ONLINE LEARNING CHALLENGES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN NOTRE DAME OF MARBEL UNIVERSITY, KORONADAL CITY, MINDANAO, PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT- This study was conducted to determine the online learning challenges of the college students amidst the Covid-19 pandemic in Notre Dame of Marbel University. A survey questionnaire using an online survey tool google form was used to collect data from the respondents and analyzed thru descriptive statistics. Results revealed that most of the students had experienced difficulties in internet connection and device accessibility, while some have difficulties and struggle to adapt the technology using the online platform.

KEYWORDS: Online Learning, challenges of students, college students, Notre Dame of Marbel University

I. INTRODUCTION

The outbreak spanning the globe which began in December 2019 from Wuhan, China is known as Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). It is the most recent viral disease that developed rapidly over the world, to the point where it has become so destructive not only on the global economy but as well as millions of deaths globally. Almost 195 countries had confirmed coronaviruses and suspected cases. The World Health Organization (WHO) had already put the entire world on high alert in terms of public health. European and Asian countries are among the top ten countries with unprecedented increase of cases in the early times of COVID-19. On March 26, the United States surpassed China as the country with the most cases. In the Philippines, the first case was reported in January 2020 and there have been 2,765,672 confirmed cases and 42,077 deaths reported as of October 2021 (https://www.who.int/philippines).

This deadly and infectious disease greatly affected the education sector globally which forced some institutions to close for the time being in order to stop the COVID-19 from spreading. Most countries opted to employ quarantine protocols, having been said, over a billion students around the world have been affected and over 28 million Filipino students across all academic levels remain at home and adhere to the Philippine government's quarantine regulations. The nation hears a lot on the news about the overall economy but doesn't hear much from the affected students. Fear and worry have risen as a result of the pandemic that the current semester, as well as future semesters, may be stopped with an unpredicted time to resume classes.

To respond to the needs of learners, the Philippines Higher Education sector is becoming more conscious of the diversity of the current learning situation and took a leap of change. From the traditional face-to-face mode of education, schools, colleges, universities set forth a range of flexible options in delivery modes and the idea of distance education or isolated learning has developed to support alternative forms of learning. As universities increasingly move towards fully online and blended teaching modes, there is much discussion as to what this means for pedagogy (Gregory & Salmon, 2013; Jaques & Salmon, 2007; Kirkwood & Price, 2014; Salmon, when it comes to technology, Orlando and Attard (2015) stated that "teaching with technology is not a one size fits all approach as it depends on the types of technology in use at the time and also the curriculum content being taught" (p. 119) as education can become transformative as possible during this tough time. The Notre Dame of Marbel University (NDMU) is a sectarian institution situated in the culturally pluralistic province of South Cotabato, on the island of Mindanao, Philippines. With the aim to ensure continuity of quality education, Notre Dame of Marbel University has adopted new normal classrooms, the "Schoology platform" as its Learning Management System (LMS) that most of the education sector institutions considered as virtual schools. It emphasized the significance of faculty-student collaboration which offered fully online (synchronous and asynchronous) and made all online academic tools and materials accessible via LMS.

One of the most important aspects of a great online course is communication, however, creating and teaching an online course that is beneficial to students and results in excellent learning outcomes is a difficult task. The learning experiences of students vary from the level of difficulties that an individual encountered, particularly (1) having a poor internet connection/technical issues, (2) limited access to gadgets, (3) identifying a quiet time and place to complete the coursework, and (4) dealing with feelings of overwhelm and frustration. "Most of the terms (online learning, open learning, web-based learning, computer-mediated learning, blended learning,m-learning, for ex.) have in common the ability to use a computer connected to a network, that offers the possibility to learn from anywhere, anytime, in any rhythm, with any means" (Cojocariu et al., 2014) yet struggles in using any forms of learning through stated above mediocre make it tough to keep up with the virtual peers and learning environment. Technology is undeniably expensive and the lack of ability of students to provide relatively up-to-date cellphones/computers/laptops can be difficult and to add up even basic upkeep and troubleshooting. Also, there is a low-level preparedness among the students concerning the usage of Learning Management Systems (Parkes et al., 2014) that led to issues with self-regulation, keeping up with the curriculum, and feeling separated from other students or others as classes went online, generating anxiety for some. Data on student individual experiences and differences will be identified and highlighted in this study.

II.   OBJECTIVES

General Objective:

To determine the online learning challenges experienced by college students amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in Notre Dame of Marbel University, Koronadal City.

