

Online Learning in Tertiary Level Education in the Philippines During the Pandemic: Challenges, Coping Mechanisms, and Lessons Learned

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ABSTRACT

Grounded in Lazarus & Folkman's (1984) stress and coping theory and Garrison, Anderson, & Archer's (2000) Community of Inquiry (CoI) Theory, this study investigates how students cope with the challenges confronting their online learning and the lessons they have learned from their experiences. The study involved a Google survey with 910 college students from various tertiary-level programs of a state university in the Philippines, such as teacher education, arts and humanities, sciences, business and accountancy, hospitality and tourism management, and engineering and architecture, who responded. About twenty-eight percent of the respondents were male, while roughly 72 percent were female. Data from the survey were thematized for similarity and then tabulated. A Google link was shared with the students, who were given the freedom to decide whether or not to respond to the survey. This study reveals the extreme effect of lockdown on education. The unhappiness and stresses of having to cope with unreasonable task deadlines, the difficulty of interpreting modules with little help from teachers, the extremely poor connection, and the deprivation in online learning experienced by the majority of students in developing countries like the Philippines could leave our students not just with the psychological pain of not having to fully learn the discipline and practice of their supposed profession, but also with anxiety for the future, where they, who are already professionals yet deprived of the significant knowledge, skills, and values they could have possessed had this pandemic not occurred among us, might find themselves unable to immediately deliver and meet the world's expectations. One important contribution of the present study to literature is that the findings challenge the existing traditional stress theory, including Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress and coping theory, which views resilience as successful adaptation or bouncing back after a stressful encounter. Contrary to findings from previous studies drawn from the theory, the current findings here show that student "resilience" was stretched to a breaking point, where it coexisted with extreme psychological pain and

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unfulfilled learning. The theory must distinguish between genuine adaptation and forced endurance. Surviving a broken educational system does not mean the coping mechanisms were healthy or successful; it often meant absorbing hidden damage that manifests later in professional life. Further, findings in the current study show that the crisis in education during the pandemic was not just a personal stress issue; rather, it was a structural failure in remote education infrastructure. It was observed that some graduates from developing countries like the Philippines did not have the privilege of in-person on-the-job training because of lockdowns. Consequently, some of them may face a heavy burden trying to meet industry standards without the skills they should have learned in school. Further research is necessary to address the limitations of the study.

Keywords: online learning, pandemic, Filipino college students, challenges and coping mechanisms, lessons learned..

1. Introduction

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world, lockdowns severely affected global economies, health, and education. Among the countries that were extremely affected are developing countries like the Philippines, whose educational system in basic education transitioned to distance learning. Like the rest of the world, because of the lockdown, tertiary-level education in state universities and colleges in the Philippines shifted to online learning. This 360-degree change has drastically affected mental health, social relationships, and various aspects of human life. In the case of education, numerous challenges in online learning were confronted by students at all levels. The advent of the pandemic had redirected the interest of scholars from different fields of specialization to health, scientific, and educational issues affected by the phenomenon.

A good number of research dwelt on the challenges encountered by students as they engaged in online learning, their coping mechanisms, and the lessons they acquired from their experiences. Some of such studies are enumerated here. The dismal effects of the pandemic are demonstrated in the academic performance of students, regardless of level. A systematic review of 1,787 studies by Alborno

et al. (2023), which investigated the effects of Covid-19 lockdowns, suggested several negative consequences of lockdowns and the shift to virtual learning schemes for children's academic performance across different knowledge areas, such as a post-pandemic decrease in reading performance of more than 3% compared with pre-pandemic results. Despite such limitations, the review acknowledges "several negative consequences of lockdowns and the shift to virtual learning for children's academic performance" (Cortes-Albornoz et al., 2023, p. 9). It was noted, however, that in about 35 percent of the articles selected for analysis, no learning loss was reported. It was also identified that the learning loss (or gain) during the pandemic were influenced by factors such as socioeconomic status, access to technology, the learning environment, the quality of innovative remote resources, and other developing countries. The study, though, acknowledges that remote learning has increased the learning gap between students.

