

From Stress to Success: Exploring How Filipino Students Cope with Remote Learning Amid Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract — Remote learning, especially in developing countries where resources are a real problem, poses overwhelming stress among the students amid the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. This study aims to explore how 20 learners cope with remote learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic. It entailed a qualitative research design following a descriptive approach. The participants were purposively sampled Filipino students. An interview questionnaire method was employed to gather the needed information which was then subjected to content analysis. It emerged that the students employ the following coping strategies: looking for good space and time; borrowing learning resources; seeking support from peers; approaching the teachers; practicing time management; doing learning tasks ahead; extending the time for learning tasks; diverting attention; regulating the self; taking extra jobs; crying; and praying. With a global pandemic affecting learners of all grades, at times the situation can feel difficult to navigate. As more schools move towards remote learning, there can be some growing pains learners are feeling as the world adjusts. Here are a few insights of learners about remote learning in the coming academic year: convenience and comfortability, availability and affordability, technology and time, social interaction and stigma, teacher and school strategies, new roles and responsibilities for parents as co-teachers, increased parent-school communication, and community getting together. This study provides evidence as regards the contextual coping strategies of students in trying to succeed in remote learning amid a global crisis. The conclusions and recommendations are offered at the end of the paper.

Keywords — *Experiences, coping strategies, remote learning, COVID-19 pandemic, insights*

I. Introduction

Set in a developing country, schools in the Philippines are observably unprepared for the sudden migration of education in the middle of the ongoing crisis and the remote learning system seems chaotic. Looking at the statistics, it is reported that almost 3.5 million Filipino learners enrolled in elementary and secondary levels are roughly affected by the pandemic (Joaquin, Biana & Dacela, 2020). It also revealed the digital divide among Filipino learners who are already under remote learning right now. Apart from the other challenges that they need to overcome before the crisis on a face to face learning set-up, learners now even have to face difficulties associated with remote learning (Simbulan, 2020). As a result, learners suffer from a lot of stressful events due to

the many responsibilities they have to handle every day. Looking at the larger picture, learning is complicated, and learners are in the middle of a social disaster.

Despite overwhelming stress and difficulties as reported in recent studies (Rotas & Cahapay, 2020; Bozkurt et al., 2020; Baticulon et al., 2020), learners still find silver linings from the challenges they encounter in the practice of remote learning. Locally, for instance, Custodio, a freshman Filipino student who only relies on her tiny 5-inch screen cell phone to participate in their remote classes, copes with the challenge by downloading the lesson plans on her phone and rewriting them on a paper for easy reading (Santos, 2020). Furthermore, in a local study (Baloran, 2020), Filipino learners surveyed used a combination of personal coping strategies during this pandemic. It includes connecting with friends and family to relieve stress, talking and motivating oneself, and diverting attention to other things at home to stay away from the stress caused by COVID-19. Despite the negativities, learners still find themselves surviving in a remote learning set-up through coping mechanisms to manage their stress.

Considering education as a global common good (United Nations, 2020), learners continually strive to survive and demonstrate positive actions, responses, and outlook to surpass the everyday struggles associated with remote learning. While action is the antidote to despair; coping strategies are also the antidote to stress and challenges. Conceptually, Chowdhury (2020) defined coping strategy as a set of adaptive tools administered to proactively avoid burnout. Berjot and Gillet (2019) further contended that coping is a response behavior used by an individual to protect himself or herself from a painful stimulus that may provoke his or her stress and anxiety. In this study, coping is a strategy or mechanism employed by the learners to successfully manage stressful events and situations pertained to remote learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study explores how Filipino learners of New Visayas Elementary School in Matanao, Davao del Sur cope with remote learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic. With the coping mechanism of learners, comes the success stories that will also be gathered by the researcher, along with the insights of the learners in remote learning.

The current research descriptively addresses the gap on how learners cope with remote learning within the Philippine context that is plagued by structural constraints and exacerbated by the current global crisis. This study provides researchers and educators a qualitative glimpse into the coping strategies employed by learners in a developing country amid this time of global uncertainty. Thus, the goal of this study is to explore how Filipino learners cope with remote learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the coping mechanisms of learners in remote learning brought by undue stress amid COVID-9?
2. What are the success stories of learners in remote learning amid COVID 19?

3. What are the insights of learners about remote learning brought by undue stress and stories of success amid COVID-9?

The crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic that is currently sweeping the world has caused a change in the paradigm of learning for learners in schools. Learning that was originally carried out face-to-face in schools has changed drastically into remote learning (Affouneh et al., 2020; Dhawan, 2020; Favale et al., 2020). Many people have negative perceptions about remote education (learning), given its performance which raises the pros and cons. Remote learning has also faced many challenges historically, such as impersonal and unsatisfactory interactions (Abuhassna & Yahaya, 2019; Affouneh et al., 2020). However, new tools and techniques such as distance learning, web-based learning or courses, and learning management systems make a significant contribution to the remote learning arena and increase student satisfaction (Abuhassna & Yahaya, 2019).

