Exploring the Lived Experiences of the Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College Students in the New Learning Environment

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Abstract. *Many activities, including those related to education, have been successfully shut down globally due to the COVID-19 epidemic. The lived experiences of the ISPSC students are essential and play a crucial role in identifying the significant challenges during this uncertain and complex period and their experiences in an online learning environment and coping strategies. The study used a phenomenological research methodology. Thematic qualitative data analysis involves quoting and explaining the participants' replies in words by grouping them into themes based on how closely they are related. The study's result showed that the said students' significant challenges were lack of high-speed internet, mental health struggles, and poor time management. Furthermore, the student's experiences in the online learning environment were self-explanation and technology-savvy skills.*

Keywords: *Lived Experiences, New Learning Environment, Challenges, Coping Strategies.*

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 19) pandemic stunned and stopped the globe at the start of 2020. Due to COVID-19, educational systems and universities worldwide have experienced a tremendous change to an online education paradigm. The emergence of the pandemic compelled educational platforms to ensure student safety. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers at all school levels struggle to switch from in-person instruction to online learning.

The COVID-19 pandemic has prevented students from engaging in face-to-face learning within the classroom. As an immediate response to ensure educational continuity, this epidemic has paved the way for the introduction of modular distance learning. Modular Distance Learning features individualized instruction that allows learners to use self-learning modules (SLMs) in print or digital format or electronic copy, whichever applies to the learner. Learners under Modular Distance Learning can also use Learner's Materials, textbooks, activity sheets, study guides, and other study materials.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highly affected our society because of its health risks that may lead to danger. One of the affected sectors was education, which resulted in the suspension of classes to avoid the virus's spread. Also, education develops the individual's personality and thoughts when dealing with other people and prepares anybody for reality and life experiences (Al-Shuaibi, 2014)

Face-to-face learning is usually where the instructor and the student meet in a set place for a set time, for either one-on-one learning or, most commonly, in gathering class lessons comparable to what happens in school. Face-to-face learning could be a truly compelling way to memorize information and abilities since it frequently combines distinctive ways of learning to count writing, reading, discussion, presentations, projects, group work, film clips, demonstration, and practice (Lochman, 2017)

Online learning is the most up-to-date and prevalent form of distance education nowadays. It has significantly affected postsecondary education in the past decade, and the trend is only increasing. Online learning is an instruction that takes put over the internet. It is frequently referred to as "e-learning," among other terms. However, online learning is fair to "distance learning" - the umbrella term for any learning that takes place over distance and not in a traditional classroom. (Rifiyanti, 2020)

The Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management of ISPSC is a four-year program that develops the learners' employable skills and competencies in preparation for the work waiting in the real world. The course aims to make graduates competitive locally and internally. The said course covers the conception, planning, development, human resource, and management of the hotel, restaurant, and resort operations.

Becoming a BSHM graduate and a professional requires various characteristics if one wants to work in the hospitality sector. A suitable employer and environment are an excellent opportunity to build a strong relationships and rapport among co-workers and employers (AGCAS, 2021). Hospitality management is one of the courses that are in high demand around the world. This degree will open doors to exciting opportunities and an excellent high salary. In some areas, the hospitality industry plays a vital role in the satisfaction of clients (iNurture, 2016).

Educating future managers and executives poses a challenge to these programs, given the number of different operational segments included under the rubric of hospitality industries, all unique entities sharing typical hospitality and tourism elements: restaurants, hotels, travel, attractions, conventions, and leisure. Creative thinking, global exposure, job security, great perks, world opportunities, and high employable rate are the things the profession offers (Choudhary, 2016)

The lived experiences of BSHM students during this unprecedented moment must be the school's top priority. As the phenomenon exists in our modern era, it is necessary to be aware of the significant problems and hurdles experienced by students during the peak of the epidemic and hereafter in order to develop measures to address such issues. This is also to respond and plan to improve the uncertainty and volatility in the learning environment to lead to a better outcome.

