LIVED EXPERIENCES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS IN PANDEMIC ERA: A PHENOMENOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) brought extraordinary disruptions to educational platforms worldwide. Specifically, this pandemic crisis caused Philippine higher education institutions to abruptly shift to online classes due to the call for continued education despite global health issues. This paper aims to explore and understand the lived experiences of college students while studying during the pandemic. It is used to describe how human beings experience a particular phenomenon. In the study, 14 First-Year college students from the education department were purposely selected to participate. The researcher gathered information from the participants through individual in-depth interviews. It is to attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of study participants. This study revealed seven themes: poor internet connection, loss of interest in learning, difficulty in learning; focusing on life goals, praying to God; difficulty in the new normal education, and new normal education has positive and negative sides. Interestingly, the study found that poor internet connection was the students' major problem in online learning. Consequently, college students' experiences in online classes should be understood and provide a lending ear to be heard and a voice for building a pedagogy of understanding about their learning journey in this pandemic crisis. Nevertheless, the CHED and the government must provide resources that would help the student's online class, enough resources, and support for the holistic development of the learner's educational needs.

KEYWORDS: *lived experiences, Covid-19 pandemic, online class, college students, internet problems, Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

Rationale

This global pandemic brought extraordinary disruption to the educational system. Earlier, we were in the face-to-face education system, but with the advent of the pandemic, it has shifted towards a digital scheme of education (Khanna, 2020). Students have faced major issues in their studies, including rapid shifts to online learning, lack of knowledge in using technology, poor internet connections, and the challenges of balancing school work and home responsibilities. Problems encountered during an online class. The interaction between school and college students became tough, and an endeavor to come up with ways to find solutions to fundamental problems that were faced during online education (Prasad 2020).

In a study conducted at the American University of Madaba in the global scenario, most students still prefer classroom classes over online classes due to the many problems they face. Some of these include their lack of motivation and understanding of the material, decreased communication levels between the students and their instructors, and an increased feeling of isolation caused by online classes (Alawamleh et al., 2020). This study found that aside from the advantageous effects of online learning, it also has a disadvantage that challenges its Effectiveness between instructors and students.

Moreover, in Indonesia, three major obstacles were identified in conducting online learning that students are experiencing first is the availability and sustainability of internet connection, the second is accessibility of the teaching media, and the last is the compatibility of tools to access the media (Agung et al., 2020). The result of the current study suggests that accessibility is still the major factor influencing online learning success.

Looking through the situations experienced globally, the national setting is never an exception. The challenges of the student's online learning within the Philippine education system are caused by several factors: limited access to technological resources, one out of five students did not have a computer, an identical proportion had to rely on prepaid mobile data for connectivity, power interruptions, weak infrastructure, and internet costs restricted the students' access to online content (Baticulon et al., 2020).

Moreover, in Davao del Sur, students' primary experiences in online learning were poor internet connection. The study by Ja'ashan (2015) revealed that most students who underwent online learning expressed negative impressions due to slow internet connectivity. Students also displayed anxiety during the lockdown period and worried about financial resources (Baloran, 2020).

Davao de Oro State College New Bataan observed that a major problem in conducting online classes is the sustainability of internet connection. Eventually, most students face difficulties in internet access due to unstable connections and financial resources to support online learning. Given these scenarios, the researcher finds it necessary to conduct the study to find out the lived experiences of college students in this time of pandemic regarding online classes and highlight what could be best done to help improve and enhance the online educational platform in accessing the needs of students.

Purpose of the Study

This phenomenological study aimed to explore and understand the lived experiences of college students in the pandemic era at Davao de Oro State College – New Bataan Branch, New Bataan, Davao de Oro.

At this stage in the research, lived experiences of college students in the pandemic era were defined as the situation, experiences, and obstacles in online learning. Above all, this study served as baseline information to strengthen the school operation's weaknesses in conducting online classes.

Research Questions

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:
1. What are the experiences of college students in the pandemic era?
2. How do college students cope with the challenges in the pandemic era?
3. **What are the insights of college students in the pandemic era?**

Theoretical Lens

The study is anchored on the theory proposed by psychologist David Kolb (1984), the Theory of Experiential Learning. The experiential theory takes a more holistic approach and emphasizes how experiences, including cognition, environmental factors, and emotions, influence the learning process. The process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of a student's experiences. Through this process, they begin to see patterns in problems and potential solutions. In his four-cycle model, a substantial experience followed by reflective observation on occasion, abstract conceptualization (that is, concluding, identifying insights, advancing ideas), and active experimentation lead to learning. This begins the cycle anew as students have new experiences based on their experiences (Oxendine, Robinson, and Willson, 2004).

Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory also supports the study. Learning begins with an experience that leads to a disorienting dilemma (cognitive dissonance, or the discomfort that comes from realizing your current understanding of the world does not fit with recent evidence). The unexpected, unplanned, and sudden shift to online learning caused by COVID-19 has undoubtedly been an experience that has led to cognitive dissonance as our assumptions about education have been challenged, and stark inequities in our system have been exacerbated.

Moreover, while experiential learning theory and transformative learning theory tell us how we learn, self-determination theory explains the necessary context in which we are most motivated to learn. According to this theory, motivation for learning occurs when three basic human needs are met. These needs are relatedness, autonomy, and competence. In other words, when we feel a sense of connection to other learners, have a sense of control over what we learn, and feel we are competent in our ability to learn, we are most motivated to do what it takes to succeed in learning.

COVID-19 pandemic affects students' learning which rapidly changes into an online class. This new experience will help the students be more motivated in their studies. In experiential learning theory, it can be good for helping students explore their strengths when learning new things. The experience itself is not always educational. Instead, to appreciate the significance of the learning experience, reflection must occur (Dewey 1933).

The theories address how learners can play to their strengths and develop areas in which they are weakest. Experiential learning can allow students to immediately apply things they are learning to world experiences.

Scope and Delimitations of the Study
      The study was limited to the experience and perceptions of fourteen (14) college students selected relative to their lived experiences in the pandemic era, particularly in Education Department First-Year students, particularly in Davao de Oro State College - New Bataan Branch in the municipality of New Bataan, Davao de Oro.
      The delimitation of this study was limited to the personal observation of the researcher and the personal responses of first-year college students who were enrolled in this school year 2020-2021. The researchers considered working on this study to find out their lived experiences in online classes during a pandemic.

Significance of the Study
      This study anticipated generating findings on college students' lived experiences and perceptions in the pandemic era. Although this is a study involving a small sample, it envisioned that the results might be important in the following ways.
      Learning from students' experiences and perceptions in this pandemic may create an opportunity for **other students** to learn from these experiences and motivate them to strive harder in their studies.
      This study gave **teachers** certain awareness about the lived experiences of their students in online learning during this pandemic.
      This study benefited the **school** because it provided information regarding their students' lived experiences during the pandemic.
      The study helped the **CHED Officials** strengthen educational awareness and strategies for utilizing online learning.
      This study is the opportunity for its findings to be used as a basis by **other researchers** to replicate the study in different schools concerning students' lived experiences in the pandemic era.

REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES
Online Learning as A New Normal Education Amid Pandemic
      The outbreak of COVID us that change are inevitable. It has worked as a catalyst for educational institutions to grow and opt for platforms with technologies, which have not been used before (Jene, 2020). The lockdown has accelerated the adoption of digital technology. It has provided a chance to develop new and improved professional skills/knowledge through online learning more efficiently and productively. Online learning is the best solution during this pandemic Covid-19 situation (Pravat, 2020). COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital technologies to deliver education. Educational institutions moved towards a blended mode of learning. It encouraged all teachers and students to become more technology savvy. New ways of delivery and assessments of learning opened immense opportunities for a major transformation in curriculum development and pedagogy. It also gives access to large pools of learners at a time.
      In short order, face-to-face classes were halted, and emergency online learning became optimal, and in many cases the only, alternative available. Although this measure has proven to be one of the most highly effective non-pharmaceutical interventions imposed by governments in containing the spread of the disease (Flaxman, 2020a; Moosa, 2020), it has also put all those involved in the educational process under substantial pressure. This is particularly true because many instructors and learners who had never had adequate (if any) experience with online learning found them obliged to do so with minimal support. In addition, most higher education systems lacked the necessary equipment "to offer online learning for all students at scale, quickly" (World Bank, 2020)
      In India, COVID-19 has impacted immensely the education sector. The Indian Govt. and different stakeholders of education have explored the possibility of Open and Distance learning (ODL) by adopting different digital technologies to cope with the present crisis of COVID-19. India is not fully equipped to make education reach all corners of the nation via digital platforms. The students who aren't privileged like the others will suffer due to the present choice of digital platforms (Jena 2020).
      Moreover, a study conducted by Onyema et al. (2020) shows that COVID-19 has adverse effects on education including, learning disruptions, and decreased access to education and research facilities, Job losses, and increased student debts. The findings also show that many educators and students relied on technology to ensure continued learning online during the Coronavirus pandemic. However, online education was hindered by poor

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infrastructures, including network, power, inaccessibility and unavailability issues, and poor digital skills. The government, however, directed that "Virtual schools and distance education be activated to ensure that the educational process continues in an effective and quality manner."

