
A Phenomenological Study of Coping Strategies In The Context of Blended Learning

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ABSTRACT

The study is limited to the coping strategies of the senior high school students in Sindangan National High School in the modular distance learning. The study covers the period of School Year 2022-2023. The study is a qualitative-phenomenological design. Structured questionnaires were used by the researcher to gather the data of the study. Thematic semantic analysis was used.

Based on the interviews with the students, the following themes emerged from the different aspects: The students felt exhausted from the tons of workloads, assignments, learning activities, and projects; and lack of communication. Though most of the students felt the exhaustion, tiredness and confusion, yet they considered blended learning to have promoted their independence in learning. The students mostly managed their time to avoid procrastination, conflicts of schedules, to learn independently, and to complete their assigned tasks. In managing the challenges of the students during the blended learning, most of them practiced time management to control themselves, prioritize their tasks, and flexibility at times. Their becoming productive and responsible were manifested by being not dependent on others, did their best and set goals for themselves to achieve. Most of the students considered time management as the best strategy to address their challenges as they avoided procrastination, segregated their tasks and set priorities.

Students experienced fatigue, exhaustion, sadness, and confusion during blended learning. They aimed to make education accessible, promote independent learning, and use electronic and online media. They managed challenges through time management, planning, and understanding the importance of education. They sought support from relatives, time management, patience, technology balance, and recreational activities.

Schools may improve guidance and counseling programs for students recovering from pandemic stress. DepEd may revisit teaching practices with modular learning and incorporate alternative modalities for support. Parents may collaborate with teachers to monitor students' recovery and reinforce positive strategies. Future researchers may explore the challenges faced by teachers, parents, and students during post-pandemic times.

KEYWORDS: *Phenomenological Study, Coping Strategies, Context, Blended Learning*

INTRODUCTION

DepEd Order No. 011, s. 2020 on the Guidelines on the Implementation of Alternative Learning System Programs in Light of the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan During

the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, provides guidance on the implementation of alternative learning system programs, which includes blended approaches to learning.

DepEd Order No. 012, s. 2020 on Adopting the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan for School Year 2020-2021 in Light of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, provides guidance on the implementation of various learning modalities based on the local situation and needs. It emphasizes the importance of blended learning and encourages schools to use multiple delivery modes.

Blended learning among students has been continuously utilized as an alternative instructional modality most especially among the secondary school system. Some students have become well-adjusted to the modality while some are still not so comfortable and attuned to the blended learning modalities. This condition along with curricular adjustments, and technical resources demands pose some issues or concerns among students which may have caused uncertainties, pressures and inconveniences among them.

Students faced challenges which emanate from their experiences with the modular learning instructional delivery. According to Codelan, Pardillo, Selim, Bastismo and Miranda [1], the problems and challenges experienced by students in distance learning modality could be self-learning modules, lack of technological equipment, lack of learning support services, special bonds, and module distribution and retrieval. On the other hand, Manalac [2] presented students' challenges in modular distance learning to include the technical element, focus and concentration of the students, and parents being not well-educated and well-equipped with proper education.

Learning in a blended environment has their own set of obstacles, which calls for creative solutions. Educators should implement technological integration, flexible instructional design, active learning methodologies, individualized feedback and assistance, and collaborative learning communities in order to overcome these difficulties. Students are able to assimilate material in a more in-depth manner, apply it to real-world scenarios, and maintain their motivation with the support of these approaches. Educators may produce a more engaging and fruitful blended learning experience for their students by emphasizing the importance of communication and teamwork. Educators are able to improve the outcomes for their students and create a learning environment that is more engaging and productive when they put these tactics into action (Koops & Vleuten) [3].

Confronted with these challenges and problems, the students resort to mechanisms to mitigate their problems and challenges. Addressing the challenges of the students may be collective efforts of the school heads, teachers, parents and the students themselves. Codelan, et al. [1] cited that interventions can be implemented to address the students' challenges in modular distance learning. Among these include: students staying engaged, implementing a balance curriculum with innovation in curriculum time, conducting home room guidance, and continually monitoring students' progress.

In Sindangan National High School, the senior high school students have experience being taught with blended instruction. There were some instances wherein the students made use of online learning management system and in some schedules, they attended face-to-face classes and interaction with their teachers. This was the transition period when DepEd gradually implemented the traditional face-to-face classes. With the blended learning, the teachers

were confronted with several challenges which necessitate coping techniques to address the challenges they encountered.

