

REMOTE STUDENTS LIVED EXPERIENCES IN DISTANCE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT: In the pursuit of continuing education at all levels, the Philippine Educational System adapted the distance learning modality causing students to be acclimated to the sudden change in the pedagogy. This descriptive phenomenological study aims to describe the lived experiences of the remote students on the sudden shift of modality from face-to-face classes to distance learning education. The data gathered through a semi-structured in-depth interview with thirteen (13) purposively selected respondents were analyzed using inductive content and thematic analysis. The study revealed five themes on the remote students' distance learning experiences: (1) Learner's Metamorphosis; (2) Learning Environment and Connectivity; (3) Social Support System; (4) Learners' Available Resources; and (5) Mental Health. The lived experiences of remote students in distance learning education were rough. However, their positive outlook in life and goals serve as the driving force to overcome the abrupt change. Having participated in the learning process in an unfavorable, uncondusive, and unsafe learning environment with no/unstable internet connection and inappropriate/no technological devices at home, but with the support from their families, peers, school, and teachers, they have overcome these arduous challenges. Thus, the researcher recommends that the school should review and improve its learning continuity plan in addressing the educational needs of students living in remote areas; Teachers should conduct their own students profiling and analysis to identify students who need more compassion and consideration to avoid traumatization and unnecessary pressure and; teachers should show more sympathy for the situation of remote students in distance learning education.

KEYWORDS: Remote students, Descriptive Phenomenology, Distance Learning, Lived experience

1. INTRODUCTION

In the pursuit of continuing education at all levels, the Philippine Educational System adapted the Distance learning modality causing students to be acclimated to the sudden change in the pedagogy. Distance learning is an alternative delivery mode (ADM) that reaches out to learners in underserved, high-risk, and disadvantaged areas (Sabio, R. A., & Sabio, C. J., 2013). An obvious choice for remote learners to overcome difficulties imposed by geographical location (Macintyre, R., & Macdonald, J., 2011). However little attention has been given to the experiences of students studying in geographically remote locations, where the remoteness has been an aspect of investigation (Owens, J., Hardcastle, L. A., & Richardson, B., 2009), and the difficulties they have experienced during the abrupt shift from face to face classes to distance learning education (Alea, L. A., Fabrea, M. F., Roldan, R. D. A., & Farooqi, A. Z., 2020)

Most countries shift instructional modalities from face-to-face classroom interaction to online learning. However, students believed that face-to-face instruction was critical for their learning due to communication and collaboration with instructors, tutors, and peers. Students attributed their success in the program to the encouragement, support, and feedback they received from their face-to-face instructors (Li, J., Kay, R., & Markovich, L. 2018).

Moreover, students living in financially disadvantaged or low socioeconomic status encounter a range of barriers and/or risks including long-term educational disengagement, digital exclusion, poor technology management, and increased psychosocial challenges (C. Drane, L. Vernon, and S. O'Shea, 2020).

The bulk of literature on distance learning for remote students focuses primarily on instructional design and user experience (Macintyre, R., & Macdonald, J., 2011). As said by Croft, N., Dalton, A., & Grant, M. (2010) understanding how the student learns is crucial for understanding how distance learning courses should be delivered. This unprecedented change to undergraduate education saw institutions adopting multiple online teaching modalities and instructional platforms.

Furthermore, some of the major concerns of distance learning is the lack of face-to-face student-student interaction and student-instructor interaction, which has led researchers to seek effective ways to keep students engaged in the distance learning environment (Watts, L., 2016). Factors related to engagement are students' connections to their peers and instructors, student motivation, and course outcomes, such as grades (Watts, L., 2016).

This drives the interest of the researcher to describe the lived experiences of remote students on the sudden shift of modality from face-to-face classes to distance learning education.

2. METHOD

A qualitative research design was used to describe the phenomenon of the remote students' lived experiences on the abrupt change of learning modality from face-to-face to distance learning, as it seeks to have a contextual understanding of phenomena, explain behavior and beliefs, identify processes, and understand the context of participants' experiences (Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A., 2020). The descriptive phenomenological approach seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon and the meaning of this lived experience from the perspective of the participants (Laverty, S. M., 2003)

Purposive sampling was used in choosing the participants of the study with the following criteria: (1) must be a college student; (2) Permanently living in a remote or rural area; (3) have experienced at least one semester of face-to-face classes, and (4) is officially enrolled in Central Philippines State University – San Carlos Campus, school year 2021 – 2021. When information from participants becomes repetitive and no new information comes from continuing data collection, researchers have reached the saturation of data (Kyngäs, H. 2020). Along the way, note-taking was also done to supplement the study.