In addition, Educational institutions, particularly in the Philippines, are presented with surmounting challenges in their planning, implementation, and assessment system. On a light note, however, the global pandemic opened up opportunities to the country to upgrade its educational mode of delivery and transfer its attention to emerging technologies. Toquero (2020) mentioned that higher education institutions need to seize the opportunity to strengthen their evidence-based practices, provide accessible mental health-related services, and make the curriculum responsive to the needs of the changing times.

The Negative Side of Online Learning
Amid the corona virus pandemic, educational institutions face an unprecedented situation. The unexpected change to online learning became a measure of organizational agility (Wu, 2020), with several academic institutions primarily focused on the transfer of educational content to the online world. Learners and teachers are unable to meet in classrooms and have to react to shifting circumstances and formulate strategies for alternatives such as online learning (Reiersgord, 2020). Nonetheless, it was a reminder of the lack of resources in academic institutions and the social marginalization of students, where insufficient access and availability of the internet and the lack of latest technology affected organizational responsiveness and students' capacity to participate in online learning (Zhong, 2020). Lack of proper interaction with instructors is another major concern associated with online learning. Additionally, according to Kapasia et al., (2020) that many students face enormous challenges in e-learning and a substantial proportion of students could not attend online classes. Students from remote areas and marginalized sections are mainly denied online learning due to the lack of electricity and poor internet connectivity. Poverty further exacerbates the problem of the digital learning process in this unwanted crisis period. It was supported by Race (2020) that online classes had decreased participation rate, were ineffective, and had limited interaction and socialization.

A study conducted in Ghana, it concludes that college students experience internet connectivity problems, financial difficulty due to the high cost of internet bundle, challenges with devices and disruption resulting from the performance of household activities (Henaku, 2020). The study also suggests that a better understanding of online learning experiences of college students may inform the Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service, parents and lecturers to put in place measures that would ensure a better online learning experience. Sharma (2020) mentioned that students who are in with a good internet connection have been able to join in for the classes, but those who struggle with the internet speed are mostly unable to attend.

Moreover, as stated by Muhammad and Kainat (2020), online learning cannot produce desired results in underdeveloped countries like Pakistan, where a vast majority of students cannot access the internet due to technical and monetary issues. The lack of face-to-face interaction with the instructor, response time, and absence of traditional classroom socialization was among other issues highlighted by higher education students. This means that educational institutions have to design appropriate and effective content, arrange an effective delivery system, and provide digital literacy training to their current faculty to achieve better learning outcomes. Thus, as Sepulveda-Escobar, P., & Morrison, A. (2020) supported, lack of direct interaction with learners and the sudden change of setting were among those that most strongly affected the participants' learning process. Despite the challenges presented, student teachers suggested that this once-in-a-lifetime experience would contribute positively, at least to a certain extent, to their teacher education and their future careers. Additionally, as a study conducted by Race (2020), it was found out that there is a need for the respective educational institutions to increase their levels of preparedness, particularly with regard to establishing a system for online learning, as well as allocating the necessary resources to conduct online class.

In Indonesia, it revealed that distance learning had not been part of most educational institutions. Relying heavily on face-to-face learning, educational institutions in Indonesia are greatly impacted by the sudden shift to online home learning (Putri, et al. 2020). The condition creates tension between schools and homes. Teachers are struggling with the drastic change at the school's side, causing an interruption in learning and teaching. At home, not all parents and students are ready with what is required to facilitate home learning. Apart from it, Adnan & Anwar (2020) cited that students also reported a few other difficulties like lack of interaction with the instructor, response time, and absence of traditional classroom socialization. The lack of on-campus socialization has caused difficulties for students to do group projects in distance learning mode.

Furthermore, as Cleofas (2020) mentioned, the transition from education to the entrance to the labor force is a delicate time for college students. Economic recessions and lack of social connectedness caused by COVID-19 have been linked with poorer mental outcomes among the youth and may affect their adult coping skills. The anxiety and frustrations expressed by the participants in the present study mirror the psychological distress outcomes in other studies done in China (Cao, et al, 2020) and the Philippines (Baloran, 2020). However, despite their fears and frustrations, the present study participants reported positive outcomes from these challenging experiences. Self-reflection is a resounding theme among the participants. During these restriction times, the students had time to look into themselves and re-evaluate their life and goals. Apart from it, Fabito et al. (2020) stated that lack of computers or laptops, which is necessary for online classes, internet connectivity also poses a problem. To aid the need for a desktop PC or laptops for students, the development of mobile apps may be explored that can help simulate professional subjects such as programming and web development. Mobile apps may provide functionalities that are observable in computers.