Remote learning at elementary and secondary levels are not a new phenomenon in the world of education but may be new for learners, teachers, and parents at the primary and secondary education levels. In fact, its popularity has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic as a new method for increasing research and learning audiences. One of the right steps in this situation is to utilize network technology and information technology for the development of a learning system, namely the remote learning model or online learning or e-learning, or online learning model (Dhawan, 2020).

Expanding and increasing the availability of materials and communication technology very rapidly, remote learning courses are on the rise. New learning methods have also been developed (Dhawan, 2020; Gupta & Goplani, 2020; K. Lee, 2020; Mahlangu, 2019). Online learning platforms have the potential to increase student interactivity and engagement, thereby contributing to influencing the level of optimism and pessimism of learners during distance learning (Kusmaryono, Maharani, & Rusdiantoro, 2020).

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic from the beginning of 2020 until now in 2023, all learners or learners and teachers have not been able to do face-to-face learning. In order to prevent the wider spread of COVID-19, several countries are still implementing a remote learning system. The hasty and unavoidable adoption of remoted learning presents an unequal and potentially unsatisfactory educational experience and threatens to further discredit remote learning as a viable educational platform (Dhawan, 2020; Gupta & Goplani, 2020; Lee, 2020).

Several pedagogical strategies were also identified by many researchers to help relieve the challenges of remote learning. These approaches can be summarized as follows: (1) integration of research and exploration to increase future teachers' abilities to conduct experiences in their future classrooms (Brown, 2020); (2) utilization of collaborative learning approaches and embracing a team approach to teaching, with a common curriculum at the center (Oznacar & Mehtap, 2020; Pace et al., 2020; Vanourek, 2020), (3) the use offline teaching strategies such as printed teaching

materials, modules, textbooks to support the success of online learning (Rusi, 2020), (4) incorporating authentic assessments and personalized learning resources during online classes (Pace, et.al, 2020); (5) formation of learners' e-learning circles, initiation of online discussion forums and online mentoring (Zayapragassarazan, 2020) and lastly, (6) the use of seven principles for good online teaching which are (a) encouraging contact between learners and faculty, (b) developing reciprocity and cooperation among learners, (c) encouraging active learning, (d) giving prompt feedback, (e) emphasizing time on task, (f) communicating high expectations, and (g) respecting diverse talents and ways of learning (Munna & Shaikh, 2020).

The use of effective institutional and management strategies also helped in hurdling the challenges. Some of the strategies highlighted in the literature include re-creating the structure of the regular school day and regular grading practices (Vanourek, 2020), maintaining sustainable academic support and communication, imposing legal resolutions and restructuring, ensuring a sufficient number of qualified personnel for online teaching and non-academic processes (Tosun, 2020), school principals' macroscopic planning and strategizing and school teachers' microscopic viewpoint for teaching practices in K-12 education (Song et al., 2020)

Few other ways of coping with the challenges of remote learning include encouraging teachers across levels of education to maintain motivation, and undergo competency and skills development in using the online learning system (Young & Donovan, 2020). Finally, providing sustainable psychological and psychosocial support is also another way to cope with the challenges; this can be done by meeting learners' social, emotional, and nutritional needs, reaching out to individual learners and families regularly, and by providing online mental health services (Vanourek, 2020).

Simonson has provided a theory on which to center this expanding field of distance education. Simonson theorized that if distance learning is to be successful, then the learning must be equivalent to learning in a traditional setting (Simonson et al, 2015). Learning will always vary by individuals, whether they are physically sitting next to each other, or communicating solely through the internet because everyone integrates new knowledge into their existing schema differently.

Simonson's basic premise is that if the learning experiences are not identical, because that is not possible for unique humans, but instead equivalent, then a student should be able to transfer from a remote learning course midway into a traditional course with little if any lacking knowledge. But, this does not mean that the two courses themselves should be identical. Instead, the remote course needs to be specially designed so that the learning experience is in fact equivalent to the traditional course. For example, a remote learning course for an elementary child should be designed differently from the traditional version, taking the child's mental development level and technical skills into consideration. "Identical traditional and remotely-delivered courses are not likely to be effective, rather, a variety of equivalent instructional approaches should be provided for learners – local and distant – to learn from" (Simonson et al, 2015).

So in other words, thoughtfully design the courses so that the learning outcome is the same, whether through remote or traditional courses. Still, even with Simonson's solid theory, there are several other theories to be considered. Keegan (1996) classified theories of remote education into three groups: *theories of independence and autonomy*, *theories of industrialization of teaching*, and *theories of interaction and communication*.

