

The New Normal Learning: Its Effect on the Mental Health and Well-Being of BPSU Students and Faculty

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Abstract

The transition in the educational system places pressure on all academic institutions and their stakeholders upon the strike of a pandemic. The issues of readiness of the students and faculty are a concern. Schools and universities immediately implemented online learning. There was control over the movement and activities of students and faculty. Faculty and students were confined to the four corners of their houses, using their mobile phones, iPads, or laptops to connect to classmates, teachers, and friends. Being deprived of different activities in school led to anxiety and stress among students and even faculty. The potential effects of online learning on the mental health condition (particularly stress and anxiety) of students and faculty in the university was the aim of this study. One hundred thirty-eight (138) students and sixteen (16) faculties completed the Perceived Stress Scale (10 items), Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7 (GAD 7- 7 items), and Psychological Well-being (18 items). A mixed method was used in this study. Students and faculty had experienced difficulty during online, moderate stress, and moderate anxiety but with high psychological well-being. They could surpass the challenges during online learning because of their coping mechanisms such as self-care, positive outlook, time management, and learning new techniques and skills.

Keywords: Technology challenges, class challenges, stress, anxiety, online benefits, coping, psychological well-being

Introduction

The Mental Health Act defines mental health as a condition of well-being in which a person may recognize their abilities and potentials, manage adequately with daily stressors, display fortitude in the face of difficulty, work productively and fruitfully, and make a constructive contribution to society. Integrating mental health awareness and promotion in educational institutions, companies, and communities is one of the objectives of the Mental Health Act.

The recent research from the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences on mental health, "No Health Without Mental Health" and "Career Resilience Mental Health And Subjective Well-being Of Helping Professionals at Workplace Towards A Proposed Wellness Program," shows the importance of mental health for every individual. Like other health workers, university students and faculty deserve a stress-free environment. Students and faculties may experience anxiety, worries, burnout, and depression.

Resilience is needed for health providers and every individual to survive, especially during these difficult times. Freud believes that it is essential to understand the cause of such mental health concerns.

The transition in the educational system places pressure on all academic institutions and their stakeholders. The administration should make sure of the readiness of the institution, faculty, and students for online learning. For Chairman Prospero de Vera III from CHED, Education has to begin. Learn together just as we do in everyday settings. The belief of the academic community's readiness for this new standard of learning, significant tension was seen from attending the Online Education Platform.

Schools and universities immediately implemented online learning. There was control over the students and faculty's daily activities. Students and faculties were confined to the four corners of their houses while using their mobile phones, iPads, and laptops. The students missed different activities in school. Disconnection from the unstable Internet causes panic attacks and anxiety among them.

Schools and universities gave training and workshops to faculty and students to understand the online learning modality. The different online learning management system has been tried and learned to make things convenient and feasible.

Despite the upgrading and series of training, the sudden change of teaching mode had caused stress to the teachers. Being lagged during online classes is a stressful experience for both faculty and students. Experience in actual online teaching is still different compared to seminars or training.

After analyzing a dataset of 775 Jordanian university students, Haider and Al-Salman discovered that after COVID-19, sleep enforcement fell by more than 50%; more than 80% of respondents said that excessive use of digital tools for learning impaired their sleeping habits; more than 90% of students said that constant exposure to electronic screens in online learning is tiring and exhausting; and 89 percent of respondents agreed that using e-learning resources for extended periods causes boredom, nervousness, and tension; and 73 percent of students do not consider continuing with the online learning model because it is socially and mentally unhealthy.

With a wide range of distractions, students are more likely to be distracted when utilizing the Internet as a learning aid, according to Halupa (2016). The presence of social media platforms has proved to be a significant challenge for students today, based on their high addiction levels. According to Hollis and Was (2016)' survey of online learners, there was a 29 percent chance that participants' minds would wander away from the online learning content.

