

Challenges in Implementing Online Learning in Philippine Higher Education: Business Students' Perspective

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Abstract—When COVID-19 happened, Philippine higher education was affected because education in most of the universities in the country is mostly delivered in a conventional way. The transition to virtual learning environment became a challenge for most students and teachers. With this, it is necessary to determine the problems encountered by the students during the implementation of online remote learning. This research is a descriptive exploratory small-scale pilot study. The objective is to gain insights and analyze the Filipino college business students perspectives of challenges in online remote during the pandemic. Using qualitative research method, a thematic content analysis was employed to discover patterns, themes, and codes. Based on the findings there are seven (7) themes emerged: internet connection problem, too much workload and problem with meeting the deadlines, difficulty in coping with online pedagogy, limited space at home and issues on environment, doing household chores while studying, health concerns and financial issues. Of the seven (7) themes that were determined, the internet connection problem was the most dominant. Given this finding, it is necessary for policy makers and leaders to address the challenges and consider the findings as inputs to faculty development and other interventions.

Keywords—online learning, remote learning, Philippines

I. INTRODUCTION

The spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) as a global pandemic abruptly became a problem for many people in higher education. Many countries around the world, including the Philippines, imposed a social distancing directive, a stay-at-home work arrangement for most working people, and homeschooling for all students. Higher education institutions were among the first establishments to shut down their normal operation. The quick transition to online remote learning by most schools and universities during the second semester of the School Year 2019–2020 was a quick change made by higher education institutions across the globe; among those institutions that dealt with remote learning is the St.

Scholastica's College Manila (SSC). During the last months of the 2nd semester, the College's higher management announced SSC will transition to online learning until the end of the semester. This online remote teaching-learning arrangement extended up to the summer course offering. SSC used Neo Cypher Learning which is an online learning management platform used to upload learning resource materials, content, and activities. It also used Zoom, an online meeting software, for the students and teachers to communicate virtually. Given the introduction of online infrastructure and facilities in the teaching-learning processes where there is an enormous change in the way college students were taught information, it is imperative to examine the business student's perspective on this online remote learning and determine the challenges experienced by them. This is with the end view of providing solutions at the institutional level whenever needed.

The transition to virtual learning environment was a challenge to many college students as well as to teachers, hence the need to determine the problems encountered by business students during the implementation of online remote learning to better address them, thus, the reason for this research. According to Ref. [1], the transition to remote classes was a struggle for students and professors alike. The development of fully online courses can take six to nine months so that the best learning experience can be implemented. When creating online classes, the professors carefully consider many design decisions, typically with the help of their campus support personnel. During the height of the COVID-19 Pandemic, many of these class design decisions were not made at the start of the semester or even after the transition to remote learning which can lead to inferior teaching [2].

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) offered various learning modalities and repeatedly assured everyone that “no student will be left behind” for basic education. To ensure learning continuity, DepEd issued in June 2020, DepEd Order No. 012 s. 2020 [3], otherwise known as the “Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP)”, which is a package of education interventions that respond to basic education challenges brought about by COVID-19. Meanwhile, on its part, the Commission on

Higher Education (CHED) has ordered the adoption of flexible learning modalities to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) which include, among others, the use of online remote teaching-learning processes. To help HEIs facilitate their migration from traditional to flexible teaching and learning options, CHED issued Memo Order 04 (2020) which prescribes the guidelines on the implementation of flexible teaching-learning approaches, strategies, systems, pedagogies, and modalities in higher education programs [4]. This flexible pedagogical approach was implemented by most Philippine higher education institutions. Flexible learning according to CHED allows flexibility of time, place, and audience including, but not solely focused on the use of technology. Although it commonly uses the delivery methods of distance education and facilities of education technology, this may vary depending on the levels of technology, availability of devices, internet connectivity, level of digital literacy, and approaches. The design and delivery of programs address learners' unique needs in terms of place, pace and process, and products of learning. It ensures the continuity of inclusive and accessible education when the use of traditional modes of teaching is not feasible as in the occurrence of national emergencies.