Further, studies have shown that school closures have been found to affect language learning negatively. For instance, Verulava, Shengelia, and Makharashvili (2023) assessed the consequences of distance learning as a result of the pandemic from the perspective of students and teachers in universities in Georgia. Findings show that a majority of the students prefer

distance learning and auditory learning methods, as these methods favor students' own choice. Although they pointed out deficiencies such as limited communication, technical access difficulties, low-quality internet access, inconvenient environments, students' involvement processes, and complicated societal relationships, the research recommends the need to equip university auditoriums with technical capabilities and to develop curricula that allow students to choose whether to attend lectures in the classroom or to attend online.

Chimbo, Mutezo, and Mare' (2023) examined the online learning challenges encountered by students in open and distance e-learning in South Africa during the pandemic. Qualitative content analysis of thirty honors students revealed the following: (1) the key challenges encountered were the lack of teacher feedback, lack of communication, online discussion, and interaction owing to a lack of teaching presence; (2) cognitive difficulties include complex modules, challenging questions, and a lack of detailed feedback; (3) the social presence challenges indicated a lack of online support, virtual interaction, and online participation by teachers with students and by students with peer students. The study recommends the importance of teachers incorporating various facilitation strategies using the CoI to create an effective online environment for students.

Barrot, Llenares, and del Rosario (2021) investigated students' online learning challenges during the pandemic, as well as their coping strategies, and found that the greatest challenge confronted by the students was related to the learning environment, particularly distractions at home, limitations in completing school requirements, and difficulties in selecting learning areas and study schedules. Regarding the impact of the pandemic on students' online learning challenges, most of the students' responses were related to teaching and learning quality, anxiety, and other mental health issues. Findings on the strategies that students employed to overcome the different online challenges revealed that the most common

strategies used were (1) resource management and utilization; (2) help-seeking; (3) technical aptitude enhancement; (4) time management; and (5) learning environment control. The study identified implications that can be drawn from these findings, such as the importance of emergency response capability and the readiness of higher education institutions in case another crisis strikes again; the need to strengthen resources and internet infrastructure and to address poor home learning environments should there be a need to shift to full online learning in the future.

Similarly, Xia et al. (2022) examined challenges encountered by college students in online learning during the pandemic. Findings show that a lack of technology skills and low learning motivation result in students' low engagement in online learning. Overall, it was found that although online learning can help safeguard the health of students and faculty, it has proven to be less successful than traditional learning. It was concluded that students' poor performance in online learning can be partly due to their dissatisfaction with the format and quality of course delivery and their lack of interaction with others, leading to boredom and low motivation to learn. Nevertheless, findings have revealed that online learning offers college students a new way to learn independently and to collaborate and build relationships with peers, which can encourage students to reconsider how to improve their technical skills, learning methods, and communication skills, and to review their responsibilities as term members.

1. What common challenges in online learning confronted college students during the pandemic?
2. How did the students cope with the challenges they encountered?
3. What lessons were learned by students from their experiences?

2. Methodology

This study used a descriptive quali-quantitative research design. The typology of challenges

examined in the study was based on Rasheed et al.'s (2020) review of students' experiences in a online learning environment. A Google survey was made available online in which 910 college students from various tertiary-level programs, such as teacher education, arts and humanities, sciences, business and accountancy, hospitality and tourism management, and engineering and architecture, responded. About twenty-eight percent of the respondents were male, while roughly 72 percent were female. Data from the survey were thematized for similarity and then tabulated. A Google link was shared with the students, who were given the freedom to decide whether or not to respond to the survey. No token was offered to the students before or after responding to the survey. The most common responses were presented in tables, and sample

responses were selected. Respondents were de-identified throughout the writing of this article. Data from the survey are treated with confidentiality and used solely for the purpose of this study.

The Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) in a seminal paper, is a pedagogical model for online and blended learning. It posits that deep, meaningful learning occurs at the intersection of three interdependent elements: social, cognitive, and teaching presence. Social Presence refers to participants' ability to connect, communicate, and form relationships within the learning community. Cognitive Presence refers to the process of constructing meaning through reflection and discourse

3. Results

This section presents the findings of the study.