This study endeavors to examine the experiences of the students in distance learning modality. In addition, the researcher also wishes to identify the mechanisms employed to cope with the challenges of distance learning modality. It was the objective of the researcher to examine these variables from the perspective of the senior high school students in Sindangan National Agricultural School enrolled during the school year 2022-2023.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study utilized the theory of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke [4]. As they emphasize, thematic analysis is a technique used to identify and examine emergent themes in a dataset in order to elucidate the themes, meanings, and essences of the individual's experiences. The following procedures were followed during the thematic analysis: Making meaning-based translations from the vernacular language to English, 2) transcribing data from digital recordings and field notes, 3) identifying significant statements in the transcript interview, 4) creating codes, 5) highlighting key phrases, and 6) defining and naming themes to cohere around a central idea are all steps in the transcription process.

The continuing fusion of two archetypal learning settings includes blended learning (Boelens, et al.) [5] However, the effects of the two delivery methods are not equivalent, and there are differences in how to integrate from the perspective of an on-site school to that of a remote education setting.

As learners interact for the first time or in novel ways with system components, their roles shift or adapt. The well-researched shift from passive to active learning is crucial. This is essential for fostering and educating lifelong learners, a quality that has been regarded as crucial in 21st-century society.

In blended environments, teachers are also new, and they will develop alongside kids as they interact with and adjust to one another and the other four components of the system. It is assumed that teachers using blended learning will adjust to pedagogies suitable for both blended learning and learners being ready to participate effectively in the highly diverse 21st-century societies.

According to the Coping Theory of Lazarus and Folkman [6], coping is the constantly changing efforts, both cognitive and behavioral, of a person to manage external and internal demands that are considered as taxing or exceeding the resources of a person. It is the conscious and unconscious efforts that a person puts in a situation to solve problems and reduce stress. The theory further posits that coping is highly individualized and dependent on the personality patterns and perceptual experiences of a person. Lazarus and Folkman's model stated that successful coping mechanisms depend on the emotional functions related to the problem. Lazarus classified these eight emotional functions as: self-control; confrontation; social support; emotional distancing; escape and avoidance; radical acceptance; positive reappraisal; and strategic problem-solving.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is the objective of this study to examine the coping strategies of senior high school students in Sindangan National Agricultural School.

Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following question:

1. What are the participants' experiences during the blended learning?
2. How did the participants cope with the experiences in blended learning?

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative phenomenological design of research was used in this study. The study was conducted in the three secondary schools in Sindangan District, Zamboanga del Norte for the School Year 2022-2023. A total of 15 participants was chosen at random, focusing on students who experienced blended learning among the secondary schools in the District of Sindangan, Sindangan, Zamboanga del Norte. Structured questionnaires were prepared by the researcher which contains open-ended questions related to the coping strategies of students in the modular learning modality used during this pandemic. The data on the coping strategies of students in the blended learning during pandemic was analyzed using thematic analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Students' Experiences during the Blended Learning

The interviews conducted among the participants yielded five themes about their experiences during the blended learning. These are: Tired, exhausted, sad and confused; Makes education accessible; Greater time flexibility; Need to study; Promotes independent learning; and Learning via electronic and online media. These themes and the students' relevant experiences are indicated in Table 1.

Blended learning makes education more accessible by providing remote access to modules and resources, enhancing accessibility to digital content like videos, PDFs, games, and quizzes. This approach allows students to engage in learning anywhere and anytime, allowing them to access new resources and ask questions. Personalized learning paths help students move at their own pace, ensuring that advanced students don't fall behind. Teachers can also personalize content for students, encouraging them to pursue topics and assignments that suit their interests. Education is the building block of crucial skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, and self-awareness, and accessibility is nonnegotiable in education, creating equal opportunities for everyone.

A student highlights the importance of education during blended learning, despite challenges like adjustment and face-to-face schooling. Education motivates individuals to tackle specific issues and ensures a promising future. It improves problem-solving skills, provides self-dependency, stability, security, and contributes to family economic growth. Despite the challenges, students continue to work hard to complete tasks and achieve their goals.

Students often seek help from their close friends and relatives, who have knowledge about their lessons and activities. They communicate, interact, and engage with classmates and teachers through video calls or personal interactions. DepEd issued Memorandum No. DM-

CI-2020-00162 to emphasize the importance of parents in the implementation of distance learning. However, teachers argue that there is inadequate parental support, as most parents are workers and have limited knowledge and skills. Additionally, illiterate parents may not be able to assist their children in their modules or serve as instructional coaches due to limited knowledge and skills.