The majority of faculty members encountered unforeseen difficulties, such as a lack of prior experience teaching online, a lack of time to design online learning courses, and learning how to utilize the assistance of the educational technology teams (Bao, 2020). They claimed that children from wealthy households would presumably have access to better Internet and computer gear, giving them an edge to fully enjoy the online learning experience (Beunoyer et al., 2020). Unlike those from unprivileged families, having access to the Internet and a device to participate in online learning is a big challenge (Al-Balas et al., 2020). Several Bataan Peninsula State University students took online classes outside of their homes to gain a decent internet connection, but the dog barking, the hen clucking, or the neighbor's voice kept them from concentrating. A poor internet connection is also causing stress and distraction for both pupils and teachers.

The harm to a person or society is a debate. According to Dhull, online learning is an excellent education option, and there are main hindrances to traditional learning situations. (Dhull, 2017) According to a 2017 study by Rodriguez-Mantilla and Fernández-Daz, students are more vulnerable to weariness and emotional depletion during the OL because of alterations in the interpersonal interactions among their peers. Students who could engage well with their classmates had greater motivation than those who could not.

In developing countries like the Philippines, there are sometimes few resources for mental health (Malolos et al., 2021, World Health Organization, 2019). Self-care practices may be the only way for some people to maintain their mental health and prevent bad mental health because of this scarcity (World Health Organization, 2019). It is essential to give the body, mind, family, and environment the attention they need when encouraging self-care. Encourage frequent exercise and stress-relieving activities when taking vacations from online classes. Due to the pandemic, the idea of being separated from family and friends causes anxiety and stress. They should maintain positive social connections with them. (World Health Organization, 2013). The figure below is Seligman's PERMA Model's five core elements that people need to achieve a healthy sense of well-being, fulfillment, and life satisfaction. Adding self-care to complete the care for mental health.

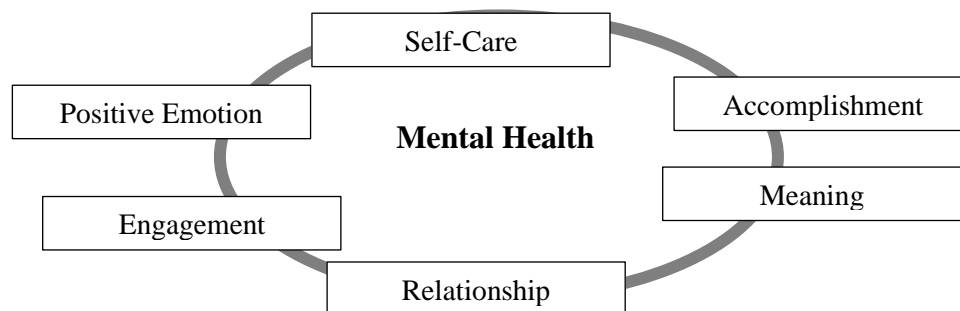


Fig 1. Seligman's PERMA Model's five core elements

Objective of the Study

The study aims to determine the potential effects of online learning on the mental health and well-being of students and faculty in the university. For the following aims, the researcher would like to 1) study the mental health condition (particularly stress and anxiety) of students and faculty during online learning; (2) determine the program or intervention proposed to the university administration to give the most significant possible assistance for students and faculty with the new normal of learning.

The researcher would also like to examine the demographic characteristics linked to stress and anxiety and determine how faculty and students view online learning in terms of its challenges and benefits to their mental health.

Methodology

A mixed method was used to analyze the data. There were 138 students and 16 faculty who turned in their consent forms and participated in answering the questionnaires as part of the quantitative method. For the qualitative part, ten (10) students and (10) faculty members answered the in-depth interview.

The survey had three (3) parts for students and faculty. The first part includes the demographic profile, such as gender, age group, discipline, and year level. The second part is a survey using the Psychological well-being by Ryff, a validated tool measuring stress level, Perceived Stress Questionnaire (PSQ), and another standardized tool measuring anxiety level, Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7). The third part was the interview with selected students and faculty. The researcher would also like to examine the following questions:

Quantitative Research Question (Phase 1)

- Does new normal learning significantly affect the mental health and psychological well-being of the faculties and students?

Qualitative Research Question (Phase 2)

- How was the faculty's and students' experience with online learning?
 - What are the challenges experienced in online learning
 - What are the benefits of online learning to the mental health of both respondents?