- A. Challenges encountered pertaining to course content, relationship with teacher, and connectivity

Table 1 Challenges Encountered by Students in Online Learning (N-910)

Challenges encountered by Students	Frequency	Percentage
1. Difficult Courses/excessive work- (238/910 or 26.15%)	258	28.35%
2. Inability of teachers to provide sufficient discussion of lessons, and feedback and materials for learning	120	13.19%
2. Limitations of space and environment	33	3.62%
3. Inability of teachers to empathize	76	8.35%
4. Lack of Connectivity/Lack of budget for Load	529	58.13%
1. Time management between school and work/household chores	18	1.97%

Table 1 shows the different challenges encountered by students in online learning. It can be derived that among the challenges identified, lack of connectivity or lack of money to avail data load constitutes the biggest reason (about 60 percent) for online learning difficulty. This is followed by difficulty of courses, most often caused by excessive work assignments. Reports about teachers' inability to empathize come third.

- a. Lack of Connectivity/Lack of Budget for Load- (529/910 or 58.13%)

Below are some of the students' testimonies about the challenge of poor connectivity in online learning.

S58: "Ngayong semester na ito, naranasan ko ang umiyak dahil wala akong pera at di ako nakapasok dahil wala akong panload, na parang hindi ka na makakasabay sa lesson kapag absent

ka o wala kang load. Naranasan ko rin ang mapagalitan sa klase dahil hindi ako nakakapag-participate.” [This semester, I experienced crying because I have no money and I wasn’t able to attend class because my phone had no load, thereby missing lectures.]

S904: “Dahil sa kahinaan ng net dito, ako ay nakakuha nang tatlong INC.” [Because of the poor connectivity, I have acquired three Incomplete grades]

S657: “Sa nakaraang semester at sa ngayong semester, ang pagsubok na aking naranasan ay iyong sabay-sabay na module na ibinibigay, lalo na ng 1st sem. Halos hindi kasya ang isang araw para sa isang subject kasi halos umaabot ng tig-apat na module. Ngayong sem naman, nagagastusan ako sa load; ngayon nag-o-online class din kami, sobrang gastos sa data. Kasi isipin mo, hindi naman lahat may allowance sa internet; kumakayod din kami tulad ng mga magulang para may maipang-tustos sa load pang-online class.” [During the previous and the current semester, are modules given at the same time. One day is not enough to work on one course because there are four modules assigned to us every time. This semester, we attend online classes, and it’s expensive because not many of us have money allotted for internet use. We need to do a part-time job so we can finance our data/ load to attend online sessions.

Data on students who experienced poor connection are often those (1) who come from economically underprivileged families, (2) those who live in rural areas of the province, (3) those who are self-supporting. According to UNICEF, two thirds of the world’s school-age children—or 1.3 billion children aged 3 to 17 years old—do not have internet connection in their homes, according to a new joint report from UNICEF and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) (December 2020). A similar article from UNICEF (December 2020) notes a similar lack of access among young people aged 15–24 years old, with 759 million or 63 per cent unconnected at home.

b. Difficult courses and excessive coursework.

Below are students’ reports on difficulties encountered in their courses.

S3: “I think most of the students, including me, had difficulty understanding our lessons without our teachers’ explanations. Especially when we basically need to self-study this academic year.”

S58: “Some courses give time-bounded activities, which are sometimes difficult to comply with, especially when other courses also have the same deadline. My biggest struggle was our PE class because our house is too small to perform activities which require large movements”.

These statements suggest that the students’ learning is affected by limited input from teachers during online classes and by strict deadlines. This finding coincides with Sabio and Sabio’s (2024) finding that among the challenges met by Filipino students in coping with online remote learning is the difficulty in meeting deadlines, assignments, and workloads. They complain of limited time given to prepare and submit their tasks, too many assignments being given that overlap with the deadlines given by other professors, and the overwhelming workloads given by teachers. Yuefan, et al. (2022) argues that online learning may not produce the desired results due to a lack of interaction with instructors, no campus socialization, or insufficiently trained technology skills, as well as the need for appropriate content for online courses and group work.

C. Limitations of space and environment

Since lockdown was implemented in 2022 to 2022, students had to stay home and participate in online learning. Among the many challenges encountered is learning from home. Some responses are worth mentioning here.

