

The Academic Experiences of Senior High School Students in the Midst of Pandemic

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ABSTRACT: As the world evolves, new problems arise and this leads to a bigger barrier for students especially with education. This paper uncovers the struggles of students with regards to the new learning modality as a result of the pandemic; COVID-19. It presents and discuss findings and methods in which the researchers examined information acquired from personal interviews – phenomenological study through “thematic analysis” (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Specifically, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Students from Samar National School were asked various questions about their experiences with education in the midst of the pandemic. 5 informants were purposively selected through selection criteria and data was collected through a semi-structured interview. As a result, the responses demonstrate how STEM students deal with the pandemic and the challenges it brings. Some students experience barriers especially doing online classes in their own homes; such as noise, doing chores, and lack of motivation. Some are not used to the new learning set-up and they only try their best to adapt with this as soon as possible. Not only with education prior but some also faced mental health struggles as an effect of the change of learning practices. Furthermore, most of the informants have comparable replies to the many issues they have experienced. In sum, the results uncovered the different challenges and struggles that these students faced with the new learning modality and how these affected their performance. This study is also about conveying a message to all students that in this fight, they are not alone.

Keywords: COVID-19, Senior High School, STEM, online class, pandemic

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INTRODUCTION

The world has been evolving for over years now and by this means everyone were able to face different types of situations; both the good and the bad. In this sense, new problems arise and this includes the most recent and the biggest problem the whole world is facing right now-COVID-19 Pandemic. The COVID-19 is a disease brought about a novel coronavirus called severe respiratory syndrome coronavirus or more known as 2019-nCov (Emedicine, 2020). It was first distinguished in the midst of an outbreak discovered in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. It was then declared on March 11, 2020 that COVID 19 is a global pandemic; the second global pandemic followed by the H1N1 influenza, a pandemic that also happened way back 2009. In 2020, the number of students affected by the global pandemic all around the world is estimated to reach 1.6 billion (UNESCO, 2020). In the year 2021, some countries were able to cope-up and return intently back to their normal way of living, especially with education. But in late 2021, the Philippines was still facing the hardships of the pandemic where in only 5,000 students in an estimate of 100 schools were allowed to go to class but only in a limited amount of days. In this case, not less than 99% of the students in the Philippines, out of 27 million students from public schools who enrolled this academic year, are still in the vast of learning with no in-person schooling (Time Philippines, 2021).

These students have not only faced problems in education prior but also with their way of living as well. Specifically, mental health problems during this pandemic have been one of the most talked issue aside from the pandemic itself. Over 81% of GenZ teens who age from 13-17 years old experience more stress amidst the pandemic (American Psychological Association, 2021). A survey conducted with 1879 respondents from the Philippines resulted to 16.3% of the respondents rating psychological impact of the pandemic as moderate-to-severe, 16.9% reported depression symptoms as moderate-to-severe, 28.8% reported anxiety levels as moderate-to-severe, and lastly 13.4% reported moderate-to-severe stress levels wherein students where one of the factors in the survey conducted (Pubmed, 2020). In a study, Dr. Bang conducted a global school-based Student Health Survey in collaboration with WHO and other private groups from January to March of 2021. He stated that 17% of high school students aging 13-15 years old have tried attempting suicide at least once, 12% percent admitted that they were serious in the attempts of suicide, and 11% started to make plans on how they would commit suicide. This study aims to uncover the struggles and situations of students amidst the pandemic. The results of this study will contribute to the hopeful aim of emphasizing the presence of such situations and creating better ways of coping.

This study aims to uncover the experiences, and understand the struggles of students amidst the pandemic, to look for results that could help in attaining resilience and a variety of coping mechanisms. This study intends to answer the experiences that students face amidst the pandemic, their mental health and academic performance, and the coping strategies used to survive the challenges experienced.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

This study is anchored on the coping theory developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). It explained coping as a phenomenon involving both cognitive and behavioral responses that individuals use to manage internal and/or external stressors perceived to exceed their personal resources. Lazarus and Folkman theorized the two basic coping styles: Problem-focused coping is engaged in by individuals who perceive problems.

