DIGITAL LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM: FROM THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THE IP LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to find out IP learners' experiences with digital learning in the classroom. Eight junior high school IP students were chosen as research participants. The findings of the study revealed that the perceptions of IP learners in digital learning helps them in facilitating better learning and understanding, difficult to adopt in digital learning, and offers opportunities for accessing education. Also, unstable internet connection, diverse experience, listening attentively to the discussion, having a hard time adjusting, hard time in participating in virtual classroom, find digital learning nice, and hard to use at first were the lived experiences of the IP students regarding digital learning. Furthermore, the digital learning approaches which were found most challenging were, lack of focus, lack of personal interaction, not feeling nervous when answering questions, distinguishing information from false information, slow or no internet connection, and need to learn how to use cellphone. The strategies used in digital learning were, stay focused on learning, have time management, face hardships, explore on using the internet, follow instructions given by teachers, and use internet when researching. The use of videos and pictures, safe-paced learning, and reporting were the activities they found effective. The classroom activities found difficult to adopt were, limited access to technology, group works, easily get distracted, activities that need physical interaction, no internet connection, lack of knowledge on how to use cellphone, and hard time in researching using internet. The coping mechanisms employed by the IP learners were, seek help from others, self-determination, positive thinking, explore more, ask help from others, with the use of internet, and learn how to use technology. These mechanisms were effective because these able the IP learners to understand the lessons, enhance their learning experiences, prevent from experiencing anxiety, able to adjust easily, and knowing how to use technology. Above all the challenges and difficulties, the insights gained by the IP learners in using digital learning in the classroom were: knowing how to access technology, self-discipline, digital learning effective in answering questions, use digital technology in the right way, be independent, helpful especially when researching, and enhancing knowledge of students. Moreover, digital learning makes learning easier, put importance on self-discipline, makes students knowledgeable, foster independence, face the challenges, challenged to explore more, and gain new learning were the ways that these insights helped in confronting the challenges in digital learning.

Keywords: *Digital Learning in the Classroom, IP learners, junior high school students, lived experiences, phenomenology*

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's modernized classrooms, numerous schools across the globe have placed focus on digital learning within the classroom. For indigenous learners, the digital learning experiences have provided significant milestones in the delivery of education to guarantee academic success; however, some IP students lack study resources, such as devices for learning at home (Jawarneh, 2017). Others may have gadgets or cellphones, but their internet connection is limited in some areas of their location (Ankiah-Gangadeen & Nadal, 2018). Many IP learners do not have sufficient access to the essential digital devices. Sometimes, they lack knowledge of how to use class-related technology and software. As a result, additional preparations, whether online or offline, are necessary.

In South America, indigenous Amerindian learners in Guyana needed to learn skills and overcome digital barriers to improve their performance in the classroom (Serdyukov, 2017). Although indigenous Amerindians in Guyana would have access to the internet, they have a low rate of technology adoption in the classroom, which hinders the development of digital learning skills and access to educational resources. To achieve meaningful change, Indigenous Amerindian learners must learn new skills and improve education in their communities (Balbay & Erkan, 2018; Gamage & Tanwar, 2017). Identifying and addressing the personal needs of Indigenous Amerindian can lead to positive change. Allowing them to express themselves can lead to increased adoption of digital learning.

In the Philippines, IP communities are growing. According to national data from the 2018–2019 school year, 2.6 million IP learners are enrolled in 31, 000 schools across the country (DepEd, 2019). Indigenous peoples, like everyone else, have experienced unintended consequences from technology. In the study of Eduardo and Gabriel (2021) in Arakan, Cotabato, it was revealed that IP learners face academic challenges in terms of personal motivation and academic aspirations wherein they are deprived of having access to technology at home. To address these issues, it is recommended to implement intervention programs, such as integrating digital learning into classrooms. Digital learning may reinforce and accelerate the technology-based thought, culture, and learning strategies but there are also areas needed to be catered to fully implement it (Al Jazeera, 2018).

