

## Students' Experiences during Pandemic: Basis for Sustainable Educational Practices

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### Abstract

Over a billion students around the world had been impacted by the pandemic. Hence, this study investigated the students' experiences during the pandemic. The study answered the research question: How do student leaders describe their experiences with the instruction of their universities in the new normal?

In this study, the researchers used a qualitative research method design. Purposive sampling technique and convenience sampling were employed to select the respondents from different universities. Interview and observation were also utilized in this study to establish the student leaders' perception and experience of the existing medium of instruction in their respective universities.

Most students preferred modular learning over e-learning; however, due to distance, the teachers could not explain more about the particular topic. The participants further express that aside from having distractive learning environment, they have the feeling of being forced into an enclosed unfamiliar sphere. Their learning environment is not conducive and distractive. Their teachers were not responding to their queries, not teaching and giving explanations, and sometimes, they cannot be reached. Although many of the teachers have adjusted accordingly to new forms of communication, few notable ones were unreachable and not felt by students. Majority of the participants have positively expressed that their teachers have consistently given them feedback on their output. The sustainability of instruction of state universities in MIMAROPA in the new normal can be highlighted through the adjustment of both instructors and learners have gone through.

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers concluded that the qualitative method of research revealed the experiences of student leaders during the time of new normal setting such as consideration and empathy, convenience and adequacy, adjustment and distraction, level of responsiveness, and giving feedback in sustainability of instructions in SUC's in MIMAROPA in the new normal towards a new model.

**Keywords:** Student Leaders, Student's experiences, new normal practices, SUC, sustainable practices

### I. Introduction

In 2020, the world was confronted with the crisis of the century. A pandemic brought about by the coronavirus-19 (COVID-19) health crisis came to the fore that turned into a global health emergency (Liu et al., 2020) for every country in the world. It was a formidable challenge for industries that changed the dynamics of every aspect of life including the education sector. No country was spared as it had caused substantial disruption in the lives of millions of people, notably children and adolescents (Ettekal & Agans, 2020) who are enrolled in all levels of education. Most governments had temporarily closed their educational institutions in order to stop COVID-19 from spreading (Melnick, et al., 2020) because nearly 36 million people had been infected and over one million had died as of October 6, 2020 (Joaquin et al., 2020). As a result, over a billion students around the world had been impacted (Li & Lalani, 2020) by the pandemic.

In the Philippines, over 28 million Filipino students from all academic levels have to remain at home in compliance with the Philippine government's quarantine protocols (Joaquin et al., 2020). In view of these figures, the COVID-19 pandemic created a change in the structures and processes of education in the Philippines, at all levels. The crisis had far-reaching effects in the field of education, especially in the preparation, implementation, and evaluation of curriculum. Due to a lack of preparation for the pandemic, implementation, and evaluation of the curriculum took a back seat (Huber & Helm, 2020). The quality of instruction in higher education was affected primarily. Although online learning had been in use in higher education, there were problems stemming from deficient computer skills that hindered students to understand and accomplish assigned topics, which caused frustration and feelings of anxiety (Aristovnik et al., 2020). Thus, there was a research gap that needed to be conducted, discovered, and disseminated. For Elmer and Durocher (2020), the facilitation of quality instruction in higher education was a challenge for the near future. In this crisis, sustaining the quality of instruction is indeed a challenge for higher education institutions.

The state universities in the MIMAROPA Region had their own share of challenges when it came to instruction in the new normal of teaching and learning scenarios. Though somewhat understandable, yet to be verified, internet connectivity issues, and demotivated learners were among the reported effects of the pandemic on students.

Hence, the researchers embarked on this study which investigated the students' experiences during the pandemic. The study will provide better learning experiences and opportunities to students which are based on informed decisions made by professors, curriculum planners, and administrators - research-based decisions, especially during the pandemic, and this will ensure standards and sustainable teaching practices that will deliver quality education to the students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The study answered the research questions as follows:

1. How do student leaders describe their experiences with the instruction of their universities in the new normal?

## **II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This part includes the research design, population and sampling, instrumentation, validation of instrument, research environment, research participant, data collection technique, trustworthiness of data, ethical considerations, procedure and time frame, and analysis plan.

