kindergarten to college.

So, what if this purported constitutional privilege is in jeopardy? According to the United Nations, the Covid-19 Epidemic affected approximately 1.6 billion students in more than 190 nations across all continents, causing a tremendous disruption to educational systems in history. 94% of students worldwide have been affected by school and other learning space closures, rising to 99% in low- and lower-middle-income nations (UN, 2020).

Hence, the year 2020 was disastrous in the system of education, forcing many schools during Covid-19 to shut down to avoid the transmission of the virus among students and teachers. Face-to-face (F-2-F) classes suspension. In lieu, the introduction and utilisation of many forms of remote learning-online, synchronous and asynchronous approaches in the teaching and learning processes. Teachers, students, and even parents slowly adopted this flexibility in the educational system. However, problems like connectivity and job loss were a few of the problems that emerged during this crisis. The Pandemic has restricted them from going out, especially the parents. As a result, they have lost their jobs. Connectivity issues were also a problem among students, particularly in those in the community's far-flung areas. All in all, education was on the brink of collapsing. However, education must continue despite the global pandemic threat due to the Covid-19 outbreak.

The conceptualisation of this study resulted in the primary reasons for limitations. Any data gathered provide insights into coming up with a remedy to enrich the student's experiences as they continue their studies despite financial instability, travel restrictions, economic deprivation, and other problems brought on by this global crisis. This study would like to re-tell the respondents' lived experiences in remote learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The results of this may guide the school administrators on the struggles of some learners in online learning and serve as a basis for program implementation of all remote learning in the future.

2. RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. The Philippine Education during the Pandemic

As of April 2021, cases of Covid-19 have declined. However, the country is still vulnerable to some new waves of new variants. The school needed to be more open to open schools for face-to-face classes fully. The Philippines is among other Asian countries managing issues with the Pandemic. The Philippines Covid-19

Monitoring Survey Policy Notes (2021) revealed the actual status of the country during the pandemic crises. The survey emerged the following key issues:

2.1.1. Children are not engaged in any learning activity

Overall enrolment in formal primary education is about five per cent lower than last year; monitor the attendance and engagement in learning.

2.1.2. Limited Effectiveness of distance learning

Challenges of distance learning include low take-up due to limited access to gadgets and the internet, poor quality materials, limited availability of materials in local languages; children's inability to focus, and psychological stress; Challenges are more significant for poorer income households and younger children, with the conditions having significant regional variations.

2.1.3. Preference for and fears about in-person classes

Most students and households support resuming in-person classes, but not all do.

2.1.4. Long-term learning losses

By the time schools reopen for in-person classes, students will have been far behind the learning level of standard years, with some groups experiencing wider learning gaps. Remediation is a must not for no student left behind during the school closure, and distance learning are likely to fall further behind as the curriculum progresses. The learning gap will be wider among children who were not enrolled in distance learning at all.

2.2. Remote Learning Environment

Due to the recent Pandemic, the shift from in-person to remote learning happened abruptly for educators and students, requiring an adjustment in education. Both teachers and school-based mental health professionals were still determining how to support the various needs of students (Raether, 2021).

As a result, Ortiz-Correa, Valenza, Dreesen, and Placco (2021) presented that the effects of Covid-19 led to school closures risking widening, already-existing learning gaps as private schools were better prepared to use technology for remote learning and kids from wealthier households received more support at home; all the while, schools were closed. Online education persisted despite the gaps since it was the most effective way to prevent Covid-19 infection online. Online learning (OL) environments are still developing both inside and outside of higher education institutions globally (Cheek, 2021).

However, some studies proved that there are better answers than online learning. The study by Oducado and Estoque (2021) demonstrated that nearly half of the students wanted more from online learning. This apprehension was contradicted by Beck (2015), stating that distance learning provides a learning environment and an effective social learning environment, especially during Covid-19.