S713: “I’ve struggled with learning in a way that I became passive in studying because there are so many distractions at home.”

S210: “Hindi lahat may healthy and comfortable environment kaya kadalasan late na magpasa tapos yung ibang subject kailangan ng kasama sa video, required and naka lagay pa sa rubric. Sana

po next time maging option nalang yun kasi nga hindi naman lahat ay komportableng relationship sa family o healthy environment sa bahay.” [Not everyone has a healthy and comfortable environment hence some of us submit late performance tasks. In some courses require video outputs and performance rubrics have to be followed to the letter. I hope next time, such requirement becomes optional since not everyone has a home that is conducive to learning]

S891: “Sa katunayan niyan itong last quarter nakitira ako dito sa kâkilala nang mama ko pero Hindi naging madali sakín dahil subrang dami trabaho akala ko titira Lang ako dito mag online class at tutulong nang Gawain bahay pero ung kahit may klase ka Wala sila pakialam Basta utusan kanila subrang hirap mawala sa o malayo SA parents dirin ako makareklamo sa kanila ayaw ko Po Kasi nang aalala sila sakín.” [As a matter of fact, this quarter, I lived with my mother’s acquaintance but it did not become easy for me. There were plenty of things to do (at home). I thought I would live there, attend online classes, and help with house chores, but even if I have classes, they don’t really care. They will ask you to work for them. It was so difficult. I didn’t tell my parents. I did not want them to worry.]

S157: “It is honestly quite harder than the normal set-up. Our lives in our houses and school are practiced together in the same environment; it is harder to manage time, and we are open to more distractions.”

These testimonies coincide with Sabio and Sabio (2022). Another issue that was mentioned by the students is the limitation of spaces and the general environment at home while studying online. Similarly, in Rotas and Cahapay (2020), poor learning environment was also mentioned as among the difficulties expressed by the students in remote learning. The findings revealed that students do not find their homes a conducive place to study.

D. Inability of teachers to empathize (120–13.19%)

Students reported that they were not motivated to learn due to the teacher’s not discussing the lessons, not regularly attending the synchronous classes, not providing feedback on students’

outputs, and not providing enough learning materials-

S 305: “May mga i-ilang guro pa rin ang tila hindi alintana ang hamon na dala ng pandemya, hindi ito paglalapat ng dahilan sa mga pagkakataon na huli at wala sa oras na binigay na deadline ang aming requirements, dahil nga sa karamihan na nilang sinasabi ang mga koleheyo ay na sa punto na ng buhay na gumagawa ng mga adulting decisions at hindi lang pag-aaral ang sa ngayon ang sa kanilang kaisipan kundi rin ay kung saan kukuha ng pinansyal na tulong para sa kanilang pamilya. Ang amin lamang na hiling ay bigyan nyo rin minsan ng mas malawakang pag-unawa sa tulad naming mag-aaral na hikahos at sinusubukang ipagpatuloy ang nais sa buhay sakabila ng pandemya.” [There were still some teachers who did not care about the challenges (we students) encountered. We were not trying to make excuses for the instances in which assigned tasks were submitted late; rather, the fact is that unreasonable deadlines were given, which we were expected to meet. College students are at the stage where they make adulting decisions. Besides studying, they still think about where to get financial support for their families. What we ask is that you, our teachers, from time to time extend your understanding to us students who are poor yet still trying to reach for our dreams despite the pandemic]

S432. “Mayroon rin kaming gurong hindi marunong mag-considerate. Kung minsan dahilan para mas lalong humirap ang paghahabol ng requirements.” [We have a teacher who is not considerate and even causes extreme difficulty for us to cope with requirements in other courses.]

S824: “May ibang teacher na dika maintindi like ‘maam wala pong connection dito kasi dito puko nakatira sa bundok o mahina yon signal kay di ako maka-join sa class,” then sasabihin ng teacher, ‘gumawa ka ng paraan; di sa amin ang problema.’ Haysst. Pero kapag sila no class because of poor connection, ay qualified agad. Paano naman po kami.” [There are teachers who don’t seem to understand that some of us live in areas where there is hardly any connectivity. When we try to explain our case, they would respond like, “You find ways. We are not the problem.” But when teachers cannot

come to class, they can easily assert that they do not have stable connection].

