

BSN Ed Pre-service Teachers' Participation in Online Distance Learning

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Abstract

Educational sectors and several institutions have integrated online distance learning due to the pandemic. The study aims to explore the students' experiences in online distance learning and identify factors that affect students' online participation. This study used a descriptive qualitative phenomenological design and data were analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) from the semi-structured interviews of the six participants. The study revealed three themes: struggles in online participation, drawbacks of online learning, and circumstances in the new environment. The data revealed that students struggle with online learning, expressing low self-esteem and difficulty focusing on their online classes. However, participants also noted that participation is an avenue for them to gain knowledge and foster online relationships. Also, the two major factors influencing students' participation in online learning were teacher factors and resource availability. Future research should look into student motivation and other factors influencing students' academic performance in online distance learning.

Keywords— Online distance learning, student participation, college students, lived experiences.

I. INTRODUCTION

In more than 200 nations, the COVID-19 epidemic has disrupted education systems, affecting over 1.6 billion students. Numerous studies have emerged almost two years into the global epidemic, showing possible strategies for improving students' learning process despite the closures of schools and restrictions on social interaction. Public and private schools opted to stop face-to-face learning, and many students and educators were forced to function in front of their screens or their respective modules.

A study by Song et al. (2019) stated that one of the most serious problems in online education is low learner participation. However, several foreign studies concluded that students benefited from participating in the class. Researchers Seethamraju and Hindawi (2014) acknowledged that online discussion forums should have left flexible and independent learning and knowledge production and, therefore, developed critical thinking skills.

In the Philippines, numerous universities resorted to online stratagems and other alternative modes of learning, such as distance and modular learning to keep classes going while implementing lockdown (Abad, 2020). In traditional face-to-face courses, student attendance and participation were variables that impacted student achievement. It is common sense that students who go to class will inevitably perform better on measures of cognitive learning than students who do not attend class.

Understanding how undergraduate students cope in the new learning mode can help address their needs and formulate possible solutions. It is necessary to comprehend how students in a state university in Cebu City responded to this global shift in the educational system. This research has been conducted to fill in the gaps and explore students' experiences in the context of a state university. It provided an in-depth understanding of student experiences in online distance learning and identified factors that influence student participation.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

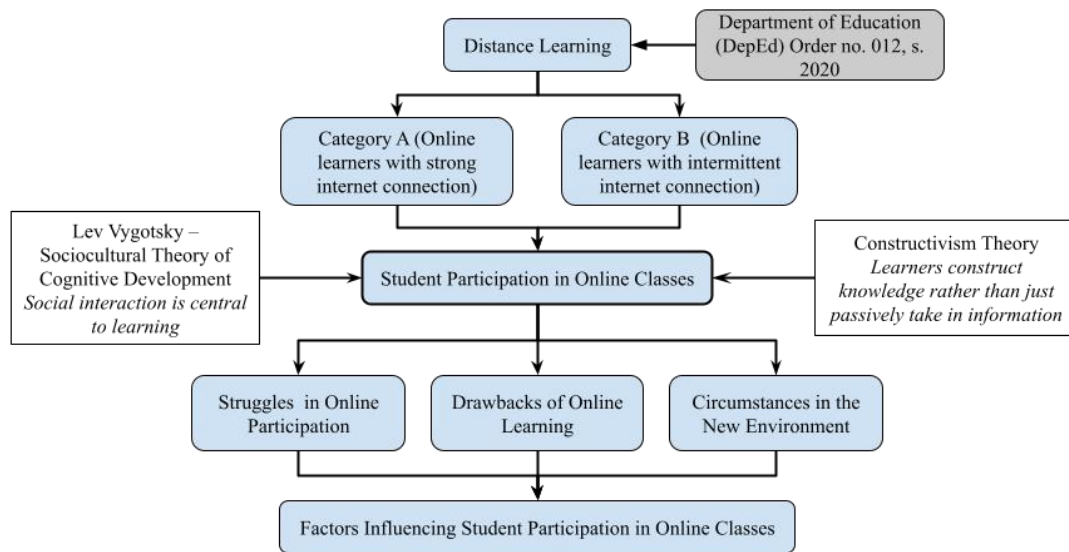


Fig.1. Conceptual Framework of the study

The schematic diagram is shown in Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual flow of the study and the theory it is anchored with. It highlights the variables: distance learning and the two learner categories in a state university in Cebu. The researchers explored students' experiences in participating online and found three main themes that encapsulate their experiences. Struggles in online learning, drawbacks of online learning, and circumstances in the new environments. Data were collected through a semi-structured interview in order for the participants to share their learning experiences when participating online. Thus, the factors influencing student participation were identified through an in-depth understanding of their experiences.