Accordingly, more significant resources should be divested in developing such online courses even post Covid-19, as they can effectively support the traditional classes and promote the educational level. Such online courses, designed and implemented professionally, can be the key to successful online learning (Alkhudiry & Alahdal, 2021).

Based on those notions and the literature presented above, this study would like to unveil the Challenges, Coping Strategies, and Realisations of Students during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Despite the global threat of the virus, how could these respondents continue and survive the crises they have been experiencing? Specifically, this study would like to reveal the lived experiences of the respondents with highlights on the challenges, coping strategies, and realisations in the conduct of remote learning education during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed at determining the respondents' lived experiences in remote learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic and utilising guide questions to gather the data from the respondents.

- a. What was your reaction when you heard there are no more F-2-F classes?
- b. What experiences have you encountered during the online classes?
- c. With all the challenges you have encountered, what is the greatest of them, and how did you survive them?
- d. Did it come to the point that you thought of stopping or quitting school? Why?
- e. With all the things you have encountered in the conduct of online classes or online learning, what life lesson have you learned worthy of sharing with others that would serve as inspiration?

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Design

Through this study, the researcher employed qualitative descriptive phenomenology that investigates the respondents' lived experiences during their online classes during the Covid-19 Pandemic. A phenomenology is

an approach to qualitative research that focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. The approach's fundamental goal is to describe the nature of the particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). It is common for this approach to use interviews to gather information from the respondents, especially those who have direct knowledge or the one who has experienced the phenomenon. Other forms of data, such as documents, observations, and art, may also be used. The information is then read and repeated in search of words and themes, which are subsequently collected into meaning clusters (Creswell, 2013). The researcher may develop the event, circumstance, or experience's universal meaning through this approach, coming to a deeper comprehension of the phenomena.

4.2. Respondents of the Study

The respondents of this study were the thirteen Second Year Bachelor of Technical Vocational Teacher Education students enrolled in the first semester of the school year 2020-2021. They were conveniently selected since they belong to the class the researcher in the remote learning/online classes via Facebook Social Learning Class. They were composed of four (4) Computer Hardware Servicing (CHS) majors, two (2) Electronics Technology (ELX), one (1) Electrical Technology (ELX), and five (6) Food Service Management (FSM) majors. With this number, three (3) were males, and ten (10) were females. Table 1 reflects the data.

Table 1: Respondents of the Study

Respondents per major	Male	Female
ELT	1	
CHS		4
ELX	2	
FSM		6
Total	3	10

4.3. Data Collection

The researcher used a structured interview sent to the students via FB Messenger to gather data. The respondents were allowed to answer the questions in a language they were comfortable using. The interview guide was composed of five questions such as (1). What was your reaction when you heard there are no more F-2-F classes? (2). What experiences have you encountered during the online classes? (3). With all the challenges you have encountered, what are the greatest, and how did you survive them? (4). Did it come to the point that you thought of stopping or quitting school? Why? (5) With all the things you have encountered in online classes or online learning, what lesson in life have you learned worthy of sharing with others that would serve as inspiration?

4.5. Data Analysis

After gathering the result of the guided interview, the researcher proceeded with the initial step in the data analysis, which was the transcription of the encoded responses of the respondents. During the data gathering, they were allowed to write their answers to the survey instrument in their preferred language they were comfortable using; thus, transcription into the English language is necessary for the benefit of varied readers. The researcher used qualitative thematic analysis grounded on descriptive phenomenology in the data analysis. It follows a procedure based on the study of Sundler, Lindberg, Nilsson, and Palmer (2019). The model follows the order (1) Achieve familiarity with the data through open-minded reading; (2) Search for meanings and themes; and (3) Organising themes into a meaningful wholeness.



Figure 1: Data analysis model

To achieve familiarity with the data through open-minded reading, the researcher should -read the text to become familiar with the data, explore experiences, i.e., how can meanings in the data be understood, and search for unique and novel sides rather than what is already known.