Specific Objectives:

The study sought to answer the following:
1.   What is/are the challenges in online learning encountered by the college students during the pandemic, in terms of:
a.   Access
b.   Technology
c.   Adaptability (Face-to-face to Online)
2.   What is/are the coping strategies of the students in online learning.
3.   What is/are the recommendations of the students in the conduct of online learning amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

III.   METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative research design which was used to collect quantifiable information gathered for statistical analysis. The quantitative research design is particularly applicable to this study because people's attitudes and behaviors were collected and based on numerical and statistical evidence that can only be evidently communicated through statistics and numbers. Thus, the researchers utilized it. Angus Maddison states that "*Quantification clarifies issues which qualitative analysis leaves fuzzy. It is more readily contestable and likely to be contested. It sharpens scholarly discussion, sparks off rival hypotheses, and contributes to the dynamics of the research process.*"

Respondents and Locale of the Study

The study targeted 100 respondents from all college levels, 1st year to 5th year of the College of Engineering Department of Notre Dame of Marbel University (NDMU) located in Alunan Avenue, Koronadal City, South Cotabato, Philippines.

Sampling Technique and Research Instrument

The researchers made use of the purposive sampling technique. This type of sampling method was utilized to ensure that the respondents targeted for the study have a say or direct experience regarding the topic under study (Purposive Sampling Definition and Types (thoughtco.com)).

For this study, survey questionnaire using an online survey tool google form was used to collect data from the respondents and analyzed thru descriptive statistics.

Data Gathering Procedures

The researchers employed the following procedures to gather data, namely; 1). sending the formal communications to the head of the University and concerned key informants and notify them about the research undertaking and 2). upon proper notification, an online survey tool through google form was emailed to the subject participants with corresponding links for them to answer the questions.

Statistical Analysis

The data gathered from the survey questionnaire was analyzed and interpreted using descriptive statistics which include frequency and/or percentage. In particular, the statement of the problem (SOP) numbers 1-4 were analyzed using frequency and/or percentage.

IV. RESULTS

The study has a high response rate with 111 respondents against our target 100 respondents.

1. What is/are the challenges in the online learning encountered by the college students during the pandemic
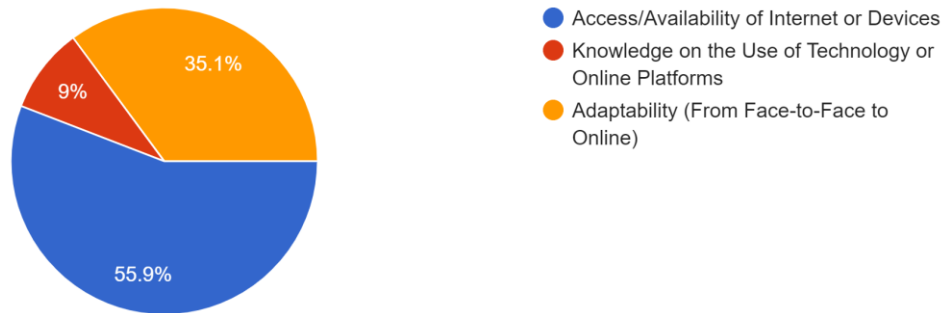
111 responses

Figure 1. Results of Question No. 1

Based on *Figure 1*, it shows that out of 111 respondents, 62 or 55.9% of the respondents experienced a challenge on the accessibility/availability of the internet or devices in the conduct of online classes in their university. 39 or 35.14% of the respondents found that their capacity to adapt to the new online platform of conducting classes is the most challenging for them. 10 or 9% found that knowledge on the use of technology or online platforms is the most challenging.

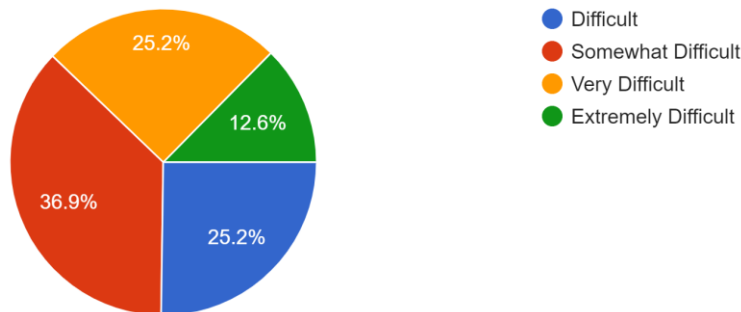2. What is the level of the said challenge?

111 responses

Figure2. Results of Question No. 2

The illustration in *Figure 2* shows that 41 or 36.9% of the respondents perceived that their challenges on the conduct of online classes is "somewhat difficult". Other respondents found the challenges as both "difficult" and "very difficult", particularly 28 or 25.2 %, respectively. 28 or 12.6% of the respondents found the challenges as "extremely difficult".

