

Short Paper

Students' Perspectives on Online Education during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic devastated the educational sector. The Department of Education and higher education institutions implemented online learning in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. The main objective of this study was to determine the perspectives of kindergarten and elementary pupils, junior high school, senior high school, and college students in public schools in relation to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it determined the learning strategies of students relative to online education, problems encountered by the students in online education, and support needed by the students in online education. A case study was employed in this research paper. Based on the data results, the pupils/students used the internet and the different learning applications as learning strategies. The pupils/students encountered problems like poor internet signal, difficulty in learning, and financial problems. Moreover, the pupils/students need assistance like Internet access, gadgets, financial or budgetary support, and facilitators of learning. Successful implementation of online learning requires a well-thought-out strategy, a more active approach, and can address the needs of the students—not the anti-poor.

Keywords – COVID-19, online learning, learning strategies, Department of Education, higher education institutions

INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of COVID-19 affected all sectors in different countries all over the world. Sadly, one of the sectors affected is education. Indeed, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 threw the world into unexpected turmoil. Schools were closed, exams canceled, and educational systems were forced to react to deep and unexpected changes in educational policy (Gilead & Dishon, 2021). Many schools were shut down due to the effects of the pandemic. According to a UNESCO report, almost 1.3 billion students stayed at home (Collins & Steele, 2020). Because of the situation, many learning institutions have adopted different learning modalities. One is online learning. The advancement of technology has had an influence on every area of our lives. Technology has become an essential component of our civilization and its integration into education is consequently unavoidable. The majority of learning institutions, from elementary to college, have already begun to use technology in the teaching-learning process (Diaz, 2021). Because of the pandemic, the newest and most widely used type of distance education nowadays is online learning. Online learning refers to the delivery of education through a variety of technologies using digital devices like computers, smartphones, and the internet. It enables the students to proceed at their own pace and convenience. In an article written by Despabiladeras (2021), due to the pandemic, active schools became ghostly vacant. As a result, internet connections, computers, and other digital devices have become a necessity. Online learning has become essential, but this kind of set-up has downsides. Students find it hard to understand the different lessons, making the quality of education at risk. Many students have limited internet access, especially underprivileged students. Furthermore, underprivileged students cannot afford to buy digital devices. Indeed, the pandemic has altered the educational system worldwide. Despite the challenges of the situation, education must continue for the future of our society.

In the face of adversity and uncertainty, it is critical for educators, parents, and other stakeholders to work together to help students develop their abilities in spite of the pandemic (Espenida, 2021). As added by Arevalo (2022), it is challenging for a third-world country like the Philippines to transition from traditional schooling to different learning modalities like online learning. Filipinos, on the other hand, are resilient. Moreover, teachers, parents, and stakeholders have shared responsibility in assisting the students in gaining wisdom, information, and skills even in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, the serious threat of the virus to education must be confronted. Esquita (2022) pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic is one of the issues and threats in the context of education. Therefore, it is critical to sustain the interest of the students in learning. Thus, careful planning is critical to the success of the teaching-learning process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the report of Al Jazeera (2021), as UNICEF said, hundreds of millions of children are suffering because their schools have been closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic but they lack online devices and connections for remote learning. Furthermore, even if the family has access to technology, children are not always able to access it. As a consequence, children have suffered enormous setbacks in their learning journey. According to Dwyer, Herndon, & Yoo (2021), new research reveals how the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the learning and skills retention of students, which even experts say could take many years to overcome. This means that many students are falling victim to "learning loss," defined by gaps in understanding and skill knowledge that prevent academic progress.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, changes in the learning system are happening. There are schools implementing online learning as a learning modality. Along with the implementation of this learning modality, there were problems encountered as recorded in other countries implementing the aforementioned learning modality. According to Adnan and Anwar (2020), online learning cannot produce desired results in underdeveloped countries where a vast majority of students are unable to access the internet due to technical as well as monetary issues. This means that online education is effective in digitally advanced nations. As mentioned in the work of Adnan & Anwar (2020), it was a reminder of the lack of resources in academic institutions and the social marginalization of students, where insufficient access and availability of the internet and the lack of the latest technology affected organizational responsiveness and students' capacity to participate in digital learning (Zhong, 2020).

In the study by Demuyakor (2020), the high cost of participating in online learning was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students spend so much money on internet data. Moreover, the study discovered that internet connectivity was very slow, resulting in students finding places just to have a good internet connection. As mentioned in the work of Tria (2020), the Philippines has the slowest internet connectivity in Asia (Akamai, 2017). He also added that implementing online learning would pose problems for students who have limited internet access, no gadgets, and the poor.