The constructivism theories and practices of Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget formed the theoretical framework for this study. Piagetian and Vygotskian ideas, constructivism theory, emphasized how constructed knowledge impacted active and reflective thinking. According to Piaget, a child makes knowledge by interacting with the environment (Pass, 2007). We can use Vygotsky's social development theory of learning and curriculum. Vygotsky (1978) believed that social interaction is critical to cognitive development. It is important to note that students learned through interaction, and the curriculum should have emphasized student-teacher interaction.

To address the public health emergency of COVID-19, DepEd Order No. 012, s. 2020 adopted the basic education learning continuity plan for the school year 2020-2021. The purpose of this was for schools to conduct interventions that bridge learning gaps and provide teachers time to apply

multiple learning delivery methods. Since face-to-face classes are not allowed, the selected state university in Cebu city opted to have online distance learning with three different categories for modes of learning.

II. METHODOLOGY

The descriptive qualitative phenomenological design inspired by Husserlian phenomenology will be utilized in this study. Descriptive phenomenology on the lived experience of students in participating online will involve "direct exploration, analysis, and description of the particular phenomena, as free as possible from unexamined presuppositions, aiming at maximum intuitive presentation" (Spiegelberg, 1975). In addition, the researchers used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to record students' comprehensive experience and perceptions in online distance learning. It also aims to know the participants' experiences, cognitions, and meaning-makings (Milton, 2004). The researchers purposely chose this research design as it appropriately aligns with their interest in providing an in-depth understanding of students' experience in online distance learning.

The participants were chosen using criterion sampling, which involved selecting samples based on pre-established criteria: (1) second-year BSN-GSN students in a selected state university in Cebu, (2) belonging to category A or B, (3) currently taking up full units in their degree program, (4) not working or having any part-time jobs. Three (3) participants from category A and three (3) participants from category B were recruited for this study. The point of data

saturation was employed to determine the number of research participants. Hennink, Kaiser & Marconi (2017) considered data saturation as the ceiling of the data collection point wherein the responses of the participants were already repeated.

This study was conducted on a selected campus of a state university situated in Cebu City. Following the approval of the Ethics Review Committee, the participant selection procedure proceeded. When the consent form was signed and the interviews were scheduled, data collection occurred. It was evaluated whether or not to employ technical means such as Zoom or Google Meet.

The researchers used a semi-structured interview in data collection and followed the interview guide. The questions were open-ended and exploratory, designed to explore participants' explanations of lived experience, understanding, and making sense in the context of their lives. The researchers used Google Meet in the interview process to record every detail of the interview, including observations on the participants' facial expressions, gestures, posture, and the way of speaking.

Data Analysis

The transcripts were analyzed using IPA. The analysis followed the staged process described in Shinebourne (2011) and Smith (2009). Data analysis involved a four-stage process. In the first stage, the initial analysis of the transcript was repeatedly read. During the transcript reviewing, texts have been highlighted and, initial observations were being recorded. In the second stage, it is where the identification of emerging themes has been made for each verbatim transcript. The researchers also identified the keywords or phrases that reflected the meaning of the participant's accounts within the context of their interviews. A list of emerging themes has been listed from each transcript. These keywords and phrases have been grouped according to initial themes. Each transcript underwent the same analytic process outlined by stages 1-2, which yielded a list and associated quotations from the verbatim transcript. The third stage includes the final comparison of transcripts. This stage ensures that there are no wrong beliefs in the analysis of transcripts and the emerging themes that have been established. Marginal topics were also excluded and guaranteed that only reported points would be presented in this study. Finally, in the last stage, themes have been arranged into clusters and high order themes (super-ordinate) and their respective subthemes. These were identified according to both the prevalence of ideas across

interviews and each salience of the main topic within the discussion.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers of this study took ethical considerations when gathering minimal data and ensured the privacy and safety of research participants throughout the study's execution. The researchers obtained permission from the university prior to conducting the study. Following clearance, the researchers distributed the informed consent form to participants via their personal Facebook accounts, requesting permission to conduct and record the one-on-one interview via Google Meet. Rest assured that the participants' profiles remained anonymous. There was no publication of profiles or information on paper or electronic devices, and it stayed confidential between researchers and participants. Following the virtual interviews, the data and information acquired were guarded with anonymity, and the participants' names were changed to their initials and will never be disclosed.