Anxiety/Depression/Loneliness due to unfamiliarity with the technology—(72/910 or 7.91%)

Below are some of the students who reported experiencing stress and anxiety due to their inability to adjust to online learning and the excessive tasks assigned to them in their courses.

S11: “My sanity is dwindling all because of the stress and pressure brought upon me. I am also suffering from low self-esteem and extreme stress.”

S752: “Some outputs from other subjects keep piling up as if they don't even know that we students are sometimes struggling with other subjects too. I mean, for me it's okay, but giving us a short time to do 'ALL' of them is hard. We have assignments or outputs from other subjects that need to be done too, so it's affecting us mentally and bothering us even in our sleep or on weekends, where weekends are supposed to be the rest for us students.”

The crisis on mental health for students dealing with online learning coincides with Barrot, Llenares, and del Rosario (2022), who found that the COVID-19 pandemic had the greatest impact on the quality of the learning experience and students' mental health.

Likewise, David, Bazelais, and Doleck (2021) found that students reported increased stress and anxiety and difficulties concentrating, suggesting that the obstacles to fully online learning were not only technological and instructional challenges but also social and affective challenges of isolation and social distancing. In addition, Wang (2023) found that the research finds that distance learning is less effective for first-year students than for fourth-year students because the former cannot effectively adapt and communicate in a new social environment and develop trusting interpersonal relationships with fellow students and teachers.

B. Coping Strategies Employed by Students to the Challenges Met

For this section, students were instructed to identify as many strategies as they could that they would often use to cope with their challenges. Data from the responses yielded at least four groups of coping strategies, which are the following: (1) Emotion-focused coping, (2) Problem-focused coping, and (3) Spiritual/Diversion coping.

a. Socio-emotional coping—38.79%

a1. Family/Peer support/Asking external help from family and friends—(154/910 or 16.92%)

a2. Open-mindedness/positive interpretation/Acceptance—(199/910 or 21.86%)

Socio-emotional coping is a positive attitude used by students when faced with challenges. Social coping is seeking the company of friends and classmates or relatives for company and advice. Financial support may also be sought. Emotion coping may be derived from the company of people close to a person, but oftentimes, emotion coping may be done alone when a person does not allow challenges to defeat him or her. Instead of dwelling on frustrations and worries, they approach the challenges of online learning through open-

mindedness and optimism. Open-mindedness and optimism were chosen by about 22 of students; about 17 percent seek the support of family and friends.

Below are some of students' sample responses that make use of emotion-coping.

S172: “I always stay positive and build my trust to myself. Mas nagiging confident ako at naglalaan ako ng panahon ko para sa pag-aaral.” [*...hence I become more confident and prioritize my education*]

S337: “Likas sa aking ang maging mapamaraan; palagi kong iniisip na ang mga bagay-bagay na nangyayari sa aking paligid ay pagsubok lamang at kailangan ko itong harapin. Ang pagiging

kuntento sa kung anong mayroon ay aking mas binibigyang halaga. Pagdating sa aspektong edukasyon, palagi ko na lamang iniisip na mabuti pa rin na kahit papaano ay may bago akong kaalamang natututunan sa kabila nang pagsubok na ating kinakaharap.” [It’s natural for me to be resourceful. I always think that what is happening around me are just trials which I can overcome. What matters is that I am contented about what I have. When it comes to education, it’s good to learn something new despite all the odds]

S611: “Well, the pandemic affected mostly our social life. Because it’s just depressing that you cannot go to school and talk to your friends. So my strategy in overcoming that problem is family time. “

In a study conducted by Radovanovic et al. (2023) evaluating the occurrence of depression, anxiety, and stress, as well as the level of life contentment and coping mechanisms employed by college students amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, it was found that the most coping mechanisms, based on average scores, were acceptance (5.76), positive interpretation (5.55), and humor (5.46).

