

Disclosing the experiences of students in the context of online learning: A qualitative inquiry

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Abstract

This qualitative study aimed to explore the challenges and insights of the selected student participants experiencing online learning. The participants in this study were chosen through purposive sampling technique. The instrument used in this study underwent validation both internal and external validators. Empirical data were gathered using an in-depth interview (IDI). The results of the study revealed the following themes as to the challenges faced by the students were understanding class disturbance, internet connectivity issues and disconnected feeling in class. As to the insights by the informants on impact of learning, there were two themes emerged: lack of autonomy and lowered confidence. As to the insights shared by the informant, the following themes emerged such as positive outlook and discontented with online learning. Finally, the themes generated can be a strong basis for possible intervention or enhancement which will provide benefits in the academic community.

Keywords: online learning, college students, qualitative study, Philippines

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1. Introduction

Challenges of Online Learning are classified into five categories, namely: individual, domestic, technological, institutional, and community barriers; what was most frequently faced by the students were the difficulties in adjusting to a new learning style, performing responsibilities at home as they are learning in the comfort of their homes and poor communication between the students and the instructors (Baticulon et al., 2021). Though there are students who have successfully engaged in learning in online environments, some factors reduce the effectiveness of these learning platforms, restricting their reach. These factors include the increased time and commitment required by online courses and the lack of a physical connection, complicating collaboration with classmates and instructors (Mehdipour & Zerehkafi, 2013).

Online learning is the new mode of learning the students are pursuing at the latter time. The relevancy of this study in the current era answers the importance of conducting this study. The result of this study will benefit the future generation of students who will go under the online mode of learning as they could gain enough information on how to handle the online learning environment. The researcher arrived to conduct this phenomenological study to describe and further understand the lived experiences of the students in pursuing online learning and how they face and cope with these challenges to raise information to the students on what to do to cope with the same struggles they are encountering. This study also benefits the institution's faculty for them to formulate interventions to strengthen the quality of education in an online setting.

1.1 Purpose of the study

This study aimed to describe and understand students' lived experiences with online learning and how they cope with their struggles. The study could also be a reference for teachers and higher administration to formulate other interventions to strengthen the quality of education in the new normal. In this study, the researchers focus on the students enrolled in Online Learning at UM Tagum College.

1.2 Research Questions

To come up with the actual content of this research, we have constructed the following main questions:

- What are the experiences of students in online Learning?
- How does virtual discussion impact learning?
- What are the insights of the students about online Learning?

1.3 Theoretical Lens

This study is anchored on the Theory of Immediacy, which is based on Mehrabian's Implicit Communication Theory and proposes that during the communication process, both verbal and nonverbal behaviors are utilized. According to Mehrabian (1967), immediacy is the Degree to which communicative practices improve interpersonal communication by allowing for interactivity and participation. Nonverbal behaviors convey information about feelings and attitudes, according to Mehrabian and Weiner (1964). Verbal behaviors include the spoken word accompanied by a tone of voice.

1.4 Significance of the study

This study informed the students about the impact of online learning on their productivity. For instance, they might experience deterioration in performance and changes in the mood and mental functioning. This study will change the student's lives after becoming aware on impact of online learning. They will know the different ways to cope with online education through the experiences of college students. And so there would be an improvement on their performance, and they will be focused in their studies. As a result, they will get good grades. The students will attain a greater possibility of learning improvements after knowing the impacts of online learning and the coping strategies.

1.5 Definition of Terms

Online Learning. Is the manipulation of the internet and different technological devices to develop learning materials for educational purposes, delivery of instructions, and program management (Fry, 2001).

Synchronous online learning. Instructors have a virtual presence and real- time interaction (Hranstinski, 2008).

Asynchronous online learning. The students learn by themselves without the lecturer's supervision (Hranstinski, 2008).

1.6 Delimitations and Limitations

This study focuses on the university's lived experiences of students in Online Learning. Thus, this research is designed to determine the affairs of the selected students, the challenges they have been experiencing amid online learning, how these existing challenges affect them in education, and their survival schemes and coping mechanism to pursue the day ahead in an online environment. The researchers will take seven persons as informants in an in-depth interview and seven as participants in a focused group discussion. Because there are only 14 informants for the investigation, it may not apply to the country's other regions.