A problem-focused approach to managing stress means we actively do things to address the problem, whereas emotion-focused coping consists of efforts to reduce the negative emotions associated with stress. Therefore, the researchers conclude that coping has two significant functions: dealing with the problem causing distress (problem-focused coping) and controlling emotion (emotion-focused coping). Apparently, problem-focused coping uses specific activities to get the task completed, whereas emotion-focused coping is the use of activities to feel sufficiently about the task. Through this theory, the researchers will be able to identify the students' coping strategies related to the coping theory by Lazarus and Folkman.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In order to better understand how the COVID-19 influences the students' mental health and the barriers that prevent them from participating in academic activities, this study will look into the experiences of Samar National School's Senior High School Grade 11 STEM students. The study will use phenomenology since the researchers will seek the essence of experiences and understanding of the Senior High School Grade 11 STEM students' mental health. Thus, the researchers will be able to find out what practices will help the students cope with the prior problem. The researchers chose phenomenology as research design to focus on their experience of phenomena. The study will determine the individuals' experiences and situations facing the pandemic. Maintaining the students' mental health issues has been difficult for the school system and so, to adjust to the state of the society at the time, the

school was compelled to switch to independent study. The researchers will collect data on these characteristics throughout the study in order to focus the investigation on the problem in depth.

Research Setting

Participants in the study were all qualified Samar National School Grade 11 STEM students. Because they are pertinent to the study's subject, the researchers chose Samar National School's Grade 11 STEM pupils. Every informant voluntarily shared their thoughts and experiences on the study. To assist their co-learners and shed more light on life as a senior high school student, they share information and assist researchers in gathering data from their experiences, challenges with their mental health, as well as their coping techniques.

Sampling and Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling, through the use of selection-criteria, was used by the researchers to narrow down the pool of potential informants, leading to a homogenous population because each of the following participants shared the same qualities: they were all grade 11 STEM students attending Samar National School and had been experiencing difficulty in the studies as reflected in their performance.

Data Collection Procedure

A semi-structured interview guide was the research tool employed in this qualitative study. The following questions were utilized by the researcher as their instrument in the study to answer: (1) Since the pandemic started, did you find it difficult to start the school year in a new learning setup? (2) Are there any specific struggles you face academically ever since the pandemic started? (3) Did you think that it will take you long before you are able to adjust to the new learning environment? (4) How is your academic performance affected by the pandemic? (5) Do you think your mentality has strengthened because of the pandemic? (6) By any chance, do you have any strategies or coping mechanisms to fight the struggles you face? (7) Do you think that they're helping you? (8) Would you recommend these coping mechanisms to other students who are experiencing the same difficulties as you are during the pandemic?

A prepared interview guide was used to conduct a semi-structured online interview. It was required of respondents to take part and share their own experiences in their own words. The researchers assisted each interview, which lasted 5 to 10 minutes depending on internet speed and the length of the answer of each informant. One research question and one well-crafted interview question were included in the interview guide. By performing and assembling

the data, the researchers were able to determine the amounts of data obtained. There were five respondents in the study. The transcripts were then verified and put through a trustworthiness check to help provide a more objective interpretation.

Data Analysis

The method used for data analysis is narrative analysis as stated by Jane Sutton, Zubin Austin (2015), in which the researchers will examine information acquired from diverse sources such as personal interviews, field observation, and surveys.

The analysis will begin by gathering and sorting the informants' responses; however, because narrative analysis does not have a set framework or methodology, the researchers will have to decide what to do next. The researchers intend to filter the informants' responses by categorizing them by concept to create a more generic variation of data.

The researchers will emphasize how trust and confidence is developed in the research study's results after processing and evaluating the data collected to ensure that the methods was correctly carried out and effectively followed through. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), constitutes to four (4) areas; (1) **Credibility**, where the researchers will confirm confidence upon the truth of the data acquired, (2) **Dependability**, where the researcher will confirm that the data gathered are consistent and repetitive, (3) **Confirmability**, where the researchers make sure that the data gathered is shaped only by the participants and is not under influence of the researcher's biases, motivation, and interest, and lastly (4) **Transferability**, where the researchers will confirm that the data gathered are applicable in other contexts.

