

Voices of Students who Quit Studies Amidst the Pandemic

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Abstract

The present study sought to describe and interpret the experiences that became the factor of the students at a selected state university in Cebu City of Bachelor of Special Needs Education to withdraw and quit studies amidst the pandemic. This research used phenomenology research design to achieve in-depth and rich first-person accounts utilizing interpretative phenomenological analysis with four stages in interpreting the data. Given the societal condition, the data gathering was held through personal conversation in Messenger with a sample size of 5. Findings revealed that the majority of the factors experienced by the respondents were about having problems with internet connection and environmental setbacks while being admitted to online learning. Financial difficulty and experiences with mental health issues were also specified from the results that influenced the decision of the respondents to discontinue their studying.

Keywords— college students, financial challenges, internet connection, mental health, Virtual classes.

I. INTRODUCTION

Presently, the current means of access to education are virtual via online classes or the “New Normal.” This strategy may be reasonably new to the current situation – the COVID 19 pandemic. However, researchers observed that there are college students who have become unwilling to enroll, which led them to quit amidst the pandemic. The need to address this emerging circumstance is essential. It lets us know the reasons behind the students’ decisions not to continue studying, will help us understand their disposition, and might help in defying grounds for this problem in our society.

The pernicious virus called corona affected millions of people who have lost their lives and jobs—it also required massive educational adjustments worldwide. According to UNESCO, more than 1.5 billion students are affected by school and university closures (Sahbaz, 2020). As a result, long-distance education has become the “new normal” of the educational system. The government chose the option of home-sitting education so that students do not suffer the loss of schooling (Ahmad & Rahi, 2020). Nevertheless, while it was implemented, students faced many significant non-curricular challenges, including a lack of connection to one another, anxieties about mental and physical health, and financial concerns.

In the Philippines, it was estimated that for the school year 2020-2021, around three million learners

chose to unenroll or continue their education at the basic education level. The change to remote or distance learning modalities through self-learning modules and online classes contradicted the high-cost yet slow-speed internet connectivity in the country, putting strain on the capacity of families to shoulder the added costs of this adjustment in the educational mode. Although the results may vary across segments of society, some households are not prepared to catch up with this immediate digital transformation.

The Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges (PASUC) has an estimated 44,069 college students of state universities, and colleges (SUCs) unenrolled in 2020-2021 as the country deals with the COVID-19 pandemic. PASUC President Tirso Ronquillo reported this in a virtual meeting of the House committee on higher education and stated that the common reasons are fear of contamination, financial problem, lack of gadgets, and their residence relative to the university (Magsambol, 2020).

As mentioned earlier, college students have been dropping out or unwilling to enroll in the current educational approach, which is virtual classes. Moreover, considering the absence of Filipino literature, this study would contribute to factors affecting students’ decision to quit studies amidst pandemic literature in a Filipino context.

The present study seeks to describe and interpret the experiences, reasons, or factors of the students at a selected State University in Cebu City of Bachelor of Special Needs Education who withdrew and quit studies amidst the pandemic.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The supporting structure in this research was divided into two categories—the extrinsic factors affecting or operating from outside and intrinsic factors affecting the people or the respondents internally.

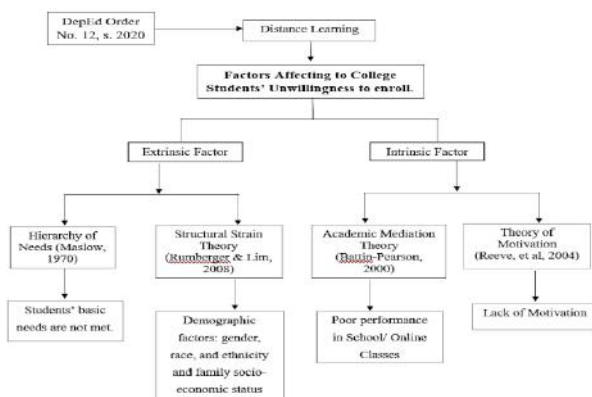


Fig.1: Systematic Diagram

The Department of Education of the Philippines made DepEd Order No. 12, s. 2020 Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan, an intervention that will respond to the basic education challenges today. Paving the way for online classes, distance learning, and printed and online modules. Though what would be the effects of these changes on students?