The study used a qualitative research method design. The researcher also wanted a fluid process of extracting data from the different respondents so that they can express what they feel. With this, the researcher enabled to create a narrative form. The study employed a sampling process to select the participants. For the study, it employed the purposive sampling technique (Ames et al., 2019) and convenience sampling to select the respondents from different universities.

The respondents were composed of at least five (5) student leaders from SUCs in MIMAROPA such as WPU in Palawan, Mindoro State University in Mindoro, Marinduque State College in Marinduque. Meanwhile, the researcher selected student leaders from each university with the following criteria: bona fide students the selected state university, student leaders, and enrolled during pandemic. There were 15 student leaders (five from each university) served as participants of this study, interviewed using open-ended questions.

The study was conducted over a period of three months from March to June 2022, which included from the point of approval of the research proposal to its implementation, subsequent treatment, and data analysis for presentation and conclusion.

The research instrument that was utilized in this study was for student leaders which was likewise constructed to establish the student leaders' perception and experience of the existing medium of instruction in their respective universities. The researcher used focus group discussion to gather the needed data through the open-ended guide questions consisted of questions that sought to situate the level of perception and adaptation of student leaders from different SUCs' delivery of instructions of their professors in this new normal.

The validation of the questions was done to ensure the position of the research instrument to the goals and objectives of the study, to establish alignment with ethical standards, and to gather the general response from the participants.

In the conduct of the study, the study underwent quality assurance wherein the adviser, critics, and members of the panel evaluated the research proposal. After the proposal had been approved, the paper underwent an ethics review. Likewise, the study underwent quality assurance of its instrument through validity and reliability tests.

After all these were completed, the informed consent was obtained from the participants. After the informed consent was signed, the data gathering started. The respondents were informed that the information that they gave would be treated with utmost confidentiality. The researcher also prepared and set a schedule of interview and focus group discussion with the student leaders. After all data were gathered, the transcript of the narrations of the participants were developed.

To establish rigor, four criteria were met based on the stipulations of Johnson, Adkins, & Chauvin (2020): fit, workability, relevance, and modifiability. Initially, fit dictated that the emerging theory's categories fit the data (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & De Lacey (2016). Through this, emerging themes and categories were compared with existing literature. Furthermore, a constant comparative analysis was ensured that the data to be processed yielded accurate findings. On the other hand, workability refers to how the emerging theory explained and interpreted the events in question (Ebneyamini & Moghadam, 2018). Likewise, this was done as the study's findings were presented to the participants through e-mail and were asked for any comments, suggestions, and learning insights that were also incorporated to enrich the study findings. Similarly, through member-checking, such input was taken into consideration, consolidated, and incorporated into the study's final version (Nowell,

Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). In addition, relevance is the capacity of the theory to address the core issues at hand. This was done through the utilization of contemporary and universally-accepted literature that deliberated the theory that emerged.

Very important was that, relevance was achieved by asking questions and probing into relevant issues that were well within the scope of the study. Finally, the last criterion, modifiability, is the nature of how the dynamic nature of the environment and the subsequent data gathered was accommodated by the existing theory (Aziz, et al., 2018). This was proven by constant comparative analysis done as the study progressed and new ideas were added to the budding theory. Likewise, the developed theory was also welcomed for validation by other studies in the future.

In the study, thematic analysis was utilized. Coding and constant comparison methods were applied on responses using line by line and word by word analysis, separating dissimilar items/ideas and clustering of similar items/ideas. Through constant coding and analysis, concepts were formed and categorized by establishing salient groupings among the gathered information until saturation was reached. Concepts were then identified through reoccurrence and development of importance in deductive processing. The core variable then emerged through selective coding among the identified concepts where the categories were examined to ensure which categories had a relationship to the theory that was developed.

#### **IV. PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION, AND ANALYSIS OF DATA**

Using the qualitative method of research, this study reveals the experiences and challenges of the student leaders on the new practices of their state universities in MIMAROPA during the new normal setting. The experiences of the student leaders on the practices of instruction of their universities in the new normal are delineated in descriptive narrative form.