While searching meanings and themes, searching for meanings of lived experiences-Mark meanings -Describe meanings with a few words and notes in the margins. Compare differences and similarities between meanings, organisemeanings in patterns, and from patterns, themes begin to emerge.

Lastly, the group of Sundler (2019) defined finding as written and rewritten while organising meanings in a meaningful text. Nevertheless, explicitly naming the themes must describe lived experiences' meanings inorganising themes into meaningful wholeness.

Additional information included students' conversations during synchronous classes and messages from the group chat.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part discusses the result of the study as they were themed according to Challenges, Coping Strategies, and Realisations into their meaningful wholeness.

5.1. Challenges: Meaningful Wholeness

"I thought it was easy since we will just study using our cell phones; however, it was challenging compared to the F-2-F." This tough time is to quote directly from the statement of Respondent 13 during the online class discussion. All respondents probably felt the same about their experiences in online learning. ThePandemic has, indeed, caught the system of our education off-guarded.

5.1.1. I have experienced learning on my own despite issues with my connectivity

During the conduct of remote learning, the internet played an essential role in the facility of learning. However, if one student location has no internet, connectivity is a problem. Sending and receiving class lessons is only possible if an excellent internet connection exists.

Respondent 8, when I heard that there are no more F-to-F classes rather online due to Covid-19, said, "I have mentioned so worried that I cannot attend an online class because here in my place, I have no stable signal.". Indeed, it is true that students already have apprehensions just by hearing about online classes.

In addition to that, in the statement of Respondent 1, "The most difficult experience I have in an online class was when you have a module to study and answer, but you cannot accomplish them due to connectivity problem." Students worry about downloading their modules and long readings from them and answering and providing feedback in the assessment. Imagine sending output on a due date or attending a synchronous class, yet your area has a connectivity problem. It would be a getting-out-of-your-shell experience to have that kind of dilemma.

To stay connected, a student should pay a corresponding amount to purchase internet data. Respondent 2, "At the start, there is no pressure since you do not have to wake up early. Since there is no financial support, it is easy since I do not need to worry about my allowance. However, it is still stressful and ding because you have to worry about where to get to buy your load. Money in the wallet to buy load/data is essential to stay connected.

In the interview with the respondents, they mainly mentioned that learning would be complex online. Respondent 12 mentioned, "I have said to myself that it would be difficult for us students to study." The same response from Respondent 2 mentioned, "It is stressful because you have no one to ask if your answers are correct. In addition, Respondent 5 added, "too much file to download and cannot understand the lessons well."

In discussion with the respondents, a sad revelation was heard from Respondent 9 upon hearing of no F-to-F classes during this Pandemic. In a statement, "I felt sad when I heard that there would be no more face-to-face and done online instead. Of course, we get used to this kind of learning then suddenly, we will shift to learning that we have never been before. I ask myself if I can be able to handle it. I am the kind of student that cannot learn well without attending the class and hearing a discussion of the lesson. I find it hard to think I will study my lesson alone. There are no classmates and teachers to ask if your works are correct."

This situation is the sad reality that is happening in online learning. Students have developed a dependency on teachers; as Respondent 6 revealed in an interview, "It was difficult because sometimes I cannot understand the module, knowing myself that I have to be spoon-fed to understand my lesson." This reliance had extended as Respondent 10 mentioned, "When the online class started, my experience was the difficulty in answering the modules because I have no idea, I cannot understand, and there is no teacher to explain them." In addition, Respondent 4 admitted that "I found it hard to study and learn by myself. You can answer the questions. However, it is tough to digest them.

However, in hopeless situations, some students would take the initiatives to communicate with their course teachers. Respondent 9 narrated, "There were lessons that I cannot understand. I was answering, but I could not understand the lesson in the module. One time when I asked one instructor how to answer a question, 'It depends on how you understand the question' was the answer. After I had done the activity, I found out that my work was wrong."

Despite all this hopelessness, some students used this experience to motivate themselves, as Respondent 8 shared, "For me, an online class is so challenging that you need to encourage yourself to study on your own."