Mixed Methods Questions (Central Question)

- How does online learning impact the well-being of the students and faculty?
 - a. Qualitative Approach
Semi-structured interview forms purposely selected faculty and students

To protect the participants, informed consent was given to students and faculty. This includes providing participants with clear and understandable information about the purpose of the study, potential risks and benefits, and their rights as participants. It was emphasized that participation in the study is voluntary and that participants have the right to withdraw at any time without facing any negative consequences. Confidentiality and privacy were also assured to the participants such as making sure that any information regarding their identity will be kept confidential and that all information gathered will only be used for this study and aim to protect the well-being of the students and faculty.

Results and Discussion

1. Survey on the Experience With Online

On the part of the faculty, 44% considered the new normal of learning (mode of teaching) challenging, 31% experienced difficulty, 13% considered it time-consuming 6% felt it frustrating, and the other tiring.

1.1.Stressed Level

Thirty-six percent were moderately stressed, and 2% had low stress. Students often felt nervous, stressed, and upset because of sudden unexpected situations like asynchronous to synchronous class and vice versa.

1.2. Anxiety Level

Twenty-five percent experienced severe anxiety. There were 32% mild anxiety, 38% moderate anxiety, and 6% minimal anxiety. Nearly every day, students were worried about class requirements, online connection, and the idea of having limitations in personal interaction. They felt they were easily annoyed and irritated and afraid that something awful might happen.

1.3.Psychological Well-being

Forty-nine percent have a high level of psychological well-being, and 51% have a moderate level of psychological well-being. Students strongly agree that life has been a continuous learning, changing,

and growth process. To cope with anxiety and stress, they agree that personal growth and self-acceptance are essential for their well-being. Children must experience new things that challenge them to think about how they view the world and themselves, as well as how to accept who they are and what they have accomplished thus far.

2. Faculty Data

2.1. Stressed Level

A moderate stress level of 88%, while the faculty experienced a 12% low stress level. Faculty often felt upset because of sudden unexpected situations like shifting from onsite to online with a new teaching modality, continuous adjusting, learning, and updating different applications while also considering the family. They also often felt nervous and stressed. Felt difficulties were piling up so high that they could not overcome them because there was a slight separation of responsibilities at home and work.

2.1 Anxiety Level

Thirty-eight percent of the faculty experienced minimal anxiety, 50% mild anxiety, 6 % moderate anxiety, and 6% severe anxiety. Most of the faculty often felt mild nervousness and anxiety, trouble relaxing, and a tendency to be annoyed or irritable.

2.2. Psychological Well-being

The 88% of the faculty with a high level of psychological well-being and 2.5% with a moderate level of psychological well-being. The faculty strongly agree that life has been a continuous learning, changing, and growth process. To cope with anxiety and stress, they agree that personal growth and self-acceptance are essential for their well-being. Same as the students believe that it is vital to have new experiences that challenge them to think about themselves and the world and accept who they are and whatever accomplishments they have at the moment.

Adjusting from the start of online learning, difficulty with a poor internet connection, series of homework and activities. Struggle to learn different applications with the limited capacity for applying gadgets and a lack of personal relationships with classmates and faculty.

There was a negligible positive correlation between gender and anxiety level (.212 $p = .016$).

Females have a higher percentage of moderate stress levels 51%, and high-stress levels for females, 31%, while 11% of males experienced moderate stress, 4% high stress, and 0.72% moderate stress for one LGBT.

With anxiety levels, females experienced 23.91% mild anxiety levels, 33% moderate anxiety, and 22% severe anxiety. Males experienced mild anxiety levels of 8%, moderate anxiety of 4%, severe anxiety, and minimal anxiety have equal percentages of 2%. LGBT experienced a 0.72% moderate anxiety level. Of the psychological well-being of females 39% scored high, 43% moderate, while males have 7% moderate and 10% high psychological well-being. Experience in online learning has been difficult for females 69.

The course of students has a negligible correlation between course and level of stress (.213). The course of students has a significant relationship with students' stress levels. Of the majority of accountancy students who have a high level of anxiety, 14% felt it was easy. Males experienced difficulty with online learning 12%, males felt easy 4%, and LGBT 0.72% experienced difficulty with online learning.

