



Students' Learning Experiences in The New Normal Education

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Abstract: *This qualitative research design employing phenomenological study aimed to explore students' learning experiences in new the normal education. An individual interview was conducted in gaining insights into the participants' perceptions, understanding, and experiences upon their learning in the new normal education. The interview question first focused on the students' learning experiences in new normal education, and the second was how the students cope with the transition to the new normal education. The purposive sampling method was used in this study's conduct. Ten (10) selected students were identified as the key informant from Cotabato Foundation College of Science and Technology-Pikit Extension Unit, Batulawan, Pikit, Cotabato, Philippines. The gathered data revealed that students are exhausted and struggling to look for a stable internet connection and become self-reliant. Furthermore, it was also revealed that most participants preferred Blended Learning rather than Distance Learning. Moreover, the study found five coping mechanisms the students used: acceptance, participating and complying, browsing the internet, seeking internet connection from friends, motivation, and hard work. The participants of this study were able to express and share their learning experiences and coping mechanisms. This study could serve as a good source of useful and accurate information to convey awareness to society.*

Keywords: *Students, learning experiences, new normal education.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Students' learning experiences vary in the environment in the learning takes place. The capacity to instruct students on what to learn, when to learn, and how to learn not only presents students with a variety of learning environments but also allows them to choose how they want to learn to turn to their area of interest. Students learn best by doing and working with others, truly interacting with the learning materials, and actively participating [11]-[13]. They can deepen their independence by participating in learning events and critical, creative, and analytical thinking skills. Moreover, students can solve a problem by experiencing challenges and difficulties in learning in which they can come up with the meaning and reality of being successful [10].

The sudden break of the pandemic, the COVID-19 that had huge disruptive effects in normal life and resulted in the new normal education, became a challenging period for the students, teachers, and even parents [14]-[17]. The traditional face-to-face learning in the classroom was changed into different types of modalities. One type of these modalities is Blended Learning (BL), a combination of both online and offline learning methodologies with the use of technology [18]-[22]. Another one is distance learning, which consists of module distribution online learning using the internet and television/radio-based instruction [23]. The third modality is homeschooling, which will be effective if the learners have an available tutor or parent qualified to facilitate their learning, specifically at the elementary level [24]-[29].

Globally, as of June 1, 2020, the closure of the educational institution in 144 countries affected 1.2 billion students, consisting of 68 percent of the total number of students enrolled worldwide [30]-[35]. In the Philippines, the synchronous lectures, which use screen-sharing slides to reproduce teachings, students are called upon to perform a recitation. Other lecturers provide links and files that can be used [36]-[41]. Students can watch lectures at their own pace. Students are also expected to dress formally during live video classes [2]. The research intended to explore students' learning experiences in the new normal education [42].

II.METHODOLOGY

This study used a phenomenological research design to explore students' learning experiences in the new normal education [43]-[47]. A semi-structured interview was utilized to gather data. Ten (10) respondents have been chosen based on purposive sampling procedure who were officially enrolled college students at Cotabato Foundation College of Science and Technology-Pikit Extension Unit, located in Batulawan, Pikit, Cotabato, Philippines. The data gathered from the interview was reviewed and transcribed through readings. The transcripts were then coded to extract general meanings, which contain words and phrases with corresponding meanings [48]-[51]. These were gathered regardless of the research questions. Coded meanings related to the research question will be grouped accordingly. Each interview has sets of clusters, and from these clusters, themes were extracted [52].

III.FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Learning Experiences in the New Normal education

Nowadays, students face many challenges with the sudden change of the educational system in the country and the different parts of the world [53]-[59]. As mentioned below, the participants revealed that they are exhausted and struggling with their learning experiences in new normal education. Students No. 1, No. 3, No. 5, No. 6, and No.7 emphasized that they struggle to look for stable internet connections, which hindered their chances to join the online class [60]-[65]. It became difficult for them to gain the learning they wanted due to this weak internet connection [66]. This means that a weak internet connection is a big challenge for students and affects their interest in learning [67]-[71]. The outcome of this change was emphasized during the interview with the participants as stated below:

Due to the pandemic, studying became difficult. Accessing signals to join the class to learn also became a challenge. My experience in the new normal education is that you need to be diligent in your studies. (Interview: S1)

This new normal education is very different from our traditional education. It saddens me that this new normal education is very different 'cause there's a lot of factors that can affect like for instance, there's no signal, no-load, and no gadgets using in our classes. Sometimes, we become uninterested because there is no signal, and classes are often not conducted, which is very difficult.

