

The greatest fighters in the new normal: How do students survive in learning during this time of pandemic?

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Abstract: The year 2020 began with devastating happenings which appalled us that we could not keep up. Wearing face masks, taking up vitamins to nurture our health, washing and disinfecting hands, the social distancing, the lockdowns, the never-ending home quarantine, working from home, and even studying/learning at home are some of the consequences of the global health crisis. Moreover, COVID-19 has a massive impact on our education. The majority of the population considers it a big problem in acquiring learning. However, there are various ways to solve such problems in the midst of this crisis. This paper significantly gives ideas on how educators adjust through implications and responses to some questions, offers suggestions on how people can cope and adapt to this new normal education setting, and ways on how they deal with their physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects enable them to overcome difficulties in this time of the pandemic. Thus, students, teachers, and parents will adapt to this new normal process of acquiring learning, so all should succeed.

Keywords: Challenges, COVID-19, Education, Learning, Neoliberalism, New normal, Pandemic, Teaching

1. Introduction

Several months ago, we were free to wander the streets—going to the mall whenever we wanted, strolling around the plaza, going to beaches with families and friends, chatting to someone, even hugging and kissing them, and traveling into any place limitlessly. But after that freedom, COVID-19 hits us up. We cannot go anywhere, we cannot do shopping, our actions have been limited, and most significantly, we cannot go out without masks and face shields. This crisis impacts not only our physical well-being but also affects our education, economics, environment, and the entire society. Many schools and universities globally are starting to pay attention to student well-being because they understand how important it is for students to maintain a healthy balance between their psychological, social, emotional, and physical well-being (Flinchbaugh et al., 2012; Mahatmya et al., 2018). Motivation, identity, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-regulation are all aspects of student well-being relevant to a student's ability to learn and complete a degree program. (Flinchbaugh et al., 2012).

COVID-19 pandemic has created an exceptional challenge and has impacted not only the usual everyday life, economic and health life, but also the educational sectors, and as a result, we are confronted with this new experience known as the "new normal." Oxford Dictionary defines "the new normal" as a brief popular or fashionable word or phrase used to encapsulate a particular concept. Similarly, American Dictionary describes this catchphrase as a previously unfamiliar or atypical situation that has become standard, usual, or expected. What has become normal nowadays are online classes, modular distance learning, and learning through technology, which some students were deprived of. This is a crucial and serious problem that our world is currently facing.

Nevertheless, this is not a hindrance in failing to achieve our goals and dreams. On the contrary, COVID-19 has sparked much confusion regarding "a new normal" for student learning and university operations. However, when most countries are still dealing with the pandemic, it appears feasible, if not likely, that colleges and universities worldwide will increasingly use online or hybrid teaching methods. As a result, new

approaches and resources are required to enhance student well-being in a hybrid or online setting (Plakhotnik et al., 2021).

Conducting an online class is a new way to adapt to the current situation, particularly when it comes to our education. Through this, students were forced to learn/study alone, taking the initiative in their education and learning process. It might be hard for students and teachers to cope with the changes of distance learning, and the then face-to-face teaching and learning environment suddenly replaced by learning at home experience. Slow internet connectivity and lack of gadgets for teachers and students are their biggest struggles when complying with this new normal (Toquero, Calago & Pormento, 2021). It requires more months of adjustments for the students as well as the teachers. Dayagbil et al. (2021) stated that most schools and universities are turning to online learning to avoid the risk of face-to-face interaction due to the global health problem. As a result of the pandemic, universities and schools are being compelled to switch from face-to-face instruction to online delivery. During school lockdowns in the Philippines, many universities, like Cebu Normal University, have turned to online learning. It has, however, caused challenges for students who lack access to technology. There is a widening gap between students who have Internet connectivity and those who do not because of the pandemic. Accessibility and internet connectivity have made it difficult for students and teachers to maintain academic engagement (Toquero et al., 2021).

2. Hopes despite pandemic

Students need to continue pursuing their goals even though things have drastically changed. The way they acquire knowledge is not the same as what they are used to. Students need to face it, and God should always be in their hearts so that He will give them hope, knowledge, and wisdom to understand all the lessons in this new normal learning setup. It reminds the students to fight and never give up. It is just a challenge that we need to overcome.