2.3. Qualitative Data

Ten students and ten faculty were interviewed to identify their views on online learning, its challenges, benefits, and its effect on the mental health of both respondents.

Eighty-two percent of the students had difficulty during online learning (asynchronous and synchronous), while 18%, expressed that the new learning mode was easy.
Students and Faculty's Interview

3. Students' Experience of Online Learning

With ten students, a semi-structured interview was conducted. The collected data were coded and examined. Creswell (2012) claims that qualitative research can be used to discover and comprehend the significance that different people or groups assign to various human social issues.

3.1. Positive experience/Strength of online learning

Flexibility. According to a student, "Online learning gave me a chance to continue my studies." The pandemic and isolation did not stop the learning of students. Through online Education, studies and training continued. Working students could attend class "pwede ka mag multi-task." (F7). Easy access to online had been helpful to them. During asynchronous classes, students have their own pace of study depending on their time and convenience. "There is freedom, and time is in my control." "It allowed me to manage my time quite effectively. Thus, allowing me to focus more on the tasks that have more importance." (F9)

Flexibility is also having time for family and studies. Students could appreciate their family's presence while they are studying.

3.2. Save and Gain

Expense on transportation and allowance for school was saved. Students and faculty had maximized time. With online learning, they were able to discover new skills and talent. They had enough time to assess their selves and learn new skills.

"What's fun in blended learning is that I have more time for myself." (F6)

"It was manageable. I can learn at the safest of my home, and I saved money." (F10)

"Less spent on money to go onsite." (F5)

3.3. Negative Experience/Weakness of Online

Exhausting. Most students expressed that online class is exhausting because of too much workload, especially during asynchronous. According to students, they felt exhausted because of stress due to difficulty grasping tasks. Students feel stressed if they do not immediately hear feedback from their

instructors. Disappointment also takes place due to a lack of connection with classmates. They merely knew their classmates.

"So far, I have experienced stress that drives me to no relaxation. The anxious feeling of submitting so many activities from one subject to another. I feel pressured, reflecting on a day that I couldn't do things I used to." (F7)

My online learning experience has been extremely stressful and difficult." (F4)

Inconvenient Environment. A small house with no room for privacy inhibits effective learning. There is difficulty in understanding the lesson during synchronous if the environment is noisy or there are many distractions. A part of the inconvenient environment is that parents do not support their children's schooling. They think their child is just watching or playing games and that they would give tasks or household chores to maximize the time staying at home, thus causing anxiety or stress to students having online classes.

"I experienced studying in noisy surroundings because we don't have a comfortable home. I also experience crying because I don't have something to answer in my activities and also become so irritated and messy because no matter how I manage my time, the time is not enough for my studies, the tasks at home, and also the noisy surroundings," (F4)

"Yung pagsabayin yung online learning sa utos na galing sa bahay hahaha kasi minsan akala nila okay lang upo upo sa harap ng computer pero di nila alam na mabigat rin yung inaaral." (F2)

(Combining online learning with orders from home hahaha because sometimes they think it's okay to sit in front of the computer but they don't know that what they're studying is also hard)

3.4. Poor internet connection challenge

Lagging from online classes has been so stressful for students. It would be frustrating for a student to miss a topic during a discussion. Having a slow internet connection or being disconnected is so disappointing, especially during examinations where there is difficulty turning in the questionnaire.

"Common difficulty in online learning is a poor internet connection" (F5)

"The most difficult I noticed when it comes to blended learning was when you cannot comprehend the teachings of your instructor due to some technical problems." (F4)

4. Faculty's Experience with Online Learning

A semi-structured interview was done with ten faculty members.

4.1. Positive experience/Strength of online learning

Challenging. Online teaching has been challenging on the part of the faculty, especially for those who do not know the use of technology. It was stressful in their role at the beginning but turned to opportunity and flexibility in the later part. Faculty learned to develop their technology skills.