Limitations of the Study

The research study of students' online learning experiences primarily concentrated on student participation. The limitations of this study merely included one selected state university in Cebu. With all the various information gathered, the researchers did not appropriately address several aspects. Creating several sub-themes that lack reliable sources led to disorganization in evaluating the data collected. Using the criterion sampling method, only six (6) participants met the criteria set by the researchers, and students from a specific category were difficult to locate due to the lack of internet access.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to answer the research questions. IPA is grounded in the experiential dimension in its concern with a detailed examination of individual lived experience and how people are making sense of that experience (Eatough & Smith, 2008). To gain this understanding, procedures for conducting IPA research served as a guide in the processes and strategies for analysis.

The three main themes that developed throughout the analysis and will be discussed in this chapter include the struggles in online participation, drawbacks in online learning, and circumstances in the new environment.

Table 1: Table of Themes

<i>Table of Themes</i>		
Superordinate Theme #1: Struggles in Online Participation	Superordinate Theme #2: Drawbacks of Online Learning	Superordinate Theme #3: Circumstances in the New Environment
Adapting to the Virtual Environment	Teacher Factor	Means to gain knowledge and skills
Distractions in Physical Environment	Resources	Participation influences relationships

Struggles in Online Participation

Participants were asked about their experiences in online distance learning. Despite being in this new normal of learning for nearly two years, student engagement in classrooms remains a significant challenge for students and teachers. When asked about their struggles in online participation, participants shared their thoughts on adapting to the new environment and the distractions in their physical environment.

Adapting to the Virtual Environment

Anxiety, doubt, and low self-esteem were the common causes why the respondents did not initiate participation in the class. The majority of respondents stated that they were intimidated by their classmates because they assumed they would be criticized or embarrassed if they spoke up.

Oh, I find it difficult because I'm shy and I get anxious about my answer. Another thing is that I feel pressured by my classmates especially when they give answers that are straight to the point, and there are answers too that are lengthy and my answers are about 1-3 sentences only (Participant A2).

However, a number of the respondents expressed readiness to learn and adjust to online learning. A participant once stated that adapting to online distance learning is one way of training them as future effective educators.

Whenever I'm being called to answer in class I get anxious but I know it trains you to speak and face your fears. We have to do this because we are future teachers and it'll help us in the future (Participant B3).

In addition, when asked how student participation assisted them in online classes, the students immediately responded that it helped develop their confidence and an attitude in sharing their ideas in class. For the researchers, it takes a

matter of time for students to gain confidence and motivation to participate in the class through online distance learning.

Distractions in Physical Environment

As more social contacts shift online, managing real-life connections and duties has become increasingly difficult. This included going to school. Students couldn't fully concentrate on what was in front of them when they had their phones in their hands, even when they were in class (Abel, 2021).

I find it hard because of the temptations in using gadgets such as when you are having a class and you decide to open your Facebook app while listening (Participant B2).

Aside from social media temptations, some participants stated numerous diversions in their physical environment, such as tardiness. When students felt drowsy, they could just turn off their cameras and settled down to sleep while in class. Furthermore, home responsibilities were considered a distraction for students taking online classes, as some of them spent their time completing household tasks.

And there are times that there are a lot of distractions around you, especially when we are at home. Like for example, when we get sleepy it's okay for us to sleep and lay down (Participant A2).

Moreover, although the covid-19 pandemic is still ongoing, most students acknowledged the new mode of learning. Even in these difficult circumstances, they believed that online distance learning was the best possible way to receive the right education.

Drawbacks of Online Learning

Students are encouraged to participate in online classes. Nevertheless, many of the participants were still reluctant to participate in class discussions. The participants discussed the reasons, means, and circumstances of why they engage

or do not participate, which were analyzed, interpreted, and categorized into two sub-themes: teacher factor and resources.

Teacher Factor

When participants were asked why or why not they participate in class, many of the participants responded that some teachers contribute to affecting student participation. Some participants revealed that some teachers do not allow recording class discussions for category B students during the interview.

I attend classes as much as possible. I don't want to miss out on class discussions. Some professors don't want their classes recorded, so being in category B is difficult, especially when I don't have money for piso wifi or the internet connection is slow. We have no choice but to really attend online classes because we can't rely on our classmates too much. They don't really give straight answers to our questions when we ask about what happened during online discussions (Participant B1).

Furthermore, most of the participants also revealed that they only participate or unmute themselves in class if they're being called and asked by the teacher some questions. Some participants clearly stated that they do not speak or answer voluntarily during class discussions unless called or required to respond.

I unmute myself during reporting. Being called by the teacher. Things that are required. I don't participate or talk voluntarily (Participant B3).