In the local context, according to the report from the Learner Information System, 40% of the total student population of the school are learners from indigenous people group. Andap National High School implemented the Project W.H.O.L.E or We Hone Learners to Excellence as stipulated in the Enhanced School Improvement Plan, by installing digital learning devices and learning resources in every classroom. This aims to cater the needs of all students including IP learners in digital education. Additionally, based on the Learning Action Cell session of TLE teachers, it was found out that students have minimal exposure and experience of using technology at home. This encouraged them to launch the technology-based instruction to address digital learning gaps and needs.

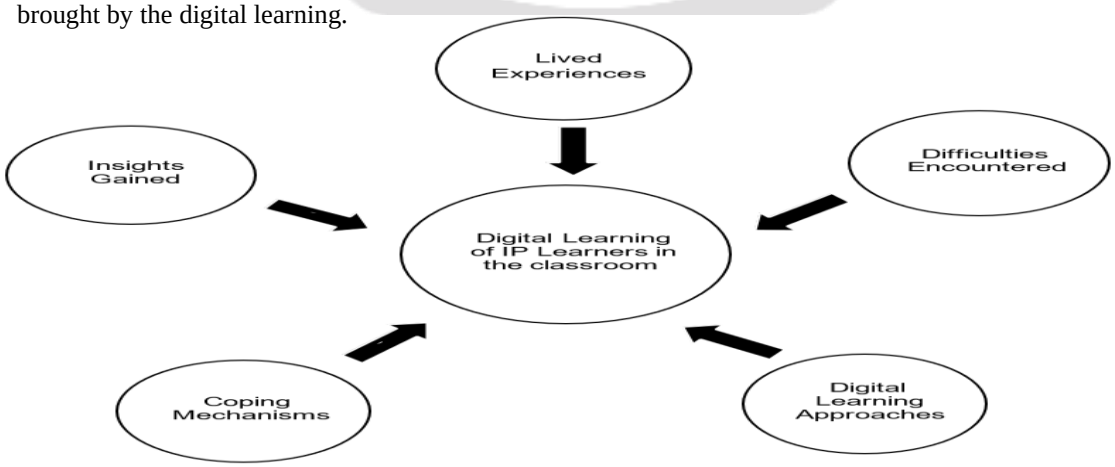
In this regard, the researcher wanted to find out the lived experiences in digital learning among IP learners in Andap National High School. Upon dwelling on this research, relevant interventions were formulated to address the challenges encountered by the IP students regarding the use of digital learning in the classroom.

1.1 Theoretical Lens

This study was based on Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which contends that technologies have the potential to transform and expand how we think about and practice education, rather than simply mediating our existing teaching practices. Digital learning has the potential to expand learning activities in a variety of ways across different social forms, and the framework aims to highlight the diverse potentials of learners from various ethnic groups.

This was supported by Fawns (2022), who contends that from a post-digital perspective, terms and distinctions such as online or offline, digital or analog, hybrid or blended, are irrelevant to this understanding of learning. The focus is on new activities enabled by digital technologies. The author also advocates for a shift away from the 'pedagogy first' or 'technology first' principles for using digital technologies. Thus, when we use the term 'digital learning spaces', we mean the unfolding of activities enabled using digital technologies.

Figure 1 shows the schematic diagram in exploring the lived experiences of IP learners in Andap National High School in dealing with digital learning in the classroom. This navigated the challenges and difficulties encountered by IP learners in their quest to digital learning approaches in the classroom. It also revealed the coping mechanisms employed by the IP students in overcoming the challenges and difficulties brought by the digital learning.



1.2 Research Questions

The lived experiences of the IP learners regarding the use of digital learning in the classroom were explored. Thus, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of the indigenous people (IP) students with regards to digital learning?
2. What are the strategies that the teachers employed to the IP learners using digital learning?
3. What are the difficulties encountered by IP students on the use of digital learning in the classroom?
4. What mechanisms do the IP students use that best cope with the challenges in digital learning?
5. What are the reflective insights gained by IP students with regards to their digital learning experiences?