As many students have limited or no internet access and many students may not afford a computer, laptop, or supporting mobile phones in their homes, online teaching-learning may create a digital divide among students. The lockdown has hit the poor students very hard as most of them are unable to explore online learning, accordingto various reports.

The Positive Side of Online Learning

A large number of studies considered statistically significant positive effects for student learning outcomes in the online class. Online learning has arisen as an alternative to traditional learning during the pandemic (Baber, 2020). Online learning often appeals to many students, as it offers versatility in participation, accessibility and convenience. Furthermore, online learning will continue to be an integral part of higher education (Croxton, 2014). Online education platforms are vital tools that support inclusive education and online learning. Online education has its roots in distance education and the emergence of digital technologies that facilitate the efficient and reliable delivery of lectures, virtual classroom sessions, and other instructional materials and activities via the internet (Onyema, 2002).

Moreover, according to Baticulon (2020), the advantages of using online learning in medical education include improved accessibility of information, ease of standardizing and updating content, cost-effectiveness, accountability, and enhancement of the learning process, wherein students are motivated to be active learners. It has the potential to address faculty shortage, expanding the reach of medical educators and improving their efficiency.Students have the chance to study in their own time and especially for free. It represents a great way to study many fields and to boost the level of self-motivation. Online learning is so effective because students can finish their homework quickly, and there is more time left for hobbies or finding a job (Armstrong 2013).

For instance, most students have experienced online classes for the first time. Variables such as interacting in the online class, student motivation to participate in the online class, course structure, and instructor facilitation and knowledge are important determinants of perceived student learning and student satisfaction. Online student engagement is a stronger determinant of the perceived student learning outcome as online classes lack physical socialization. Scagnoli, Choo, & Tian (2019) mentioned that students' satisfaction with VL has a strong relationship with a positive overall learning experience and perception of the impact of video on learning. Furthermore, VL can enhance engagement with content because of learners' control of the media and instructors' presence. The findings also alert us on the importance of careful planning and balanced integration of VL with other course materials. This provides important information on the Effectiveness of videolectures in college teaching and learning and implications for practice in online course design.

Furthermore, online education allows students to attend classes from any location. It also allows schools to reach out to a more extensive network of students instead of being restricted by geographical boundaries. Additionally, online lectures can be recorded, archived, and shared for future reference. This allows students to access the learning material at a time of their comfort. According to Fedynich (2013), that convenience is attributed as the prime value of online learning. Students are in circumstances where they choose the convenience of online learning over the face time provided by the brick and mortar classrooms. The ease of online learning enables direct communication between instructors and students in cyber classes. In addition, ease of participation is an aspect of the appeal of virtual classrooms. One of the many versatile aspects of cyber learning is the willingness of the students to participate in a mixed learning environment, either asynchronously or synchronously. Online education can take several forms, from blogs to mailing lists to courses management systems such as Blackboard. Students can participate in chat rooms in real-time or asynchronously by posting to newsletters or forums (Morrison et al., 2019).

By being equipped with all those forms of communication, students are given the easier route of communication with either the instructor or other students in the class. For communication purposes, the playing field is set, and everyone in the class can participate.

This large shift to online instruction does not need face-to-face interaction between teachers and the students and their classmates, so there is prevention and control over the spread of the virus. Knibel (2015) stated that online learning allows students to learn at their convenience since it is needless to attend training centers and universities. As supported by Hussein et al. (2020) mentioned some of the positive aspects of online learning from students' perspectives. Time- and cost-effectiveness as important advantages of online learning refers to the fact that online learning helped students save the time of getting ready and commuting to and from university.

At some point, some previous research pointed out that online learning allows learners to use their time more efficiently (Fidalgo et al., 2020; Jung & Rhea, 2000; OECD, 2020). As for cost-effectiveness, it has been argued that the online mode of learning is generally cheaper than the face-to-face mode (OECD, 2020). However, since tuition fees were not altered at AAU during the study, cost-effectiveness mostly referred to the cost of transportation. Safety was considered an important advantage of online learning during the pandemic (Hussein et al., 2020). This view is consistent with several studies which have emphasized the need to prioritize the safety and well-being of students and educators during the pandemic (AlRabiaah, 2020; Bozkurt, 2020; Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Sahu, 2020; Selwyn, 2020).

In addition, to Murphy (2020) stated that consequences of the securitization of higher education for post-pandemic pedagogy might increase access to education in rural communities due to personal or financial circumstances, the flexibility of asynchronous eLearning may provide wider access; also hybrid or blended forms may help improve the quality of face-to-face teaching by moving content delivery online and focusing in-person sessions on active learning within traditional higher education institutions. Toquero (2020) stated that higher education institutions need to seize the opportunity to strengthen their evidence-based practices, provide accessible mental health-related services, and make the curriculum responsive to pandemic situations.