This study's purpose was to qualitatively evaluate students' learning experiences in the new learning environment. Notably, it determined the the learning challenges encountered during the pandemic; and the coping strategies used by the students.

A modern economy needs highly trained and skilled human resources, and higher education institutions (HEIs) are required to produce qualified graduates to meet the needs of national development and employers. The industry defines its workforce's characteristics and skill requirements, which may or may not be matched by the graduates being produced by HEIs.

The primary function of the hospitality industry is to serve people, provide assistance, and attend to people's needs while they are in the four corners of an establishment (ILO, 2010). According to IMPOFF (2020), the hospitality industry can be split into four sections: food and beverages, travel and tourism, lodging, and recreation. It can include hotels, restaurants, events, entertainment, cruises, and more. Among all areas, the primary goal is to help customers have an enjoyable and comfortable experience by the services establishments provide.

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Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management (BSHM) is a degree program that produces graduates connected to building careers in the leisure industry, which involves planning, development, implementation, and control of culinary accommodation/billeting operations. The BSHM program trains and equips learners with the competencies that are needed to perform tasks on food production and accommodation operations and food-beverage service operations. The program aims to make earners exceedingly competent hospitality management practitioners serving their constituents and other concerned professions while showing ethical and moral standards and professional technical competence

On Covid 19 Pandemic

The Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic defines the global health crisis of our time and the most significant challenge we have faced since World War II. COVID-19 (Coronavirus) has affected day-to-day life and is slowing the global economy. Thousands of people have been impacted by this epidemic, either ill or dying due to the disease's spread. The most common symptoms of this viral infection are fever, cold, cough, bone pain, and breathing problems, ultimately leading to pneumonia. Vaccines are not yet available because this new viral disease affects humans for the first time. Thus, the emphasis is on taking extensive precautions such as extensive hygiene protocol (e.g., regularly washing hands, avoiding face-to-face interaction etc.), social distancing, wearing masks, and so on.

COVID-19 has rapidly affected our day-to-day life and businesses and disrupted world trade and movements. Identification of the disease at an early stage is vital to control the spread of the virus because it very rapidly spreads from person to person.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the interconnected nature of our world – and that no one is safe until everyone is safe. Only by acting in solidarity can communities save lives and overcome the devastating socio-economic impacts of the virus.

On Online Learning

Digital transformation is not a novel phenomenon; it has been accompanying higher education institutions for some years now (Kopp, 2019). Digital transformation of Higher Education institutions is a topical issue that several stakeholders of education must feel concerned about; abilities to apply ICT in every sphere of life are on an incremental level; thus, universities must be up to the task of preparing potential professional to be able to face challenges and provide solutions

(Bond, 2018) a study has suggested integrating sustainable management to adjust to the modifications enforced due to novel technologies (Abad-Segura, 2017) and the recent pandemic. Digital transformation in the context of higher education institutions can be regarded as the summation of all digital processes required to accomplish the transformation process that gives higher education institutions the opportunities to positively apply digital technologies optimally (Kopp, 2019). This process also consists of adequate strategic preparation, trust establishment,

thinking in processes, amalgamation and reinforcement of all parties involved, and separate, collaborative, and organizational knowledge (Cameron, 2019)

According to (Hiltz, 2005), the modern transformation will be seen as revolutionary changes in the requirements of higher education as a process and as an institution in the next 50 years because it has moved face-to-face instructional programs using objectivist, teacher-centered teaching methods for thousands of homegrown, provincial, and domestic universities to online and hybrid programs using digital technologies in enhancing constructivism.These researchers added that online learning is a novel social process that has been gathering momentum as the surrogate for the regular face-to-face classroom but is viewed from the perspective of replacement processes that has been branded as disruptive processes. The covid-19 pandemic initiated the digital transformation of higher education. The Covid-19 pandemic crisis has accelerated the introduction of novelties in higher education that would ordinarily take years due to different managerial restrictions (Strielkowski, 2020). This has also changed the perception of online learning as a disruptive process to one of a "messiah" status.