To effectively carry out a successful online remote learning, it is necessary to determine the challenges as experienced by the business students during COVID-19 pandemic. Revealing these problems is important for removing, reducing, or solving the barriers in distance education implementations to be conducted in the future [5]. While there is various literature on online remote learning during the pandemic, this study will specifically identify Filipino business college student's perspectives on the challenges in online remote learning that will eventually provide lessons and recommendations to improve future attempt to implement a full distance, online/technology mediated instruction. Given this backdrop, the main goal for this study was to gain Filipino college students' perspective on the challenges experience during the initial implementation of online remote learning. Thereupon the current research problem is as follows:

- What are the challenges experienced by Filipino college business students in online remote learning education during the COVID-19 pandemic?

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. Research Design and Approach

This research is an exploratory small-scale pilot study as the goal was to gain insights, to comprehend and analyze the Filipino college student perspectives of challenges in online remote during COVID-19 Pandemic. Specifically, this research utilized the case study method, which is among qualitative research methods. Case study is a qualitative approach that describes a case and reveals the themes of the case by profoundly collecting data in order to produce a deeper understanding related to a situation in real life, current system, or in a specific time [6]. Particularly, the case in this study is the online remote learning process which the business students of SSC

actually experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The qualitative approach was utilized, which is a social inquiry method focused on how people interpret and give meaning to their experiences according to Ref. [7]. Qualitative research aims to "understand the social reality of individuals, groups and cultures". The objective for choosing this approach was to follow the emic perspective to study the views, opinions, and interpretations of students regarding the integration of technology in classrooms while the implementation of online remote learning was in place during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The study particularly employs a descriptive approach to qualitative research. Descriptive research describes the fundamental characteristics of a phenomenon at a given period [8]. This design is suited to this study as it attempts to describe the challenges during online remote learning of students in St. Scholastica's College, Manila, Philippines during the period of the global health crisis.

B. Environment

Because of COVID-19 pandemic, online remote learning has been implemented in St. Scholastica's College, Manila, and other HEIs in the Philippines during COVID-19 Pandemic. The study covered the students who have been involved in online remote learning education process via the Learning Management System (LMS) of the College. In addition to the LMS, SSC also used Zoom conferencing when meeting students during synchronous classes. Some teachers also incorporated PowerPoint presentations while others used video conference systems which have been integrated into the software. Others utilized live courses which are also available for every lesson. The duration of live courses is 1 hour for each lesson. The teachers make the live courses recorded and make them available to the students through the LMS. Given slow internet connection of some teachers and students, the hour limit was prescribed to avoid a possible over loading on the servers during live lessons. The learning management system which was utilized by SSC is called NEO cypher learning management system; it includes specifications as adding lessons, subjects, files, sharing materials, announcements, posting of homework, submitting requirements, and downloading capacities. As regards assessment and evaluation, SSC teachers provided homework, quizzes, and examinations via the learning management system. In each evaluation activity, students were given feedback about their scores and how the process of evaluation was made.

C. Participants

The Participants of this survey were fourth year college students (who are mainly from the 2 programs enrolled in BSBA Major in Marketing Management program and International Business Economics and Diplomacy [IBEAD]), St. Scholastica's College, Manila, Philippines) who experienced online remote learning during the Second semester, School Year 2021–2022. There were 30 students who completed the survey. Since these students are in their final year, it is essential to consider their inputs so that appropriate approaches to innovating the delivery can be made if proven to be necessary.

D. Data Collection

The collection of data was executed through Google Forms, an online surveying tool. The survey was sent out to the participants in two ways: by email and a link posted on their Learning Management System (LMS). The email was sent out to all the participants. They were contacted through the social media app FB Messenger and the LMS. None of the participants received compensation for completing this survey. The main goal for this project is to gain insight on online remote learning from the perspective of college business students. In the study, the researcher prepared an open-ended question to collect data. The data gathering was applied based on voluntary principle and online individually. The average time of answering was 15 minutes.