In data collection, the researchers, and a semi-structured interview are the instrument of the study, allowing a deep discussion with the interviewee instead of a straightforward response. The researcher explained the purpose of the study, privacy of responses, the confidentiality of the data, instructions, as well as questions on the demographic profile of the participants, and open-ended questions. Written informed consent was given to the respondents to solicit their participation, and audio/video recorders were used to record the interview more accurately. To ensure the content validity of the constructed interview questions, it was subjected to research experts and fine-tuned based on their recommendations and feedback.

Face-to-face or video call interviews were the nature of gathering data to describe their lived experiences and challenges in dealing with the sudden change of modality. The face-to-face nature of the interview allows for immediate clarification or expansion of the participants' thoughts and access to nonverbal cues such as gestures and facial expressions (Speziale, H. S., Streubert, H. J., & Carpenter, D. R., 2011). The researcher encrypts the interviews and transcripts to be more immersed and to capture the meaning that the participants want to convey. Memo writing, reflections, and noting personal analysis on the relationship, variation, and links between basic concepts were observed.

The researchers analyzed the data using inductive content analysis. This method is used when a qualitative study has an inductive starting point or when the data collection approach is open and follows loosely defined concepts (Kyngäs, H., 2020). Its main advantages include content sensitiveness, application in highly flexible research designs, and wider application in analyzing various types of qualitative data (Kyngäs, H., 2020). This study was done in a basic inductive content analysis according to the following steps: preparation, organization, and reporting (Elo, S., Kääriäinen, M., Kanste, O., Pölkki, T., & Utriainen, K. HK, 2014). First, identify data collection and sampling strategy as well as select the unit of analysis. Second, involved data categorization and abstraction, interpretation, and checking of the representativeness of the sample data collected. Lastly, systematic and logical reporting of the abstractions.

Any researcher biases not adequately addressed or errors in judgment can affect the quality of data and subsequent research results (Rose, J., & Johnson, C. W., 2020) the application of standards of rigor and adherence to systematic processes well documented in an audit trail are essential. Ensuring that the research design, method, and conclusions are explicit, public, replicable, open to critique, and free of bias (Leung, L., 2015). Through thoughtful and deliberate planning, diligent and ongoing application of researcher reflexivity, and honest communication between the researcher and the audience regarding the study and its results (Johnson, J. L., Adkins, D., & Chauvin, S., 2020).

To ensure ethical considerations of the research, all participants were informed about the details of the study. Participation in the study is voluntary and they could withdraw anytime without any consequences. They were informed about the academic purpose of the study. The researchers guaranteed the secrecy of the participants by assigning encrypted codes. The confidentiality was ensured as only the researcher has access to the research data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There were thirteen (13) remote students who participated in the study. Most of them are female, aging from 20 to 24 years old, and are currently third-year college students. In terms of strength/availability of internet connection or signal in their home, majority of them has no internet connection or signal inside their houses and they only use smartphones in complying with their activities, editing their output, and in joining synchronous meetings.

One hundred eighty-eight (188) total significant statements were extracted from the interview transcripts of the thirteen (13) respondents. Sixty-five (65) formulated meanings were gathered from the significant

statements, and Five (5) themes emerged. First, is the learner's metamorphosis and is divided into four (4) sub-themes: learning preferences, dependent and independent learners, mindset and orientation, adjustments and adaptation. Second, the learning environment and connectivity. Third, is the Social Support System, which has three (3) sub-themes: family, and peers' support, school support, and teachers' encouragement and consideration. The fourth theme, Learners' available resources, has two (2) sub-themes: financial, and device availability and capacity. Lastly, the fifth (5) theme: mental health.

Theme 1: Learners' metamorphosis

Theme 1 reflects remote students' response to the sudden change of modality in delivering and continuing education as revealed in the in-depth interviews. The theme is divided into two (2) sub-themes: (1) Learning preferences, (2) Dependent and independent learners, (3) Mindset and Orientation, and (4) Adjustments and adaptation.