While assessing the assumptions surrounding the digital transformation of higher education institutions, (Kopp, 2019) gave five common assumptions that are considered hindrances to the digital transformation of higher education institutions as against contributions to its realization. These assumptions are related to (i) change, (ii) pace, (iii) technology, (iv) competencies, and (v) financing. Digitalization in higher education institutions should not be referred to as e-learning since online learning is only one of the several features of the digital transformation of higher education institutions. "Online learning" refers to the educational use of technological tools, devices, and the internet (Means, 2009). Tallent-Runnels (2006) added that since the turn of the millennium, increased internet accessibility and technological innovation had increased the motivation for online learning. However, Joshi (2020) concluded that the instructional success of online learning is disputed because it results in the absence of face-to-face relationships between learners. (Hodges, 2020) differentiated adequately planned online learning experiences from courses presented online to respond to a crisis. These researchers went further to refer to online education during this pandemic as "emergency remote teaching" because the latter contrasts with quality or effective online learning.

Effective online education consists of online teaching and learning, boosting several research works, principles, prototypes, theories, ethics, and appraisal of benchmark concentrations on quality online course design, teaching, and learning (Hodges, 2020). Since it has been confirmed that effective online learning is a byproduct of cautious design and planning of instruction with the application of organized models for designing and developing of instruction (Branch, 2015). The absence of a cautious design and development process (Branch, 2015) in the migration process gave birth to the rejection of the recent online education experience during this pandemic as effective online education instead as emergency remote teaching (Bozkurt, 2020)

METHODS

A qualitative method, specifically the phenomenology design, was employed to explore students' lived experiences on their learning during the pandemic. Phenomenological research looks at people's perceptions of the world by exploring the lived experience of a concept or a phenomenon from several individuals to interpret the common meaning (Creswell, 2017)]. In doing phenomenological research, it does not require getting inside someone's mind. Instead, a researcher is supposed to meditate and theorize how things manifest and appear through and in day-to-day living (Vagle, 2014). The study included ten students enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management. The study's objectives were explained to the students, who were also aware that the information would only be used for academic and research purposes.

After the College officials' approval in the study, the participants were invited to participate voluntarily in an interview via messenger. The researchers set available dates and times for the participants to answer honestly. They were also informed that the interview was recorded for

further procedures. The semi-structured interview consisted of two-ended questions focusing on their experiences and challenges encountered during their learning during the pandemic and the coping strategies in the new learning environment. Data saturation was achieved when the same information was obtained, and the participants could no longer give additional or different information. After which, the transcripts were transcribed. The collected data were coded, and themes were produced.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Major Challenges You Incurred During the Pandemic:

Lack of High-Speed Internet. In the age of online learning, a concern facing students living in rural areas and remote communities is the lack of high-speed internet to attend lectures and conduct any evaluation.

" Interactivity, Stress and the place (bad study environment). We are learning remotely and sometimes it making me feel isolated hence the Stress of being distracted because of the noise and other responsibility I have to do as a member of the family greatly affects my concentration." [P3]

"The experience of distance education during the pandemic has highlighted the issue of students' independent learning. Here in our country one of the major problems when it comes to virtual learning is that Some students are complaining about their internet connection." [P5]

"Tough, having to balance your life being a daughter and a student at the same time plus the challenge like poor internet connection. However, I do appreciate the effort our teacher putting to teach us." [P2]

"The bad internet connection is one of the aspects that make the learning more difficult. Not all students have computer or cellphones. Also financial, which is needed for internet." [P2}

"One of the aspects was having bad internet connection. In order to join online classes, you'll be needing fast internet connection so that you can come up to all the topics." [P5]

" Insufficient Internet Connectivity." [P3]

Sometimes experiencing slow internet connectivity" [P7]

"Unstable Internet Connectivity" [P8]

Mental Health Struggles. Due to Covid-19 Pandemic, colleges and universities all over the world transitioned into online classes. The health and safety of the students is the utmost priority during the pandemic, and online schooling is the only best option during these times. Online classes affect the mental health of students.