RESULTS

The study aims to uncover the struggles and experiences of the learners and to retrospect the informants' responses of grade 11 STEM students; the researchers conclude that the students had various challenges and coping mechanisms to help them lessen their stress and maintain their mental health conditions. The Grade 11 STEM students are still experiencing what they faced during the pandemic. The following are the statements of the participants that may support the claim that can also be found in the presentation of data:

R1: *"At first, yes, I thought it will be hard for me, not just for me but to the majority of learners. Nahirapan ako sa simula kasi kailangan kong intindihin yung mga lessons and learn without teachers guiding me, kailangan kong siguruhin na maipasa ko yung mga outputs ko before or on the deadline, kailangan kong ivalue at imanage yung time ko at iba pa."*

R2: *"Yes, it was very nerve wracking but as days passed mas nasasanay na ako."*

R3: *"It was hard for me to adjust to the new normal learning modalities which made the school year difficult."*

R4: *"Yes, I had a hard time adjusting from my usual setup where there was physical interaction between the teacher and the student, it suddenly ended up having a modular were it self-learning setup became normal since the pandemic started."*

R5: *"Yes, because nanibago ako han una na set up naton han kanan education system na mag conduct han modular learning since nasanay ako han face to face bagan nanibago ako han set up pag start han pandemic "*

The researchers proved that some students in Grade 11 STEM of Samar National School had different struggles and coping mechanisms due to their pandemic experiences that affected their mental health and academic participation, which was caused by the new learning modality during the pandemic. The data that has been gathered is based on the respondents' answers. The primary five informants had dissimilar struggles and coping mechanisms to combat those prior problems. Still, they only pointed out that they were not accustomed, and at the same time, they were still innovating to the new learning modality, which affected their academic performance. As a result, the researchers concluded that the learners needed an allocation to call attention as they experience paramount about their mental health.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of the study imply that students have different types of struggles in the new learning system during pandemic. These struggles affected their mental health and academic performance. Not all these students find the new learning system effective. Attempting to learn new things inside their bedroom is different than that of learning inside an actual classroom, and this had a big impact to them. Not everyone finds the blended learning effective. Especially, they are in their own house which apparently, could have barriers that they have been experiencing as a student, barriers such as noise, doing chores, and lack of motivation.

Furthermore, the students' perspective and adjustments in the new learning mode gave them a hard time pacing because some are not used to an online learning set-up and they only try their best to adapt to the new learning system as soon as possible.

The Struggles the students have been experiencing in the midst of the pandemic has really impacted the way they act and behave. Stress, Anxiety and in worst case scenario, Depression are the problems that affects these students. By these acts, it affected the way they perform in terms of academic. Some students are mentally stable and some students are mentally stressed in an

online learning mode, students cannot cope their responsibilities because of these struggles that caused them to have mental health issues and affected their academic performance.

To avoid these struggles, they make changes to what they used to do and adapt their self to the new learning system. It's all about managing their time for it really helps them to be responsible to what they do. Time Management will help them to maintain and balance their well-being. They have these coping strategies that helps them to surpass those struggles, and by that, it can lessen their stress.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Such responses demonstrate how STEM students deal with the pandemic, the challenges it brings, and the coping methods they use to overcome them. Most informants have comparable replies to the many issues they have experienced, the impact of the pandemic and various struggles on their academic performance and mental health, and parallels in coping mechanisms.

Furthermore, one respondent out of five does not have any coping skills to help tackle the different challenges encountered during the pandemic, which is the focus of this study. To collect information, specifically effective coping strategies, from the respondents' fellow students in order to facilitate them in their own struggles. This is also about conveying a message to all students that in this fight, they are not alone.

In line with the results, the researchers suggests that students should manage their time to reduce their workloads one step at a time, which will also reduce their stress from the said requirements, teachers should be transparent and compassionate to students, especially those who are frustrated or who are having difficulty pacing, parents must monitor their children's mental health on a regular basis to ensure that they are not suffering from any mental health issues, the school should create a mental health-friendly environment by displaying posters and signage on mental health, the community and people around us should initiate a program or seminars on mental health in general in order to better understand and eliminate the stigma.

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