Generally, online learning helps students develop technological skills, conversational skills, find answers to their questions, develop a sense of collaboration, allow knowledge sharing, and leverage their learning outcomes (AlEmran, Elsherif, &Shaalan, 2016). As Naciri et al., (2020) mentioned, mobile learning allows learning anytime, anyplace, and anywhere. Mobile Learning is an unavoidable alternative during COVID-19. Besides, it will enable teachers to personalize instruction (Steel, 2012) and allow students to self-regulate learning (Sha, Looi, Chen, & Zhang, 2012).

The quick transition to online learning went successful, and they gained experience that can be used in the future. The lesson learned from COVID -19 will force a generation of new laws, regulations, platforms, and solutions for future cases (Basilaia&Kvavadze, 2020). The circumstances of confinement caused by the coronavirus and ensuring continuity of teaching for students make mobile learning an essential educational technology component in higher education. It makes it possible for students to learn, collaborate, and share ideas.

The literature has highlighted the different studies which provide the information to understand the students' lived experiences regarding online education. It shows that with the fast change of the educational system to online learning, there are many things to consider. This paper also highlighted the problems and benefits of online learning for students during this pandemic. These descriptions critically emphasize that online learning has to be upgraded to the diverse needs of all learners, especially those who are poor and live in far-flung areas.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design
Qualitative research focused on understanding a research query as a humanistic or idealistic approach. This method is used to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior, and interactions (Pathak, Jena &Kalra, 2013).

Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that is used to describe how human beings experience a certain phenomenon. A phenomenological study attempts to set aside biases and preconceived assumptions about human experiences, feelings, and responses to a situation. It allows the researcher to delve into the perceptions, perspectives, understandings, and feelings of those who have experienced or lived the phenomenon or problem of interest.

Procedures for selecting study participants and collecting and analyzing data were also described in this section. This study utilized a qualitative viewpoint approach since it studied a particular phenomenon concerning the

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college students in Compostela Valley State College, New Bataan district, regarding the lived experiences of college students during this pandemic.

We used phenomenology because the group we chose was individuals such as the students from Compostela Valley State College – New Bataan regarding their experiences in online classes. They explored such a single idea about how this pandemic affects their studies into more composite descriptions based on what and how they experienced the phenomenon. Itfocused on identifying shared experiences among these students experiencing shared phenomena and locating the essence of an experience (Bawalan, 2012). We gathered information from the participants through in-depth interviews.

Research locale

This study was conducted at Davao de Oro State College, New Bataan Branch. The school has a total of 737 students who are enrolled in the school year 2021-2021 consists of three departments, the Bachelor of Elementary Education, Bachelor of Secondary Education, and Bachelor of Science and Entrepreneurship. Davao de Oro State College New Bataan Branch was located at Purok 10, Cabinuangan, New Bataan, Davao de Oro, in region XI, one of the major islands of the Philippines called Mindanao. The school was selected as the only college in that municipality.

Role of the researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary research instrument. The researcher brings to the investigation from their own background and identity should be treated as his or her bias (Maxwell, 2005). Since qualitative research is interpretive, researcher biases, beliefs, and assumptions can intrude into data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Social researchers should attempt to neutralize or bracket their biases through full disclosure (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1987).

Furthermore, the lived experiences of First-Year Education Department students in this pandemic were highly needed to find out how this pandemic affects their studies. For some reason, a qualitative philosophy approach was considered to be an option in collecting data. Students' knowledge, understanding, and perspectives about the pandemic were studied to identify how they fully understand and are aware of its impact in all educational platforms.

In addition, we undertook survey research methods conducted with the participants at a given point in time in collecting data. Moreover, in-depth interviews had been used for data collection. It was a suitable method to identify experiences and opinions, more than focus group interviews successfully used to create new ideas (Trost, 2010). However, focus group discussion was not used due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, selecting the data gathering procedures and the tools to be used in the said problem should be relevant.

In addition, the said actual in-depth interviews were carried out separately or individually to provide a more comfortable environment where the research informants can freely express their experiences during this time of the pandemic. It was to attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of study participants.

In any case, this was not an easy task, as it involved asking people to talk about things that may be very personal to them. This could also have aided our data collection, survey methods, and the understanding of the process and phenomena being studied, as it needed to be truly experienced before having the ability to write about. The data collectedwas a primary responsibility of the researcher to safeguard participants and their data.

Research participants

Creswell (2013) advised that a phenomenological study conducted with a heterogeneous group should be a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 15 individuals.