2. Review of related literature

Online learning is an educational method in the form of distance learning achieved through the internet and different devices (e.g., computers, mobile phones) instead of a physical classroom. It is often referred to as "e-learning" (Dhawan, 2020). Due to the increasing rate of COVID-19 cases that resulted in the closure of physical classes, web learning through the utilization of mobile phones and laptops, together with the access to the internet in synchronous and asynchronous modes, became the tutorial platform for the students. It is where there is freedom in learning and finding connections with their professors wherever they are (Signh & Thurman, 2019). Synchronous Online Learning is completed through videoconferencing or chat rooms where there is an on-the-spot interaction and communication between the teacher and the scholars. In contrast, asynchronous online learning, on the other hand, the students as they learn to use different coping strategies improving their learning efficiency continuously. Provides indirect interaction where the students and teachers communicate with each other through emails or chats, and this platform of education provides advantages in independent learning to the students (Dhawan, 2020).

In a recent study conducted about online learning, the majority of students in virtual classes voiced their worries about the teaching and assessment techniques, the heavy workload, the inability to use gadgets properly, and the isolation (Fawaz et al., 2021). In addition, to cope with these challenges brought by online learning, students tend to actively deal with these barriers by seeking help from their teachers, family member, and relatives (Carter et al., 2020)). On the contrary, a study by Gonzales et al. (2020) shows that confinement brought by online learning positively impacts the students as they learn to use different coping strategies improving their learning efficiency continuously.

According to a study by Copeland et al. 2021, it was reported that the pandemic adversely affected students' behavior and emotional functioning as they engaged in online Learning, especially attention and externalizing problems (i.e., wellness behavior and mood changes). Furthermore, in recent years, although it may be challenging to witness the complexities of emotions as they emerge during online learning, a small body of research reveals that thoughts and feelings have a significant impact on learning, engagement, and sense of achievement in online contexts (The Internet and Higher Education, 2012). Online learning is growing continuously. However, there is limited empirical research on personal factors. The investigation addresses this research gap by exploring the relations between emotions such as boredom, frustrations, and self-regulated learning behaviors in an online course (Artino, 2012).

3. Methodology

This part deals with the research design, role of the researcher, research participants, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness and the ethical consideration.

Research Design - This investigation employed qualitative study which aimed at knowing the challenges faced by the informant in this research and the insights shared that can be very beneficial in the academic community. Qualitative research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, either single case or multiple cases over time through detailed in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information such as interviews, observations, audio-visual material, documents, reports and generates a case description and case themes (Creswell, 2013).

Role of the Researcher - Researchers are one of the instruments in qualitative research. It involves sharing ideas and also discussing to bring process. Sutton and Austin (2015) stated the role of the researchers in qualitative research is to attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of the informants.

Research Participants - In this case study, the participant were the students of UM Tagum College; they consist of seven (7) informants for the IDI and seven (7) participants for the FGD, with a total of fourteen (14) students under the Bachelor of Physical Education program who are enrolled in online learning. The informant was chosen through purposive sampling technique. In line with the selection of the participants, the researcher considered Creswell's suggestion on the selection of the participants. Further, the informant must possess the quality that this research proposes and observes in the careful selection of the participant.

Data Collection - The main method used in data collection was personal interview supplemented with thorough description and comprehensive narration of all aspects of the data collection process. Data Collection component of research is common to every phase of the study.

Data Analysis - This study made use of the content and thematic analysis in analyzing the collected data. Content analysis and thematic analysis are two common approaches in data analysis.

Trustworthiness - Qualitative research entails a variety of disciplines, paradigms, epistemologies, embraces multiple standards of quality. Trustworthiness as suggested by Cuba and Lincoln includes credibility, transferability and confirmability (Morrow, 2005).

Ethical Consideration - To establish ethical considerations, we followed the ethical steps as suggested by (Boyatzis, 1998) such as *respect for persons, beneficence, justice, consent and confidentiality*.

4. Results

This case study aimed to explore the challenges of college students and to look into the insights on the use of online learning that can be shared to the academic community. The participants in this study was chosen using the purposive sampling technique. The researcher was prompted to conduct this investigation in order to voice out the viewpoint of the students who experienced intricacies in experiencing an online learning. Qualitative

research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, either single case or multiple cases over time through detailed in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information such as interviews, observations, audio-visual material, documents, reports and generates a case description and case themes (Creswell, 2013). The participant in this qualitative study revealed that as to the experiences of students, the theme emerged such as *class disturbance, internet connectivity issues, disconnected feeling in class*.