Michael Moore's theory of remote education – "independent study" fits into the first of Keegan's groups. This theory is composed of two parts, the two-way communication between the two physically separated parties and how responsive the program is to the individual needs of the learner. Simonson's equivalency theory is similar to the second part of Moore's theory, in how they both agree that the instructional approach should be tailored to the needs of the learner. A remote course will need to have a different design than a traditional classroom to meet the needs of the learner for equivalent learning outcomes. A classroom has frequent interaction between classmates and the instructor, while a remote learning course requires more autonomy on the student's part. This means that the remote course needs to be designed with this consideration in mind for equivalency learning. (Simonson et al, 2015).

Simonson would agree with Holmberg (2019) when he stated, "Though it is an effective mode of training, remote education runs the risk of leading to mere fact learning and reproduction of accepted "truths." However, it can be organized and carried out in such a way that learners are encouraged to search, criticize, and identify positions of their own" (Simonson et al, 2019).

So like Simonson postulated, if remote learning can be carefully designed using a variety of equivalent instructional approaches, the learning outcomes can be individualized as learners work through the course on their own, maximizing the learning outcomes. Though the theories may seem dissonant at first glance, they harmonize with the idea that remote learning may be the key to the possibilities of the idealized individualized learning experience.

II. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design following a descriptive approach. A qualitative research design involves a discovery process that enables the researcher to develop details. It does not test a hypothesis, but rather explore a given phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). One of the approaches under qualitative research design is the descriptive approach. It is an approach that describes the current status of a phenomenon without intent to manipulate (Mertler, 2019). Thus, based on this information, a qualitative research design following a descriptive approach is considered appropriate for this study which has the primary purpose to explore how Filipino learners cope with the remote learning in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic

A total of 20 Filipino learners served as participants of this study. They were chosen through purposive and convenient sampling techniques. They are currently enrolled in the elementary level (Grades 5 and 6), thus have considerable experience in remote learning. They

were further selected based on their ability to furnish the needed data and considering their availability at the time of the data gathering. This sample does not represent the population of the learners, but it is considered adequate to demonstrate the qualitative purpose of this study to saturate all possible coping strategies that learners employ in remote learning.

The instrument used to collect the data for this study was an interview questionnaire. Pressed by the current restriction, the researchers developed the interview questionnaire. It consisted of open questions designed to gather responses about how the learners cope with the remote learning amid the current situation. The researchers tailored the questions based on the interest of the study. They were content validated by a professor and two other graduate school professors to ensure their intelligibility, appropriateness, and relevance.

The research process was done by initially securing the consent of the target participants. The researchers explained the purpose of the study. Considering the current situation, it was emphasized that their participation is voluntary and follows the principle of anonymity. It was also articulated that no advantage nor harm is accrued from participating in the study. The interviews were done in the classroom, school premises, and their residence. The learners answered the interview questionnaire. The data were organized, and subjected to analysis.

The gathered data were specifically subjected to content analysis. Jupp (2020) defined content analysis as a technique used to analyze data obtained from a range of practices presented in different forms such as written words and images. The researchers initially downloaded the transcript of all the responses of the participants. The preliminary inspection of the data made possible the identification of the codes. These codes were repetitively examined based on their similarities and differences until categories were generated. The researchers iteratively returned to the original transcript to review the codes and proposed categories.

III. Results and Discussion

Coping mechanism of learners in remote learning brought by undue stress amid COVID-19

Based on the narratives of learners, five themes emerged: *looking for good space and time, borrowing learning resources, seeking support from peers, approaching the teachers, and practicing time management.*

Success stories of learners in remote learning amid COVID 19

Remote learning was difficult for learners. They have to cope with difficulties. However, their narratives were also told with stories of success such as *doing learning tasks ahead, extending time for learning tasks, diverting attention, regulating the self, taking extra jobs, crying, and praying.*

Insights of learners about remote learning brought by undue stress and stories of success amid COVID-19

Learners are experiencing uncharted territory when it comes to their education: transitioning from in-person classroom and campus experiences to virtual ones. With a global pandemic affecting learners of all grades, at times the situation can feel difficult to navigate. As more schools move towards remote learning, there can be some growing pains learners are feeling as the world adjusts. Here are a few insights of learners about remote learning in the coming academic year: *convenience and comfortability, availability and affordability, technology and time, social interaction and stigma, teacher and school strategies, new roles and responsibilities for parents as co-teachers, increased parent-school communication, and community getting together.*

Discussion

A drawback of this study might be the exploratory nature of the qualitative methodology. This study involved interviewing parents and professional educators in one diverse county to better understand the impacts of online learning on elementary students' mental and social emotional well-being amid the COVID-19 pandemic. A further and more in-depth investigation into the use of Social and Emotional Learning in an online classroom setting is warranted and timely. Although the researcher chose participants using rigorous criteria to avoid any biases, sampling bias still occurred. First, the study sample was too small to represent the larger community. The researcher's positionality as a parent and educator also affected the data analysis. Second, the researcher did not interview any students, and the study was conducted within limited demographic diversity. The participants' ages ranged from 27 to 56, and they lived in just one part of one county. Third, the study was conducted in only a few months, limiting the scope of awareness that participants might have been able to add after they had integrated more experience.