Sub-theme 1.1: Learning preferences

Despite the increasing exposure to technology, many students are still more comfortable with traditional learning as the years they spent being immersed in such an approach span longer during their primary and secondary schooling years (DeWitt, D., Adams, D., & Sumintono, B., 2021). College students in a learning situation are different in many aspects, because, besides other variations, they have developed their learning preferences and it is the responsibility of educators and teachers to understand and deal with the diversity of students' learning preferences (Khan, S. A., Arif, M. H., & Yousuf, M. I., 2019). Students take this shift as a temporary adjustment owing to the response to the pandemic; even though students are advocates of technology, many of them are unwilling to forgo the face-to-face learning experience (Kundu, A., & Bej, T., 2021)

RS2: *I'm happy and adapting sa new normal education. Pero need gyud nga may face to face kay lahi ra ang quality of education*

RS4: *Stop, that's the first thing nga na nahuna-hunaan nako, because mas prefer nako ang face to face and walay signal sa amo-a unya the load itself mahal. Mao na akong gihunahuna that time.*

RS5: *For me okay lang I shut down to avoid COVID-19 but sometimes makahunahuna ko nga dapat naa gihapon face to face. Mas prefer nako ang face to face kay struggle kaayo ang signal especially ang electricity interruption sa amoang lugar kay sige rag brown out.*

RS7: *Dili physical, lahi ra gyod ang face to face, for example among confidence ma develop and naa'y interaction. Lahi ra sa mag online learning naa ra balay ikaw ra usa mura kag isolated boring kaayo. Murag boring imung pagskwela nga ikaw ra usa sa imung mag balay mag hikay para sa klasi.*

RS8: *Medyo nalipay nga naguol. Kay mas maayo gyud kon naay face to face kay ang teachers naa ra sa school pwede ra mapangutana dayon unlike sa online class og modular kay mangita pa og signal para maka communicate sa ilaha regarding sa subject. Pero naka adjust nako nga walay face to face basta ma continue ra amoang learning.*

RS12: *Sad ra gihapon, sad nga happy, sad kay siyempre dili gihapon mi kaadto sa skwelahan and galisod sa distance learning pero usahay makaingun ra pud ko happy ra pud distance learning kay siyempre dili kalas og kwarta among kalasan kay load ra di nami magbayad og boarding house or transportation*

Sub-theme 1.2: Dependent and Independent learners

The lack of social interaction in an online learning setting may create an obstacle for students who depend on social interaction to learn. Previous research has found that providing students with multiple routes of delivering content promotes learning (Ilievski, I. L., 2021). Independent learning demands great responsibility from students (Kemmer, D., 2011). The role of teachers and parents greatly determines the continuation of their education, so that no student is neglected in their learning activities (Rozi, Fathor, et al., 2021). Learning independence is the main requirement in implementing Distance Learning (Putri, S. K., & Syahputra, E., 2019)

RS2: *Lisod kaayo ang mga module or activity online kay wala kay mapangutan-an nga nakabalo sa mga topic, compared sa face to face lahi ra interaction and pwede ra makapangutana og idea sa mga classmate og sa instructor directly. Karon kay self-learning na lang gyud kay maglisod pangita og signal.*

RS3: *Kanang mga activities, para nako need jud cya e-explain sa mga teachers kay maglisod ko ug sabot, niya kailangan pa nako i-search, then mangita sad ko og classmate nga naka sabot para lang maka answer ko.*

RS5: *It is good because we are given enough time to answer. Sometimes there are questions I cannot comprehend so mangita ko og signal para makaresearch ko og makasabot.*

RS6: *Sometimes dili ko ka answer dayon kay lisod sabton ang module especially if wala na discuss sa instructor.*

RS9: *Of all the challenges, na eager and strong ko then I became independent in doing my outputs and answering my module.*

RI3: Naglisod ko kay naay uban word nga laglum kaau then mangutana rako sa akong mga classmate unsay pasabot ana, ilaha rapud ko tubagon.

Sub-themes 1.3: Mindset and Orientation

Learning goal orientation has been shown to have a strong driving effect on the motivation of individuals to learn and master skills, and it plays an important role in promoting individuals to make positive behaviors: for example, improving work performance (Chughtai, A. A., & Buckley, F., 2011). A student with a positive mindset and increased motivation has a higher likelihood of reaching academic achievement. Motivation is key to helping students persevere through challenges that may come their way, actively participating in opportunities for collaboration, and ultimately reaching desired goals. (Hubble Studios, 2021)

RS1: Overcoming those challenges, I learned a positive mindset is very important due to whatever challenge you may take. Even during the challenging times, I always thought to myself to open the door and allow challenges to come and I know this difficulty turns to victory which is a positive side.

RS2: No, it didn't come up in my mind nga mo stop ko. Besides nakasugod nako og eskwela, anugon ang panahon og adlaw nga molabay. While naa rako sa balay I keep on learning. Kung naa kay ma face nga challenges mangita jud kag way para ma overcome og dapat dili ka mo give up.

RS4: I am a servant of God nagserve ko sa Ginoo ang reflection nako sa tanan wala man ihatag ang Ginoo nga challenges nga dili nimu ma survive then sa tanan challenge ikaw raman pud makasulbad dili nimu ibato sa lain ang imung challenge e-solve ra nimo through yourself despite all the challenges, ang faith rajud.