Figure 1: New normal education in the Philippines (Source: <https://www.newsbeastph.com>)

2.1. Learning in the new normal education

The teaching and learning process has become challenging for everyone due to the pandemic. Secretary Briones of the Department of Education (DepEd) stated, “Education must continue,” but how does the government handle this situation wherein our country has the slowest internet connectivity? Due to the pandemic, many people have lost their jobs, which means they do not have enough financial support to give to their children. According to the Department of Education (DepEd), many kids suffer from no internet connection to no new learning experiences gadgets. Most students prefer “modular” learning over online classes due to the scarcity of resources. That is why the Department of Education (DepEd) produced self-learning materials/modules for education to continue the teaching and learning, which clearly shows that students and their guardians learn or work together with the teacher’s guidance and instruction. Considering each student’s home has different challenges, we need to address how to scaffold the students’ learning process in experiencing the new learning environment. Students had a hard time dealing with the changes in their learning experiences and became easily stressed out. Some students say, “face-to-face learning is already hard for us; how much more in this new distance learning with self-studying and just modules?” Teaching and learning today have become challenging for everyone. How should we build an environment that adequately facilitates students’ learning process? Preparing the students the 21st Century Skills makes the changes easier. However, they face external difficulties in dealing with the new normal learning. The absence

of external resources can have a negative impact on the student learning experience, such as interrupted learning, lack of engagement in in-class discussion, absenteeism in class, and limitations on completing their final exams, all of which can result in students selecting lower-status employment to survive (Plakhotnik et al., 2021).

2.2. How COVID-19 affects academic endeavor

COVID-19 is not a joke. This crisis has killed many lives that contributed to the decisions of the educational leaders and administrators to stop the academic year (Toquero, 2021). The normal class, which includes face-to-face interaction, can impossibly be conducted now due to the health protocols and mandates which include the practice of social distancing. On a serious note, it makes students sad. The online class is quite far from the normal class. Until now, the students have not totally adjusted yet to how things go through online. Moreover, it induces a high amount of stress because all activities are needed to be accomplished double-time as the usual pacing in the normal classes. But then, this pandemic shall not be the reason to stop admiring and reaching our goal. Nevertheless, use this crisis to be the reason to strive hard and boost yourself to catch up with new lessons that will help to get our passion.

Without the physical classroom where the students spend their weekdays learning with classmates, the lockdowns and quarantines helped them realize the importance of working together to accomplish a difficult task. The students always believe that nothing is impossible in working together. The usual routines and lifestyles wholly change in a small amount of time, and it is devastating how the students also adapt to the changes in education. This crisis tests commitment, patience, personality, and even the students' health. It made the students question their ability and skills to handle their own learning experience.

Moreover, the lack of resources in today's learning environment challenged the students mentally and physically, making them emotional and sad, knowing that their learning capabilities are shallow. They have sacrificed a lot to adjust to the situation that made them agitated towards everything, but knowing that they chose this profession for future generations changed them completely. It made the students realize that this is just the start of their journey, and it is not even halfway through this; thinking that this profession only molds and makes them better teachers/mentors/educators someday is just satisfying regardless of their difficulties in this time and age.

2.3. Strategies and coping mechanism in the new normal learning

This quarantine and lockdown taught the students to meditate, pray, have a quiet time with themselves, and reflect. It is amazing and satisfying to start the day by having time with God. Before attending classes and doing class work, they stretch their bodies and do household tasks. These students have their law of attraction on how they draw their future as educators. They list all their tasks/assignments/assessments for the whole week to help them organize everything they do. It is essential for them to have time with their family; they encourage them, lift them, and give advice on handling things in these difficult situations. Doing things that make them happy, like watching movies, videos from their favorite Korean boy band, and reading books, helps them de-stress and keep their mentality stable. They need to be responsible students, and they also need to do their part to achieve their aspirations in life. Be brave in all aspects because it can boost energy and strengthen your capability to face many struggles and circumstances in life. Just pray always and keep motivated. These students always appreciate things, even in the smallest, because for them, it is one spice to be strong. Do not belittle and drag down yourself. Inspire yourself to inspire others too.

3. Conclusion

This global crisis also caused unexpected happenings that turned the lives of the students, and at the same time, it teaches the students to fight all the weaknesses and look into the brighter side. This crisis would not be the reason for students to be weak and to stop fighting, instead this would be the reason to strive harder and be strong. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected and will continue to affect the delivery of knowledge and skills at all levels of education. When students work together with their teachers, parents, classmates and even the policymakers, they can survive and make the academic year efficient. Teaching and learning take on a new form at times of distress. Schools and colleges must be resilient and come up with new innovative ideas to keep the teaching and learning process going in the midst of disasters and crises (Chang-Richards et al., 2013). Collaborating and communicating to everyone can create things easier and it will give a better result. Working together can help students to overcome this crisis. Meditating and breathing is one of the effective

actions that these students always did because it releases their negative energy. They just keep on trusting God, and they believe that having a strong faith in Him, they can survive.

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