The first extrinsic factor is **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**; it proposed that when individuals work in a setting where their needs are not met, they will most likely operate in an undesirable way. The pandemic affected the student's families by not meeting their basic needs daily. This influences the student's mental and emotional well-being in which they might feel anxiety, depression, and mental breakdown.

The second extrinsic factor is **the Structural Strain Theory**, which focuses on demographic factors such as gender, race and ethnicity, and family socioeconomic status (Rumberger & Lim 2008). One example of socioeconomic status was the marginalized sector. They were the ones who suffered a tremendous blow when the pandemic might have a hard time providing their children's education, especially in the "new normal."

Moreover, the Intrinsic factor starts with **the Academic Mediation Theory**, which talks about the poor academic performance of students in school. It means that

students with low academic achievement would be most likely to drop out of school and not continue their education level (Battin-Pearson,2,000). A variety of challenges in long-distance learning, such as difficulties accessing instructional material, low-speed internet connection, vague learning content, and many more, significantly affect students' academic knowledge and performance in school.

Lastly, **the Theory of Motivation** focuses on the wants or needs that direct behavior toward a goal. The student's motivation depends on various reasons. For example, if they have great relationships and constant communication with their peers, they learn effectively in the new educational setting or have excellent family support. Motivation is the deciding factor on how a person will achieve their goals.

All theories come together to support and describe the results of this research, knowing the factors that affect the unwillingness of college students to enroll amidst the pandemic.

Domain of Inquiry

This paper sought to know the reasons for the students at a selected State University in Cebu City of Bachelor of Special Needs Education who withdrew and quit studies amidst the pandemic and learn the factors that affected college students' unwillingness to enroll and/or quit amidst the pandemic.

Limitation of the Study

The respondents of the study were only limited to the students who have previously been enrolled in the BSNEd program of the stated State University where the research was conducted. Therefore, this study only focuses on the experiences and factors voiced out by the said former students who fit the category given by the researchers.

Additionally, all the responses collected were kept with maximum confidentiality.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study was anchored on Descriptive Qualitative Phenomenological Design influenced by the Husserlian Phenomenology study. This study is concerned with an in-depth exploration of personal lived experience on online learning systems due to a pandemic that affected them not enroll in this school year (Spiegelberg, 1975). The interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach was utilized and reiterated the essence of exploring the research participants' lived experiences and allowing them to narrate the research findings (Alases, A. 2017).

Research Environment

The interview happened at a selected State University in Cebu City. However, due to the pandemic, data gathering was held online, which was mutually agreed upon between the participant's convenience and availability. The interview was conducted on a social media platform called Messenger through a one-on-one chat conversation between the participant and the researcher to ensure the participant's privacy and give and take the responses used in the data analysis.

Research Respondents

This paper used Homogeneous Purposive Sampling, where they picked a small homogeneous sample (Patton, 1990). All the participants met the following criteria: (1) Have been a student of BSNEED mainly from the specific chosen University of the study before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic; (2) should have stopped from their studies and are not currently enrolled in the first term of Academic Year 2020-2021 of the said program. The point of data saturation was guaranteed since there was enough collected data to achieve the research purpose. Any further data collection would yield identical results and confirm the respondents' emerging themes and conclusions.

Research Instruments

The primary instrument used in this study was a semi-structured questionnaire for the participants, composed of more open-ended questions. Researchers opted to record or collect their answers through the private conversation through Messenger (a mobile messaging application software) to ensure there was no essential missing data.

Data Gathering

Informed consent was sent beforehand that corresponds to the purpose of the respondent's part of the study. They were asked to fill out the consent asserting their permission to participate. The interview proceeded through a personal conversation. They were provided with a questionnaire about their experiences and reasons for not enrolling this semester, followed by in-depth follow-up questions. The researchers provided the participants a day to finish answering since personal difficulties have been a problem upon conducting the chat interview. Taking down significant responses and screen recording of the discussion was also done to document the whole session for transcribing the data.