RS5: Don't give up, if there are more challenges na maabot bisan lisod, just continue. It's okay to fail basta continue ra gihapon.

RS6: If naay kalisod sa atoang kinabuhi atoang lampuson og paninguhaon aron makab-ot ang goal o ambisyon

RS8: Before I was thinking to quit my studies but na realize nako nga importante nga mo padayon og eskwela, dili mo give up bisan unsa kalisod nga maagian. Gi serve ra nako nga motivation ang nahitabo kay sa amoang family ako ang eldest so dapat maningkamot ko kay nakasalalay sa akoang kamot ang amoang sitwasyon karon.

RS9: No, kay ang goal nako is to finish my studies so wala gyud nako nahunahunaan mo undang bisan unsa kalisod. Naa sa akong hunahuna nga tapuson nako ang akong pag eskwela magkinaunsa pa.

Sub-theme 1.4: Adjustments and adaptation

Given the sudden shift to emergency remote education at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, combined with external stress factors, such as uncertainty about the situation, distraction at home, and reduced social interaction (Son, Changwon, et al., 2020), as well as higher levels of autonomy, resource-management strategies may have played an important role in adapting successfully to emergency remote education. Students probably already adopted effective cognitive and metacognitive strategies because of their experience of independence during higher education, but they had to quickly adapt these strategies to apply them in the new situation (Bower, Felicitas, et al., 2021)

RS2: Affected kaayo akoang learning especially nagpuyo me sa bukid so ma interrupt ang learning, aside sa walay internet connection wala na sad interaction and communication between sa instructor og students. Wala na naka focus sa develop and learning because naka focus nami sa mga ubrahanon sa balay.

RS3: Pagkabalo nako nga naa'y distance learning gi adjust nalang nako akong kaugalingon sa mga possible nga mga buhaton sa skwelahan and ako-a rang gi-accept.

RS4: Before, in face to face, more active ko into mga buhatunon like oral recitation and then pag online class na dili ko kasabot usahay, ang signal dili kaayo nindot, then naa kay ma miss nga topic and then dili naka kabalo pag answer maayo because of signal. Lahi na kaayo, ni less na akong participation.

RS5: So far struggle kaayo kay usahay naa koy work sa buntag then pagkagabie magpulaw ko para obrahan ang mga activites sa module. Daghan sugo sa balay. For now, quite good and challenging because of the barriers especially in internet connection then may silingan pud me nga early pa lang mag sing-along na so banha kayo. Transportation kay dako kayo ang singil sa plete. Submission sa activities and outputs nalisuran ko

RS7: Naa gamay, nakahuna-huna og undang, kay galisod ko'g adjust. Dili pa kaayo hanas sa mga application lisud lahi ra sa face to face nga naay teacher magdiscuss; sa distance learning imuha ra gyod paningkamot makakat-on kay lahi ra man parehas anang google meet mawala ang discussion murag maputol among learnings murag mawala ang discussion dili masabtan tanan.

RS8: So far medyo lisod ang distance learning especially pinakaunang tuig sa pandemic kay tungod walay signal sa amoa sa bukid. For now, I am staying with my high school teacher so makapasignal nako. Dapat dili magtinapulan sa pag-comply sa mga activities, mopasa gyud on time para dili magdungon tanan.

RS11: Lisod gyod, first nako face to face hantod 2nd semester then before mo end na ang klase ni lock down; pag ingun na online or module I was shocked, kay wala ra ba kasulay ani nga sitwasyon ako pag skwela face to face man, lisod pag adjust permiro pero naanad nako.

In the implementation of the distance learning modality students living in remote areas had the hardest experience. Taking a modality that they don't choose but are left with no other option but to accept the fact that this is the only way to continue their education in the current situation. Adjustments are not easy as it is; accepting distance modality, and the learning environment needs a positive outlook in life together with a personal goal as the driving force to overcome the abrupt changes in the educational system. Adapting to the new ways and setup will always take time especially when the learners are natives in face-to-face classes from their primary years to their first-semester in college.

Theme 2: Learning Environment and Connectivity

Theme 2 depicts students' learning environment that they need to overcome and the struggles that they need to face first, for them to be able to attend synchronous meetings and the research articles or online resources that could help them with their modules and activities.