We used purposive sampling to ascertain the participants. Purposive sampling is a technique that relies on the judgment of the researcher when choosing who to ask to participate. Researchers may implicitly thus select a representative sample to suit their needs or specifically approach individuals with certain characteristics. Finding the right people at the right time is crucial in collecting data that is usable, viable, and valuable (The Academic Triangle, 2017).

Using purposive sampling, we interviewed fourteen (14) selected participants from the First-Year Education Department (Bachelor of Elementary Education and Bachelor of Secondary Education). Fourteen in-depth interviews were conducted in Davao de Oro State College - New Bataan school year 2020-202. All participants had experienced various phenomena regarding the online classes.

Garg (2017) added that participants must have inclusion criteria to identify the study population consistently, reliable, uniform, and objective. The inclusion criteria of our study were the following: participants are enrolled in Davao de Oro State College New Bataan Branch school year 2020-2021; participants were selected from Education Department First-Year students; participants can be in any status (single, married, and widow); and participants can be male or female of any age. Additionally, our study's exclusion criteria are students in the second year, third year, and fourth year in Education Department; and students enrolled in Science and Entrepreneurship.

Data Collection Procedure

Creswell (2007) mentioned that qualitative researchers were tied up in a series of activities to collect data. A vital step is finding participants involved in this study, the availability of material, and a place to conduct the study to obtain accurate information.

In this study, data were collected over five days in April. As a researcher, we took careful steps in the data collection procedure. We also engaged in a series of activities to collect data before arriving after the research study.

First, we asked permission from the School Branch Director of DDOSC New Bataan Campus to conduct a study by sending a letter of approval. We also provided and sent consent letters to the selected participants to conduct an interview.

Second, participants were identified with the use of a purposive sampling method. We ensured that those who were purposely selected really have an experience on the phenomenon being studied.

Third, the individual in-depth interview took place in the specified time and venue only after the participants signed the consent and were informed of the study's objective. We used open-ended questions in the conduct of the individual in-depth interview. If ever the participants were not able to make the virtual interview due to poor internet connection and financial problems, the researcher will conduct the interview face-to-face; however health protocol is still strictly followed (social distancing should be observed, wearing of face mask and face shield, and hand sanitizer). Video recorder was used to ensure validity and reliability, which are very significant in the conduct of the study.

Fourth, participants' responses were stored and encoded in the computer for translation since most participants used vernacular. Answers were transcribed verbatim to ensure a greater degree of accuracy during the data analysis. In line with that, we made transcription references to ensure accuracy and avoid missing important details.

Fifth, thematic analysis was done. Our adviser assisted us in ensuring that our participants' responses were analyzed carefully based on the core ideas.

Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis is the process of making sense from research participants' views and opinions of situations, corresponding patterns, themes, categories, and regular similarities (Cohen et al., 2007). Qualitative methods are generally interactive. The structure of an experience is interpreted during phenomenological analysis (Sitko, 2013).

From the audio-recording stored in our computer, we transcribed the participants' answers from specific questions to follow-up questions. To help us transcribe the data gathered, we made transcription references to ensure accuracy and avoid missing important details. Then, followed by coding, wherein we analyzed the content of the answers of the participants and assigned key words to the idea. Next, thematic analysis was done wherein we extracted the main themes and core ideas of the responses related to each other, for us to capsulize it. Analysis and interpretation were made afterwards. The results of the gathered data were the bases for the conclusions, the implication for online learning and recommendations for further research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS
Experiences of College Students in the Pandemic Era

From the data collected on the experiences of the participants, three main themes emerged: 1.) Poor Internet Connection;2.) Lose of Interest in Learning, and 3.) Difficulty in Learning.

Poor Internet Connection

The pandemic brings a huge impact on our lives, most especially on the educational system. From face-to-face classes into online learning, students have difficulty highlighting this as having a poor internet connection. The students experienced problems attending classes, downloading activities, and submitting outputs because of the poor

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internet connection. Most places here in the Municipality of New Bataan don't have stable internet connections and mostly rely only on peso Wi-Fi. As supported by Deo and Deogracia(2020), struggling with an internet connection is one of the leading complications experienced by most students in terms of online classes. Sharma (2020) mentioned that students with a good internet connection have been able to join the classes, but those who struggle with internet speed are primarily unable to attend.

In line with this, since the learning process is done online, fast internet connectivity is imperative, which most students have problems with. Slow internet connection is a common problem in the Philippines; few have a fast internet connection, and some have difficulty having a strong signal due to location (Salac& Kim,2016).

Moreover, having a poor internet connection makes online learning harder for students. Internet connection plays a big role in the current learning setup in which almost all the activities and discussions are needed online (Deo and Deogracia, 2020).