2.METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative-phenomenological study, and data were gathered through in-depth interviews (IDI). A qualitative design was appropriate in this study since it explored the lived experiences of IP learners in digital learning in the classroom. Phenomenological research is a qualitative technique that focuses on understanding the essence of an experience by describing the lived phenomenon (Creswell, 2019).

Moreover, a qualitative investigation begins with an assumption and the application of a theoretical framework. According to Creswell (2013), the outcome of this form of study includes the participants' voices and requires a greater emphasis on the interpretive aspect of the inquiry. The study employed a phenomenological approach to investigate a specific phenomenon relating digital learning experiences of IP learners in the classroom. Because lived experiences were important in this investigation, phenomenology was appropriate.

2.2 Research Participants

In this study, research participants who were selected contributed informative and concrete lived experiences in digital learning employed by teachers in the classroom. A limited number of participants were considered particularly those who were officially enrolled IP learners of Andap National High School. Eight IP learners were chosen to undergo IDI. The IP students who were selected were ensured to meet the inclusion criteria which were bonafide students in Andap National High School and were identified from the list in learner identification system as an IP learner. Participants of this study were determined through criterion sampling method which is one of the purposive samplings (Creswell, 2013).

2.3 Data Collection Procedure

A set of steps was followed in conducting the study in exploring the lived experiences of IP learners in using digital learning in the classroom. The data were collected through in-depth interviews to the identified IP students based on the report from the Learners Identification System of the school. Data sources were considered since it provided opportunities in understanding situations from various phenomena (Merriam, 1996; Stake, 2000). An in-depth interview, a data collection method, was primarily employed to 8 research participants eliciting their experiences, challenges, effective learning approaches, coping mechanisms, and insights gained digital learning using the validated research instrument. The in-depth interview was utilized to gain a better grasp of certain opinions. The interview followed the interview guide prepared by the researcher.

Before conducting the interview, an endorsement letter was secured from Assumption College of Nabunturan and letters of permission were given to the office of the Division of Davao de Oro, Office of the District Coordinating Principal, and office of the school head of Andap National High School to ask for permission to conduct the study. The manuscript was subjected to ethical review to ensure validity, honesty, integrity, and respect in all dealings with the participants and in the utilization of evaluation data from all sources. During the interview, participants had the opportunity to engage in a free-flowing discussion in a secure setting. To avoid surprises, research participants were personally informed about the interview ahead of time and were given informed assent form from the RPDC office. It was conducted in accordance with health regulations to ensure the safety of both the participants and the researcher. Following data collection, the findings were be transcribed, analyzed thematically, coded, and interpreted.

2.4 Data Analysis

During the data gathering time, analysis began. The obtained data were examined, synthesized, and recorded to maintain accurate, thorough, and detailed records for the study. After gathering enough data through in-depth interviews, thematic analysis was utilized to further analyze the results and look for disparities and similarities across the responses received. This was the time when responses were categorized and arranged into themes.

3. FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings to the research questions that explored the lived experiences of the IP learners in using digital learning in the classroom. The primary focus of the investigation was on how the learners confronted the challenges and difficulties in digital learning environment. The research participants were preselected eight junior high school students of Andap National High School in New Bataan District, Davao de Oro.

The content analysis of the responses revealed the themes that appeared. Codes had been applied in accordance with the research ethics for qualitative research. to keep the research participants' names a secret. The sequence in which the results were presented was determined by the research questions that were employed in this investigatPerception of IP Learners of Digital Learning

What are the lived experiences of the indigenous people (IP) students with regards to digital learning?

This section presents the results to the 1st major research question; What are the lived experiences of the indigenous people (IP) students with regards to digital learning?

Perception of IP Learners of Digital Learning

The themes in this section were coming from the specific research question 1.1 ‘As an IP learner, how do you perceive digital learning?’ The responses generated five themes: facilitating better learning and understanding, range of benefits and challenges, difficult to adapt to digital learning, offer opportunities for accessing education, had a hard time.

What are the strategies that the teachers employed to the IP learners using digital learning?

This section presents the results to the 2nd major research question ‘What are the strategies that the teachers employed to the IP learners using digital learning?’ Three specific research questions were used to collect data for this question highlighting the understanding of strategies that the teachers employed to the IP learners using digital learning.