A learning environment is more than just a classroom, it's a space in which students feel safe and supported in their pursuit of knowledge, as well as being inspired by their surroundings (Oblinger, D., 2006) Interactions between students may happen more naturally in face-to-face classrooms, where students are located geographically in the same community. However, in an online environment, where students may be located regionally, nationally, or even internationally, students may feel isolation, loneliness, and lack of human interaction (Gagnon, K., et al., 2020). All over the world, millions of students are affected and some have already given up their status of being a student. One of the biggest challenges to address the problem regarding learning, is the availability of technological gadgets and internet connectivity (Asio, John Mark R., et al., 2021).

RS1: *Mostly is ang internet connectivity, sometimes we need pa mo saka og buntod just to find a stable connection but it is challenging kay there are times gina limit ang chance para maka attend ka, so burden kaayo ang internet connectivity.*

RS2: *Affected kayo akoang learning especially nagpuyo me sa bukid so ma interrupt ang learning, aside sa wala internet connection wala na sab interaction and communication between sa instructor og students. Wala na naka focus sa developmont and learning because naka focus nami sa mga ubrahon sa balay.*

RS4: *Mixed emotions I guess, happy at the same time sad. Happy ko na naa gihapon kay ma learn despite of the situation. Sad kay lagi wala'y signal mo adto pa og highway para makasulod og klasi.*

RS5: *So far struggle kaayo kay usahay naa koy work sa buntag then pagkagabie magpulaw ko para obrahon ang mga activites sa module. Daghan sugo sa balay. For quite good and challenging because of the barriers especially in internet connection then may silingan pud me nga early pa lang mag sing-along na so banha kayo. Transportation kay dako kayo ang singil sa plete. Submission sa activities and outputs nalisuran ko*

RS8: *Yes, I was thinking to stop kay lisud kayo ang connection dayon layo kaayo magpa signal need pa motangas sa buntod unya kapoy kaayo. Sometimes mo kalit ra og brown out then pila pa ka days before mosiga usab. Kinahanglan pako molabang og pito ka sapa aron makaadto sa lungsod magpasignal niya usahay dili pa kalabang dayon kay baha. Pero nakaya ra intawon.*

RS9: *Sa online class maglisod ko labi na mag-ulan kay mangita pako og signal then lugar sab nga safe ko kay daghan kaayo og kahoy og bato then ang sa load pud usahay kay dili makasulod.*

RS11: *Ingun sila mag online class, mao gyod na ako problema. Akong na experience lisod kaayo lasbi nag ulan kay dili ko kapangita signal kay ako gipangitaan signal open raman bali bakante magdala mi payong pero mao rajud japon lahi rajud naa sa balay or sa gawas. Kung init magdala raman ko og payong dili rako mabasa lisod jud mag ulan kay mabasa ka, kung init okay ra.*

The unfavorable, uncondusive, and unsafe learning environment, and the lack or unstable internet connectivity are only a few things that students need to face and overcome first before they could join synchronous meetings, do research, and interact with their peers or instructors. These things might be common factors or issues in distance learning. However, this is the reality and sometimes it is much worse. These difficulties and natural phenomena need courage and determination to overcome, and this is what the students show.

Theme 3: Social Support System

Theme 3 depicts remote students' emphasis on the importance of a support system in their journey in overcoming distance learning education in the form of their family, peers, school, and teachers. This is much more elaborated in the following sub-themes: (1) Family and peers support, (2) School support, and (3) Teachers' encouragement and consideration.

Sub-theme 3.1: Family, and peer support

Based on the social support theory, an important environmental resource for individuals in social life is closely related to the control and prevention of negative emotions; good social support can protect individuals under

stress and has a generally beneficial effect on maintaining their health and stabilizing the mood of individuals (Martín-Albo, José, et al., 2015; Hou et al., 2020 as cited by Mai, Y., Wu, Y. J., & Huang, Y., 2021).

RS1: *Family and peers play important roles so, medyo balance siya, while on distance learning they serve as my motivation, they also strengthen and stabilize my social life by extending their moral support.*

RS2: *Because of the influence of my family, friends and sa akoang mga kaila nga ga advice nga dapat I continue gyud nako akoang pag eskwela kay nakasugod nako. I was thinking nga maabot ra ang time na mabalik ang face to face that's why bisan lisod mangita ko og signal makasulod lang sa klase og para dili ma behind*

RS3: *Maka ingon kang maka stress and maka pressure pero kayanon ra tungod pod sa distance learning. Akong relationship sa akong mga classmates kay ni strong kay magtinabangay rami, so I can say nga okay raman sad ang distance learning.*

RS4: *Family nako wala man, wala man sila moral support siguro ano nalang sila ang motivation nako nga mo padayun because of that lack of support. Peers, sila nag hatag nako moral support if wala sila wala nako ron ni padayun og skwela.*