Lose of Interest in Learning

Online learning brings new experiences to students. It is hard to adjust from the situation because the students are accustomed to face-to-face classes. As shared by our participants, she loses interest in learning and doing her assignments or activities just for compliance during these online classes. In online learning, teachers can't notice what the students are doing unless it is open cam during the session. The interaction between the students and teachers is not the same in face-to-face classes. As Belgica (2020) mentioned, because face-to-face interaction is absent, it is theorized that students will experience a lack of interest in online classes. Rost (2019) stated that online environments could give students a feeling of anonymity, making it easier for students to withdraw or participate minimally or entirely disappear from the course.

Moreover, as mentioned by our participants, some of her classmates commit dropouts and one of the reasons is losing interest in learning. Lack of interest is one of the main things which hinder the growth of online learning, and this way, it also increases the scale of dropouts from the online courses (Aragon & Johnson, 2008). Shore (2020) mentioned in his article that an online class eliminates the human connection; therefore, student motivation, interaction, and educator's ability to adapt course materials and presentations are somehow lost.

Difficulty in Learning

Due to the changes in the educational system, online learning serves as a mode to continue the students' learning process. Although it is very helpful that the students will study harder and learn independently, we can't deny that not all the students learn the lessons easily because they are not equal in terms of intelligence. As shared by our participants, she is not that kind of a fast learner student, the reason why it is hard for her to adjust.

Furthermore, during online classes, teachers and students have the least interaction. Sepulveda-Escobar, P., & Morrison, A. (2020) supported that lack of direct interaction with learners and the sudden change of setting were among the most strongly affected the participants' learning process. As also mentioned by Race (2020) that online classes had decreased participation rates, were ineffective, and had limited interaction and socialization.

Moreover, distance education gives students much more freedom in how and when they interact; however, Sun & Rueda (2012) argued that their ability to regulate learning becomes critical. Online learning students can't easily approach the teacher if they have questions about the lesson or activity. Powers, Brooks, Galazlyn, and Donnelly (2016) concluded that face-to-face learners had the immediate physical help of the educator to clarify any challenging concepts and direct their queries, but this was not the case with online learners. Aside from that, during online classes, students can't focus on listening to the discussion because of the distractions of the surroundings. Amadora (2020) pointed out that students tend to get distracted easily on smartphones, pets, deliveries, and many others due to the lack of interaction during online classes rather than ongoing classes. Therefore, the students can't focus on their studies, and why they are having difficulty learning the lesson.

College Students Cope with the Challenges in Pandemic Era

Two themes emerged from the analysis of data for research question number two. The participants mentioned coping mechanisms: 1.)Focusing on the Goals of Life; and 2.) Praying to God.

Focusing on the Goals of Life

Most of the students suffered difficulty in shifting to online learning. But, despite the difficulty that they encountered, they continued striving for their dreams in life by pursuing their studies. God, their loved ones,

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themselves, and their goals in life serve as their motivation to overcome the challenges they encountered during this pandemic.

In line with that, even though it is tough and challenging, they want to succeed in life for themselves and their families. According to Suleman et al. (2012), the family is the foundation and the supporter of their children, whatever challenges it is because the family is the one who gives a hand to their children.

In addition, some students have a positive outlook despite the difficulty that they encounter. Although they feel tired and lose hope and interest in every challenge they face, they have a weapon to conquer it: the people close to their hearts and serve as their motivation.

Praying to God

Online learning creates considerable adjustment and many challenges facing students in attending online classes. But, despite their challenges, praying to God is the coping mechanism used by the participants. Schnittker (2001) stated that prayer and spiritual help-seeking might help individuals better cope with life stress and depression.

Prayer is simply communicating with God listening, and talking to him. In the face of the coronavirus pandemic, the participants continue to pray and felt the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding.

Furthermore, the participants did not forget to pray to the Lord and feel his presence because, with him, nothing was impossible, and they would overcome all those challenges they encountered with the help of the Lord. Most students agreed that spiritual/religious values were necessary and relied on these values to solve problems and cope (Kane, 2010).

Insight of College Students in the Pandemic Era

After gathering, transcribing, and analyzing the participant's experiences, we only identified two essential themes. These themes are: 1.) difficulty in the new normal education; and 2.) New normal education has positive and negative sides. These insights come from the direct answers and experiences of the participants.

Difficulty in the new normal education

One of the biggest issues facing students today is the internet connection that is why participants still prefer face-to-face classes rather than online classes. Because they found online classes as a new normal education very difficult.

In fact, Alawamleh (2020) stated that most students still prefer classroom classes over online classes due to the many problems they face when taking online classes, including the decrease in communication levels between the students and their instructors.