(Interview: S3)

It affects my studies because our class is online most of the time, and I struggle to find a signal to join an online class. And as well the financial support. I struggle in my experiences. (Interview: S5)

As a student, there are many changes with this new normal education, specifically with online learning. New normal education is exhaustive for me; aside from online, I struggle looking for a signal and with modules because of its cost and load. (Interview: S6)

It is difficult because other students are struggling to look for signals. It is difficult online, particularly if there's no load and the internet connection is weak. (Interview: S7)

On the other hand, data with Students No. 2, No. 4, No. 8, No.9, and No. 10 stressed that because of their struggles in an online class, the teacher sometimes could not discuss the lessons; they pushed themselves to become self-reliant [72]-[87]. This means that students are struggling when the teacher will not discuss the topics with them, and the students have no choice but to rely on themselves. The responses of the students are stated as follows:

Normal education affects my learning experiences because we are not accustomed to this kind of education. We became used to face-to-face, so we are still adjusting ourselves to handle our independence. Because most of the students are unaccompanied during their learning in this pandemic. (Interview: S2)

I became independent in these online classes. Unlike before that, some teachers can guide you. In this online class, you become independent because you are the one who will understand any lesson your teacher will give. Now, it depends on your strategy on how to understand the lessons. In my experience, I gained my learning in social media the internet. I further searched the topics being discussed by the teacher. (Interview: S4)

As a student, our situation is very difficult because we are the one who is teaching ourselves for us to learn. There are a lot of experiences we do that are becoming complicated with our studies or our responsibilities in school and our houses. It seems difficult to gain the knowledge you want. (Interview: S8)

The effect of the pandemic on my learning experiences is that I barely understand the lessons because our teachers sometimes cannot be able to explain them to us. In this new normal, I struggle because I am not used to being independent with my learning. (Interview: S9)

New normal education doesn't give me enough knowledge instead of creating my ideas. I depend more on the internet and don't put so much effort into my study. My family's condition or status also has a big impact, since new normal education needs a lot of cost in the internet, cellphones, laptops, and more. (Interview: S10)

Looking for a stable internet connection and becoming self-reliant became the most common struggle of the participants when it comes to their learning experiences in new normal education. According to Tibon [7], the new normal schooling posed several issues. The COVID-19 is responsible for ensuring students, instructors, and workers' health, safety, and well-being during a crisis. According to Kirom [5], students' experiences in the new normal are diverse because some students have access to primary materials to participate in the learning process, such as mobile phones and personal computers with internet access. Students worked at their own pace as their teachers sent links and/or files in the applications supplied, which also indicated the deadlines. It is simple to give instructions to students who have a quick understanding to come up with better and faster replies to the exercises given. Students are also hindered

in reporting activities before the deadline due to a poor internet connection.

Blended Learning and Distance Learning

One of the modalities of new normal education is blended learning. Combining face-to-face lessons with e-learning modules is a relatively new phenomenon in education [8]. Data acquired from Student No. 3 and No. 10 revealed that although they are struggling with the educational system today, they prefer this modality of learning in new normal education because face-to-face instances will be conducted. Chances of them asking about their concerns from the topics will be possible to approach their instructors personally. This means that students need face-to-face interaction to cope with the subjects effectively and ask their instructors about the topics. According to the participants:

In Blended Learning, you can cope with your topics, and there are instances to have face-to-face rather than modular. (Interview: S3)

My experience in Blended Learning is more fun and knowledgeable. Teachers can still share and teach us about our subjects, making us understand everything in our lessons. (Interview: S10)

According to Wang et al. [9], BL allows students to become more active in the learning process. According to Aspden and Helm [1], the blend's efficiency depends on the active participation of all parties involved, and the environment will only be effective if all parties are involved in the process.