In this study, the participants who are student leaders of their institutions willingly shared their experiences in the new normal setting of education. They have different reactions and emotions in relation to their experiences about the new normal educational system particularly to the new normal practices introduced by their instructors. These experiences were divided into three categories such as preparation of instruction, implementation of instruction, and evaluation of instruction.

##### **A. Preparation of Instruction**

The student leaders were asked about their experiences on their teacher's preparation of instruction for the new normal. Preparation of instruction of teachers was first observed by the students in their classes. It is necessary that teachers prepared for their classes, they should equip themselves with readings and researches that will help them in their lessons. In the new normal set-up, the preparation of instruction was not like before. Teachers of the new normal are equipped with series of training provided by their institution about the different online platforms as well as training on preparing modules. Based on the interview and focused group discussions, student leaders have cited different scenarios on how their teacher's made preparation in their mode of teaching. Some of the students shared in their statements that:

“Based on the survey conducted to the learners on the most convenient way of delivering instruction, there are only 2 teaching method that we've experienced during this new normal set-up of learning.”-P3

“Yes. Conducting survey for vaccinated students for more equip and comfortable classroom.”-P6

“They are all techy and advanced. I think, it was because they have intense training before their classes start.”-P10

“Our professor checked our personal background during the first day of school. She asked to say something about ourselves as well as our situation amidst the pandemic. Afterwards, she proceeds to a lesson proper.”-P14

From the above statements, those indicate that teachers are preparing for their instruction. As part of their preparation, they conducted survey among their students about the possible mode of teaching. They also checked the personal background of their students to design and plan for lessons and activities that would fit to them as well as for the teachers have a little background about their students. As mentioned by one of the statements, teachers have intense training about the new technologies that is why they are fine to any mode of teaching: modular or blended learning, preferred by their students.

This preparation practice of instruction is conformed with the study of Knibel (2001) which he emphasized that higher education institutions in the Philippines should prepare the courses for online transfer since another

epidemic can break out in the future. Similarly, Barr & Miller (2013) mentioned that there was a need to acquire online-driven competencies in planning, implementing, and assessing the performance of their students, providing teachers with adequate training courses that can assist them to effectively implement the courses through electronic delivery.

From the experiences of the participants, the teacher should be prepared for their lessons for the whole semester. Regardless of the teaching method that their students prefer, teachers should have training and seminars about new technologies so that they can keep up with the changing new education system.

Meanwhile, teachers asked for the students' background and current situation to identify also their needs, from then, they can design objectives of their lesson that would fit the situation and the background of their students. Preparing the class objectives is one of practices in the preparation of instruction. Teachers need to ensure that their objectives will be met at the end of their discussions, but due to limited factors in the new normal, teachers made adjustment and fit the learning objectives to achieve their teaching goals despite the new normal set-up.

The following statements were given by the student leaders such as:

“We are very much aware of the target objectives of the lesson. Before, the first day of classes, professor explained about the objectives of the lesson.”-P3

“She always presents the learning objective before starting the lesson. It's always indicated on her PPT and he/she also discusses those before the lesson proper.”-P11

“I am aware that the learning objectives must be stated before proceeding to the instructions or discussion. Besides, it was written in the lesson plan/ course outline wherein it serves as the roadmap for teaching the lesson with the students.”-P15

From the given statements by the participants, those show that teachers still prepare objectives and presents those in their classes so that their student become aware of their learning objectives. Upon learning about the class objectives, students understand the different activities given in time of pandemic.

This is similar with Barr & Miller (2013), according to them, in instructional preparation, the professor must consider the knowledge of content and pedagogy he/she is teaching, knows how to set instructional outcomes, demonstrates knowledge of the available resources, knows how to design coherent instruction, and can design student assessment. Suarez, Chan, & Obieta (2018) noted that this ensured the higher education institutions had activities in place to ensure that learned information is returned to society in a direct manner.

Learning objectives should be planned carefully by the teachers. Based on the statements of the participants, they are aware of the importance of learning objectives presented in their classes.