Table 1

Essential themes and core ideas on the experiences of students in online learning

Emerging Themes	Core Ideas
Class disturbance	Family can be noisy, causing some students to lose attention. Very hard to focus in class because of many distractions at home.
Internet Connectivity Issues	Students struggle with looking for a stable internet connection Struggle with entering G-meet sessions because of low signal
Disconnected feeling in class	lack of direct contact between students and lecturer. I feel unmotivated when I see a pile of requirements. Cooperative lessons are different compared to a face-to-face classes. Responses from teachers take a day before student concern is addressed

As to the insights shared by the participant, there were two themes emerged such as *Lack of autonomy and Lowered confidence*. Table 2 revealed the insights of the participant.

Table 2

Essential themes and core ideas on the virtual discussion impact on learning

Emerging Themes	Core Ideas
Lack of autonomy	I lack the ambition and energy to complete tasks. There are not many things to do when it comes to online class
Lowered confidence	We could get the answers from our classmates. I am not confident with my learning I have low confidence in answering questions. I am not confident with my learning because most answers are copy-pasted from Google. I am not that confident in my learning because I depend on Google.

As to the insights shared by the participant, there were two themes emerged such as *positive outlook and discontented with online learning*.

Table 3

Essential themes and core ideas on the insights of the students about online learning

Emerging Themes	Core Ideas
Positive outlook	My coping mechanism for overcoming challenges in online learning is to balance everything I always think of trusting the process. Make small positive changes to alleviate the pressure from online learning.
Discontented with online learning	Not an effective platform for learning. Unfair for students who have problems with internet connection. Tasks are submitted just to pass. I still prefer face-to-face classes over online learning because face-to-face courses are better.

5. Conclusions and Discussions

Discussion, conclusions, implications for practice, and implications for future research are supported by the themes that emerged during the data analysis. This study coined its purpose, and that is to describe and understand the lived experiences of students under Online Learning and how they cope with their struggles. It aims to discuss students' experiences under online knowledge, their insights, feelings, and coping mechanisms in their teaching tasks, and to verify what concepts may be pulled together from the findings.

Lack of interaction during online classes, students tend to urge distracted easily by smartphones, pets, deliveries, and lots of others rather than the continuing online class; because face-to-face interaction is absent, it's theorized that students will experience a shortage of interest in the web class in an online learning environment, feedback is limited where the teacher cannot give real-time feedback and direct interaction to students, which can cause social isolation or disconnected feelings in class. It requires strong motivation and management skills as the students are learning in the comfort of their homes; it limits the progression of communication skills development and the lack of accreditation and quality assurance in learning.

A recent study conducted has found out that students engaged in online learning reported having an increased workload in studies which immensely impacts the students learning motivation to decreased, causes anxiety which would contribute negatively to the well-being of the students and their performance in Learning (Niemi & Kousa, 2020). Students and teachers become unproductive and physically weary from having the virtual learning setup due to less connectivity to each other (Hindocha, 2020). Students still prefer the physical mode of learning, which they find more effective rather than online learning.

5.1 Implications for practice

The finding of the particular study implies the students pursuing online Learning at UM Tagum College. This is also applicable for teachers and professors to gain a better understanding of the feelings and experiences that those students have. The parents can also assess their children concerning their experiences and feelings. This could also help the other researchers who want to expand this study's factors.

5.2 Implications for further research

The outcomes of this study develop new ideas which could help provide more explanation and implications for further analysis. The study will guide further research and investigation on what experiences, how the student copes with the struggles encountered in an online environment while learning, what other factors can change their perspectives in learning, and how they adapt to those changes.

5.3 Concluding remarks

As the researcher prepared the informants from the UM Tagum College for the study, we were utterly pleased with the discussion. When the interview persisted, the informants expressed their opinions willingly and honestly. They had given enough information as they answered each given question. The researchers were delighted with the interview results as the participants showed fascinating and evocative answers. The researcher established that this study differs from the other existing related studies. As most of the people perceived in this study, the students under online learning often face challenges and struggle at understanding due to issues in the online mode of learning and become unproductive. However, as we go deeper in our investigation, those students under online education have a coping mechanism that made our study utterly different from the other related studies.

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