

Mag-Aral ay Di 'Biro: A Phenomenological Study on the Lived Experiences of the Students on Blended Learning Amidst COVID-19

Lhyza Perante¹ Ella Mae Solmiano² Jhoana Paola Lunesto³

Julia Ann Marie Malicdem⁴ Jhomari Malaca⁵

Jhoselle Tus⁶

¹⁻⁵Research Students, Filipino Psychology ⁶Research Professor, Filipino Psychology
Jesus is Lord Colleges Foundation, Inc., Bocaue, Bulacan, Philippines

Abstract

Blended learning cut the barriers brought by the distance between teachers and students through online and traditional teaching and learning methods. Thus, it is subjected to many challenges such as forced consideration of digital technology characteristics, which demands skills and knowledge and the improvement of the reading comprehension ability of each student. This study is intended to identify the lived experiences of the students towards blended learning amidst pandemic, specifically: (1) to describe the experiences in blended learning, (2) to describe the challenges experience on blended learning, and (3) to describe their coping mechanisms. Thus, the study utilized Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) with ten (10) respondents from the community. Based on the study, the findings are the following: (1) Blended learning implications are mostly negative. (2) The respondents are most challenged in adopting a lesson and lacking resources. Due to the sudden changes, they resorted to adjustments, but conflicts such as not having enough sources necessary for blended learning requirements still emerged. Finally, (3) most of the respondents need to seek social support to cope with blended learning.

Keywords: Sikolohiyang Pilipino, Blended learning, Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis, COVID – 19

1. INTRODUCTION

Blended learning cut the barriers brought by the distance between teachers and students through online and traditional teaching and learning methods. This learning-teaching modality has already been used early in the 1840s through mailed postcards and continues innovating until the kind of blended learning that the world has right now (Pappas, 2020). Researchers and educators conducted various studies to grasp blended learning implications in students, specifically their lived experiences.

According to Bouilheres et al. (2020), peer engagement, lectures and contents, and the overall learning experiences revealed that the blended learning environment positively impacts the students. In support of this, the University of Dandee (n.d., as cited by OSullivan, 2020) found that blended learning is more convenient than a classroom setting. It manifests positive effects on the students' performance in reading, writing, critical thinking, arts, music, and health. However, The National Indian Students and Alumni Union [NISAU-UK] UK (2020) found that almost 40 percent of Indian students expressed dissatisfaction and desire that the teaching process will be amended as further arrangements are made.

Although blended learning had already existed before this day, it became in-demand to many educational institutions as the 'new normal' of learning-teaching modality amidst pandemic. Patel (2020) stated that virtual classrooms became direct substitutes since physical interaction and one-on-one discussion are prohibited. In support of this, Llemit (2020) stated in his article entitled "Finding a new path amid the pandemic," as the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continuously threatened the world, various adjustments are needed, particularly in one more major segment of society, which is the educational sector.

Blended learning, nevertheless, is subjected to many challenges such as forced consideration of digital technology characteristics, which demands skills and knowledge and the improvement of the reading comprehension ability of each student. Also, the lack of access to technology for online learning is possible. According to Warren and Wagner (2020), the survey conducted by Save the Children and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) revealed that around 90 and 117 million children surviving in poverty could lead to between 7.0 and 9.7 million children possibly drop out of school due to the incapability of meeting the ends. Furthermore, in the Philippine context, Araneta et al. (2020) mentioned that as the Department of Education (DepEd) opens the new-normal class, they already received 16,000 reports or complaints regarding blended learning, including internet connectivity. Also, not yet received modules for the students. This article coincides with Uy's (2020) statement in her article, "Blended Learning: In Virus-Hit Philippines," regarding the implementation of the blended learning program, disadvantages must be considered. Learners are vital partners in the process of learning. Therefore, their ability to completely adapt to the 'new normal' might be influenced by their backgrounds and characteristics, thus impinging the effectiveness of their learning (Kintu et al., 2017).