Strategies Used in Digital Learning

The themes derived from the responses of the research informants to the specific research question 2.1 ‘What are the strategies that you used in digital learning?’ are presented in this section. The themes were: stay focused on learning, have time management, face hardships, explore on using the internet, participating in class, follow instructions given by teachers, and follow instructions given by teachers.

What are the difficulties encountered by IP learners on the use of digital learning in the classroom?

This section presents the results to the 3rd major research question; ‘What are the difficulties encountered by IP learners on the use of digital learning in the classroom?’ Three specific research questions were used to gather data and information for this major question.

Difficulties Encountered on the Use of Digital Learning in the Classroom

The themes in this section were coming from the specific research question 3.1 ‘What are the difficulties you encountered on the use of digital learning in the classroom?’ The following were the themes: difficulties in understanding lessons, access to technology, too many distractions, no Internet connection, difficulty in using technology.

What mechanisms do the IP students use to cope with the challenges in digital learning?

The results in this section were from the responses to the specific research questions used to gather data for the 4th major research question, ‘What mechanisms do the IP students use to cope with the challenges in digital learning?’ Three specific research questions were utilized to collect data and pieces of information.

Mechanism Used that Helped Cope with the Challenges in Digital Learning

The themes created in this section were from the responses to the specific research question, 4.1 'What mechanisms did you use that helped you cope with the challenges in digital learning?' The themes were embedded with seek help from teachers, self-determination, positive thinking, explore more, ask help from others, with the use of internet, learn how to use technology.

What are the reflective insights gained by IP on to the digital learning experiences?

This section presents the results to the 5th major research question, 'What are the reflective insights gained by IP on to the digital learning experiences?' Two specific research questions were utilized to gather data that would answer the question.

Insights Gained in Digital Learning Experiences

The results in this section were taken from the responses to the specific research question 5.1, 'What insights did you gain in your digital learning experiences?' under the 5th major research question 'What are the reflective insights gained by IP on to the digital learning experiences?' The following were the themes drawn from the responses; knowing how to access technology, self-discipline, digital learning effective in answering questions, use digital technology in the right way, be independent, helpful specially when researching, enhancing knowledge of students, and makes learning more exciting.

4. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

4.1 Discussions

The structured themes and the emerging therein were made as bases in broadening the discussion of the findings in this study. As each theme was linked to related literature and studies, substantial discussion was made to find their alignment with the theme.

Perception of IP Learners of Digital Learning. The emerging themes in this structured theme are facilitating better learning and understanding, range of benefits and challenges, difficult to adapt to digital learning, offer opportunities for accessing education, and had a hard time. These were the perceptions of the IP learners in using digital learning in the classroom. The participants revealed that digital learning presents several advantages, provides access to education, and enhances learning and comprehension. Nonetheless, some students hold unfavorable opinions regarding digital learning. They reported that they found it challenging to adjust to digital learning and that they had difficulty in completing the tasks.

Lived Experiences Regarding Digital Learning. The participants revealed that digital learning in the classroom brought lots of challenges for them to learn. The study revealed that unstable internet connection, had a diverse experience, listen attentively to the discussion, having a hard time adjusting, hard time participating in virtual classroom, digital learning is nice, hard to use at first, and made me motivated to learn were the lived experiences confronted by the IP learners. The only beneficial experience that the study found was that digital learning increased the students' motivation to learn. In order to help the students become more motivated, it is therefore a task for the teachers to create more engaging and dynamic digital learning activities.

Digital Learning Approaches Found Most Challenging. The emerging themes were lack of focus, lack of personal interaction, note feeling nervous when answering questions, distinguishing factual information from false information, slow or no internet connection, and need to learn how to use cellphone. Some of the digital learning strategies that presented the biggest challenges to the learners were lack of focus and interpersonal interaction.