It is a positive indication of Filipino college students’ resilience that about 39% of them employ socio-emotional coping strategies specifically positive interpretation and acceptance in the midst of challenges during the pandemic.

b. Problem Solving—Coping

b1. Creating a good study habit/organized, resourceful/time management—(550 or 60.43%)

b2. Financial Management—(47/910 or 5.16%)

b3. Being patient/hardworking/focused- (115/910 or 12.64%)—(155/910 or 17.03%)

b4. By having technical know-how with the technology—(40/910 or 4.40%)

b5. Regular engagement in both online and offline modalities—(15/910 or 1.65%)

b6. Finding a place with strong internet connectivity—(21/910 or 2.31%)

S539: “I tried to manage my time and learned to use various tools or technologies that could be helpful for my online learning.”

S703: “I performed time blocking or scheduling my tasks for the entire day, and I take time to do things I like when I feel my positivity is running low. I also try to make reviewers as much as possible to help myself learn even if I am alone. I make sure to attend my online classes because I sometimes struggle with learning with a book alone.”

S742: “Gumawa ko ng timetable sa aming bahay dahil malala talaga ang aking sitwasyon pagdating sa planning. Epektibo naman at nag-a-adjust pa rin. Buti na lamang ay nagse-self study na ako bago pa ang pandemic kaya hindi rin ganoon kabigat sa akin ang ibang mga subjects.” [I created a timetable (of activities) because I used to be very disorganized. It was effective and I keep on adjusting. It was good that I was self-studying before the pandemic that’s why the courses have not been difficult for me]

S459: “Focus sa bawat aralin, kailangan kong makinig at intindihin ang lahat ng aralin, kailangan ko rin makipag-interact sa klase, ang pag-rerecite ay nangangahulugan lamang para sa akin na ako ay nakikinig at nakakasabay sa itinuturo ng aking guro.” [I just have to focus and be more diligent. I need to interact more in class to show that I’m listening]

Ruihua et al. (2025) conducted a systematic review of studies on both direct and indirect effects of social support. Direct effects include improved psychological and emotional well-being, reduced stress, and better health behavior. Indirect effects highlight social support’s role as a mediator, enhancing resilience, self-esteem, and life satisfaction by providing emotional and informational resources. These results emphasize the importance of nurturing supportive relationships to promote student well-being.

C. Spiritual- coping

C1. Spiritual involvement/praying [Pagdarasal]- (270/910 or 29.67%)

C2. Seeking diversions/recreation (Pag-iwas o kaya paglilibang)-(64/910 or 7.03%)

S279: "I will always pray; everything will be fine, and I will maintain a positive mindset."

S57: "The thing that I always do when I get overwhelmed is I take a breather. I pause for a bit and put my mind at ease. After the stress and troublesome thoughts disappear, I go back to doing the tasks at hand. Playing games and visiting my social media accounts became therapeutic activities as well."

According to Deak and Mengga (2023), coping mechanisms help someone overcome their psychological problems. Coping skills are very necessary for every individual in managing and dealing with psychological stress. Various coping mechanisms can be done. For a believer, prayer is a spiritual-religious coping strategy that is very possible to practice while struggling in the healing process.

As regards the use of social media as a diversion from stress, Sun, Li, Zhang, and Zhang (2023)

C . The students most important learnings both in life and in the academe

Table 2 Students' Most Important Learnings from the Challenges of the Pandemic (N=910)

Theme	f (n=910)	%
a. Adapt to new normal classes	235	25.82
b. Take initiatives in learning on your own	172	18.90
c. Balance time and resources	164	18.02
d. Value the importance of education	125	13.73
e. Keep determination, discipline, and positivity strong	87	9.56
f. Continue to have determination toward achieving your dreams	67	7.36
g. There are times when you have sacrificed in life just to fulfill your dreams	29	3.18
h. Budget one's finances for future expenses that matter	19	2.08
i. Be patient and flexible	19	2.08

found that perceived COVID-19 stress was related to the intensity of social media use for problem-focused coping, socioemotional coping, and mental disengagement. In addition, individuals' psychological adjustment was positively associated with social media use for socioemotional coping and mental disengagement while negatively related to problem-focused coping.