E. Data Analysis

The data that were generated in this research were analyzed using manual thematic analysis, which is a process that qualitative researchers use to determine patterns and discover themes by reviewing the data, making notes, and sorting it into categories and codes. The content analysis method was used in the data analysis. Content analysis is used to analyze data such as one from interviews and observations, to systematize and often quantify data [9]. After transcribing the data acquired, the participants were coded as S1, S2, and so on. For grouping purposes, the researcher interpreted the raw data and determined the themes and codes which has similarities and differences in the students' responses to challenges. For responses with similar coding, the data were then grouped and presented to respond to the aim of this research.

III. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

A. Themes and Codes Revealed as a Result of the Analysis

Analyzing the challenges faced by Filipino College Business students in a higher education institution during the online remote education process implemented in the COVID-19 pandemic, revealed seven (7) themes and thirty-eight (38) codes. Based on the responses (as seen in Table I), it specifically revealed the following themes in relation to the challenges/problems experienced by the students while on online remote learning: "internet connection", problems in "meeting deadlines, assignments, and workloads", pedagogical challenge on "online learning" delivery, limitations on "space and environment", difficulty in attending to "household chores", while studying, "health problems", and "financial concerns".

TABLE I. SUMMARY OF THEMES AND CODES

Themes	Number of Codes
Internet Connection Problem	4
Meeting Deadlines, Assignments and workloads	9
Online learning pedagogy	8
Space and Environment	7
Household chores	3
Health	4
Financial concerns	3

Results of analysis showed that based on Table I, the internet connection theme has four (4) codes, meeting deadlines, assignments and workloads theme has nine (9) codes, online learning pedagogy theme has eight (8) codes, space and environment theme has seven (7) themes, household chores theme has three (3) codes, health problem theme has four (4) codes, and financial concern theme has three (3) codes.

B. Challenges Experienced by Filipino Business Students

Given the purpose of this research to describe the challenges of Filipino business course students in online remote learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Table II illustrates the results as follows:

TABLE II. STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE OF CHALLENGES

Selected Codes	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow Internet • No internet connection • Intermittent connection • Internet Load/data problem 	Internet Connection Problem
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School requirements are difficult to do online • Overwhelming tasks given by some professors • Lots of workloads • Too many assignments • Need to do cramming specially with the tight deadline given. • Time is so tight/limited given the need to balance school and work at the same time. • I feel like I am behind my lessons. • Late submission of requirements • Difficult to manage time properly 	Meeting Deadlines, Assignments and workloads
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having trouble to understand the lessons because it's done online/virtual • Difficulty coping with online learning because we're used to face-to-face • Difficulty interacting with groupmates if there are assignment 'coz of virtual set-up. • Communication challenges in online class • Can quickly get distracted online • Learning is limited when delivered online. • Less focus in online class • It's hard to absorb the lessons online 	Online Learning Pedagogy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very minimal space inside the house; our house is small • I don't have my own space to study at home • Noises and many distractions at home • Easily get distracted with the people at home • Struggling to stay focus on school because of my environment which is not conducive • Noise from outside house/environment makes it difficult to focus • Exposed to family problem experienced at home 	Space and Environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other responsibilities at home is a problem. • I'm the only child so I need to follow orders from my parents. • Household chores hinders time supposed to be for studying. 	Household Chores
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's hard mentally and physically. • My eyes get sore with online classes • Struggling to keep physical and mental health stable • Tendency to rest all the time since it's home-schooling 	Health
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I cannot afford to have my own gadgets, laptop and mobile phone. • Can't afford to buy glasses (for online class when eyes get sore) • Need to earn and work a little 	Financial concerns