In this view, the researchers are motivated to study the lived experiences of junior high school students in blended learning amidst pandemic. Specifically, the study aims to identify the implications of blended learning to junior high school students' lived experiences amidst pandemic.

1.1 Research Questions

This study is intended to describe the implications of blended learning to junior high school students' lived experiences amidst pandemic. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of Junior High School Students in blended learning amidst pandemic?
2. What are the challenges that junior high school students experience on the blended learning amidst pandemic?
3. How do junior high school students cope with blended learning amidst pandemic?
4. What grounded theory may be developed from the findings of the research?

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Formation of Blended Learning

Blended learning in the current situation of the Philippines in this pandemic became prominent. Even before the crisis arises in the Philippines, blended learning already exists in our country. Morales (2012) stated that it started in the Center for Blended Learning in Cubao way back in 2007. It offered enhancement and different activities to their students. They discover the effectiveness of blended learning and turn it into regular classes as requests by Joanne Tupas-Parsons, the after-school center's pioneer. Therefore, it leads to the creation of a combined classroom and homeschooling arrangement that is now called blended learning.

2.2 Definition of Blended Learning

It is vital to know the Philippine context's features and definitions to understand Blended Learning clearly. In the article of Aguinaldo (2013), 20th century blended learning was expressed through employing the union of both online and face-to-face learning. Wherein it will be an authentic engagement of technology to education to gain learning. Moreover, the Department of Education (2020, as cited by Custodio, 2020) gives a viewpoint on blended learning as a merging of printed materials and online distance learning that can be done in learners' homes and with the help of barangays.

The Department of Education (as cited by Llego, 2020) gives blended learning features that can be characterized through a combination of face-to-face and online learning that can be done using modules, worksheets, activity sheets, and gadgets. Furthermore, they also employ television and radio-based instructions. These methods of Blended Learning values the education technology tools which prove to help learners and teachers turn classroom setting through the use of its features and make the learners student-centered and constructivist (Brioso, 2017). Blended Education was already used a long time ago, as the DepEd Secretary Leonor Briones said (2020, as cited by Rodriguez, 2020). Thus, it is adopted by applying learning tools, methodologies, online and offline tools, and the DepEd Commons, which was their digital platform, to attain a particular goal. Also, Tus (2020) elaborated that the school with its teachers must keep them motivated and challenge them to do their best despite of the circumstances on blended learning.

2.3 Experiences in Blended Learning

Technological advancements continuously emerge in countries like the Philippines. Its ability to affect Filipinos' everyday living can be described as impacting the educational sector, particularly the students. In the study of Calamlam (2016), a quasi-experimental design was used to compare the performance between the control group (group X) and the experimental group (group Y). Each group was given the same pre-test and post-test (with group Y undergone a treatment) to compare each group's performance. The research findings implicate that a flipped classroom environment had a large significant effect in terms of improving students' trigonometry performance. Compared to the students in a traditional classroom environment, students exposed to a flipped classroom environment performed better.

In support of this, a study conducted by Rabacal (2018) used the same method as the research mentioned above to identify the impact of blended learning in the academic performance of graduate students. The results showed that blended learning took part in enhancing both the viability and productivity of significant learning outcomes. In addition, the study conducted by Ward (2019) is action research that further studies the impact of blended learning on student motivation and engagement. The researcher chose two heterogeneous classes of fifth-grade students as the participants. The findings revealed that the experimental class was more engaged and motivated to achieve more excellent knowledge of social studies. Additionally, the results showed that they also reported higher post-test scores or more remarkable academic growth in fifth-grade social studies.

Moreover, a study conducted by Austria et al. (2013) concentrated on the effect of blended learning for two (2) general education courses of Jose Rizal University SY 2011 - 2012, as part of their Course Redesign Program (CRP). The type of blended learning in the university involved a rotational model wherein both face-to-face and online learning will be experienced by the students simultaneously. The research findings showed an improvement in student passing rate and the students' positive approach to blended courses.