3. What is/are the coping strategies of the students in the online learning?
111 responses

- Maintaining Positive Attitude on Online Learning
- Seeking Professional Counselling
- Seeking Friends and Families Guidance
- Keeping Oneself Motivated and Inspired
- Seek out Spiritual Guidance
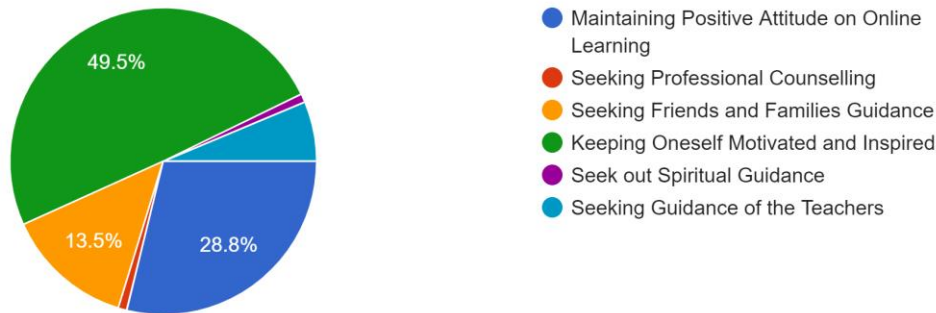- Seeking Guidance of the Teachers

Figure 3. Results of Question No. 3

The illustration in *Figure 3* states that 55 or 49.5% of the respondents perceived that "keeping oneself motivated and inspired" is the most effective way in dealing or coping with the challenges brought by the online class amidst the pandemic. 7 or 28.8% of the respondents said that seeking guidance from the teachers is the more effective coping strategy. Lastly, "seeking professional counseling" and "spiritual guidance" is with the respondents that found it a good coping strategy having only 1 respondent, respectively.

4. What is your general recommendation and your recommendation in the conduct of online classes?
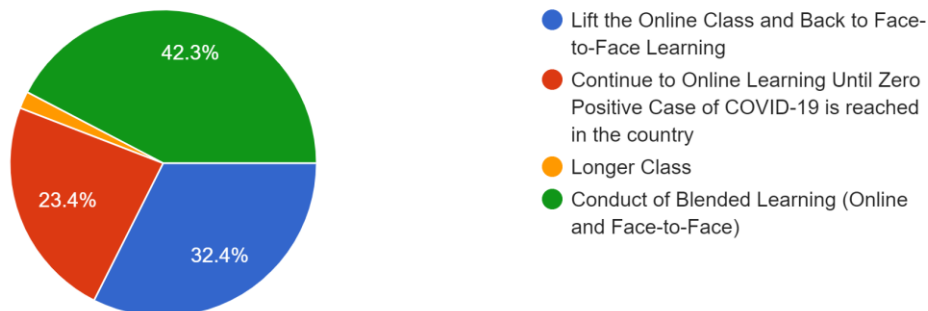111 responses

- Lift the Online Class and Back to Face-to-Face Learning
- Continue to Online Learning Until Zero Positive Case of COVID-19 is reached in the country
- Longer Class
- Conduct of Blended Learning (Online and Face-to-Face)

Figure 4. Results of Question No. 4

In *Figure 4*, it shows that 47 or 42.3% of the students recommended that the conduct of blended learning should now be implemented by their school. 36 or 32.4% recommend that online classes should be lifted to pave the way for the conduct of face-to-face learning. 26 or 23.4% of the respondents believed that online learning should be continued until the cases of COVID-19 positive in the country is down by 0. Lastly, 2 or 1.8% of the respondents recommended conducting online classes longer.

V.   DISCUSSION

Online learning has already been adopted in the Philippines. In the case of the Engineering Department students of Notre Dame Marbel University (NDMU), the majority of them are having difficulties with internet connection and device accessibility. This finding corroborates the study of Mahyoob (2020), where it was reported that internet connection speed is the top reported challenges or obstacles of students in online learning, along with accessing online materials and

online examinations. The finding on difficulties with internet connection and device accessibility substantiates the fact that the educational institution may not be fully ready or equip with technology and/or facility in the online type of learning system. Indeed, the whole educational institutions in the country may have similar experiences. It has also been determined that the students are facing financial hardship to purchase, maintained and sustained the costs and the gadgets / technology for their online learning. This online learning is dependent on the internet connection and/or access. Similar observations was noted by Adedoyin & Soykan (2020), whom they suggested that schools and or universities may collaborate with internet provider companies to subsidize the cost of the students' internet subscription as part of their corporate social responsibilities. Aside from the challenges in internet accessibility, other students are facing difficulties to adapt to the new online platform of learning and on the use of technology and the online platform itself. This finding reveals that not all students are able or capacitated to adapt to the new trends of the learning. Moreover, most of the respondents perceived these challenges as somewhat difficult, leading to almost half of them recommending the conduct of blended learning. On the other hand, one-third of the students perceived these challenges to be very difficult and extremely difficult that unsurprisingly, one-third also of the students recommended lifting the online classes and paving the way back to face-to-face classes even with the current Covid-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, despite the difficulties of online learning by the students, most of them are dealing with these challenges by keeping themselves motivated and inspired while others seek help or guidance from their teachers.

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