Blended learning, a combination of online and offline learning, offers students greater time flexibility and the ability to learn at their own pace. This flexibility allows students to manage their schedules and complete tasks at their own pace, allowing them to improve at their own pace and address issues around time management. Blended learning also allows students to work at their own pace, ensuring they can work at a rate that is most comfortable for them, ultimately leading to better outcomes.

Planning. According to Timothy [7], planning involves emphasizing on identifying clear learning objectives. It is very important in blended learning to identify the right course goals and objectives before starting to study. The objectives serve the purpose of a roadmap and helps in understanding where the learning is headed to successfully achieve the course outcomes.

Students can make use of the outline to keep a track of their learning. They could identify what skills are essential to achieve understanding and competence of the lesson outcomes.

Time Management. Students' time management practices during blended learning included creating schedules for activities, managing household chores, helping parents, and setting specific hours or days for studying and research. These practices aimed to focus on studies, avoid procrastination, achieve goals, avoid conflicts, and study independently. Students did not pressure themselves, eat three times a day, and pray to God for guidance. They usually study in the morning, night, or weekend, and restrict themselves with their house. During blended learning, students balanced their time by setting a day when no one could disturb them and completing homework. They learned better time management and independent study to better handle school work. Students organized their schedules by jotting down subjects and their corresponding time, helping their parents with household chores, and devoting a small portion of their time to learning tasks such as assignments, reports, and recitation. Overall, students' time management practices helped them focus on their studies, avoid procrastination, and respond effectively to school work.

Todorov [8] emphasizes the importance of time management in various aspects of life, including online learning. Online students need to set aside time for their own learning and pace, which requires discipline and understanding of time usage. Time management is crucial for efficient task completion, meeting goals, and avoiding stress. One common issue is trying to do too much at once, as it may not be successful if it differs from normal routines. Instead, it's better to start small and gradually improve, as with any other skill. By understanding and managing time wisely, individuals can achieve their goals and achieve their goals.

Students emphasize the importance of time management in achieving stress-free learning, especially during the pandemic. They prioritize tasks, avoid unnecessary distractions, and invest more time in studying than using their phones. Time management skills enhance productivity and efficiency, making it crucial for students to complete daily tasks and work effectively. Effective time management helps students develop a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment, leading to active learning and fulfilling their duties in the classroom. Despite

challenges, students continue to manage their time effectively and remain flexible, ensuring they are able to fulfill their responsibilities effectively.

Students often employ time management strategies to minimize their burdens in blended learning. Learning to manage time is crucial for both school and home life, as it helps students focus on their studies and avoid procrastination. Strategies include providing a space for learning, balancing gadget use, and taking breaks. To cope with challenges in blended learning, students should invest time in studying, take time to read lessons, and avoid postponing assignments. Proper time management involves organizing and planning time between tasks, such as assignments, projects, study groups, or extracurriculars. By shifting focus from activities to results, students can complete tasks with minimal effort and work smarter. Effective time management helps students achieve goals faster, prioritize work, get more done in less time, reduce stress, prevent procrastination, boost confidence, and improve career opportunities.

Blended learning promotes independent learning, allowing students to take responsibility for their own learning and explore topics independently. This approach allows students to manage class time more productively, allowing them to focus on interactive discussions and group projects. Blended learning also boosts personalized learning, allowing students to learn at their own pace and with the support of classmates, friends, and trained teachers.

Personalized learning is better centered around students' needs, leading to increased engagement and better understanding of concepts. Blended learning models have proven to be more engaging for students of all ages, with 73% of educators seeing an increase in student engagement

Students feel more autonomous in a blended learning environment, as they are more active in their own education and utilize goal setting and time management strategies. This model can help students develop stronger critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Students also report a need for study, as lessons are discussed in modules rather than personally by their teachers. Modular distance learning promotes student-centered learning, allowing students to identify their strengths and areas for improvement.

Chan, et al. [9] highlight the success of blended learning, with 94% of students completing a program successfully and 62% having high AP test scores. This educational environment makes learning more fun and engaging. Blended learning often involves adult supervision, providing a tactile learning environment. However, some disciplines require labs, such as science or health-related courses. Technology advancements in blended learning have made it more useful, providing a virtual reality feel that enhances online learning.

In blended learning, students often communicate with teachers online or through parents, addressing lessons, activity sheets, deadlines, worksheets, projects, and assessments. Effective communication is crucial for student success, and planning can facilitate this. Students communicate with teachers through parents during module submission and meetings, ensuring social presence and promoting professional respect and courtesy. Online communication should be safe, smooth, and collaborative.