According to Balahadia (2022), poor internet connection is one of the problems students face in online learning. Furthermore, according to Gonzales (2021), over a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, online schooling has become a tiring and difficult way of learning for many Filipino students. As UNICEF said, there are other problems among the students due to the pandemic, like learning delays, which can affect their well-being. Moreover, the problem brought by the pandemic is multiplied several times in slum areas and far-flung villages where students do not have access to online tools. As recommended by UNICEF, the governments must reopen schools for in-person learning as soon as possible and provide a comprehensive recovery response for students. For

now, as the school is not open, parents can only do so much to help the students cope with the difficulties of online learning at home.

The traditional education systems around the world became one of the early casualties of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (Mateo, 2021). In the Philippine context, with the risk of transmission high among students, schools at all levels were immediately shut down as it became apparent that the illness was quickly spreading in different countries. According to Flores (2021), based on the survey conducted by Social Weather Stations (SWS), about four in 10 Filipino students do not have any devices needed for distance learning. This means that not all Filipino students can afford online learning as a learning modality. Furthermore, Philippine senators are seeking the immediate launch of pilot tests of localized and limited face-to-face classes in low-risk areas to prevent further learning losses and other adverse social, developmental, and health costs linked to prolonged school closures.

In the report of Adonis (2021), virtual lessons are nothing like the interaction between students and teachers in physical classrooms. The problems of students cannot be totally addressed through an online learning approach. Parents and students are struggling to understand the lessons. Truly, in-person classes are among the casualties in the pandemic-hit education system. Even parents and experts agreed that learning is still best done in a face-to-face setting in classrooms. in the report of de Vera (2021), as the report showed by the World Bank, schoolchildren in the Philippines struggled with remote learning, aggravating learning poverty in the country to a new high of 90 percent amid the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic. According to the World Bank, effective teaching, suitable technology, and engaged learners are necessary for this time of pandemic. On the other hand, these are not only needed by schoolchildren but all levels of students in the Philippines. According to Joven (2021) of CNN Philippines, many children feel that they are not learning with the remote setup, affecting their confidence and mental health. Furthermore, remote learning has been difficult because of the finances and technology needed.

In the report of Magsambol (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult for financially struggling families to fulfill their children's needs for distance learning. Parents and their children need to watch video lessons uploaded on YouTube or do research for their classes. If the children have online classes like Google Meet, the parents need to provide internet access for their children. Added to this, without teachers explaining the lessons to students, parents need to change their morning routines so they can guide and motivate their children to complete their learning activities. Indeed, parents, teachers, and Department of Education experts all agreed that there is a need for in-person classes. In the report of Barreiro (2020), distance education or online learning approaches is not easy, but we need to do it and improve on it regardless of the initial problems the country might face. The related literature mentioned pieces of evidence of the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the solutions made by the educational sector in continuing education in spite of many challenges.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study would be beneficial to students, teachers, stakeholders, curriculum implementers, and future researchers. For students, once this study is realized, it may help them to determine the advantages and disadvantages of online learning. The findings of this study would help teachers in planning more conducive online learning. For stakeholders, this study would help them understand the reality of online learning in order to determine an action plan to support students undergoing online learning. For curriculum implementers, it would give them ideas to integrate some salient points in implementing online learning for better learning. For future researchers, the results of this study would serve as a reference for future related studies. The main objective of this study was to determine the perspectives of kindergarten and elementary pupils, junior high school, senior high school, and college students in public schools in relation to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it answered the following:

- 1. Determine the learning strategies of students relative to online education.
- 2. Determine the problems encountered by students in online education.
- 3. Determine the support needed by the pupils/students for online education.

METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out when the COVID-19 pandemic expanded over the province of Sorsogon in the Philippines. This study employed a case study. The case study is useful for a researcher to obtain and examine data in a context. The researcher employed the case study in order to capture a range of perspectives from the respondents. In this study, there were 5 respondents, one each from kindergarten, elementary, junior high school, senior high school, and college levels. The subjects of the study were enrolled in the school year or academic year 2020–2021 in public elementary and secondary schools and at state university, and they belonged to indigent families. In the paper report of Baškarada (2014), it was mentioned that the case study involves intensive analysis of an individual unit—e.g., a person, a community, or an organization. In other words, even one respondent is enough in conducting a case study. In this paper, the researcher chose 1 respondent each from the 5 levels—kindergarten, elementary, junior high school, senior high school, and college. Due to the spike in COVID-19 cases when this study was conducted, the researcher employed convenient sampling and settled on the 5 respondents. Convenient sampling is the practice of gathering data from subjects who are convenient for the researcher to contact.

