

Coping Mechanism of Disadvantaged Learners During Online Learning

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Abstract

The study explored learners' coping mechanism during online learning at Colegio de San Juan de Letran-Manaoag for the Academic Year 2021-2022. Snowball sampling was used by the researchers in selecting the informants and data was gathered through a semi-structured interview. Findings revealed that the challenges being encountered by the disadvantaged learners during online learning was intermittent internet connection, digital divide, unconducive learning environment, financial incapability and overloaded academic activities. To cope up with these challenges, disadvantaged learners are in need of peer support, side hustles, crafting of study plan, devising methods and emotional comfort. This study found out that intermittent connection and digital divide mostly affects the active participation of these learners in the conduct of online learning. Thus, giving them the disadvantages of being unable to provide these necessities for effective learning. Lastly, emotional Comfort by their peers and especially their instructors is highly needed to help them persevere in finishing their studies despite challenging times for them.

Keywords: Coping Mechanism, Disadvantaged Learners, Online Learning, COVID-19 Pandemic, Philippines

Introduction

In March 2020, like other countries, the Philippines resulted in school closure as a preventive measure to control and stop the rapid spread of COVID-19 virus. Amid the COVID-19 threat, educational institution pushes through to continue education. The Department of Education (DepEd) and Commission on Higher Education (CHED) implemented a new way of learning in which, a shift from physical face-to-face class to distance learning wherein students were given modules or attend their classes virtually.

Further, the Commission on Higher Education adopted flexible learning as a new normal in collegiate level. Schools can deliver lessons online or offline - synchronous sessions, which happen in real time, and asynchronous session, which omits interaction but uses online channels and/or the combination of both. However, moving to online learning, many students experienced difficulties in technological matters. Some students struggled with the unfamiliar ways and some were burdened with financial issues especially those disadvantaged college students (low-income students and working students). Low-income students experienced challenges while attending online class during 2020 mostly due to great lack of internet, higher childcare responsibilities or greater probability of being sick or stressed (Rodriguez-Planas, 2020).

Despite the challenges brought by the pandemic, most students also expressed efforts to address the situation

by finding productive coping mechanisms. The students' coping mechanism addressing the issues encountered were: self-care, prioritize studies, always take time and effort, organize schedule, and rest (Comendador et al, 2021).

However, little is known about how students cope up to the challenges during new normal education. Thus, the researchers came up with a study entitled "Coping Mechanism of Disadvantaged Students of Colegio de San Juan de Letran-Manaoag During New Normal Education Academic Year 2021-2022" to identify the

coping mechanism/strategies employed by the students amid challenging times of the new normal setting. Further, the present study also aims to identify students' perception and experiences during new normal education.

Research Questions

The researchers aim to determine the coping mechanism of disadvantaged learners during online learning at Colegio de San Juan de Letran-Manaoag for Academic Year 2021-2022. Thus, researchers sought to answer the following:

1. What are the challenges faced by the college students of Colegio de San Juan de Letran-Manaoag during online learning?
2. How do the disadvantaged learners cope with the challenges identified?

Literature Review

According to Caunca (2021), 'New Normal' education is a journey full of hindrances especially during these trying times. The road that students have taken is not easy, considering that students need to adjust to different platforms to continue their education. Students experienced difficulties along the way such as it is hard to navigate the learning management system, problems with adapting to the schedule of classes and its set up. Some students are living in homes that may not have access to Wi-Fi or limited access at best. The move towards online learning has been a challenge for everyone. However, despite the struggles faced by the students in online learning, they utilized various ways to cope up with such difficulties.

In August 2020, Nuria Rodriguez-Planas, in his study *Hitting Where It Hurts Most: COVID-19 and Low-Income Urban College Students*, City University of New York, Queens College, found out that low-income college students experienced challenges while attending online classes during spring 2020 mostly due to higher childcare responsibilities, greater lack of internet, or greater probability of being sick or stressed. Planas, 2020 also added that low-income college students have or are currently more at risk of experiencing financial distress including securing basic food needs and shelter, facing job loss, or losing their financial aid.

Furthermore, Barrot et. al, (2021), conducted a study entitled *Students' Online Learning Challenges During the Pandemic and How They Cope with Them: The case of the Philippines*, and found out that the online learning challenges of students varied in terms of type and extent. Their greatest challenge was linked to their learning environment at home, while their least challenge was technological literacy and competency. They also added that the specific strategies that each student adopted may have been shaped by different factors surrounding him/her, such as available resources, student personality, family structure, relationship with peers and teacher, and aptitude. In terms of strategies employed by students, the most frequently used were resource management and utilization, help-seeking, technical aptitude enhancement, time management, and learning environment control.

Moreover, Logel et. al, (2021) conducted a study entitled *Experiences and Coping Strategies of College Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic* and found that students struggled with the unfamiliar,

unstructured, and isolating circumstances of early pandemic lockdowns. But most students also expressed efforts to try to address the situation by finding productive coping strategies, such as establishing new routines, turning to others for companionship, and bettering themselves through exercise or new hobbies.

Despite overwhelming stress and difficulties as reported in recent studies, students still find ways out from the challenges they encounter in the practice of new normal. The motivation level to learn of the college students was affected by the sudden implementation of online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, students can be motivated in online learning despite the hindrance through proper support, assistance, and encouragement (Avila et al, 2020).