Overall, students may be said to employ more than two or more types of coping mechanisms. This is not surprising because, as one may possess a mature perception about learning challenges, such students believe that positive action is as important as a positive attitude toward any barrier to a goal. Hence, a student may carry optimism into a negative situation while also realizing the importance of time management and organization and putting that realization into action.

As shown in Table 2, twenty-six percent (26%) of the respondents maintained that the most important learnings in life and academe is to adapt to the new normal classes. This is followed by 21% of them who responded that they need to take initiatives to learn on their own ways to cope with the new normal situation, while 17% of the survey respondents said that they need to balance time management for schoolwork and household chores. Thirteen percent of the respondents realized that they should value the importance of education, while nine percent of the total respondents believe that even though we are in this kind of new normal situation, they should not give up on their dreams despite the challenges they are facing. Seven percent of the respondents said that they should continue to have determination toward achieving their dreams.

The most important learnings of the respondents during the academic semester in the midst of a pandemic differed from one another. The respondents tend to adapt to the new normal situation, wherein they learn to manage their time in doing school activities as well as household chores since they were just staying at home. But in spite of those challenges that they encountered during the academic year, the respondents still have the determination to achieve their dreams. The respondents took the initiative to learn on their own and prioritize education because they believe that education is the key to help their families and themselves achieve their dreams.

In a research conducted by Fore et al. (2023), data suggest that students favor interactive activities to mend the online communication gap between students and professor(s). Overall, students recognize that online courses require a substantial amount of work and that specific qualities are embodied by successful students, including excellent time management skills and being independent and responsible. The findings help craft a “road map” for online course structure and content.

5. Discussion

Despite the resilience demonstrated by college students during the Covid-19 pandemic, the findings revealed the extreme effect of lockdown on education. The unhappiness and stresses of having to cope with unreasonable task deadlines, the difficulty of interpreting modules with little help from teachers, the extremely poor connection, and the deprivation in online learning experienced by the majority of students in developing countries like the Philippines could leave our students not just with psychological pain from not being able to fully learn the discipline and practice of their supposed profession, but also with anxiety for the future, where they, who are already professionals yet deprived of the significant knowledge, skills, and values they could have possessed had this pandemic not occurred among us, might find themselves unable to immediately deliver and meet the world's expectations.

Findings from the present study suggest that the transactional model of stress and coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) needs to be expanded when applied to prolonged, systemic crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic in developing nations. The findings imply limitations of "appraisal" in chronic, structural crises. Firstly, Lazarus and Folkman define primary appraisal as deciding whether an event is irrelevant, positive, or stressful (harm, threat, or challenge). The current findings show that for students in developing countries, the threat is not a discrete, manageable stressor. It is a continuous, overwhelming structural failure (poor internet, bad modules). The model understates how constant macro-level deprivation turns every minor academic task into an unmanageable threat. Second, Lazarus and Folkman's framework shows that secondary appraisal assumes individuals weigh their resources (time, money, social support, skills) to handle the stress. Findings from the current study, however, show that the resources are fundamentally absent or blocked (no help from teachers, poor connection). The theory assumes

a baseline of accessible tools; when the environment completely deprives the individual, secondary appraisal breaks down into learned helplessness or chronic anxiety.

Lazarus and Folkman categorize coping into *problem-focused* (fixing the problem) and *emotion-focused* (managing the emotional response). The present study reveals an existential, future-oriented anxiety—the fear of becoming an incompetent professional. This goes beyond the traditional scope of immediate coping. Students cannot use problem-focused coping because they cannot fix the internet or the poorly designed modules. Furthermore, emotion-focused coping only masks the deeper dread of professional failure. The theory needs to account for *anticipatory professional identity trauma*, where the stressor is a permanent deficit in future capability rather than a present inconvenience.

As regards teaching, in whatever mode it is delivered, it will always remain, and should always remain, a caring profession. During the pandemic, data from students reported experiences with teachers who might have deliberately ignored student messages and failed to consider late submissions, even though they were aware that most students were either experiencing poor connections or lacking financial support to purchase data as regularly as possible. In addition, plenty of data showed problems with teachers who assigned so many tasks but provided so little input—unclear instructions with so little feedback on students' work and ratings.