Several participants were grateful for those teachers who continued to encourage and motivated them to participate. When teachers impose more questions upon students and create a healthy and friendly environment for students to participate in, it enhances students to participate in the learning process actively.

Resources

When participants were asked why or why not they participate in class, many of the participants responded that access to resources affects their participation in online classes. Participants were asked what devices and mode of connectivity they use in online classes, most of them had smartphones and laptops. Some participants revealed that using smartphones in answering modules and creating presentations for reports is very inconvenient.

I mean yes, you can use it through your phone but it's inconvenient to use because it's small. It's different when you use a laptop because it's way more convenient since it has a bigger screen and it has a bigger-sized keyboard (Participant A2).

In addition to that, several participants revealed that having both laptops and smartphones makes online classes easier. Moreover, the participants were queried if they encountered any connectivity issues during their online classes. Most of the participants had experienced issues in connectivity, including some participants of category A.

There are times it's difficult for me to fully participate in class due to an unstable internet connection. There are also instances when my gadgets would lag and I would be left hanging facing my screen (Participant B1).

Also, some participants stated that there were times that they could not attend classes due to unstable Internet connection and low service on mobile data in their areas.

I also have a classmate who's from Bohol and she said that she needs to walk to the mountainside because that is where the signal is (Participant A2).

Some participants acquired piso wifi in order for them to attend classes. When people in that area used the same wifi connection, the connection was slow and unstable. Thus, it was inevitable for some students who had no other option than to use piso wifi. Furthermore, most of the category B participants have had financial difficulties.

I think I am just lucky to have the resources I have now but when I think about students who are struggling it makes me think how unfair it is to have this online setup. It is natural for us to have a strong internet connection to participate in class but it might be a challenge for those students who are struggling (Participant A2).

Undoubtedly, accessibility to resources affected students' participation and online learning experiences.

Circumstances in the New Environment

Various responses disclosed the experiences of students in online distance learning. The struggles and drawbacks of online learning were analyzed, however, this study also believed that the circumstances in the new learning environment affected online student participation. These circumstances vary in context namely, seeing participation as means to gain knowledge and skills, and how it influences relationships.

Means to gain knowledge and skills

Participants have shared their perspectives on participation as a means of gaining knowledge and skills. In a study by Simovska (2007), they defined participation as something that can sometimes be as simple as participating in a class discussion.

Student participation in online classes is very

needed especially in online classes usually, the students' mic is muted so that's why there is a need for teachers to know if their students understand the topic by asking them to participate in answering questions (Participant A2).

Also, students struggle to rely on their own understanding of the concepts discussed in online classes thus, making participation a method to synthesize and compare different insights in class discussions. Vygotsky (1978) believed that social interaction is critical to cognitive development. Interaction is how students learn, and the curriculum should prioritize student-teacher interaction.

There are times when I don't rely solely on what I know. Participation in classes is one way to gain knowledge from my classmates and compare the things that I am not aware of. (Participant B1).

In addition, several participants have expressed how this helped them boost their confidence, one important skill as a preservice teacher. Students' confidence is critical to their success. A child's level of self-confidence will influence his or her educational aspirations (Kohli, 2020).

Knowing that we are teachers in the future... Online participation in class is more like a practice for you to be ready for your future. And it helps boost your confidence in answering questions (Participant A2).

Furthermore, the participants appeared to understand how participating could help them understand the lesson better and be more involved in the learning process.

If I always get shy, I am the one disadvantage at the end of the day. So, I'll try my best to answer frequently in classes. Because in the end, I am the only one who can benefit from it (Participant A2).

I will still continue to participate in online classes frequently because I don't want to miss out on any learning experience (Participant B1).

Through participation, this is where you see your potential as an education student and that is when you share your learnings with others (Participant B3).

Participants saw involvement as a necessary component of properly comprehending an idea addressed in their virtual classes. Student participation fosters engagement and motivation for current and future learning and future professions (Bergmark & Westman, 2018). As a result, their interest in future participation increases.

Participation influences relationships

Meanwhile, being in an unfamiliar setting increases the likelihood of being unable to form strong relationships or

communicate effectively. When asked about how they perceive participation, many of the participants stated how it makes them feel connected with each other despite now seeing each other.

There are also times when participating is easy because even if we don't see each other physically, it makes me connected to my classmates and professor which builds our relationship (Participant B1).

In addition to improving connections, participation allows teachers to increase learning and promote engagement inside the classroom. According to the findings of Bergmark and Westman's (2018) study, teachers' responsibilities included sharing their extensive knowledge and engagement, identifying what was challenging and novel for students, planning accordingly, and connecting the lesson with the course's objectives.