The study conducted by Trajeco & De Guzman (2012) showed that students' engagement in discussions improved through the help of a tablet-based learning environment. Also, considering that they no

longer need to wait for their turn to use a desktop at home or in school since they already have a tablet for their own, it enhanced their ability to submit their outputs anytime, anywhere.

In line with this, in the article of Cua (2020) it is indicated that for a UST senior high school graduating student named Jana, her strand Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) makes online learning easy to cope with. Since time management availability is possible, she could control most of her time, given that online learning indicates studying at home. However, another student named Alexandria pointed out other students' incompetency in online classes due to internet issues.

The road of involving digitalization in education has not been easy, nonetheless. Amid the positive approach of blended learning in some students in the Philippines, difficulties emerging in technology are still an issue in some areas.

In the Philippines, with regards to the released report of enrollees from the Department of Education (DepEd), around three million students were calculated to have possibly dropped out of the school system ("As Classes Open, 'Learning Crisis' Highlighted With Millions Of Students Left Behind," 2020). This report indicates the students' likelihood to stop returning to schools due to a lack of technology access needed for distance learning and the support they need at home. Also, the existing cases of anxieties and depressions among students could be intimidated by this system.

The Department of Health (as cited by Villanueva, 2020) indicates that the feeling of isolation among students is more likely to increase during online classes brought by the lack of face-to-face interaction. Thus, the DOH suggested precautionary measures such as taking breaks to prevent unnecessary situations that may cause students' more serious mental and state of mind. In relation to this, Gedik et al. (2012) conducted the study to elicit students' perceptions regarding blended course design's most facilitative and most challenging features. The results regarding the Blended Learning Environment (BLE) barriers revealed that the students complained that their workload became heavier than usual, enormously, that workload increased came along with the start of the project assignment. Furthermore, as their semester continues, they perceived the overall course load to be too heavy, and they viewed the BLE as causing significant time devotion.

The study conducted by Hinampas et al. (2018) used a quasi-experimental design in determining the students' academic achievement and practical skills in science laboratories through a blended learning approach. The research findings revealed that even though it is indicated that blended learning improves the practical skills of the students, it failed to enhance their academic achievement.

In another study conducted by De Guzman (2015), results indicated how the impact of blended learning in the expository writing skills of the students was negatively perceived by the latter. The research findings revealed the students' dissatisfaction with online tasks since even their teachers do not check their outputs online; hence, they find it unimportant. Also, they were having difficulties paying attention to their studies whenever they were using gadgets due to the temptation to access websites, applications, or programs that were not needed for their studies. In these reasons of dissatisfaction, the study of Mellar et al. (2018), was conducted to explore the higher education Teacher's perception of the prevalence and types of cheating that possibly occur in their courses. Using student authentication and authorship checking systems to address cheating and plagiarism, the result revealed that both face-to-face and online assessments recorded cheating in the form of plagiarism and ghostwriting, followed by copying notes from other students, and lastly is impersonation.

Regardless, some areas still showed positive regard for blended learning despite the undesirable issues linked to it. For instance, in the study of Bouilheres et al. (2020), the researchers focused on assessing the usefulness and effectiveness of blended learning in promoting interactions among the students and their peers, their teachers, and course materials. In order to gather the data needed for the study, sixty - six students exposed to blended learning were subjected to answer an online survey. The research findings proved that the blended-learning method on the students' learning experiences had beneficial effects in each of their classes. Moreover, its beneficial impact was described in the four dimensions of benefits: Engagement, Flexibility of Learning, Online Learning Experience, and Self Confidence, which were emphasized in the students' survey questions.

In addition, the study of Kavitha and Jaisingh (2019) tests the student's experiences in a blended learning environment. The researchers used undergraduate and postgraduate students who had been exposed to blended learning as a sample. The results concluded that the blended learning method had beneficial effects on the computer literate students, and most of them are indeed one. Thus, this conclusion was supported by the study of Hoar (2014) wherein the researcher suggested the need for undergraduate students to be technologically literate, hence, graduates must be able to use computers efficiently. Furthermore, with the advanced access of 21st-century students to technology, blended learning provides a positive experience to them regarding the availability of time management and discipline for self-learning.