Theme 1: Internet Connection Problem: One of the most prominent challenges as named by all (100%) the SSC business students that were surveyed in dealing with online remote learning is the problem on internet connection which they stated to be slow, intermittent, internet load and data problem was identified to be costly while others have little or no internet access at all. In the paper of Rotas and Cahapay [10], the same problem occurred as a major challenge among Filipino students. Their study revealed that one of the most recurring difficulties experienced by students in the Philippines during remote learning is unstable internet connectivity. From the literature that were reviewed, it revealed that the Philippines has slow and expensive internet access, and the households. This is also validated by the result of the study made by Akamai Technologies on the Global State of the Internet Report. The Akamai State of the Internet Report ranks the Philippines at 6th out of 15 Asia-Pacific countries with an average mobile internet speed of 8.5 Mbps. Peak connection speeds also reached a high 105.1 Mbps for the Philippines which means that the country continues to have one of the slowest internet connection speeds across the Asia Pacific [11]. The technological challenges such as the absence of internet connection may increase inequalities among students through uneven access to the technology needed by the learners [12]. Given this result, it is necessary that school officials should provide the needed intervention to students who mostly have little or no access to personal computers and internet.

Theme 2: Challenge on Meeting Deadlines, Assignments and Workloads: Another challenge that was specified by the students of SSC in coping with online remote learning is the difficulty in meeting deadlines, assignments, and workloads. They complain of limited time given to prepare and submit their tasks, too many assignments being given which overlaps with the deadlines given by other professors, and the overwhelming workloads given by teachers. The specific example of the challenge related to this theme, are as follows:

S5: *“Some Professors give out 2 or more homework in a week, it is the workload that makes us draining. Some teachers teach for 3 hours while others teach for 1 hour and 30 minutes which results to not being able to learn and not being able to process the lessons that were discussed”.*

S7: *“We have professors who gives assignments with the same deadlines as the others, it’s hard to comply because of limited time; that’s why we do cramming”.*

Theme 3: Problem with Online Learning Pedagogy: The students of St. Scholastica’s College who were enrolled in Business courses also disclosed their difficulty coping with online learning pedagogy. The majority of the participants prefer to have a face-to-face class than online remote learning. This finding is actually similar to the result yielded in the study of Swartwood when the students had an overall negative attitude toward their remote learning experience. From the survey, it was revealed that of the 37 respondents only one student preferred the online

way of learning. Therefore, 97.3% of students preferred in-person learning. In the case of SSC business students, they specifically mentioned the difficulty understanding the lessons when delivered virtually, communication challenges, interaction with peers, and limited retention when lessons are delivered online because of distractions, among others. Given this result, it is necessary to consider Ferri *et al.* [12], which study states that in order to plan an adequate pedagogical course for remote teaching, it is necessary to increase the technological skills of all the actors involved. In various countries, challenges related to gaps in digital literacy in education among teachers, students, and parents were said to have emerged. Teachers should be trained to increase digital and other specific skills for online education in order to adequately plan and implement an innovative pedagogical program. Although students are usually very familiar with the use of digital devices, they may not be prepared to receive remote teaching and it is quite difficult to capture their attention. To be able to increase the interest of the students towards online learning environment, it is necessary for the SSC administrators to consider giving their faculty members a development program or on the use of ICT enabled teaching-learning processes that is more interactive and engaging.

Theme 4: Limitations of Space and Environment: Another issue that were mentioned by the students is the limitation of spaces and the general environment at home while studying online. Similarly, in Rotas and Cahapay poor learning environment was also mentioned as among the difficulties expressed by the students in remote learning. The findings revealed that students do not find their homes a conducive place to study. Some of the responses that are worth mentioning are as follows:

S6: *“There is very minimal space inside the house; our house is small. There is a problem on the workspace as I don’t have my own space to study; there are noises and distractions that I can easily get distracted”.*

S9: *“Outside house noises makes it difficult to focus most of the time”.*

S10: *“When doing online classes, you are exposed to all the family problems you see at home”.*