Ethical Consideration

This study has set down the ethical consideration in collecting only the necessary and appropriate information and keeping the privacy and safety of the research respondents. Before the study commenced, the researchers

opted to inquire for approval from the Dean of College of Teachers Education in the said State University in Cebu City, where the study was conducted along with the signature of the research professor. After receiving approval, informed consent was sent to the participants corresponding to the purpose and their part of the study. They were asked to fill out the consent asserting their permission to participate in it. The interview then proceeded through a personal conversation in Messenger. The only people who had access to all the discussed and given private responses were researchers alone. The recordings used for educational purposes were destroyed as soon as the research was done. The confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents were of paramount importance. The usage of offensive, discriminatory, or other unacceptable language was avoided in the formulation of the interview questions and thoroughly checked by the researchers for maximum protection from any unwanted results. Moreover, participants have the right to withdraw from the study if they wish to do so.

Data Analysis

Data gathered was subjected to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), concerned with exploring in detail the personal lived experience and examining how people are making sense of their personal and social world (Shinebourne, 2009)

The data were transcribed through four stages: First is the; (1) the initial stage, where researchers had read the transcribed data as much as they could to familiarize it, they collected significant responses and textual analysis and wrote notes and comments on the transcript. The; (2) second stage included the observation of the data collected in seeking emerging patterns from the initial notes on the transcribed data. This involved formulating concise phrases with enough accuracy to remain grounded in the text and attain enough ideas to offer adequate understanding. Afterward, (3) the third stage had confined the practical information that the researchers collected, clustered together according to their similarities. The researchers thereafter sought patterns in the emerging themes and produced a structure that helped highlight converging ideas. Once all data was rigorously analyzed, a table of articles was created to display the themes constructed for the study. Fourth and last, (4) a table of themes was made to exhibit the structure of the major themes and their sub-themes.

III. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

After the researchers thoroughly read the whole transcript several times, they came to phenomenological reduction by outlining a set of meanings through jotting patterns on how the respondents exposed their experiences. After that, the

researchers clustered the interpretations to support the created themes. Sixteen themes were produced that generated six superordinate themes.

Table 1: Clustered Themes

Focus on Experience	EXTRINSIC FACTORS		INTRINSIC FACTORS		Future Anticipation
	Technological Availability	Environmental Setbacks	Personal Affliction	Social Discomforts	
Counterproductive way of learning	Slow internet connection	No conducive space for learning	Mental Health Crisis	Deprivation of Personal Interaction	Waiting for the return of face-to-face set up.
Doubts in the new learning setting	Medium to use for online learning	Upsetting societal conditions	Negative influence on decisions	Difficulty in managing peer communication	
Value-added cost to students			Escaping the causes of emotional challenge	Personal outlook in social interaction.	
Financial Scarce in the household					
Present consequential impacts.					

IV. INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Focus on Experience

The first theme described the participants' experiences with Online Learning during the pandemic. The respondents were asked about the reasons that influenced their decision to quit their studies after the first school year of online learning. Each of the respondents mentioned numerous grounds that affected their decision. The respondents regarded the phenomena of online learning during the pandemic as a *“Counterproductive way of Learning.”* Being admitted in an online mode during the pandemic is ineffective and an inefficient way of learning, as they only feel like they are not gaining knowledge. Adding the factor that it does not make them acquire the necessary skills they should obtain, the emerging sub-theme *“Doubts in the New Learning Setting.”*

Even if the respondents are granted free tuition to the said State University, the external finances do not leave them indispensable and affect them; this created the sub-theme *“Value-added cost to Students”* due to the expenses they need to spend. Students who do not have access to internet connections in their houses have to buy loads every day to attend classes, and payment for the services on internet connection is an additional burden on their finances.

This led to the emerging sub-theme *“Financial Scarce in a household”* that corresponds to the household

necessities of the participants that counterparts the need for them to study. This urged them to work instead of studying to ease these financial difficulties.