During this pandemic, it was been so tough and difficult to adopt new changes especially the learning system. It's hard for me because I wasn't able to engage myself again to teachers and students which I need the most. This pandemic brought so much negativity and it really affect the mental health of everyone. [P2]

Stress, anxiety and loneliness were the top challenges of us students identified the dealing with during the fall semester, and those issues outweighed stressors such as struggling financially or managing academic workload. [P1]

Interactivity, Stress and the place (bad study environment). We are learning remotely and sometimes it making me feel isolated hence the stress of being distracted because of the noise and other responsibility I have to do as member of the family it greatly affects my concentration. [P3]

It can be tiring and stressful making it hard to focus. However, having the courage and persistence to adjust to these changes is one of the major keys in surviving this new kind of learning. [P3}

Poor Time Management. One of the most significant issues that impact online learners is poor time management. Lack of schedules, distractions, and multitasking can lead to poor time management. Another factor that may lead to poor time management is the lack of designated work space.

It is the load of work at home and school, the data connection, and the problem with time management. [P10]

Insufficient internet, Self-motivation, Mental exhaustion, drastic change in study habits, time management. {P9]

Coping Strategies

Self-Explanation: Due to a number of cases during this challenging period, face-to-face instruction is not permitted. Online learning is the substitution for face-to-face learning. Self-explanation is a learning technique in which students explain themselves pieces of learning material to improve their understanding.

It was like learning independently, unsure if the knowledge you were trying to adopt was proper. Self-explanation and self-discovery [P8]. Learning in a modular environment is hard for some reason. It is difficult to focus and hard to understand the modules since we are only learning on our own. It feels flexible and given a chance to learn by myself

Technological Savvy: Being technology savvy is essentially one's skill to be smart with technology. This skill reaches beyond understanding the concepts of how technology works and encompasses utilizing such modern technology to enhance productivity and efficiency.

"The different platforms used by our teachers in communicating with us, students, are the best thing I have learned, for I can use them in my future classes." [P4]

"It is satisfying because I am familiar with those technologies used by our teachers." [P10]

"I tried to learn technological aspects to cope with the new normal of education." [P9]

"It is easier to communicate via computer-mediated communication than in face-to-face situations. In addition, the online environment lends itself to a less hierarchical approach to instruction, which meets my learning needs, who do not approach new information systematically or linearly. Online learning environments are used to my potential for collaborative learning. My independent learning also finds online courses well suited to my needs." [P7]

Self-Realization: Self-realization during this time is essential because it enables us to comprehend the true extent of a problem. Self-realization is fulfillment by oneself of one's character or personality possibilities.

"Allowing myself to take a break by doing things I love and constantly reminding myself that things will go back to the way they used to be. Second is spending time with my loved ones and friend." (P4)

"Submit yourselves to the rules and follow safety protocols and less travel. Make time with your love ones" (P6).

CONCLUSION

Online learning is one of the impending trends in the education sector, according to the survey and responses of the Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management students. Online learning, which makes extensive use of the internet, is one of the upcoming advances in the educational industry during this time. Online learning is also preferred in higher education institutions. There are benefits and drawbacks to online learning. According to the responses, the aforementioned learning disadvantages were low internet connectivity, poor mental health, and poor time management. Self-reliance, technological know-how, and self-realization are the coping mechanisms suggested.

Therefore, the study recommends that the teachers and administrations formulate alternative plans to solve the abovementioned challenges of online learning. Also, it is further recommended that further studies on the current situation of students in the new normal of education must be conducted: (1) Expand student awareness of an online learning environment's benefits, expectations, and demands; (2) Other learning modalities must be incorporated for students with poor internet connectivity; (3) A webinar series concerning mental health must be implemented; (4) Increase student engagement in online learning; (5) Providing guidance for learning; and (6) Continous forecasting, planning and reviewing of continuity learning plans to address the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity in the educational sector brought by the current and further pandemics.

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