5.1.2. I worked for my family at the same time studying; I lost interest in studying.

Their absence in the classroom became an opportunity for them and their family to earn a living. Sometimes, however, they would have divided thoughts between their school and family obligations. As Respondent 4 mentioned in the interview, "I was glad because we can save in our expenditures, then I can help with the work at home. Nevertheless, it becomes difficult as time passes because you want to help your family. However, your thoughts are filled with worries on what to answer in your module." In support of this claim, Respondent 6 shared, "My first experience was working part-time in a store—not knowing that the teacher has already sent an activity and will be due in the afternoon. To some respondents, remote learning can be easy; however, to some can be a struggle.

To think of the possible effect of Covid-19 on the students, losing interest in school and eventually quitting studying would be the worst-case scenario. However, this is close to happening. Due to the virus's rapid spread, cities, municipalities, and communities must lock down. Workplaces limited workers, non-essential businesses were closed, and going out from respective homes was limited; with this, incomes and living sources were cut off. When the budget depletes, a shortage in basic needs is expected. It created a dilemma for some students. Respondent 10 stated, "I thought of quitting because I do not know where to get money for my daily allowance. It takes work to be a working student.

Worrying about where to get the allowance was a minor problem compared to the problem of Respondent 11, "...I lost my interest in studying because I do not have any gadget to use in answering my modules." The same feeling of helplessness was also experienced by Respondent 13, narrating, "There were times that I thought of quitting schooling, especially when my cell phone was damaged. Of course, I have no money, and also my parent. It even came to the part that I thought of committing suicide, but I did not bother to give in because I knew that these were just challenges to us."

Some students would think that this Pandemic will pass in a year or two, and they would think of hibernating for a couple of years; as Respondent 9 shared, "It came to the point that I thought of stopping. When I learned there would be no face-to-face, I told my elder brother to stop for a while since the online class is difficult." The online class is a challenging experience for students; as Respondent 7 narrated, "... I thought of quitting school, and that is because of the pressure I have experienced. Pressure may be because they have to work with many modules, activities/outputs, deadlines, and many other things, as revealed in their interviews.

Other respondents have much desire to help their families during these trying times. At college, they are confident enough to help their parents and not just mere students. As Respondent 6 assured, "I felt like working and quit school. I felt like I have the skills and ability to find work."

5.2. Coping Strategies: Meaningful Wholeness

"When I heard that there are no more face-to-face classes, my reaction was that I felt so sad but needed to accept the reality. Because of this Pandemic, it is a time of survival in which we must stand and continue living even though our classes will be online. Even if we encounter this situation, we must pursue to finish our studies even if it is hard times." Quoting the statement of Respondent 3 during the interview.

5.2.1. I cope with it through positivity, hard work, and trust in God.

This Pandemic is indeed a survival. Covid-19 is just around and ready to infect everyone. The measures being observed, like wearing of face mask, washing hands, and keeping a required distance, should be joined with positivity and trust in God that this disease will end soon. The respondent's mindsets have been brewing in coping with their problems in remote education during the Pandemic. This trust in God and positivity spawned hard work to accomplish their tasks, as Respondent 6 shared:

I have survived all of these through hard work, self-confidence, and asking for help from God to hurdle them all. The same secret was also shared by Respondent 7, saying: "I survived it because I keep praying to God to overcome all the challenges that come into my life. I believe in myself and try my best to do it."

Some participants' desire not to get failing grades and eventually to finish their studies motivated them to do this hard work. Respondent 2 revealed:

I surpassed them all because I knew I could. I consider deadlines to be my reason to work hard; I am afraid that I will get failed.