Methodology

The researchers utilized a qualitative research design to study, explore, and understand the coping mechanism of disadvantaged learners during online learning in Colegio de San Juan de Letran-Manaoag. In line with this, the qualitative approach utilized to conduct this study was phenomenological research. Phenomenology is a form of qualitative research that focuses on the study of an individual's lived experiences within the world (Neubauer et. al, 2019).

Participants

The participants of this study were ten college students of Colegio de San Juan de Letran-Manaoag. They were identified to belong to the cluster disadvantaged learners through the following inclusion criteria: 1) the learners belong to a family who has an income of 10,957 and below; 2) a learner without wi-fi connectivity; 3) a learner using only one outdated device for online classes. In addition, snowball sampling was used by the researcher in selecting informants for the study.

Instruments of the Study

The researchers made use of a semi-structured interview to collect data for this study. To get the appropriate data, the researchers crafted interview questions with two parts. The first part consists of items which gathers students' socio-demographic profile such as name, age, gender, year level, parents' occupation and monthly income. The second part consists of questions made by the researchers in line

with the purpose of the study.

Procedure

Several steps were taken to determine the coping mechanism of disadvantaged students during new normal education. The first two steps focused on the researcher as the researcher identifies research topic and bracketing so as to suspend personal biases toward the topic under study. The next step focused on the participants as it involves the data gathering process through online semi-structured interview which was recorded and saved in a data storage device. Then, it was followed by data management and analysis. Further, every piece of information and data gathered was stored properly and treated with confidentiality. The collected data was analyzed according to Hycner's Explication Process. The data were then transcribed, analyzed and categorized into themes and sub- themes.

Ethical Considerations

As the interview begins, the informants of the study were given information about the study being conducted. The researchers discussed thoroughly that the informants have the right to withdraw at any given time. It was clarified to the informants that their information and their answers in the said interview will be treated with confidentiality in accordance with the RA 10173 - Data Privacy Act of 2021. For the purpose of this study, the data will only be accessible to the researchers and their adviser as it will be stored in a drive which will be encrypted. In addition, the data collected from the informants will be permanently deleted upon the completion of the study. Codenames or pseudonyms was used to preserve informants' anonymity. This study was bounded by the ethical principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy, and justice. The researchers ensured that within the conduct of this study, these principles were observed and maintained. The researchers ensured that the informants were kept aware of their right to self-determination, right to privacy, right to anonymity and confidentiality, right to fair treatment, and right to protection from harm.

Result

This section presents the findings according to the study's research questions.

Table 1. *Challenges Faced by Disadvantaged Students During New Normal Education and Their Coping Mechanism*

<i>Challenges Encountered on New Normal Education</i>	<i>Coping Mechanism</i>
Intermittent Internet Connection	Peer Support
Digital Divide	Side Hustles
Unconducive Learning Environment	Crafting Study Plan
Financial Incapability	Devising Methods
Overloaded Academic Activities	Emotional Comfort

Discussion

The research's principal goal is to determine the challenges faced by the disadvantaged students and identify how they cope up with these challenges. Upon interpreting and analyzing the informants' responses in a semi-structured interview, the following were found out. The informants who are considered disadvantaged learners experiences intermittent internet connection which greatly affects their active participation during online classes. Digital divide was also the main concern due to financial restraints. Disadvantaged learners suffer as the device they are currently utilizing cannot support some specification needed in some activities. Moreover, unconducive learning environment is also a concern since these learners live in a place where the space is limited and lacks appropriate are for learning. Financial Incapability was also seen in their response as they cannot easily and immediately provide some resources need for their learning especially load for data connectivity. Lastly, due to unavailability of devices that can perform certain processes needed for their academic requirements, disadvantaged learners were being piled up with works that affects their time management and study plan.

To cope up with this challenges, disadvantaged learners depend on peer support. They are in dire need for the assistance of their classmates who are more privileged to access devices and internet connectivity to support their studies. Fortunately, their classmates are willing to lend them a hand regarding these challenges. Next is side hustles. Most of the considered disadvantaged learners' resort to looking for part-time jobs in order to suffice the needs for load and data connection though they admit that it greatly affects their time allocated for studies. Crafting study plan is also a way for them to identify what activities needed submitted immediately. These academic activities were given priority to avoid late submissions. Disadvantaged learners are also capable of devising methods. Learners manage to deal with it somehow through making initiatives and figuring out how to solve the difficulties they are facing. Lastly, to cope up

with the challenges mentioned above, emotional comfort provided by their instructors is a way to motivate them persevere with their studies despite of those difficulties.

Conclusion

Upon interpreting and analyzing the data provided by the informants, the result showed the challenges that disadvantaged learners faced during online classes. Further, it was also determined how they cope up with these identified challenges. Therefore, the following conclusions were made: (1) The challenges faced by disadvantaged learners were in terms of intermittent internet connection, digital divide, un conducive learning environment, financial incapability and overloaded academic activities. (2) To cope up with these challenges, disadvantaged learners is in need for peer support, side hustles, crafting of study plan, devising methods and emotional comfort. (3) It was also found out that intermittent connection and digital divide mostly affects the active participation of these learners in the conduct of online learning. Thus, giving them the disadvantages of being unable to provide these necessities for effective learning. (4) Emotional Comfort by their peers and especially their instructors is highly needed to help them persevere in finishing their studies despite challenging times for them.

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