## **B. Implementation of Instruction**

One of the practices in the new normal was the implementation of the teacher's instruction. Participants mentioned about how the teachers conducted their classes despite the distance and threat of the Covid-19. They really feel how the teacher show their concern and care during online classes. They have interconnected the words, **consideration and sympathy**, to how their teachers relate with their situations. The participants feel their teacher's consideration when they were asked about their current situations including their personal backgrounds and preferences before the semester and/or class starts. Sympathy is also observed by the participants during times when they experienced internet connection issues and other barriers in accomplishing learning activities. They feel how the teachers sympathized with them by adjusting on the deadlines of the output and by giving supplemental activities to fill the gap in their learning. These emotions of the participants towards the implementation of instructions by their teachers can be feel in the verbatim statements of the participants such as:

“Yes, most of our professors consider our personal background. They sympathize and support us esp. when we felt stressed and depressed.”-P6

“On the brighter side, the new normal in education maximizes the use of technology in many feasible ways, but with lots of consideration to take such as the internet connection stability and financial aspects.”-P13

From the above statements, consideration and sympathy of the teachers towards their students are best practices. These described how their teachers did their best and established their new normal practices. Through these features, participants agree that their teachers give support for their students to continue education despite distance learning brought by the pandemic. Teachers have shown their ability to interact with their students and

also, they assisted students' emotional states, especially at times of stress and depression. Because of consideration and sympathy, students feel welcomed, cared for, and loved.

This is similar with the study of Lee et al. (2021), he states that considering the contingent nature and the challenges in implementing learner-centred pedagogy, it is essential to understand teachers' concerns and consideration while they are embarking and transforming their teaching. In the article of Yussif (2022), he mentioned that it is often difficult for students to navigate through tough times and situations on their own. However, when they have a sympathetic teacher who can offer guidance, it can make all the difference in the world. Teachers who are able to show sympathy and understanding to their students can be a great resource for them, especially during difficult times.

It is suggested that teachers should be considerate and sympathetic in implementing new normal practices. In this way, students feel they are belonging to the class. Students will get motivated and will help achieve the success of the teaching in the new normal.

Another new normal practice experienced by the participants was the flexible mode of instruction. The participants described the popular modes of instruction used by their teachers such as e-learning, modular, or blended. Majority of the participants chose modular learning, wherein their teachers were obliged to prepare conducive modules. From this, the participants experienced its convenience and flexibility of learning schedules. Participant 12 said that:

“We have modules. Our teachers send us complete set of materials for each subject with activities and quizzes. It is convenient on our part because we will not go to our school for face-to face lectures.” P12

From the above statement of one of the participants, Participant 13 stated the limit of the new normal practices:

“Modular, sometimes it's not adequate because there's a time that the instructions are not clear.” P13

The verbatim statement reveals the impact of the teachers' new normal teaching in the student's learning. Most students preferred modular learning over e-learning; however, due to distance, the teachers could not explain more about the particular topic. Some of the instructions were not clear that lead to inadequacy in part of the learners. Some participants also stated that even they have convenient learning method, their learning outcomes are inadequate. This happened because teachers merely prepared and gave the materials to the learners. There was no interaction at all. The participants were expecting at least some form of explanation and analysis from their teachers, but did not happen due to the teacher-learner distance.

This suggests a limitation in the use of modular mode of teaching. Teachers could not ensure the learning of the students, the materials they prepared would be put into waste if the students have no learning at all. Thus, **convenience and adequacy** are generally rooted upon the participants' experience in the different modes of learning during the pandemic.

Apart from availability of learning resources, adequacy, relevance and usability of such resources are very critical in teaching/learning situations (Mutema et al., 1999). Instructional resources are not only expected to be available to sufficient levels to enable teaching and learning to properly take place. They should be adequate enough for utilization in teaching and learning (Igwe in Martin's Library, 2004).

On the other hand, while there are countless complaints on the inconveniences, discomfort and disadvantages of the new normal learning system, the most apparent advantage in modular learning case is the advantage of time. Modular learning allows the students to set their own schedules for the completion of the activity sheets and other documents required to be submitted by the teacher at the end of the week. Not only does modular learning allow the students to complete the module with their own schedule, it is also flexible as to place. The modular learning may not seem to be convenient to all the various types of learners, but surely, there are groups of students who would prefer the same, and even find it to be most effective (Cuare, 2020).

From the situation, it can be recommended that the teachers and management should monitor the learning of their students. Teachers also need to conduct evaluation to their students to assure the adequacy of the learning. Another thing, it can be suggested that teachers should explore different means of teaching the students.