"It was a challenging experience since I had a lot of concerns and issues to address at the beginning." (F8)

"Challenging but lots of Personal and Career growth." (F9)

Flexibility. According to the faculty, there is convenience in online teaching. They could still be at home with their family while working online. There is a balance of time according to them. According to a faculty,

"Students can do their assignments during their free hours. Instructors are not required to monitor how students do this face-to-face. They have only to wait for the student's submission on the due date. In this way, instructors have more time to prepare lessons and exams and comply with the requirements related to their functions." (F10)

"Nothing is more grateful if you have the privilege of controlling your own time at some point. You can allocate time balanced in different aspects of your life (family, personal, friends, career, school)." (F9)

Patience. With the changes in the teaching mode, from face-to-face to online, teachers and students should develop more patience. Teachers should communicate openly with students to quickly assist them with their queries and concerns. Faculty improves tolerance in learning new applications, styles, and techniques to make discussions lively and compelling.

"I need to be more patient and understanding to students." "It had helped me to see the teaching world from a broader and deeper perspective." (F2)

4.2. Negative Experience/Weakness of Online

Trust issues. Faculty worries about the credibility of the result of the assessment. It is difficult for the faculty to teach during the online class while students are off cam. There were cases when they called names, but no one responded. After class, there will be messages saying they lost their internet connection

"With regards to giving learning assessments (quizzes & exams), I have doubts on the reliability of the result although some safeguards are being implemented." (F8)

"Trust and honesty are vital. And that most, if not all, students are exerting more effort to learn in this mode of learning." "It might be hard for online learners to resist the temptation of looking up things on the web while learning from a computer or smartphone." (F4)

Balance. Even though work is accessible at home, continuous 100% online classes at home will be exhausting and, at times, stressful. Students and faculties may practice time management to avoid overlapping responsibilities at home and work.

"Tiring. Working from home also means doing all household chores and other responsibilities as a mother." (F7)

"Difficulty in separating school hours with family and household responsibilities." (F4)

Poor internet connection. A similar issue with the student is the poor internet connection. Faculty experience stress when being lagged or disconnected. There are cases wherein the faculty keeps talking and discussing, not realizing they are no longer connected. Stress also occurs when there are technical concerns like no audio, no video, or cannot share slides.

"Sometimes frustrating because of poor internet signal and unacceptable reasons of students not attending online classes." (F1)

"I am stressed when there is a poor internet connection or when I am disconnected during discussion." (F6)

4.3. Coping Mechanism: Students

Self-care. Riegel et al. (2004) defined self-care as a naturalistic decision-making process involving the selection and performance of behaviors that maintain physiological stability and self-management as the decision-making process initiated in response to symptoms when they occur. Online classes for students had been stressful, and they thought of ways on how they will be able to cope with the stress.

"Sleep on time and eating on time would help me to cope with blended learning because blended learning is exhausting because of the gadgets that we have every day, but when you eat on time and sleep on time, you have the energy to fight for the challenges in blended learning." (F9)

Time-management. Setting realistic objectives, getting organized, delegating, and giving up guilt are the key components of effective time management, according to Jackson V.P. (2009). These are some of the mechanisms students use to cope with online learning. Students would practice time management.

"I always do time management in activities, especially during exams, quizzes, etc." "I have a pin board, and it has all the schedule, and also I make sure I don't miss any activities" (F6)

Connectedness. Students need to be connected to the environment and friends. When using computer-mediated conferencing, it is "more difficult to establish educational relationships with learners" (Wikeley & Muschamp, 2004, p. 138). When people don't feel connected, they may feel lonely. Loneliness is a terrible emotional state brought on by people's beliefs of rejection or separation from others as well as a lack of social networks and other support systems.

"Talking with friends about our struggles with blended learning." "To cope with blended learning, I connect with other people to share my troubles and also acquire much-needed support." (F5)

Learning new technology and skills. Focusing on the possibility of learning new things, new technology, and a new application enhances positive thinking for students. In general, nations' coordinated social and economic endeavors to accomplish scientific and technological breakthroughs in support of the national interests of institutions and the welfare of the population are what lead to these developments. (Coccia, M., 2019)

4.4. Coping Mechanism: Faculty

Self-care. Self-care has been helpful to faculty in coping with online teaching.

"I would not say it as a technique, but I would say I tend to have a break time and attend to some other activities, like playing guitar, attending to my dog, or even taking a nap. In that way, I could have balanced well-being. I don't spend my whole doing the activity." (F9)

Positive Outlook. The faculty has practiced positive psychology. They look at things from a positive point of view.

