

New normal experiences of students in the academe during pandemic

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Abstract: The world manifested dark horizons as COVID-19 pandemic strikes around the globe. The pandemic has widely affected the educational system of different nations across the world. This crisis is the root that caused the new normal setting in education. The Philippine government took actions to control the spread of coronavirus in the country as they established initiative to provide quality education amidst COVID-19 pandemic. This article aims to reflect on the students' challenges and presents coping mechanisms in dealing with the new normal setting of education in the Philippines.

Keywords: Challenges, COVID-19, Digital platforms, Education, Mental health, New normal

1. Introduction

In 2020, the COVID-19 virus has spread around the globe and the number of cases is still prevailing. Community lock down continues and not all people are permitted to travel and go out. Plans are affected and delayed, many people lost their jobs, economic status dropped and graduating students from elementary-college did not have the chance to celebrate and most especially did not experience the graduation ceremony and receive their diploma on stage. Many got disturbed and suffer a lot because of this covid-19. Almost all people hated 2020 because it was a heart-breaking year for all of us. Imagine after the new year's celebration, bad news will greet everyone. Instead of being happy and positive over the year, it has been replaced by fear and negativity.

Due to the rapid increase of cases of the said COVID-19, in just a period of less than 3 months the pandemic has radically transformed the lives of people around the globe, including students. Coronavirus triggered educational sectors which half of its operations lead to temporary closures of schools. The classes that were supposed to end in June 2020, ended earlier than the expected date. Most of the students at first were very happy, thinking that maybe they can take a break from school works for at least one week or even just days. But sadly, the days became months and months became years until the school decided to automatically pass all of the students. With that, most students feel like there are some missing pieces in the knowledge that gained in that school year.

Nevertheless, this pandemic can be positively looked at as an opportunity to build a foundation to sustain education for everyone. As the pandemic will blow out, we should prepare ourselves to face the new era of our society. Similar to Toquero et al. (2021) article, this provides the voices of students' experiences. Hence, this article provides a glimpse on the experiences of students in the new normal academic setting in the Philippines.

2. Effects of COVID-19 in educational system

Shifting educational setting: Globally, most of the schools have been temporarily closed for several months to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Millions of learners are currently facing the effects of coronavirus in the field of education. The Philippine government initiated programs that will address the critical situation in the educational system. Higher Education opens the academic year 2020-2021 through online classes, modular, or blended approach. There is the implementation of the so-called flexible learning which incorporates the use of online and offline platforms, modular instruction, and use of social media (Toquero, 2021). Online learning has been very difficult, far from the usual face to face class and more tiring than the usual. There are a lot of things to do; modules are everywhere and sometimes it is difficult to understand it. Though many are

against the opening of classes and want the academic freeze or postponement of school opening. Nevertheless, there are still students who enrolled and wanted to graduate on time.

Virtual learning platforms: Virtual classes are currently realized in all schools nationwide. Amidst the pandemic, most students are glad because the government has imposed initiatives to provide quality education for everyone. With the virtual classes, some students are depending on the different digital platforms to access learning materials which has been helpful. However, there are some instances that unreliable information is being cited. There are also some learners that are blessed to have technologies to be used in online classes. However, others do not have the same opportunity, and a few students took their lives as reported in local news. Generally, we have the freedom to choose whether to access online learning or not. On the other hand, this program is somewhat crucial because of the possibilities that it can ruin the credibility of education due to the current complications brought by the pandemic.

Students low level of readiness: Students have different capabilities to cope up with this new normal setting. There are fast learners and slow learners. Some find it difficult to learn considering the range of their understanding is different from others. It's also difficult to communicate with one another to address some concerns. In today's education, students need to be independent and practice self-study since there is no one to rely on and there are hindrances like the internet connection, time and even status. From 50 pesos allowance every day in face to face class to 100-200 pesos for online class, which is beyond the pockets of many students. Most of the time, students are struggling in understanding, and coping with the lessons because of several factors, especially the lack of internet connection, which gives a stressful experience. Financial and technological issues add to the difficulty of the students during online classes (Toquero, Calago & Pormento, 2021). Not everyone can access all the educational learning materials provided by the school because of the lack of availability of resources. Listening to a teacher in front of a cellphone is a very challenging task; it's because they also fail to present and deliver their lessons well due to poor internet connections. Most students are doubting themselves and their capabilities. They are worried about their future. The questions that keep on lingering on the mind of every student are, "Can students handle this new normal education?" "Can students learn from this kind of school setting?" "Will students pass this semester/school year?" "What about in the teaching field? Will their future students learn from them?". There are times that students may feel so down and tired, doubting everything. Some students are also worried that they might fail their parents expectations for not doing well in academics.

As students ourselves, this new normal strategy of acquiring education is providing an opportunity to challenge ourselves to develop our critical thinking capabilities, to utilize our own learning and equipped ourselves with the waves of changes that despite of this pandemic we will still become whom we wanted to be. Nevertheless, even though the road is rough, how difficult the situations are--- there are students who dream of making the future a better place for everyone. There are some that wanted to achieve their ambitions in life and no one can stop them, even this pandemic. Covid-19 is just a virus and these students are dreamers who are determined to finish the race and pay off their hard work and most importantly, their parents hard work. Along the way, prayer is the most essential weapon. Having faith that everything will be alright and that everything will come back to their proper places is valuable. We need to be healthy and practice proper hygiene until all of these are over. We can beat this pandemic

2.1. Strategies in the new normal setting of education

Inculcating learning during this global pandemic is a challenged for all educators, to continuously provide quality education despite of different academic concerns because of COVID-19. Different digital and online platforms are primarily used in modern pedagogy of teaching. Basically, constant engagement in these platforms may bring pressure and anxiety to teachers and students engaging in virtual learning. Mental health is constantly affected due to pandemic and academic pressure. Establishing proper communication with students can probably balance the gap between learners and teachers. It may provide opportunity to enhance the interest of learners to learn. Reducing academic workload for students to think critically must be realize because excessive workload can develop the lack of interest of learners to learn. Acknowledging extraordinary skills of the learners can basically enhance the structure of distant learning. Teachers should provide meaningful activities for students for them to explore their knowledge despite of the challenges of virtual learning. Lastly, promoting takeaways or reflections for the learners to evaluate or to manage their feelings and worries. Despite all of these, learning must continue whatever means of learning modalities that our educational system can realize. Teachers should consider the opportunities of this new normal setting and it is necessary to take preventive measures in promoting academic excellence amidst of pandemic.

3. Conclusion

Coronavirus becomes trending globally. It stops the different phases of activities in the countries all over the world. Most schools and famous tourist spots globally are closed. Most counties are economically unstable and hundreds of families suffered from hunger and many individuals face death because of the wide spread of coronavirus. This crisis causes dilemma of different stakeholders to maintain educational opportunities in the country. Many sectors are affected especially educational institutions because of the challenge of virtual classes. Millions of learners faced different issues specifically mental health issues. Teachers are bombarded with different educational task as well as students. who are also challenged in establishing and actualizing the home-based learning. In the setting of new normal education, many teachers used different digital and online platforms to deliver quality education even in the midst of pandemic. This pandemic can be positively looked at as an opportunity to build foundation to sustain learning for every student.

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