There are times that teachers will call out names to participate, so yeah there will be times that you'll have to force yourself to participate in class (Participant B3).

Yes, I do participate whenever it is needed or required because whenever you participate you'll get recognized by the teacher (Participant A3).

To summarize, participants expressed an interest in developing stronger bonds with their classmates and teachers in order to enhance their educational experiences. Their perception that participation contributes to their connectedness despite not knowing each other directly demonstrates how much they value online education. Thus, turning on cameras can also help students improve their relationships. This will help them feel less worried and self-conscious about how they talk in class, which will increase their likelihood of participating in online classes on a regular basis.

IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

The findings indicated that students struggled in the new learning mode as they tried to adapt to the new environment and expressed their thoughts on the various distractions in their physical environment that may sometimes hinder their ability to focus in class. Students' lived experiences in online distance learning revealed teacher factors and available resources that may influence their participation. However, students' online learning experiences revealed positive effects of participation, as participants expressed how they perceive participation as a means to gain knowledge and foster their online relationships.

The majority of data indicated that students' experiences with online distance education were challenging. Participating in classes felt apprehensive and under pressure due to the class's weak online relationships. Participants regretted not participating in the virtual class, even if they could answer the teacher's questions. They experienced anxiety, doubt, and low self-esteem since they were unfamiliar with the virtual environment and required time to adjust. Some participants had trouble adjusting to online learning, were distracted by social media, and used their cell phones for self-indulgence. Also, other participants mentioned physical distractions, including tardiness and home duties. Time management is an issue for online students. However, several participants in category A found online distance learning useful because it allowed them to do household chores and study recorded classes. Despite the ongoing covid-19 pandemic, most students embraced the new learning style. Thus, the majority of the participants believed that online distance learning is the greatest alternative.

Two major factors influenced student participation in online courses. Teachers were one factor that influenced why students engaged or did not participate in class. Findings showed that students in category B opted to attend classes due to some teachers restricting class recordings. The majority of participants indicated that they only participated when asked to do so by the teacher. The second factor was resource availability. Many participants preferred laptops due to their larger screen though having access to laptops and smartphones simplified online classes. Unreliable internet, lack of resources, and financial insecurity prevented participants in category B from participating in online classes, while most category A participants had sufficient resources to attend lessons. However, inconsistent Internet connections and inadequate mobile data access in their areas had prevented most participants, including those in category A, from attending sessions.

Participants perceived participation as essential to assess student understanding. Students participate in synthesizing and comparing different viewpoints offered during class discussions. Participation also helped improve student confidence, which was a critical skill for preservice teachers. Participants were also able to connect with their peers and teachers due to participation in online classes. Participation made people feel connected even if they weren't physically present, several findings showed. Participation improved student learning and engagement in the classroom, as well as relationships.

Conclusion

This research aims to fill in the knowledge gaps in the context of a state university by providing an in-depth

understanding of student experiences in online distance learning and identifying factors that influence student participation. In this study, the researchers used a descriptive qualitative phenomenological design inspired by Husserlian phenomenology and sought to gather evidence from students in the two categories of distance learning; Categories A and B. This study was essential to understand the experiences of students in online distance learning and how they perceived student participation. The IPA approach used in the study provides a flexible framework for the processes and strategies for analyzing the participants' lived experiences.

The study was able to develop the three major themes despite the small sample size used in the study. The three emerging themes, struggles in online participation, drawbacks of online learning, and circumstances in the new environment, made up the whole experiences of student participation in online distance learning. However, all three themes conveniently answered the research questions that this study was framed. It highlights the struggles of students in the new mode of learning and how much it affected their attitudes and well-being. Despite the difficulties shared by the participants, they were also able to make sense of their experiences and will continue to engage and participate in online classes.

This study also allowed the participants to speak up about how much each of them differs in many factors. One participant may have online classes conveniently while the other is struggling. Therefore, it is important to consider each student's situation and encourage them to participate more as it is also a way to build connections beyond their screens.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, teachers should take into account a variety of factors when determining the level of student participation in online classes. Despite the university's implementation of various learning modes to address some students' lack of resources, there are instances where teachers fail to recognize the difficulties that the administration is attempting to address. Participation may be difficult for some students due to the inability to access a strong internet connection. Also, reinforcement of different teaching methods should be done to assess student learning especially those in category B.

Further research investigating student experiences and student participation in online distance learning should be conducted in other State universities in Cebu City (or in region 7). The study should also include student motivation, attendance, and other aspects that may affect students' academic performance in online distance learning. Thus,

these recommendations should also provide an in-depth understanding of the student experiences in online distance learning.

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