RS7: *Yes, Akong peers usa sila sa rason nga nagpadayun, nag tinabangay rapud mi, like anang ang usa absent naa me amega tig kuan nga unsay activity nga himuon so, usa pud sila sa rason nga nagpadayun ko. Among barkada nagtinabangay mi bisag online gachatanay rapud mi sige, naa me GC nga amua then kung mo adto me og skwelahan magkuyog-kuyog rapud mi maong mainspire rapud ko nila. Yes, dako jud kaayu nagtinabangay man if may usa lacking o makaabsent wala sya lain mapangutan-an so namu or mangutana ko sa ako mega kung unsa ang mga activity or unsay dapat himuon dako sya tabang nga maaware ko sa angay nga himuon.*

RS11: *Gihatag sa ako family kay support. Unsa man gihatag na challenges nga ako ma encounter ilaha rako ipasaka sa babaw "dai laban rajud dai mahuman raka hapit na" ana rajud gasupport ra gyod sila ug unsa'y naa nako.*

RS13: *Encouragement sa akong family. Gina encourage ko nila nga dili mag stop kay hapit na daw. Ako raman ga decide nga dili mo stop kay nakita nako among kapobrehun ba sa ako pamilya nga galisod sila. Gina motivate ko nila nga e-pursue lang gyud ako pag skwela.*

Sub-theme 3.2: School support

Schools adopted relevant technologies, prepared learning and staff resources, set systems and infrastructure, established new teaching protocols, and adjusted their curricula. With the primary concern on the health and safety of the school personnel, parents, and learners. Strictly implemented the basic safety and health protocol (Panunciar, 2020). However, the transition was smooth for some schools but rough for others, particularly those from developing countries with limited infrastructure (Pham & Nguyen, 2020; Simbulan, 2020). With reference to policies, government education agencies and schools scrambled to create foolproof policies on governance structure, teacher management, and student management. (Barrot, J. S., Llenares, I. I., & Del Rosario, L. S., 2021).

RS6: *It would be better if the school will help and understand our situation also because there are instructors nga strict kaayo especially in submitting our activities. In that way, they help our learning.*

RS8: *The school should consider our situation kay usahay in submitting our activities kay late ma submit. They let us choose what modalities we want. My family motivates me, especially my mother who is working far from us just to support my studies and my needs. And classmates who motivate and support me all throughout every time may obrahon sa school.*

RS9: *Ang school ga motivate sa akoa then ang teacher mo consider bisan late mo submit sa school requirements. Sa akoang family nga ga support nako financially and emotionally, sila akoang daganan everytime if maglisod ko sa klase. Sa akoang mga peers nga mo cheer up sa usag usa then sharing of ideas through communication.*

RS12: *Gina ensure sa school nga naa mi learning. Ang learning efficient siya bisag distance learning siya. Akong family akong strength, akong hope para ma overcome nako ang mga challenges sa distance learning. And akong peers kay sila ga encourage nako, usahay shoulders to lean on.*

Sub-theme 3.3: Teachers' encouragement and consideration

In today's world, being a teacher is an incredible challenge. Beyond the day-to-day teaching and marking, teachers are faced with students with behavioral or family issues, learning disabilities, and more. Motivated teachers foster a collaborative culture and a positive environment for faculty and students (Schuck, R. K., & Lambert, R., 2020)

RS1: *Some of my teachers motivate me to push through and continue because they said I have this potential and even though sometimes I didn't believe nga amo ko na, through them they also impart or played input as well. It's the good side despite this challenging life.*

RS3: *Sa school, ang mga teacher kung feel nila mo give up na ang isa ka student ilaha na dayon e-motivate.*

RS8: *The teacher will consider us every time they set a deadline. Instead kasab-an me much better if they will motivate us. Sometimes sakit sila mang-istorya dapat in a good way pud tane because we are trying our best to comply. Dapat they consider us also and our situation*

RS10: *Kay kung naa koy ma miss out mo chat ra ko sa ako mga teacher para ma reach out nako og mo sabot ra sila.*

RS11: *Gusto pajud nako mahatag sa mga teacher sa school bali kanang consideration dapat tagaan pud mi nila taas nga time supposed to be dili man stable amo connection. I hope makaunderstand sila mao ra gyod na ako gipangayo, pinakadakong tabang nila nako.*

RS13: *Nice but kapoy usahay dili ko kasabot sa lecture sa module og sa teacher gina pressure sa pag pass, unya kung online class na dili ka pasudlon kay late naka.*

The journey of remote students in distance learning was a rough climb toward the unexplored mountain that tests their determination and faith; without support from their families, peers, school, and teachers, it would not be possible for them to overcome such arduous challenges. The motivation and support shown by their parents keep them moving forward despite the situation. Their peers are their partners in arms of overcoming and coping with the strengths and difficulties they experience in school, and lastly the school and teachers for providing the opportunity to continue their education. The words of encouragement from their instructors and the importance of compassion and understanding the situation they are in.