On the other hand, Present Consequential Impact encompasses how the phenomena affected their personalities. Although they have expressed their negative commentaries after experiencing the online learning mode, the part where they have been pushed to be more responsible because of the real-life situations contributed to their maturity.

Technological Availability

Extrinsic factors affecting the respondent's decisions also affected their unwillingness to pursue their studies, such as *“slow internet connection,”* highlighting how they struggled with connectivity issues that hindered them from adequately participating in online learning.

Some participants emphasized that the gadgets to be used were not accessible to them, which led to the sub-theme *“Medium to use for Online Learning.”* It was also considered how they do not have Wi-Fi services, making it even harder to participate in the class.

Environmental Setbacks

The Extrinsic Factor the respondents, have voiced was *“Non-conducive space for learning,”* the setting where they live to participate in online learning. It is difficult to be admitted into the *new normal* without a likable space to be settled. Environment beyond home was also a setback for

the respondents who coined the sub-theme “*Upsetting Societal Condition.*” Society under pandemic stresses the factor of their unwillingness to enroll in this school year. Although they have not undergone COVID 19, their mental and emotional balance has been unbalanced.

Personal Affliction

As external conditions affected the respondents, so are the Intrinsic factors that dealt with the internal dispositions where they voiced out having a “*Mental Health Crisis*” while being admitted to the first school year under pandemic. Participants stated that online learning caused them to be mentally and emotionally unstable, have breakdowns and self-doubts, and blame themselves for being incompetent due to mental health exhaustion.

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These circumstances have impacted the participants’ choices, surfacing the sub-theme “*Negative influence on Decisions.*” This led them to setbacks in studies to evade these circumstances where the sub-theme “*Escapdo notrom the Causes of Emotional Challenges*” emerged. Hence, the need to protect their mental and emotional stability is much more critical than being under an online educational system that weighs them down.

Social Discomfort

Another Intrinsic Factor that the respondents have voiced was “*Deprivation of Personal/Social Interaction,*” Social interaction produces social relationships and develops bonds outside or inside the school. The lack of this brought immense depletion of personal engagements. Online learning commenced after the DepEd Order No. 12, s. 2020 mandate, students had to stay at home and be admitted to virtual classes that caused poor social skills.

Additionally, it delineated the sub-theme “*Difficulty in managing Peer Communication,*” where the respondents experienced communication difficulties. Respondents voiced that the lack of social interaction paved the way for adverse impacts on their social and communication skills. Nevertheless, some respondents pointed out that social/personal interaction also depends on the “*Personal outlook in Social Interaction*” of each individual, for some people prefer not to engage as they are uncomfortable being on it.

Future Anticipations

Although all the respondents opted to quit their studies during the second school year of the pandemic. They are all “*Waiting for the return of face-to-face setup*” to be able to go back on track and study as they also want to finish their education.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The lived experiences of the BSNEd students of a selected State University in Cebu City have underpinned the foundation of the six themes and its sixteen sub-themes. Consequently, the respondents voiced the experiences of mental health issues and exhaustion that greatly impacted them to quit studying. The current mode of learning gave notions of doubts concerning its effectiveness and productiveness.

Moreover, financial scarcity brought added cost to the students and the respondents’ families, giving them the impression to help in the financial crisis they were facing and fill the household’s lack of necessities by working and putting aside studying. Additionally, environmental setbacks in our society and social discomforts were also mentioned as significant factors that affected their decisions. Although they have expressed withdrawing from studying for this school year, they are still expecting to re-establish the old face-to-face educational mode.

Based on the results of the study, the researchers recommend that parents need to be practically engaged and aware of their children’s performance in school and concerns. Likewise, they should provide all the necessary support they can provide so students will survive in this virtual learning amidst the crisis. Second, schools may develop dropout intervention and prevention strategies to prevent students from dropping out. Third, the school heads can take measures to enhance support to students from all perspectives. Correspondingly, teachers should adjust their learning activities and pedagogy that suits the students’ physical, mental, and emotional needs amidst this pandemic. Lastly, this study could support future researchers about online learning during pandemic literature.

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