"Just be realistic to help build students' resilience. As an educator, I always show a positive attitude to my students during our online classes." (F1)

5. Qualitative and Quantitative Discussion

Table 1

Quantitative Result

	Online Learning	Stress	Anxiety	Well Being
Student	80.7% Difficulty	63.04% moderate	37.68% moderate	50.72% moderate
Faculty	43.8% Challenging	87.5% moderate	50% moderate	87.55% high

Table 2

Qualitative Result

	Positive Experience			Negative Experience		
Students	Flexible	Save & Gain		Exhausting	Inconvenient Environment	Poor Internet Connection
Faculty		Challenging	Patience	Trust Issue	Balance	

Coping Mechanism				
Students	Self Care	Time Management	Connectedness	Learning New Technology and Skills
Faculty		Positive Outlook		

Students experienced difficulty during online learning, wherein they experienced moderate stress, moderate anxiety, and moderate psychological well-being. They experienced exhaustion at the beginning of online learning. They were used to face-to-face classes with a sudden change of learning mode because of the pandemic. The struggle to master learning management platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet,

aside from limited or old gadgets, poor internet connection, and inconvenient environment, distracts their concentration during online discussions. After the difficult times of online learning, coping mechanisms such as self-care, time management, having relationships with friends through online and social media, and learning new technology have been a big help. They also looked at the positive view of online, wherein they had saved money from their transportation and allowance, maximized time, and were taught to be productive by discovering new skills and talent.

On the part of the faculty, online teaching had been challenging and its flexibility. Learning new applications, different learning management platforms, and technology during class discussions was initially difficult. Students' queries and concerns measured the patience of faculties. The weakness that the faculty had seen in online teaching and learning was the confidence in giving exams online. Faculty had trust issues due to the possibility of students cheating during an assessment. Faculty were not confident that students would not open notes or use their search engine to possibly look for answers or chat with their friends and classmates to ask for help. Another opposing view of faculty with online learning was work-life balance. They complain that there is no longer a separation between work and home. The continuous flooding of memos and messages to faculties email and group chat causes more stress and anxiety for them. Poor internet connection has always been a struggle. To resolve the concern, faculties subscribed to at least two internet providers. To avoid being lagged or disconnected during online classes, another alternative was upgrading their subscriptions. With the resilience of the faculty, they learned to be more flexible, ensuring that they continuously have self-care and a positive outlook in life.

This study explores the students' and faculty's experiences during the new normal learning. Both had experienced challenges and difficulties. This information emphasizes the importance of paying close attention to the mediating impacts of mental health, mobility limits, and readiness for delivering online learning. Copeland et al. (2021) and Fawaz et al. (2021),

Students and faculty who participated in the study used appropriate coping mechanisms. They were able to adapt to the circumstances. In light of this, the administration, student services, and human resource office may consider implementing a program for psychological well-being, time management, a good view of life, and clear, ongoing plans for self-care and learning one's strengths and talents. The study's definition of self-care was more precise: the ability to take care of oneself through awareness, self-control, and independence to achieve, maintain, or promote optimal health and well-being. Perez, Calero, Martnez, Connelly, and 2021.

Another adjustment at this point is hybrid learning, a combination of face-to-face and asynchronous or online classes. The students are experiencing adjustments, stress, and challenges. Higher Education should provide information and a program to help students and teachers adjust to the new system. Proper multi-tasking management with regular breaks every thirty minutes is suggested to boost concentration and prevent burnout from online learning activities. In lengthy videoconferencing sessions, carrying out these activities may also reduce mental stress and screen fatigue (Peper et al., 2021).

Conclusion

Stress and anxiety have been a part of one's life. Every individual must learn to cope with different challenges in life, it is essential to consider self-care and a positive outlook in life to be resilient.

Recommendation

A recommendation to future researchers is to consider respondents from other schools, private and public, both students and faculty. Future researchers may include the non-teaching staff as respondents.

The human resource office may consider a program for the well-being and self-care of the faculty, the same way with the student services office and guidance counselors. Support of the administration and deans is essential to the proposal and implementation of the mental health and wellness programs for faculty and students.

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