Theme 5: Problem with doing household chores while studying: The respondents also mentioned the need to take on responsibilities at home as among the challenges in doing online remote learning. They specifically mentioned the need to follow the instructions given by their parents (obeying the orders of the parents are among the natural traits of most Filipino children). Students mentioned that these chores run counter to their time supposed to be allotted for online remote learning. In Ref. [13], the same findings were revealed when they disclosed that more than one in three students could not study at home as they were engaged in household chores during the pandemic. Of the 396 who participated in UNICEF’s U-Report South Asia poll, the biggest concern for more than 100 Bhutanese youth was about not having time to study at home due to household work during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Theme 6: Health Problem: Most of the notable findings that emerged in this study is on health concerns. Most

students complained of eye problem, mental and physical constraints while on online remote learning and struggles when it comes to keeping a stable health condition. According to Ref. [14], concerns ranging from eye strain and obesity to mood swings and depression have been widely noted in association with excessive screen time. With the recent and widespread shift to online schooling, where students may spend up to seven hours a day in front of a computer screen for class before likely turning to their phones and TVs in their free time, the health concerns are significantly magnified. Therefore, given this result, it is suggested that class activities be a combination of both synchronous and asynchronous modalities and that school officials take serious steps to attend to health issues (both physical and mental concerns) and well-being of the students.

Theme 7: Financial Concerns: While many people would argue that SSC may be an institution for most affluent students, the findings of the study reveal some issues that need to be attended to specifically for some vulnerable sectors of the institution like those indigent students who are given scholarship by SSC. Some of the students mentioned that they have problems owning laptops and cellphones while others stated that they have no money to buy glasses and that they need to work while on school at the same time to cope with their living expenses. To be able to address this concern, it is necessary for school officials to attend to these concerns so that issues of equity, access, and inclusivity may be given solutions right away.

IV. CONCLUSION

Online remote teaching learning processes have provided universities and colleges in the Philippines an opportunity for learning continuity during school closures brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Given this scenario, there are challenges and impediments in its implementation that universities and colleges have to face. This research highlights the business students' perspectives of difficulties and impediments while COVID-19 pandemic still affected most higher education institutions all over the world. The study is an attempt to determine the challenges faced by the students while in online remote learning environment. Results of analysis revealed that business students from the Philippines named the following challenges while online remote education was still in place: Internet connection problems, overloaded workloads and difficulty meeting deadlines, problem with coping with online pedagogy, limited space, and distractive environment, attending to household chores, health problems, and financial concerns. Of the themes mentioned by the business students, the problem with internet connection was the dominant challenge specified by all the student participants. Given the findings, it is recommended that school administrators, policy makers, educators/teachers should address the problems specified by the students by making these results a possible input to policy making and future attempts to improve educational processes at the institutional level and the country in general. The lessons learned by both

teachers and students from the emergency online remote learning should also be made the basis for innovation at the school level and infrastructure development. It is also necessary to consider providing capacity building, training, and development intervention to both students and faculty to properly address the challenges that were specified. To be able to aptly provide for a more accessible, inclusive and equitable higher education, educational leaders and policy makers should respond to the issue of internet connectivity and provision of more updated technological infrastructure specially for vulnerable students who may not have the financial means to avail of such services. Given that the findings also reveal problems on the overloading of assignments, health deterioration (mental and physical constraints), it is necessary that teachers and school administrators should consider the volume of tasks they give to students such that it would not result in fatigue and mental concern to students because of too much tasks. It is also necessary that teachers should be given proper training on the use of technology for online teaching-learning purposes to make instruction more engaging, lively and at par with the traditional delivery. Given the limitations of this paper, it is necessary that future researchers should consider conducting the study on a larger and diverse scope to really get the real reflections of the challenges faced by Filipino students during online remote learning.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Ralph A. Sabio, the principal author of this research, was responsible for the data gathering, interpretation and analysis of findings. The gathering of related literature was also part of his contribution. Meanwhile, Cecilia J. Sabio, the corresponding author, was responsible for the writing of the objectives, methods, and the rationale for this research. Both authors have significantly contributed and cooperated to finalize the whole paper e.g., editing, referencing, literature review, among others. Both authors had approved the final version.

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