On the other hand, Distance Learning is also one of the modalities of new normal education. This refers to the students' modular, online, and radio/television learning. In this modality, the participants have revealed that they struggle to answer their modules. They stressed that distance learning made them independent with their learning. It is because they cannot ask their instructors directly about the topics and activities given in the modules to answer them precisely. The gathered data was from Students No. 2, No. 3, No. 6, No. 8, No. 10. Research has been their method in understanding the lessons in the module. This means that students struggle with their modules and still need further explanation from their instructors. According to the participants:

In Distance Learning, you are the only one who will move to have a learning. Just like researching. You cannot gain help from others, even from your instructor. (Interview: S2)

In Distance Learning, you become independent because you will not do much; you just answer and pass it afterwards. (Interview: S3)

I struggled with answering the modules because words were so deep that they became hard to understand. (Interview: S6)

In our module, you have to research everything to understand the lessons given by your instructors. (Interview: S8)

In Distance Learning, students struggle more since they can't have the opportunity to ask the teachers directly, and in addition, it is a problem with internet connection. (Interview: S10)

According to Evans [11], distance education has significant challenges compared to more traditional types of education. To begin with, teaching materials are produced well in advance of actual pupils becoming aware of the school. Second, distance learners are more likely to be diverse than students in a traditional classroom; their social, economic, spiritual, political, experiential, and personal qualities add many interwoven layers to the teacher-student separation. Third, the issues that students face may go unnoticed by distance educators, who may be unaware of the actual situations they learn.

Galusha [3] went on to say that with distance learning, students and teachers will find themselves in roles that are different from what is expected in traditional education. The instructor no longer serves as the single source of knowledge; instead, they serve as a facilitator to aid student learning. The student actively engages in the content and delivery of knowledge. More than any other teaching approach, distance learning necessitates a collaborative effort between student and teacher, free of the constraints of time, place, and single-instructor effort. Because distant learning is student-centred, understanding the characteristics and demographics of distance learners can help us identify potential learning hurdles. While the traits and demands of students may not ensure success in a distance education course or program, it is easy to argue that they do contribute to success. Furthermore, understanding student characteristics and motivators aid us in determining who is most likely to participate in remote education and, conversely, why others do not.

Coping Mechanisms

The means to deal with stressful and troubling situations are called coping strategies or mechanisms [4]. Participants have their ways of coping with the new normal education. Students No. 1, No. 2, No. 3, and No. 10 have similarities in which they stated that their coping mechanisms are about acceptance, participating, and complying. This means that they cope with the new normal education by accepting their responsibilities as a student, participating in the different activities of every subject, and complying with the instructors' tasks and requirements to not fail the subjects. Following instructions have also played a vital role in complying activities, as mentioned by Student No. 2. The statements mentioned below are the responses of the participants:

I overcame normal education by accepting my responsibilities as a student and doing the requirements given by my instructors. (Interview: S1)

The particular way that I did was to follow the instructions to adjust myself and my study. The things that are necessary to do to cope up or to help with your studies, you must strive for it. (Interview: S2)

In new normal education, all you need to do is to participate. Because if you do not participate, your grades will hang. Even though it is hard, you still need to comply with all requirements. (Interview: S3)

My way of coping with the new normal education is by doing what I can do to pass and never fail my subjects. It helps me by not stressing myself and staying calm. (Interview: S10)

On the other hand, Students No. 4, No. 6, and No. 7 revealed that they cope with their difficulties with their education during pandemics through browsing the internet. When they want to further understand the topics and deep words from the discussion of their teachers, they tend to search it on google and/or watch videos from YouTube related to their course, as what Student No. 4 mentioned in which their course is often doing experiments. This means that the discussions of their teachers are not enough for the students. This is why they are doing their best to look for different means to understand further topics and deep words for them to learn in this new normal education. The students' responses are stated below:

What I did was research on google. I researched the meaning of the words or the things that I did not know how to do. I sometimes watch on YouTube because we often experiment in my course, which is agriculture. That is why I watched what agriculturists do on YouTube. (Interview: S4)

For me, I just did some research. I sometimes ask my friends who have high grades. (Interview: S6)

The first is a cellphone, and the second is a stable internet connection. It helped because, for instance, the instructor cannot be able to explain, you can search it on google for you to learn, and you can also read it from there. (Interview: S7)

As stated above, coping mechanisms have differences, just as the following students have revealed; Student No. 5 coping mechanism is seeking internet connection from friends. When the participant does not have mobile data, the participant seeks friends to connect with their Wi-Fi to cope with the lessons of their instructor. This means that not all students have access to mobile data, although they have mobile phones.