The researcher of this study made the survey questionnaire and submitted it to a qualitative research professor for checking. The researcher performed a dry run after checking and revising it. There were five pupils/students who answered the questionnaire in a dry run. One respondent from each of the kindergarten, elementary, junior high,

senior high school, and college levels. After the dry run, the researcher re-sent the data to the qualitative research professor for final checking of the questionnaire. The survey questionnaire focused on the different problems encountered by the students relative to online learning. Furthermore, the survey questionnaire also focused on the strategies applied by the students in connection with online learning and also asked for their needed support to sustain online learning. After the approval, the researcher conducted the data collection properly.

Because of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the gathering of information and data in this study was possible through the use of cell phones in interviewing. The researcher of this study texted, phone called, and chatted through Facebook Messenger with the respondents of the study. In the case of kindergarten and elementary pupils, the researcher asked for the help of their parents in guiding the respondents in answering the survey questionnaire. The results of the study were analyzed by means of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was applied to identify, evaluate, and create a theme based on the answers of the participants. Furthermore, other researchers' work was used to explain further the data results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Learning strategies of pupils/ students relative to online education

According to Gautam (2020), the new normal in education is the increased use of online learning tools. The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered new ways of learning. All over the world, educational institutions are looking toward online learning as a learning modality to continue the process of educating students. Gautam (2020) added that online learning also suits a variety of learning styles, meaning that every student has a different learning journey and learning style.

According to McQuirter (2020), the current COVID-19 pandemic presents all levels of schooling with the challenge of converting face-to-face instruction to online learning. The adoption of technology in learning has had mixed results. One of the results is in learning strategies. Learning strategies are a big help for students learning online education. Based on the responses of the respondents of this study, during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, they used different applications in learning, like YouTube for tutorials, Google Classroom, and other applications needed for their lessons. Moreover, they used Google to search for different concepts in the lessons. It was also found that as the level of schooling was high, the more applications they used as learning strategies in the middle of the pandemic.

According to Zayapragassarazan (2020), any crisis in a nation will always have an impact on education. Students' right to education is threatened at times of crisis. As a result, the students need to apply more and more effort to learn. In the online mode of

learning, students are provided with a variety of choices for their learning, which allows them to take more responsibility for their own learning. Zayapragassarazan (2020), added that students used Zoom, Google Classroom, e-mail, YouTube, and other online platforms in their learning. Moreover, students formed e-learning circles or groups wherein they interacted with each other to discuss different topics using social media.

According to Wu, Jing, Gong, Mou, & Li (2021), learning strategies influence students' online learning satisfaction. This only means that learning strategies relative to online education play a vital role in the learning of students. This is connected to the study of Sutarto, Sari, & Fathurrochman (2021) that found interest has a very important role in learning. This interest leads to motivation in learning, and it can improve learning outcomes. Thus, to have an interest means having learning strategies.

On the other hand, the findings of this study were congruent with the findings of the previous studies that during this time of the pandemic, the pupils or students maximized the use of the available technology, primarily the Internet and different applications which are useful in online learning. Additionally, collaboration and participation among the students and the aid of the parents and teachers are needed. Table 1 summarizes the learning strategies of the pupils/students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1. Applied learning strategies in the middle of COVID-19 Pandemic

YouTube	VauTuka	SCHOOL	SCHOOL	
	VaTba		JCHOOL	
Tutorials	YouTube Tutorials and Doing research online	YouTube Tutorials, Group Study Through Group Chat and Facebook groups, and Doing research online	YouTube Tutorials, Group Study Through Group Chat and Facebook Group, Online classes via Google Meet and Zoom, and Doing research online	YouTube Tutorials, Group Study Through Group Chat and Facebook Group, Online Class via Google Meet and Zoom, and Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, e-mail, and Doing research online
	research online	Through Group Chat and Facebook groups, and Doing	Through Group Chat and Facebook Group, Online classes via Google Meet and Zoom, and Doing research	T C V a G M

Problems encountered by the pupils/students on online education

Despite the advancement in technology, students still encounter problems with online education. Based on the responses of the respondents, they experienced poor internet connection while in the middle of online education, leading to difficulty in understanding the lessons. Moreover, they needed to find a place just to have a stable internet connection and financial difficulties were also a problem. Persistent and

recurrent internet connectivity problems emerged as a salient challenge faced by students (Dridi, Radhakrishnan, Moser-Merce, & DeBoer, 2020).