Theme 4: Learners available resources

Theme 4 describes the struggles of the remote students with their personal and family financial deficiency and the availability and capacity of the device needed for them to participate in distance learning education. The theme is made of two (2) sub-themes: (1) Financial, and (2) Device availability and capacity.

Sub-Theme 4.1: Financial

In the case of a developing country, families from lower socioeconomic strata have limited learning space at home, access to quality Internet service, and online learning resources. This is the reason why the learning environment and learning resources recorded the highest level of challenges. The socioeconomic profile of the students (i.e., low and middle-income groups) is the same reason financial problems frequently surfaced in their responses. These students frequently linked the lack of financial resources to their access to the Internet, educational materials, and equipment necessary for online learning (Barrot, J. S., Llenares, I. I., & Del Rosario, L. S., 2021)

RS4: *First is money, ako raman gapa school sa akong self so mao jud na pinaka una galisod jud ko sa money kung asa nako sya makuha, COVID baya need pod nako maka income. Support gikan sa ako pamilya wala mao ng naka gahunahuna jud ko mo undang because also of that.*

RS5: *Sometimes I was thinking to stop because of the signal kay magputol putol. Also our financial budget kay dili kaayo ka deliver akoang papa sa bakery, if walay delivery walay income*

RS6: *Yes, kay gasto kaayo. Double na ang gasto kay mo plete pako aron makapasignal dayon magpload pako sa cellphone. Compared sa face to face nga makasave gyud ka kay usa ra ang bayran, ang boarding house lang. Burden kayo ang gasto*

RS13: *Nag guol ko, kanang naglibog ko asa ko mo kuha sa load ing-ana, kay ni undang naman ko ato og work kay daghan na activity.*

Sub-Theme 4.2: Device availability and capacity

In the Philippines, several studies showed some contrasting sentiments with regard to internet connectivity and the use of gadgets or devices for online learning (Asio, John Mark R., et al., 2021). Poor students do not own laptops and desktop computers and have limited internet connections (Cleofas, J. V., & Rocha, I. C. N., 2021). The availability of learning tools or devices is equally important. Although we are in an era where technological instruments and apparatuses are within reach, there are still some who do not have one. (Asio, John Mark R., et al., 2021).

RS5: *It is difficult kay full storage na akong phone need to delete files usa maka submit usab.*

RS7: *Naninkamot nalang gyod nga maka cope. First nako gibuhay kay dili pako kapaapil sa klase, akong cellphone dili ma downloadan og mga apps dili makasarang. Mao to nagpalit ko cellphone para makaapil ko sa klasi and adjustment, lisod, stressful og crucial.*

RS8: *Nalipay ko pagkabalo that time, pero dili pwede magamit akoang cellphone sa online class. Akong idea ato kay moadto ko sa akoang classmate sa lungsod para makipagshare sa iyahang cellphone while our instructor is conducting class online. Usahay pahulmon ra sab ko sa akong classmate aron makasubmit sa mga activities. Nakq cope ra ko sa mga requirements kay kon makaadto ko sa lungsod obranon nako tanan.*

RS9: *If madugayan among klase mo out nako og sayo kay delikado ang lugar kong magab-ihan para sa safety. Then every time makasubmit ko sa mga activities and outputs mang delete ko dayon kay dali ra mapuno ang storage sa akong cellphone.*

RS10: *Kuan na kulbaan kay lahi biya ang physical tapos wala mi Wi-Fi connection tapos ako cellphone low specs hinay kaayo maka signal og hinay ang connection. Nalipay ko kay gipalitan kog bag-o na cellphone para dali maka connect.*

As we recall, the implementation of distance learning was due to the COVID-19 pandemic and almost everything was shut down such as public and private establishments, schools, even churches. This caused the daily expenses to increase twice or threefold its cost e.g tricycle fare, food, transportation of goods, etc. This situation pushes the students to the edge in choosing between continuing education or stopping due to financial problems. The problem doesn't just stop there, because for them to be able to participate in the distance learning education, they need to at least have a technological device like a smartphone or laptop that is appropriate and capable of joining synchronous meetings, downloading/uploading heavy files, editing, has enough storage and with specifications that could maintain stable internet connection. These necessary devices are what they don't usually have.