Blended learning has been found to be effective in fostering productivity and responsibility among students. By allowing students to learn at their own pace and prepare for courses before class, blended learning promotes student-centered learning and aligns with 21st-

century education values. Research shows that students who attend blended learning courses have higher achievement scores than those who attend traditional teaching, supporting the idea that blended learning is effective in increasing students' performance and improving academic achievement averages.

Students in blended learning often seek support from friends, family members, and relatives to manage challenges. They seek help from their cousins, parents, friends, and teachers through messengers. Parents play an active role in the learning process, guiding their children through modular lessons sent to students during remote learning. This approach allows Filipino students to learn in their comfort, with limited contact with teachers, placing parents or significant family members as the learners' model.

Today's digital natives are comfortable with online environments, making blended learning a beneficial approach. Students use electronic and online media for distance learning assignments, and while some may face internet issues or software downtime, these issues are often resolved quickly. Gadgets and social media platforms are essential for students' learning activities, but they should be used responsibly for educational purposes. Electronic gadgets offer numerous benefits for the educational sector, including cognitive activation, participation, global learning, personalized help for students with learning challenges, better social interaction, visible learning methods, and immediate access to information. Blended learning breaks down traditional classroom walls by utilizing social media culture, breaking down the walls of traditional classrooms.

Students are adapting to the new normal of blended learning, which involves adjusting their curriculum, instructional activities, and environment. They have made adjustments to meet their personalized learning needs, such as adjusting the amount of tasks and content allocated for each lesson, and searching for alternative learning methods. They have also made adjustments to their environment, including adjusting with peers and friends, and implementing buddy systems, peer-assisted learning, and peer tutoring.

To cope with blended learning, students need to extend their patience and be positive. Patience involves waiting despite difficulties and managing expectations. Students have found that staying positive, asking for help, and encouraging themselves helps them stay motivated and focused on achieving success. They have also found that staying patient with their peers and managing expectations helps them stay motivated and focused on their goals. Overall, students are embracing the new normal and adapting to the challenges of blended learning.

Blended learning requires educators to balance the use of digital technology and information communication technologies (ICTs). ICTs can process information independently, similar to humans and other biological life, and communicate information without human intervention. Online technologies can increase access to nontraditional and underserved students by providing educational resources and experiences. Students in the study resorted to watching tutorials, online videos, and demonstrations to facilitate understanding of their lessons. Balancing gadget use and time management is crucial. Engaging in recreational activities like walking, swimming, meditation, reading, playing games, and dancing helps maintain physical strength, prevent diseases, improve concentration, and stay focused.

Students during blended learning used strategies such as reading Wattpad stories, watching movies, listening to music, and bonding with friends and family to relax and manage stress. By applying these strategies, students were able to cope with the challenges and make challenges easier to manage.

The students in this study experienced fatigue, exhaustion, sadness, and confusion due to the overwhelming tasks assigned by their teachers. They struggled to prioritize tasks and were overwhelmed by the constant communication failure, distractions, and lack of focus. They felt sad for the wasted time spent in the house, as they should have been exploring different topics and sharing ideas.

P7 and P9 expressed disappointment in the situation, as they struggled to understand lessons without guidance from their teachers. P11 was overwhelmed by the situation and felt overwhelmed by the lack of guidance. Blended learning also caused anxiety due to the lack of peace in their studying environment. Many students, especially those with other obligations or lack of parental support, struggled with studying alone.

A study found that 75% of college students reported feeling more anxious or stressed due to online learning, and with only 4% of colleges fully reopening for in-person instruction, online school has become the norm for most students.

Filipino students are experiencing exhaustion and anxiety due to the increased academic workload and unstable internet connectivity in online classes, according to a survey by Church-run Radio Veritas. The survey found that 34% of students feel exhausted, 30% anxious, 10% frustrated, and 8% determined. The overwhelming workload and unstable internet connectivity hamper students' participation in online classes, with exhaustion being the leading emotion among high school students and anxiety among college students. The Department of Education has urged schools to lessen the burden of distance learning, which was implemented after the government banned in-person classes due to the corona virus pandemic. Constant fatigue, characterized by loss of energy, inability to perform work duties, and lack of motivation, affects both physical and psychological health. Students often struggle with concentration, memory, and assimilation of new information, which can lead to accidents on the road. Despite the overwhelming tasks and workloads, students can manage these challenges by being positive and reminding themselves of their dreams and family pride.