The study of Shantakumari and Sajith (n.d) is a cross-sectional study that focused on determining the students' perceptions toward blended learning, which will be used to determine their satisfaction and the usefulness of the courses offered of their university. Through a total of 70 students who completed the questionnaire, the research findings showed that when it comes to the process, students find blended learning to be a less stressful and even more efficient method of learning compared to the traditional one. Given that blended learning offers various delivery methods, students perceive that offering the course in a blended-learning setup made their lessons easy to understand. The students also had a positive approach to online content, which they regard as easy to comprehend. Moreover, due to a flexible schedule offered by blended learning, they were able to meet their objectives in a desirable duration.

Furthermore, the study conducted by Gecer & Dag (2012) was based on the qualitative research model and centered on defining the students' perceptions of blending face-to-face and online learning in teaching

Computing II course. The researchers used a semi-structured survey conducted online to collect the data from freshmen students of mathematics and primary school education; wherein 67 voluntarily students completed the survey. The results revealed that combining technologies in teaching courses had positive effects on the students in terms of learning and evaluation perspectives. More importantly, it established active participation among students when it comes to their course, homework, and projects that were all done online. They find it interesting and useful.

The study of Inatry (2017) used a qualitative method to identify the feelings of the students toward a blended learning class. The researcher involved three sections: face-to-face (F2F) preference, blended preference, and converted preference. A total of seventy-two undergraduate female students in a federal university, UAE, served as the study sample. Each student was encouraged to write in a journal at least once a month. The researcher also reminded the students that even though its primary purpose was for the study, the journal is still about them. Meaning, they can add something outside the study; hence, they still have to input their feelings, thoughts, views, and reactions towards their blended learning experience. The research findings showed that many of the students still preferred a face-to-face method of teaching. However, most of them considered blended learning an enjoyable experience, that they even wanted to encourage their friends to enroll in the same course.

More than these positively regard statements of the students, blended learning's positive approach is also illustrated in their attitudes. For instance, the study of Bakeer (2018) focused on the attitude of the students regarding blended learning as a method of teaching English Language course. Sixty (60) undergraduate students were grouped into two, control and experimental, and compared their attitudes with each other. The study's result confirmed that students' attitudes regarding the unification of blended learning enhanced their language skills and motivation.

In the study of Aladwan (2018), students had a positive attitude towards blended learning and indicated that it was useful. The results also pointed out that the students find blended Learning more efficient than the traditional method when it comes to improving their knowledge and skills and their ability to take responsibility for their self-learning.

The study of Alsahi et al. (2019) conducted several ways of teaching science topics while assessing the students' attitude towards their use. A total of 112 students were divided into two groups, with 51 participants in the control group and 61 participants in the experimental group. The researchers gathered and compared the data of each group. The results showed that the experimental group's attitude toward blended learning was more favorable than the control group. This conclusion was based on their academic performance in a science subject, which was marked as pass.

2.4 Challenges Experienced in Blended Learning

Blended Learning offered opportunities for the uplifted access to knowledge, social interaction, richness and flexibility, cost efficiency, personal agency, and improved outcomes. However, the funders and the people and organizations or groups behind its implication have little awareness about the related challenges ahead (Gilmour, 2020). One of the critical problems is the literacy in using technology as not all digital resources are easy to use and reliable (Hunt, 2016). Also, Shraim and Khlaif (2010) found in their research that the failure of 72% of teachers and 75% of students in e-learning and blended learning are due to the inadequacy in skills and experiences to ICT based learning using computer and internet applications. Withal, it is essential to note that time management and computer literacy are pivotal and meaningful in the context of distance learning and online classes (Rovai, 2003). Also, Priscila (2020) said that workload in the early stage of blended learning is another problem, given that the process of switching to a new method when a learner is accustomed to the traditional approach is very complicated. Correspondingly, family responsibilities, and learners' hours of employment interfere with the learners' learning process (Cohen et al., 2012). In addition to that, Packham et al. (2004) observed that time conflict regarding family issues, management support, and employment status turned out to be a common factor why students fail and drop-out. Thus, esteem needs and personal worth would help them do their best to surpass this new curriculum's challenges (Tus, 2020).