Further studies might consider strategies that teachers can implement to keep elementary students in specific, and all students in general motivated and engaged in unprecedented situations and crises. Future research might expand the study to examine the impact of online learning on vulnerable students, such as English language learners (ELLs) and students with learning disabilities. Furthermore, based on the findings of this study, the researcher suggests including students in the interviews to learn more about their perspectives regarding online learning and to better understand how implementing SEL programs in online learning affects their mental health and social-emotional well-being. Studying the different perspectives of educators, parents, and students reveals whether online learning hinders or facilitates students' learning and gives school stakeholders insight into effective online strategies that enhance students' motivation and engagement in an online setting. Lastly, the researcher suggests that schools devote more attention to Social and Emotional Learning as this study shows that SEL can teach students new skills to regulate their emotions and make them more responsible. This is especially important for students at risk, students with special needs, ELLs and other vulnerable groups.

The findings of this study focused on the impact of online learning on elementary students but did not give a wider understanding of the perspectives of middle school students. Future research might study whether including Social and Emotional Learning curricula in schools might lead to different results than the ones of this study. Future research could adopt a longitudinal, mixed methods research design to compare the relationship between the impacts of online learning on elementary, middle school, and high school students.

IV. Conclusion

This study offers guidance to teachers and school stakeholders about addressing the challenges of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The experiences and perceptions of the participants mirror the educational consequences of online learning on the students' well-being and academic performance. The findings reflected the importance of tailoring instruction to meet the needs of all students, regardless of their abilities, race, cultural background, or economic status. These findings showed that students are more than academic selves, teachers' self-care matters, parents' relationships with their students and school affect the learning outcomes of these students and building community-wide networks empower teachers and the students' families. Maintaining connection and positive interrelationships, in addition to teacher training, improves the quality of education and allows students to achieve their academic, social, and emotional goals.

This research suggested useful strategies and resources for effective online learning, addressed reassurance to students and parents and provided information about students' needs during and after the pandemic. The researcher concluded that it is necessary to adjust the curriculum and to address individual learning needs for students to reconnect. Moreover, the findings highlighted that students' and educators' well-being is a priority because this impacts student learning. The review of the literature showed that SEL focuses on educational inequities and empowers students to become successful (CASEL, 2005). Based on the interviews, findings, and review of literature, the impacts of online learning address the need for curricula and policies that meet the diverse needs of all students to promote social justice and equity.

Remote learning amid a crisis may present tremendous stress to students. This study aimed to qualitatively explore how Filipino students cope with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. It can be concluded from the results that students employ several coping strategies in their attempt to succeed in remote learning amid the current crisis. The categories of coping strategies that emerged are: looking for good space and time; borrowing learning resources, seeking support from peers; approaching the teachers; practicing time management; doing learning tasks ahead; extending the time for learning tasks; diverting attention; regulating the self; taking extra jobs; crying; and praying. This paper presents a contextual conclusion as far as particular coping strategies of college students in remote learning during a global crisis are concerned.

Based on this conclusion, it is recommended that formal mechanisms at the institutional level should be placed. For example, the government should address perennial problems with internet connectivity. A drive to provide identified students with phones or computers should also be coordinated as a partnership with private sectors. Moreover, the Department of Education (DepEd) should broaden their student support services as far as psychological services are concerned. These services may be integrated in the mental health of public schools' students, parents and teachers. The instructional requirements, e.g. schedule of submissions and number of activities, should also be adjusted by the teachers when designing the instruction. This action will help students as they adjust to the remote delivery approach while learning the modular content at the same time.

As this work focused on qualitatively exploring and describing the coping strategies of selected participants in a particular environment and circumstance, the conclusions can only be applied within the context of the research. Restricted within a small sample of public school students, the result is not intended to generalize about the coping strategies of the population of all students'. Thus, based on this constraint, it is suggested that future researchers should conduct an extension for the quantitative component through surveys and involving a larger sample in the different levels of education. This approach will provide a broader perspective as regards the coping strategies employed by the students amid challenging times of the COVID-19 crisis.

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