In addition to the new normal practices, participants described their experience in the new normal as more adjustment and distraction. This experience started with the Covid-19 pandemic, which is described as a traitor disease that brought lockdowns and closures of the schools. It stole some opportunity of learning in the classroom. It creates confusion, unpreparedness, and culture shock to all elements of educative process of learning. Because of that situation, teachers prepared and upgraded their methods of teaching to reach out and

provide the learning needs of all students, while students were expected to have their learning from lectures through online and read and comply the activities given in the module. Teachers should adapt their teaching methods based on the student's learning preferences. The process sounds easy but literally, it is not. Students and teachers made adjustment all the time and avoid distraction. The situation mentioned gives emphasis on the words, **adjustment and distraction**. According to Participant 4:

“No. Promptly speaking, the new normal setting of education was a cultural shock, because we had been introduced to classroom-based studies, where there is an active interaction among the teacher and the learners. Since new normal interaction among teacher and learners is limited, they brought up the gap between the teaching-learning process.”-P4

The above statement clearly means the students need learning adjustment. It is indeed true that the students were used to the face-to-face classroom set-up, then all of a sudden, because of Covid-19, face-to-face turned into online or modular. Students are not prepared physically, mentally, socially, spiritually, and financially. During that time when teachers receive series of training about the different platforms, mental health awareness, and even different ways on how to accommodate learning, their students were patiently waiting for their teachers to contact them and tell them on what to do next. Students, that time, have very limited time to adjust to the period of new normal because they were exhausted on their teachers' different mode of teaching. Students were culturally shocked because of having difficulty to adjust in the new normal practices introduced simultaneously by their teachers. Students were not prepared, exhausted, culturally shocked, and confused. Participant 14 shared his experience in the adjustment period:

“We are not prepared for the new normal teachings. Personally, I found it hard to adjust in the situation because unlike teachers, we do not receive any training. Imagine, bahaynamin, yun din ang classroom (Our house, our classroom). There are many distractions. For me, it is not good in receiving the lectures of teachers.” P14

It is mentioned in the statement that their learning environment is not conducive and distractive. The participants phrased that learning was still on-going while they were on the adjustment period in their not-so conducive new learning environment. Though they expressed gratitude that they were able to spend more time with their families and can manage their time, distractions happened in their homes. Adjustments distractions are connected and related to how the participants shifted from a focused classroom learning environment to their current spaces in time of pandemic. Here are some of the statements:

“I have lots of nephews and nieces living in our house and for me it's not conducive for learning.”-P14

“We, students, were put into a sphere we are not even familiar about. The pros of the new normal classroom-based studies is that, it will somehow bring back the true essence of schooling wherein learning genuinely fosters. Still, I prefer the new normal classroom-based learning.”-P15

The participants further express that aside from having distractive learning environment, they have the feeling of being forced into an enclosed unfamiliar sphere. Students have the feeling that they were coerced to fit in the new normal environment which left them with no choice. By this, they have to adjust and avoid distractions in the new normal practice of learning.

### **C. Evaluation of Instruction**

From the previous discussions, the participants shared their positive feelings on how the teacher's made consideration and sympathy in their pandemic situation at the beginning of their classes or the semester. Meanwhile, they also expressed the adjustment and distractions while the new normal classes in on-going. The new normal setting brought changes in the learning process and instruction. It is everyone's responsibility to commit in this new normal instruction particularly the teachers who shed light and hope to students for them to survive the new normal situation. There are new expectations for both teachers and students. However, for the new normal practices of evaluation of instruction, some participants expressed their dismay to some of their teachers. Here are some of their statements:

“Wala talaga po syaginagawaminsan ,dedma”-P5

“Nakakadissapoint po to be honest, karamihansaguro ko ay di nagtuturo at kapagtinanongmo ay maaaring di ka sagutin, walangmabigaynamaayosnasagot, ila-like ka lang or seen sa Messenger.”-P10

Participants have mentioned that some of their teachers were not responding to their queries, not teaching and giving explanations, and sometimes, they cannot be reached. Although many of the teachers have adjusted accordingly to new forms of communication, few notable ones were unreachable and not felt by students. Based on the participants' experiences, they have received poor level of responsiveness from their teachers. Some teachers were absent frequently and unreachable when students asked them questions. They were disappointed in their lecturers because of them being **unresponsive**.

