Perceptions and Challenges Encountered by BTVTED Students Towards Online Classes During the COVID-19 Pandemic in a Polytechnic State College: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

This study phenomenological explored the perceptions and challenges of second-year Bachelor of Technical Vocational Teacher Education (BTVTED) Fish Processing students at Camarines Sur Polytechnic Colleges-Nabua during online learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This study aimed to answer two central questions: (1) What are the students' perceptions of online classes? and (2) What challenges did they encounter during online learning? Additionally, three sub-questions were explored: (1) How do students handle these difficulties while taking online classes? (2) What do students perceive as the positive effects of online classes on their development? and (3) What teaching approaches could teachers adopt in online learning to address these challenges? A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing Colaizzi's descriptive method to analyze participants' experiences. Thirty purposively selected students participated in online interviews. The study revealed that students found online classes challenging and unconventional, with compromised education quality and difficulties understanding topics due to a lack of interactive engagement. Identified challenges included limited access to resources, unstable internet connectivity, power interruptions, weather disruptions, and a lack of motivation. Students developed coping mechanisms such as time management, prioritizing tasks, staying motivated, and avoiding distractions. The positive effects of online classes included flexibility, reduced travel expenses, and increased time for family and personal tasks. The study emphasized the need for teachers to adopt more engaging and interactive teaching approaches and recommended addressing resource availability and improving internet infrastructure to alleviate students' difficulties and ensure effective online learning experiences.

Keywords: Online Learning, COVID-19 Pandemic, BTVTED Students

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly disrupted the global educational system, creating significant challenges for students and educators. As schools and institutions grappled with sudden closures and the shift to remote learning, the impact extended beyond academic performance, significantly affecting the

emotional well-being of students (World Health Organization, 2020). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), over 1.5 billion students were affected by school closures, and more than 800 million pupils were impacted globally (UNESCO, 2020).

In response to public health concerns, governments worldwide were forced to close schools, cancel national exams, and halt in-person instruction, implementing strict physical distancing measures (Global Campaign for Education). Schools had to quickly adapt by preparing resources, developing new systems and infrastructure, and introducing innovative teaching methods. While some institutions managed this transition smoothly, others faced significant difficulties, particularly in developing countries with inadequate infrastructure (Pham & Nguyen, 2020; Simbulan, 2020). The transition to online learning has also raised concerns about students' mental health. Studies have reported significant increases in depression, anxiety, and distress among university students during the pandemic (Savage et al., 2020; Essadek & Rabeyron, 2020). The sudden shift from traditional face-to-face teaching to online methods, including asynchronous and synchronous delivery systems, posed challenges in maintaining student engagement and well-being (Garris & Fleck, 2020).

Camarines Sur Polytechnic Colleges-Nabua, like many other institutions, launched online classes during the pandemic. BTVTED Fish Processing Students of this institution faced numerous challenges during the shift to online classes. Many lacked access to laptops or high-speed internet at home. This digital divide hindered their ability to participate fully in online education (Simbulan, 2020). The acceptance of technology-enhanced education was further hindered by several factors, including inadequate technology tools, difficulties in student assessment, communication barriers, and the loss of in-person interaction (Dhawan, 2020). These challenges underscored the need for better infrastructure and support systems to facilitate effective online learning. Moreover, the shift to online learning also raised concerns about student engagement and learning outcomes. Research has shown that students often struggle with self-discipline and motivation in a virtual learning environment (Bawa, 2016). Effective online education requires innovative teaching methods and approaches to address these challenges and enhance student learning experiences (Bozkurt et al., 2020). Given these challenges, this study aims to explore the perceptions and difficulties encountered by BTVTED students regarding online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it seeks to understand their views on online education and identify their challenges. The study addresses two main questions:

Thus, the researcher conducted a simple study to identify the Perceptions and Challenges Encountered by BTVTED Students Towards Online Classes During the COVID-19 Pandemic. Specifically, this study is anchored on (2) two objectives. The first problem is to determine the BTVTED Fish Processing students' perceptions of online education during the COVID-19 outbreak, and the second is to determine the challenges these students encountered in online classes during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, this study used two (2) general questions to answer the study's main objectives. 1.) What is your perception of online classes? 2.) What are the challenges you encountered during the online classes?. To make the study more detailed and obtain more information from the participants, the researcher expanded the questions to help the participants express their perceptions and challenges encountered during online classes. These questions are the following: how do you handle these difficulties while taking classes online?, what do you think are the positive effects of online classes on you as students?, and in your opinion, what are the possible teaching approaches that teachers could use in online learning to address these challenges?

2. Research Objectives

Central Questions of the Study

- What is your perception of online classes?
- What are the challenges you encountered during the online classes?

Sub Questions

- How do you handle these difficulties while taking classes online?
- What do you think are the positive effects of online classes on you as students?
- What are the possible teaching approaches that teachers could use in online learning to address these challenges?

3. Methodology.

This study is based on phenomenology, which is primarily concerned with the personal experiences and perspectives of individuals. The phenomenological approach is suitable for exploring the lived experiences of second-year BTVTED students majoring in fish processing at Camarines Sur Polytechnic Colleges-Nabua during the transition to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants. The participants in this study were purposively selected to ensure that the sample accurately represents the population being studied. A total of 30 students participated in the study. The researchers established a set of guidelines for participant selection to avoid bias and ensure reliability in the results. The criteria for participants included that they must be enrolled in the BTVTED program with a major in fish processing at Camarines Sur Polytechnic Colleges and at least one year of experience with online classes within the program.

Online interview. Data was collected through online interviews due to the constraints posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the necessity of remote interaction. Online interviews were conducted using a semi-structured in-depth interview guide to allow for flexibility in responses while ensuring that all relevant topics were covered. The interviews were designed to explore participants' perceptions of online education and the challenges they encountered.