Although the pandemic has ended, this era has caused educational systems around the world to adopt online learning; in fact, developed countries implemented online learning even before the pandemic. The transition to a hybrid learning system, or more appropriately, the partial transition to online learning, has practically addressed not only the rising cost of education but also the shortage of classrooms and the lack of teachers in many developing countries like the Philippines. For many, online learning has slowly closed the distance between

the school and its target students who live in geographically isolated areas of a country. Surrounding problems, however, occur with the implementation of online learning, such as connectivity issues and ensuring the quality of learning for courses that necessitate the presence of laboratory equipment, hands-on activities, and students' actual engagement in learning.

During typhoons, teachers are often advised to conduct classes asynchronously. Indeed, this is the era of the new normal. To ensure that students enjoy full learning, the present study suggests strengthening the monitoring system of colleges not only during face classes but, more importantly, when online classes are held. The habit of regularly checking attendance by chairpersons or the attendance committee will promote faculty attendance in their classes even without being checked. It is also suggested that observations of online classes by immediate supervisors be conducted unannounced to ensure that teachers remain prepared for class even when no one is looking.

Since students generally encounter challenges in adjusting to the hybrid mode of learning, dealing with asynchronous tasks, and managing stress brought on by various factors, to help students cope with the stress of the post-pandemic period and build resiliency, the school should offer stress management workshops and webinars. Students require assistance from the school. These stress management training sessions aim to recognize common emotions and issues associated with the new normal.

One limitation of the study is that it did not involve students from different parts of the country. Nevertheless, the 910 college students, from a state university in an island province in the Philippines, may not necessarily represent the experiences of students from other universities in the mainland provinces, which have easier access to online connectivity. Still, it is assumed that since all academic institutions were on lockdown for a prolonged duration of time, it is highly likely that students living in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDA) are largely represented in the

present study, given that the university is located in an island province. The Philippines is a country that is largely made up of island provinces.

6. Conclusion

Findings from the study have shown that pandemic lockdowns overwhelmed college students' coping resources, revealing that institutional support is essential to prevent long-term professional and psychological damage. One important contribution of the present study is that the findings challenge the existing traditional stress theory, including Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress and coping theory, which views resilience as successful adaptation or bouncing back after a stressful encounter. Contrary to findings from previous studies drawn from the theory, the current findings here show that student "resilience" was stretched to a breaking point, where it coexisted with extreme psychological pain and unfulfilled learning. The theory must distinguish between *genuine adaptation* and *forced endurance*. Surviving a broken educational system does not mean the coping mechanisms were healthy or successful; it often meant absorbing hidden damage that manifests later in professional life.

Further, findings in the current study show that the crisis in education during the pandemic was not just a personal stress issue; rather, it was a structural failure in remote education infrastructure. It was observed that some graduates from developing countries like the Philippines did not have the privilege of in-person on-the-job training because of lockdowns. Consequently, some of them may face a heavy burden trying to meet industry standards without the skills they should have learned in school.

Based on the findings, the present study recommends the following:

First, to help students cope with the stress of the post-pandemic period and build resiliency, the school should offer stress management workshops and webinars. Students require assistance from the school. These stress management training sessions aim to recognize common emotions and issues associated with online learning.

Second, with plenty of reports of teachers manifesting an uncaring attitude toward their students, it is suggested that lectures on dealing with students be included in teacher conferences to remind teachers that professionalism requires not only the knowledge to teach but also to be caring. More importantly, institutions should create regular, monitored evaluations of faculty members by students to safeguard the welfare of students themselves while ensuring that there is an authentic basis for merit promotion of faculty.

Third, to address learning shortcomings, academic institutions may offer catch-up programs and hands-on training to repair missed learning, provide ongoing counseling to ease student anxiety about the future, and create future online learning plans that account for poor internet access and provide clear teaching guides.

Finally, research on the current experiences and challenges encountered by our students who subscribe to the hybrid mode of learning that the university offers is not only an interesting study but also timely and relevant. A systematic study of this nature will help improve policy in implementing hybrid programs, but more importantly, influence and develop practice.

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8. Author Declaration

I declare that this work is original and I confirm that no conflict of interest arose either during the conduct of the study or during the writing of the article for publication.