From the situation above, if teachers are unresponsive, then, the transmission of the learning is poor. Therefore, the instruction is a failure. The teachers did not perform their responsibilities as a facilitator of learning in the new normal.

This conforms with the findings of Burgess and Sievertsen (2020) about the aspects that were triggered due to the global lockdown of educational institutions including disruptions in internal evaluations and the cancellation or replacement of public assessments for qualifications.

Teachers should give their responses to their students. If not, it is responsibilities of administrators to monitor their teachers. Teachers are aware of their role and responsibilities, and these were highlighted during their training and seminars. They should not forget their calling as a teacher. It is therefore, a teacher's role to give responses to their learners.

In relation to being unresponsive of the teachers, the participants were asked about the evaluative practices by their teachers. As a result, participants have different experiences regarding the new normal ways of giving feedback of their teachers. Some negatively responded that they were neglected by their teachers. Participant 3 frankly stated that:

“To be honest, we rarely receive feedback. It just depends on the teacher.”-P3

It is clear from the above statement that teachers have different evaluation of instruction. Giving **feedback** is one of its practices. The challenge here is how the teachers give feedback to their students in the new normal setting. From the above statement, some participants rarely receive feedback from their teachers. This is related to the participants who experience their teachers who are unresponsive and sometimes could not be reached out. One of the notable response's highlights that some of the teachers have not provided any feedback at all. Another form of feedback has also been dismissive – where the participant shared that the teacher told them:

“No feedback, sabi lang matuto,kunghindibahala ka.”-P8

This type of teacher forgets his/ her mission as a teacher. Teachers should teach with a heart, not by the book and they need to be holistic. In time of new normal, there were factors that affect the motivation of these teachers. There could be reasons behind the dull execution of the new normal practices by the particular teachers.

On the other hand, majority of the participants have positively expressed that their teachers have consistently given them feedback on their output. The researcher quoted the following statements from the participants:

“Professor have an assessment during instruction to gauge learning.”-P9

“Yes, by having an assessment.”-P13

Giving feedback can motivate and help the participants improve their learning. Despite the overwhelming changes in education because of Covid-19, the World Bank (2020) supported teachers by sharing guidelines stressing the importance of: providing feedback to students, maintaining constant communication with caregivers, and reporting to local education units to keep track of learning. In a technical psychological sense, there is little learning without feedback. Feedback on performance is so important that Gibbs and Simpson (2004) said that feedback to the students on their assignments was the single most powerful influence on student achievement.

It is suggested that teachers should give feedback and be responsive to the queries of the students. Real teachers know how importance feedback is.

The sustainability of instruction of state universities in MIMAROPA in the new normal towards a new model can be highlighted through the adjustment both instructors and learners have gone through. Adjustments in learning methods and teaching executions have been made and are still undergoing effective appropriation. With the general idea of teachers trying with their best efforts and relating to the student's situations, there are notable instances where teachers are dismissive, lacking in instruction, and provide inadequate student feedback.

The learning experiences of the student leaders assess the new normal practices of the teachers in giving their instruction. They identified the following terms: consideration and sympathy, convenience and adequacy, adjustment and distractions, unresponsive, and feedback as part of their learning experiences with the teachers, before, during, and after the instruction in time of pandemic.

## V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that the qualitative method of research revealed the experiences of student leaders during the time of new normal setting such as consideration and empathy, convenience and adequacy, adjustment and distraction, level of responsiveness, and giving feedback in sustainability of instructions in SUC's in MIMAROPA in the new normal towards a new model.

### Recommendation

Based on the conclusions of the study, the researcher recommended the following:

1. The students should be flexible and responsible in learning process. They should commit in making the online activities given by their instructors.
2. They should be open-minded and sensitive in the academic transition brought by pandemic. Through this, they will understand the situation of their instructors.
3. Decisions made on the basis of research, particularly during the pandemic, ensured that the students received the high-quality education they deserved by ensuring consistent and long-lasting teaching methods

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