Data Analysis. The data gathered from the online interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis guided by Colaizzi's descriptive method, a systematic approach in phenomenological research. This method involved several steps to deeply explore and understand the participants' experiences and perceptions of online education during the COVID-19 pandemic. First, the researcher immersed themselves in the data by reading and rereading the transcriptions to fully grasp the essence of the participants' narratives. Significant statements directly related to the phenomenon were then identified and extracted, serving as the foundation for uncovering the meanings embedded within the participants' words. These meanings were carefully interpreted and grouped into subunits or subcategories, such as technological challenges, academic pressures, and emotional well-being, reflecting specific dimensions of the participants' experiences. Moreover, related subcategories were clustered to form broader themes, capturing the overarching aspects of the phenomenon. Through this process, the researcher identified general themes, providing a comprehensive understanding of the students' experiences. These themes were integrated into an exhaustive description that synthesized the rich details of the data and distilled into a fundamental structure, highlighting the essential elements of the phenomenon. Finally, the findings were validated by returning to the participants to ensure their experiences were accurately represented. By combining thematic analysis with Colaizzi's method, the study achieved a nuanced and in-depth exploration of the challenges, adaptations, and strategies of students navigating online education during

the pandemic.

Ethical guidelines and considerations. Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were made aware of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Confidentiality was maintained at all stages of the research.

4. Result and Discussion

Following Colaizzi's step-by-step descriptive method, the study concluded the subunits or subcategories through online interviews with the participants. And arrived at the study's general themes.

Identified subunits or subcategories upon online interviews of the participants.

This section presents the data analysis of the study. Based on the information gathered in this study, the following subunits or subcategories were identified: (1) perception, (2) challenges, (3) coping mechanism, (4) positive effect, and (5) teaching approach for online classes.

Perception for online classes. Students experienced numerous changes to an online class, which was more effective in terms of learning students' responses to changes were negative. Online classes are a technological and internet-based, demanding, unconventional method of learning. Education quality is often compromised, and students cannot thoroughly understand the topics.

Challenges for online classes. Cramming, power interruptions, weather disruptions, a lack of resources and gadgets, poor internet connectivity or an unstable internet connection, time management, technical difficulties, low attendance, and a lack of motivation and interest in attending the online class are all possibilities.

Coping Mechanism. Time management, thorough preparation, and organization should all be practiced. Always prioritize online learning, identify the factors that influence learning in an online class, stay motivated, develop regular study habits, establish boundaries, and avoid distractions.

Positive effects for online classes. Students will find it more convenient with flexibility, time, effort spent on online classes, and communication transparency. It is more practical, less expensive, and safer. Make a connection with your family. Encourage students to become more self-reliant. It saves money and time on travel. It relieves my stress. There is no need to get up early, there is more time to complete tasks, and work is becoming more organized. Spend more time on the parts of our lesson that we don't understand.

Teaching approaches for effective learning. The teacher must become more involved and supportive of all students. Keep an efficient learning environment. Participate in online discussions. Provide students with hands-on learning experiences to help them understand concepts and apply theories in real-life situations. Always strive to improve communication with students to make studying easier. The use of instructional strategies must be consistent with the content that students are being taught. Determine the most effective teaching technique for the student's lesson. Group teaching, cooperative learning, scaffolding, hands-on learning activities, and developing new teaching strategies in response to student feedback.

General themes generated from the study

A researcher found the following after identifying all of the study's units or subcategories among the BTVTED students majoring in processing at Camarines Sur Polytechnic Colleges-Nabua:

The availability of technological tools and gadgets influences every learner's learning. It should be noted that the majority of BTVTED students' responses indicated a lack of resource materials such as cellphones, laptops, printers, textbooks, and modules to be used during online classes. Their learning is

also influenced. As a result, their learning has a negative impact, and the quality of education is frequently compromised, resulting in poor assessments.

An unstable internet connection could lead to absenteeism. Online classes are internet-based and technology-driven. As a result, high internet connectivity is required for smooth instructional delivery. However, unreliable or inadequate connectivity at home, particularly for those students who reside in rural places, is the most frequent issue that students have during online sessions. As a result of the poor internet connection, students lose interest in attending online classes on a regular basis, which can lead to absenteeism. Cramming to comply with activities due to power outages and weather disruptions. As a result, students must submit their requirements late.

Observing and practicing time management must be established during online classes. In order to reduce stress, become more flexible, and increase time and effort spent on online classes, time management must be practiced in this time of pandemic, particularly during online classes. This will benefit students by reducing cramming and allowing them to be more self-sufficient and organized. It will also improve your relationship with your family.

Developing learning activities for online increase the motivation of learners during online classes. Teachers must create highly engaging and interactive learning activities for students to be more effective and efficient. Furthermore, teachers must assess the most effective teaching technique for the student's lesson. Cooperative learning, hands-on learning activities, scaffolding, group teaching, and the development of new teaching techniques based on student responses are all examples of effective teaching techniques. As a result, students will be able to better understand the concepts and apply the theories in real-life situations.

5. Conclusion and recommendation

According to the findings of this study, participants responded that taking an online class has resulted in numerous changes for them as students. In terms of requirements submission, it is extremely demanding and difficult. Students frequently face challenges such as a lack of available resources such as learning activities, textbooks, gadgets such as printers and cellphones, and technical issues such as poor internet connection and power outages. Despite these shortcomings, students learn time management skills for more effective and efficient online students.

Furthermore, it is suggested that student teachers adopt or develop highly engaging and interactive learning activities using a variety of learning strategies to improve students' conceptual understanding of the subject matter.

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