If I don't have a load, I look for my friends. I connect to their Wi-Fi, and I do my best to make up with our teacher's lesson. (Interview: S5)

Student No. 8 said that motivations coming from his dreams and family are her coping mechanism. By thinking of those, the participant focused on uplifting himself and focusing on the course the participant chose. This means that the motivation of the family and the instructors from the course are important factors for the students to overcome the struggle of new normal education.

As a student, I have a goal. Many things are motivating me, aside from dreams my family. I used those to uplift myself and focused on my studies and chosen course. (Interview: S8)

Moreover, Student No. 9 revealed that his coping mechanism is all about hard work. The stress there is that students should strive hard with any challenges they will face in new normal education because this challenge will pass at the end of the day.

My way of coping with the new normal education is by doing what I can do to pass and never fail my subjects. It helps me by not stressing myself and staying calm." (Interview: S9)

The most common among the students' coping mechanisms is acceptance, participating, and complying. Students shall understand and be patient with every challenge they face as they go through different aspects and ways in their lives, specifically in this new normal education. According to the findings of Nyatsanza et al. [6], students adopted eight coping methods in reaction to stressful situations in their schooling. Confronted coping, distance, self-controlling, seeking social support, admitting responsibility, escape avoidance, issue solving, and positive re-appraisal was used as coping techniques. Each coping mechanism included various coping statements that students may employ to cope with stressful situations. The most frequently employed coping method was planned problem-solving. This is a self-esteem-protection approach. Students want to be seen as well-organized. More research is needed to determine whether or not the students are truly organized. The least employed coping method was escape avoidance. This mechanism demonstrates a lack of trust in one's ability to handle stressful events.

IV. CONCLUSION

New normal education has been identified as a difficult challenge student face nowadays. Students revealed that they are exhausted and struggling to find a stable internet connection and become self-reliant. The study found that a weak internet connection hinders the students' learning experiences affects their interest in learning. Moreover, when the instructors are unable to discuss the topics, students are struggling to comprehend and have no choice but to rely on themselves. In this study, two modalities of new normal education have been used: Blended Learning and Distance Learning. The study found that students prefer Blended Learning rather than Distance Learning because in Blended Learning, chances of face-to-face interaction and personally asking their instructors are possible. While in Distance Learning, students are struggling with their modules and are becoming independent. Generally, students still need a face-to-face to cope with the subjects effectively and ask their instructors personally. Moreover, further

explanation of the instructors is still needed for the students to understand their modules.

The study found five different coping mechanisms the students used because coping mechanisms depend on the challenges they faced. These coping mechanisms are: acceptance, participating, and complying; browsing the internet, seeking internet connection from friends, motivation, and hard work. Regarding the students' learning experiences in new normal education, students are advised to approach their instructors, friends, and/or classmates beforehand with their concerns. When the students are already aware that they are experiencing a weak internet connection and is struggling to look for a stable connection, they can chat with their instructors, friends, and/or classmates for them to know about their concerns and that they cannot be able to join online meetings and submitting requirements online if the deadline is already up. That way, instructors can be aware of the current situation of their students.

Moreover, students can also approach their instructors if they cannot clearly understand the topics in their discussion for them to have a connection with each other. Generally, communication is the best way for the students and instructors to understand and clarify their concerns. In the two modalities of new normal education, especially in Distance Learning, both the students and the instructors are advised to approach each other. In the students' part, when they cannot understand the topics in their modules, they can frankly ask their instructors to explain them further. Afterwards, the instructors should also ensure that the students get the instructions they have been told, and instructors must be open-minded for questions and clarifications. Each of them should be open-minded and do their part to overcome the challenge of new normal education.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to report regarding the present study.

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