Table 1. *Students' Experiences About Blended Learning*

Initial Codes	Subthemes	Emerging Theme
Blended learning enhances accessibility, connects learners, and creates integrated classrooms. Despite challenges like adapting to face-to-face school and using modules, it underscores the importance of education.	Realization on the Importance of Education	Makes educational accessible
Utilize strategies such as seeking knowledge from knowledgeable individuals, practicing problem-solving,	Seeking Assistance and Support from Relatives and Friends	

<p>and engaging with classmates and teachers through various methods, including video calls or personal interactions.</p>		
<p>Blended learning offers time flexibility, allowing for self-improvement at one's own pace, requiring effective planning and practice to develop skills.</p> <p>Time management is crucial in blended learning, balancing homework and study independently. Prioritize tasks, avoid distractions, and invest time in studying. Divide challenges into manageable parts and focus on self-improvement and self-confidence to overcome challenges.</p>	<p>Planning</p> <p>Time Management</p>	<p>Greater Time Flexibility</p>
<p>The author feels good about continuing learning through blended learning, which allows them to take responsibility for their own learning and explore topics independently. Despite the lack of teacher explanations, they find the experience enjoyable and appreciate the online guidance.</p> <p>The participant demonstrates their commitment to productivity and self-improvement through their dedication to learning and personal growth, despite facing challenges in blended learning. They emphasize the importance of self-motivation and setting goals for personal growth.</p> <p>The individual seeks help from their family, friends, and teachers through messenger, addressing confusion and sadness through comforting and seeking guidance from their cousins and teachers.</p>	<p>Takes responsibility of their own learning</p> <p>Becoming Productive and Responsible</p> <p>Drawing Assistance and Support from Relatives</p>	<p>Promotes Independent Learning</p>
<p>Blended learning is a style of education that combines electronic and online media, offering a modular approach to education.</p>	<p>Use of Gadgets and Social Media Platforms</p>	<p>Learning Via Electronic and Online Media</p>

<p>The text advises balancing gadget use and studying time, avoiding excessive cellphone use, and utilizing the internet and social media platforms for easy connectivity.</p> <p>Blended learning is challenging, but it's part of adjustments. Adapting to it requires slowing down and avoiding procrastination, cramming, and constant sleep during the pandemic.</p> <p>Staying positive, extending patience, and working hard are essential for success in learning. Seeking help and encouraging oneself can help motivate and stay focused on the task.</p> <p>To effectively manage time, balance gadget use, create a learning space, and prioritize breaks. Utilize YouTube tutorials for unfamiliar lessons.</p> <p>Strategies for relaxation include reading wattpad stories, watching movies, staying in one's room, listening to music, and bonding with loved ones. Additionally, playing video games, reading books, and watching k-dramas can help manage stress and improve focus.</p>	<p>Adjustment</p> <p>Extend Patience and Be Positive</p> <p>Balance the Use of Technologies</p> <p>Do Recreational Activities</p>	
<p>The participants experience exhaustion, sadness, and stress due to the pandemic, especially during blended learning. They struggle with difficult lessons, lack of teacher guidance, and time spent at home. Despite these challenges, they manage by focusing on positive aspects.</p>	<p>Being Positive</p>	<p>Tired, Exhausted, Sad and Confused</p>

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The students' feelings about blended learning ended with the following themes: tired, exhausted, sadness and confused; makes education accessible; greater time flexibility; promotes independent learning; and learning via electronic and online media. The students

managed their blended learning through time management, planning, doing their best, and realizing on the importance of education. The students managed the challenges they encountered during the blended learning through adjustment, communicating to teachers, time management, use of gadgets and social media platforms, becoming productive and positive, drawing assistance and support from relatives, and being positive. Amidst the challenges that students faced during blended learning, they survived due to some strategies used to address the encountered challenges through seeking assistance and support from relatives and friends, time management, extend patience and be positive, balance the use of technologies, and do recreational activities.

The schools may strengthen their guidance and counseling programs and activities to give attention to students who may need some kind of help and recovery from pandemic stress. DepEd Supervisors and Principals of Sindangan District revisit the current standards of practices in teaching with modular learning and enhance the standards to include the use of other modalities to provide support mechanisms to whatever constraints that the modality may bring to teaching and learning at the same time achieving excellence in academic performance. The parents enhance their collaboration with the teachers to continuously follow up and monitor their children at school to ensure that the students have recovered from the challenges they encountered from blended learning. The parents reinforce those favorable and positive strategies of their children in coping with the challenges. The future researchers delve further on the issues of the teachers, parents and students' challenges on the post-pandemic times.

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