Moreover, this online class also affects the students' learning phase because some of the lessons are not well-learned and somehow not able to be comprehended. Apart from it, this new normal education brought huge challenges faced by the students during online class. As supported by Kapasia et al., (2020) , many students face enormous challenges in e-learning, and a substantial proportion of students could not attend online classes. That is why some students from remote areas mainly denied online learning due to poor internet connectivity.

New normal education has positive and negative sides

COVID-19 pandemic brought disruption in the educational system, and online classes became an alternative way for face-to-face learning. The participants perceived new normal education as a positive and negative side based on their experiences.

Internet connection became the major problem and concern in attending online class sessions of the participants, especially because most of them lived in a far-flung area. As mentioned by Sharma (2020), students who are in with a good internet connection have been able to join in for the classes, but those who struggle with internet speed are mostly unable to attend.Although some areas have an internet connection yet unstable and intermittent.

Despite the challenges the participants have encountered during this new normal education, they still find ways to reinforce their learning. Generally, online learning helps students develop technological and conversational skills, find answers to their questions, develop a sense of collaboration, allow knowledge sharing, and leverage their learning outcomes (AlEmran, Elsherif, &Shaalan, 2016).

Implications for Online Learning

The global pandemic changed the educational platform into online learning as a new normal education. This is to ensure the continuous learning-teaching process of the students amidst pandemics.   However, the students experience difficulties along the process. The results of the lived experiences of college students in the pandemic era:

First, poor internet connection, as emphasized by our participants, implies that having an unstable interconnection is one of the common problems experienced by students from attending classes, downloading and submitting activities, and many more. Aside from that, it also implies that the students found it difficult to balance between schoolwork and homework. It just means that there are existing problems to consider in conducting online classes that need attention and solutions.

Second, loss of interest in learning implies that the education should make moves or plans to attain students' needs during an online class. Based on the gathered data, the participants felt a loss of interest in their studies. They attend class without acquiring knowledge from the discussions and submitting outputs just for compliance.

Third, difficulty in learning implies that the students should motivate themselves to stay engaged with their learning regardless of the difficulties they have experienced. Thus, internet connection is the major obstacle in having online learning, that is why the teacher should also consider and understand the lived experiences of their students in attending classes or submitting their outputs. Moreover, even the difficulties that the students have experienced during this pandemic still find ways to overcome the challenges. It also implies that if the students are eager to learn, they look for many ways to enable them to attend classes online.

This study also implies that online learning as a new normal education carried positive and negative sides in students' lives. Positive in terms of; you can educate yourself self-sufficiently; be literate in using; learn new learning routes. Moreover, negative in terms of; unstable internet connection, power interruptions, difficulties in acquiring new lessons; and adopting the new normal. This implies that the CHED and government should do their actions regarding the needs encountered by the students in online learning.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study explores and understands the lived experiences of college students in the pandemic era. Nevertheless, the result of this qualitative exploration is limited only to the experiences of selected students from the first-year college of Compostela Valley State College, New Bataan Branch.

To get more extensive answers to the questions of this study, it is recommended to conduct further research using a large number of participants and should cover a wider range of schools.

Furthermore, it is recommended to research further about the experiences of both teachers and students in relation to their lived experiences during the pandemic era.

Concluding Remarks

Education plays a vital role to students because education helps students learn how to think critically. It enhances their creativity and imagination. It will expose them to new ideas, and it helps the students find the path to a career that they wish to pursue as an adult. However, due to the global pandemic that affects the educational system from face-to-face to online learning, the students found it difficult and challenging.

We used an in-depth interview to generate the experiences of the selected participants. The primary source of data is the transcript of the participants answers from the given questions. During the interview, we were challenged to get and convince the participants to share their experiences; luckily, they are very much willing to do it.

Along the conduct of this study, we really experienced how it feels to be a researcher. We took all the necessary measures to make this research a successful one with the aid of our adviser. It is indeed a demanding task because it requires time, patience, and perseverance to gather quality and relevant data that will support our study.

"Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world", Nelson Mandela. Hence, students must be strong despite the challenges they face these days. This global pandemic crisis should motivate every student to do better in achieving their dreams in life. An online class is a new educational way to continue the students' learning process and progress despite the current dilemma we are facing.

Therefore, this new normal education teaches students to work hard, be creative in finding ways, learn their lessons independently, and do their best as much as possible. The study found that poor internet connection was the students' major problem in online learning. Consequently, the Commission of Higher Education and the government

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must provide resources that would help the student's online classes, such as Wi-Fi, gadgets, and other materials that aid students' learning. Enough resources and support duly for the holistic development of the learner's educational needs.

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