Theme 5: Mental health

Theme 5 represents remote students' experiences when distance learning education is implemented and how this affects their mental health in adjusting and coping with the changes that accompany it. It tackles overcoming the challenges brought by changes and keeping their hopes.

Cited in the study by Lister et al., (2021) there has been much discussion around student mental health in higher education in recent years, as research shows that mental health difficulties have a serious effect on students' attainment, progression, and study outcomes (Evans et al., 2018; Hughes & Spanner, 2019; Sick et al., 2019; Thorley, 2017). Students experiencing mental health difficulties are less likely to complete and/or pass a course or module (Mojtabai et al., 2015; Richardson, 2015), are more likely to drop out of university (Brown, 2016; Mojtabai et al., 2015; Richardson, 2015), and are less likely to attain higher grades (Eisenberg et al., 2009). Additionally, students are more likely to experience or develop mental health problems than non-students, implying that studying and university culture is a significant contributing factor (Brown, 2016; Ribeiro et al., 2018; Tinklin et al., 2005; Winzer et al., 2018).

RS1: *I am amazed by their decision because I thought before it will be easy even though there are no physical classes but that amazement was turned into a metaphorical torment in adapting to this new normal. School culture is quite mentally draining.*

RS2: *There was a time nga nami na kayo i-undang kay wala gyud connection sa balay. Then ang pag-obra sab sa module wala ko kabalo kon asa ko mo ask kay maglisod ko og sabot. Kay nakahunahuna ko nga dili na pareha ang quality sa education unlike sauna nga competent gyud*

RS3: *At that time, pagkabalo nako nga ma shut down ang school tungod sa pandemic kay maka ingon ko sakong kaugalingon ato nga dili nalang ko mo skwela og tiwas kay nawad-an ko og hope.*

RS4: *Yes, dali ra kaayo ang submission, ma stress ka gamay kay usahay example mo hatag 2 days ra, usahay gane, 1 day ra mo hatag og deadline mao na usahay naa kay buhaton dli nimu mabuhay kay mahunahuna sa deadline, pero kung mo hatag 1 week ok ra. In school san-una ang plete pero karon naa naman ko motor.*

RS7: *Mura ko ato na disappoint naka feel ko ato og stressful more in activity lisod baya kana sa smartphone mag encode ka murag dali ka ma stress. The struggle gyod ko ato pero karon ga anam anam nakog adopt.*

RS12: *Ato nga time murag stress jud siya, stressful- galisod gyod mi adjust tungud sa bag-ong modality plus pa pag mag online class hinay ang connection. Ato nga time naa pami city ato nauli mi tapos ni announce pud nga dli mo balik ang face-to-face class so mag unsa nalang ta me ani? Paano nalang among klasi? Unsa nalang mahitabo sa klase? So na worry gyod mi.*

Distance learning education brought so much culture shock and changes to educational practices that the remote students used to and even now they are still in the process of embracing this reality. Changing their ways of learning swiftly in order to keep up with these changes; remote students feel pressured, stressed, and develop anxiety thinking that if they will do nothing they will be left behind in their classes and activities. Exploring

beyond what they have used to and finding ways to have internet access to connect with their peers and teachers is mentally draining.

In summary, in a distance learning educational setup, students living in remote areas had a rough experience. Taking a modality that they didn't choose, but as they are left with no other option but to accept that this is the only way to continue their education, is very challenging. Accepting distance learning needs a positive outlook in life and a goal to overcome the abrupt change in the educational system. Adapting will always take time especially when the learners are natives to the face-to-face modality. The unfavorable, uncondusive, unsafe learning environment with no/unstable internet connection are the things they need to overcome every day. Financial problems and the lack of appropriate technological devices needed for distance learning drives remote students to the edge in choosing between continuing or stopping education. Their journey in distance learning is like a rough climb toward the unexplored mountain that tested their determination, mental health, perseverance, and faith to their limit; without the support from their families, peers, school, and teachers, it would not be possible for them to overcome arduous challenges.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The experiences of remote students in distance learning education are a rough journey toward the unexplored horizon. Their positive outlook in life and goal serves as the driving force to overcome the abrupt change in the educational system. Having participated in the learning process in an unfavorable, uncondusive, and unsafe learning environment with no/unstable internet connection and inappropriate/no technological devices at home is very challenging. Without the support from their families, peers, school, and teachers, it would not be possible for them to overcome arduous challenges. With this, it is recommended that the school should review and enhance its learning continuity plan in addressing the educational needs of students living in remote areas. Teachers should conduct their own students' profiling and analysis to identify students who need more compassion and consideration to avoid traumatization and unnecessary pressure. Lastly, teachers should show more sympathy for the situation of remote students in the distance learning educational setup.

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