Strategies Used in Digital Learning. The emerging themes were stay focused on learning, have time management, face hardships, explore on using the internet, participating in class, follow instructions given by the teachers, and use internet when researching. Considering the strategies employed in digital learning, it can be inferred that IP learners maintain their focus on what they are studying, manage their time well, deal with difficulties, research on the internet, engage in class, obey teacher instructions, and conduct researching digitally.

Activities Found Interesting Using Digital Learning. The emerging themes were use of videos and pictures, self-paced learning, self-assessment activities, when using Google meet, collaborative projects, and group activities. The utilization of images and videos, self-paced learning, self-assessment exercises, Google Meet, group projects, cooperative learning, and reporting were some of the digital learning activities that were thought to be engaging.

Activities Found Difficult to Adopt Using Digital Learning. The emerging themes were limited access to technology, group works, easily get distracted, activities that need physical interaction, no internet connection, lack of knowledge on how to use cellphone, and hard time in researching using internet. The utilization of pictures and videos helped students grasp the discussion done by the teachers. One of the most effective methods in digital learning is self-paced learning.

Difficulties Encountered on the Use of Digital Learning in the Classroom. The emerging themes were difficulties in understanding lessons, access to technology, too many distractions, no internet connection, and difficulty in using technology. Although digital learning has a lot of potential, there are drawbacks as well. Due to a lack of dependable technology and internet access, some learners may not have equal access to educational opportunities. But for other students, particularly those who learn best through peer-to-peer collaboration and social engagement, digital learning may become isolated. For teachers to successfully incorporate digital resources into lesson plans and curricula, professional development and training are necessary.

Mechanism Used that Helped Cope with the Challenges in Digital Learning. The emerging themes were, seek help from teachers, self-determination, positive thinking, explore more, ask help from others, with the use of internet, and learn how to use technology. With the help of digital learning, students may take charge of their learning speed, establish realistic goals, create a timetable, and follow it. This enhances self-control and a feeling of achievement.

Effectiveness of Mechanism in Coping with the Difficulties in Digital Learning. This structured theme elicited five emerging themes; able to understand the lesson, enhancing learning experience, prevent from experience anxiety, able to adjust easily, and knowing how to use technology. IP learners can more efficiently navigate resources and learning materials by being proficient with the digital learning environment.

Insights Gained in Digital Learning Experiences. In as much, IP learners can become increasingly self-sufficient learners and cultivate a passion for continuous learning by discovering how to use internet resources and obtain the answers to their queries. Digital learning's self-paced approach can be especially helpful for IP students who may have different learning preferences or little experience with traditional classroom instruction. While juggling online coursework with other obligations might be difficult, IP students benefit from the development of important time management and organizing skills.

Ways These Insights Helped in Confronting the Challenges in Digital Learning. Digital learning platforms give users access to a wealth of material that goes much beyond what local resources may offer. This enables IP learners to go deeper into subjects, identify various learning modalities that work for them, and uncover new interests. Regular use of digital learning platforms improves comfort level with technology. This may encourage IP students to investigate additional programs and resources that may enhance their current and future professional lives.

4.2 Concluding Remarks

With the lived experiences of the IP students were given emphasis in this study, the difficulties encountered were disclosed at the same time the strategies employed by them were highlighted. The challenges of the IP students about digital learning, drawn from their experiences in the classroom and at home, could also help teachers devise strategies that could make digital learning environment worthwhile. Teachers as facilitators of digital learning should employ effective ways to cater the needs of the students especially in dealing with the use of technology in learning.

For IP students, digital learning has enormous potential to overcome constraints related to physical location, cultural preservation, and resources for learning. Asynchronous learning models are made possible by digital learning, letting the students to study at their own speed and go over content again when necessary. This potentially improves learning results by accommodating students with different schedules and learning styles. The acquisition of fundamental digital literacy skills—which are more and more crucial today— is facilitated by digital learning. IP students who possess these abilities may find it easier to obtain information, engage in online forums, and look for further training or employment prospects.

All things considered; digital learning has enormous potential to change IP students' educational experiences. Through the resolution of accessibility issues, creation of culturally relevant content, and utilization of digital platform capabilities, educators can create a bridge that allows IP students to fulfill their learning objectives.

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