When in difficult situations, a person can develop a strategy to overcome them. In working with their modules, students make ways to minimise the burden of working with them. This testament has been proven by Respondent 9:

Even though I was just in the house working with my modules, it was exhausting, especially accumulated activities in all the courses/modules. I sometimes work in moderation, but still, it is tiring. However, I worked hard to answer them even though they were difficult, and I needed to become more familiar with them. I tried to answer them all to the best I could, I read the questions more than once until I comprehended them, but sometimes I asked my classmates about them.

The hard work brought by the Covid-19 virus to the students could not even stop them from taking the initiative. Despite the danger of getting the disease, they even take the ingenuity to meet with their classmates to discuss their lessons. As Respondent 5 revealed:

"I survive it with the help of my friends and classmates. Sometimes we meet in one place to discuss our lessons, and each of us gives some ideas so that others who cannot understand will have some knowledge."

5.3.2. I cope with it through time management.

Result of the study on Effects of Covid-19 on College Students' Mental Health in the United States: Interview Survey Study, authors Son, Hegde, Smith, Wang, and Sasangohar (2020) identified the multiple stressors that increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depressive thoughts among students brought by Covid-19. These are (1) fear and worry about their health and of their loved ones; (2) difficulty in concentrating; (3) disruptions to sleeping patterns; and (4) increased concerns about academic performance.

Respondents have sought support from others to cope with it and helped themselves by adopting either negative or positive coping mechanisms (Son et al., 2020).

With the fact presented above, the coping mechanism emphasised that it is either positive or negative. The variety of options that students can engage with sometimes creates activities that would interfere with their tasks as students. Respondent 8 shared, "I survived this challenge using time management by dividing my time for study and leisure." Indeed, leisure can overrule school work, more so that teachers are not physically present to supervise the students. Students become addicted to computer games and other vices. Respondent 11 admitted: I experienced getting lazy in my classes due to my addiction to online games... I also learned to put limitations on my use of it.

An exciting proposal was suggested for dealing with time management as a coping strategy in handling this Pandemic in remote learning. Respondent 3 shared, "Time management is the key for me to survive and make it a hobby now."

Students have been exposed to problems brought on by Covid-19, and slowly they have learned to survive it. Similarly, in coping with the difficulties encountered in the conduct of their classes, time can be a valuable element. In answering their modules, how hard it can be, slowly, it can be hurdled by a wise use of time. These statements were proven by Respondent 1, in a statement: The online class is challenging since I need the gadget to use. However, I was able to finish some of it little by little. All that is needed is ample time.

5.3. Realisations: Meaningful Wholeness

Some scholars often heard to say, "We learn from our experience, and Experience can make us strong and better persons". This statement is true, especially for advocates of Experiential Learning Theory. This theory states how experience shapes the learning process of a person. To relate this statement to this study, participants had made important learnings from their experience in remote learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The following were the realisations made by the participants in this study.

5.3.1. I became a strong and optimistic individual; thus, remote learning during the Covid-19 experience made me a better person

It takes Covid-19 to change the views and attitudes of the students. This might not be a good idea to entertain; however, this Pandemic has made the mindset of the respondents attuned to a more responsible and mature one. They have become adult thinkers at this instant.

Throughout this discussion, as revealed in the story of the respondents, the theme of survival is prevalent. It is observed that they struggled, fought, and survived by all means. Remote learning and poor and difficult conditions brought on by the Pandemic were indeed a challenge that tested the respondents' resiliency. The crises have bent them, but they did not a thing to give up; yet the experience made them strong and resourceful. They were able to channel their attention to positive things, not stress themselves, and they were able to find persons that could help them ease their burden. Trials made them strong, independent, and responsible beings in the end. Respondent 2 has made the best translation of this paragraph to this statement:

"Face the present, then focus on it. There should not be face-to-face classes so that I will not get stressed about things not happening. In short, embrace whatever things we have. Learn to adjust so that things will be easy and accept it. Then, time management. Work the things you can do today so they will not get loaded. Enjoy self-learning even though you have the internet. There is no need for perfect at all because nobody is perfect. Please do not complain that you cannot do it because no one will do it for you but for your grades' sake. Pray to God; He will not fail you as long as you help yourself. You can do it!"

6. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1. Challenges

In the conduct of Remote Learning during the Pandemic, real stories occurred. The researcher has made identification the following points:

The main challenge that the respondents encountered in the conduct of Remote Learning during the Pandemic was the problem with internet connectivity. Through its agency, the government should create more initiatives and partnerships with private telecommunication companies to extend their connectivity even to the far-flung areas of the community. They should encourage these companies to build more satellites to provide signal coverage and internet connections to the remotest areas in the country.

Another noticeable problem revealed in this study was the curriculum. Indeed, the education system was caught unaware of the deadly strike outbreak. The higher education institutions, especially the SUCs, were surprised since the practised face-to-face classroom setting was prohibited and implemented urgent remote learning setup. The HEIs curricular preparations include training teachers for flexible learning and online tools, instructional material development, and other preparations for remote learning environments. Online infrastructure such as LMS or other online platforms is considered a medium for teaching and learning.

The conduct of Remote Learning during the Pandemic affected learners. Most respondents mentioned the difficulties they have experienced in understanding and learning with their modules. One student admitted that learning is complex without a teacher explaining and discussing the lesson. This statement shows the dependency of the students on teachers. Teachers always considered the source of learning. Without them, there will be no more learning among students. The learners need to establish more dependency on their teachers and the sole authority to make them understand their lessons. They rely much on the discussions and interpretations of the teachers. As a result of this dependency, learners need more initiative and resourcefulness to understand their lessons, eventually leading to losing interest in their studies.

6.2. Coping Strategies

Yourdictionary.com defines resourcefulness as the ability and creativity to cope with difficulties. Indeed, this is true of the situation and experiences of the respondents in remote learning during the Covid-19 crisis. Resourcefulness is the approach to coping with the problematic situation in which one is engaged.

As defined by Newell (2021), coping is the process of using behavioural and cognitive approaches to manage difficult or threatening situations. It plays an integral role in maintaining an individual's physical and mental well-being. The same also provided a type of coping skill which is Adaptive behaviour. Generally, optimism is a healthy choice when dealing with stress. The respondents used this behaviour to cope with the stresses and difficulties encountered in remote learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Problems come as it is, and worrying is a useless thought. Having adaptive behaviour creates resiliency. This attitude enables a person to put bad things aside by channelling thoughts to positive and more important things.

However, positivity can be an individual perception or state of mind. The study's result revealed the respondents' resiliency in facing adversities. Considering individual differences, not all possess such a mindset. This study revealed that individuals, private groups, and even institutions should engage in adaptive and resiliency-building activities to develop this positivity among individuals, especially learners.

Another strong character revealed in this study was the faith in God. As a Christian country, the religion of most of the respondents. Along with this is the fatalistic attitude of the Filipinos. Putting all beliefs together will be overcome if one works hard, and God will do the rest.

6.3. Realisations

One crucial learning that this study revealed was the resiliency of the respondents showed in the course of the Pandemic. They have experienced difficulties, lived and coped with them, and learned from that event.

The realisation made by the respondents about their experiences in the conduct of remote learning during this crisis is worth sharing, especially among younger generations or the next generations to come. Surviving their education was a challenging task. They have experienced difficulties, lived with them, and survived. Respondents of this study became strong and optimistic individuals. These experiences were imprints that would remind them to keep going despite the adversities in life.

The new standard created by Covid-19 requires resiliency that everyone should adopt. If the Pandemic introduces new standards, each should respond to new ways of resolving issues. Martin, Nejad, Colmar, & Liem (2012) defined adaptability as the capacity of individuals to adjust their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in response to new, changing, or uncertain situations. In real life, it should be remembered that these respondents are also fighting their own everyday battle. Practice optimism and positivity in their daily fight for their problems, hardships, and difficulties in life. The experiences during the Pandemic should serve as lessons that eventually make them renewed, strong and mature individuals.

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