This is true, especially in poor countries like the Philippines. As per the news posted by ABS-CBN, in Southeast Asia, the Philippines has the 3rd slowest mobile internet speed and, as of October 2020, the Philippines ranks 32nd out of 50 countries in terms of fixed broadband speed. In online education, having a poor internet connection can result in students not fully understanding the lesson and students not interacting well with their classmates and teachers (Domingo, 2020). As concluded by Khati & Bhatta (2020), poor network and security of the Internet are some of the challenges in online education, and Qiu & Olugbenga (2020) proved that shortage of internet bandwidth is one of the challenges in online education. As said by Rehman (2020), technology without equity among all children would not lead to efficient learning and not all can afford e-learning. Furthermore, students need to load to have internet or mobile data. In other words, the financial aspect is also concerned.

On the other hand, based on the results of the study, the main problems of the pupils/students in connection with online learning are internet signal, difficulty in learning, and financial problems. In other words, these main problems should be addressed. Table 2 summarizes the problems encountered by the pupils/students in online learning in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2. The disadvantages of online learning in the middle of COVID-19 pandemic

KINDERGARTEN	ELEMENTARY	JUNIOR HIGH	SENIOR HIGH	COLLEGE
		SCHOOL	SCHOOL	
Poor internet signal, difficulty in learning, and financial problem	Poor internet signal, difficulty in learning, and financial problem	Poor internet signal, difficulty in learning, and financial problem	Poor internet signal, difficulty in learning, and financial problem	Poor internet signal, difficulty in learning, and financial problem

Supports needed by the pupils/students on online education

Primarily, the pupils/students need financial assistance to sustain online education (e.g., e-load, gadgets, discussion of the topics, guidance in learning activities) and support from the people (e.g., family members, friends, peers, and others) surrounding them. According to Rasmitadila et al. (2020), the involvement of parents, teachers, and the school is a collaborative effort, which can be achieved by creating a community of knowledge to understand online learning practices. Additionally, the collaboration of students and the people around them is also needed in online education. Table 3 summarizes the support needed by the pupils/students for online learning.

Table 3. The different needs of online learning modality in the middle of COVID-19 pandemic

KINDERGARTEN	ELEMENTARY	JUNIOR HIGH	SENIOR HIGH	COLLEGE
		SCHOOL	SCHOOL	
Internet load, gadget, financial or budget, and facilitator of learning	Internet load, gadget, financial or budget, and facilitator of learning	Internet load, gadget, financial or budget, and facilitator of learning	Internet load, gadget, financial or budget, and facilitator of learning	Internet load, gadget, financial or budget, and facilitator of learning

Overall, kindergarten and elementary pupils, junior high school, senior high school, and college students have strategies relative to online learning. They also encounter problems and need support in connection with online learning as a learning modality. Despite the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, they showed their willingness to learn. This means that they maximize the use of technology in the learning process, especially for junior high school, senior high school, and college students, but all of them need facilitators of learning. Given the results and the pieces of literature mentioned, the COVID-19 pandemic greatly devastated the educational sector. But in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic, education should not stop. For the quality and education of all Filipino pupils and students, the Department of Education, higher education institutions, and stakeholders must collaborate.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Online learning is one of the learning modalities useful in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. But using this learning modality needs learning strategies. The learning strategies are based on the capability or capacity of the pupils and students as well as their parents. Online learning makes the pupils or students learn by doing their tasks, collaborating to achieve a goal, and participating in activities; they need a facilitator of learning. Furthermore, implementing online learning has problems. The pupils/students may experience poor internet signal, difficulty in learning, and financial problems. Thus, the pupils/students need support in online learning. They need internet access, gadgets, financial backing or budget, and a facilitator of learning.

It is suggested that before the implementation of online learning, different factors must be considered, like internet connection, availability of gadgets, and financial capability of the pupils or students. Internal and external stakeholders in education must work collaboratively to enhance the effectiveness of online education and to solve the problems encountered by students in online learning. Successful implementation of online learning into the curriculum requires a well-thought-out strategy, a more active approach, and can address the needs of the students—not the anti-poor. Additionally,

further studies on students' perspectives in online education during the COVID-19 pandemic using other variables must be conducted.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study provide direct implications for the Department of Education and higher education institutions. Such implementation of online learning requires a research-based plan. Moreover, education for all must be applied in all learning modalities in the middle of a pandemic, especially for underprivileged pupils and students.

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