Also, poor internet connection has to lead to frustrations and negative impacts on students' learning as it inhibits students' ability to engage in online discussions (Akpan, 2015). According to the Challenges of Blended Learning Models (2015), blended learning requires using a computer, tablet, or laptop that needs an internet connection. However, the implementation and maintenance of this program are expensive for everyone. Moreover, various countries still report a digital divide wherein, when considering the internet connection, several children do not have enough means to access the internet, especially those in the rural areas or areas with a high poverty rate (Barbour et al., n.d).

Another is pushing students to work independently using computers, but the problem is how to ensure that students really learned. Numerous computer-based projects permit the students to speed through the prerequisites without genuinely acing the substance or aptitudes they need to succeed (Barnett & Farrah, 2019). Also, Winstead (n.d) said that learners fall behind the course flow as of the use of lecture recording as the means of teaching. In an article entitled Disadvantages for Blended Learning (n.d), research was conducted across four different universities. The result showed that not all students put an effort to watch the video of their lessons or follow the right schedule of watching the videos sent to them. In fact, only half of the students watched the lecture videos regularly, and nearly 40% of students watched several videos in one sitting when, in reality, it must be done for several weeks. Furthermore, Kenney & Newcombe (2010) said that another challenge was getting students involved in the new format as some of the doubts and not used to

self-paced learning. So, to keep up and learn effectively, learning needs to seek conducive support from teachers and peers through email, chats, and face-to-face meetings (Lynch & Dembo, 2004).

2.5 Coping Mechanism

Although blended learning already emerged before this time, some students had only their first exposure to blended learning. Given the situation of some students still adjusting themselves to blended learning requirements, their ways of coping are necessary. Also, with the stressful events brought about by the new pace of learning that caused damaging effects on the student's physical and mental well-being, consequently, they need to acquire coping mechanisms to help them have control and succeed in education is needed (Nyatsanza & Mtezo, 2013). According to Hanifan (2020), a positive effect on mental health and improvement in anxiety and stress condition of the students is a result of introducing mindfulness, or relaxation, breathing, meditation, focus, and body awareness, to name a few of its essential elements, to the classroom. The researchers also mentioned how these strategies contribute to the students' self-esteem, social behavior, and academic performance. Rappaport & Thibodeau (2020) also added that teachers should guarantee that they are introducing their lessons while infusing joy into new routines for the students to enjoy the new structures of learning so that their strengths and competency to stand out will be emphasized. According to Miller (2012), teachers can employ unique projects where students see the significance and urge to do an activity. If students are hooked in playing games, instructors can use games as an instrument for the students to learn, whether online or offline.

Furthermore, according to Kaur (2013), the instructor needs to have technical skills, sufficient resources, and dedication to making their teaching-learning activity interactive. The teachers' dedication to teaching their students helps build an environment where students are less likely to hate studying. In support of this, Torres (2015) stated that to motivate students, it is crucial to encourage an environment where they will have more excellent credentials and accountability over their work. When a goal was achieved, they will feel a sense of accomplishment. Moreover, according to the study entitled *Blended Learning: Skills* (n.d), research suggested that students should have a habit of consistent and specific timetable deposited each week for their studies online in order to become an efficient online student. Moreover, in the literature review of Hesse (2017), the research showed that student engagement, student achievement, and positive perceptions of learning increased upon using blended learning. It eventually causes students to be able to develop an ability to self-pace and self-direct as a beneficial impact of using blended learning.

Likewise, for the students in general, an orderly, structured routine schedules and encouraging environment at home such as the time plot for academics, leisure, working on projects, and family meetings can help calm the brain as it works better if the environment is well-organized (Gonser, 2020). Thus, to make the students' engagement in blended learning successful, the process must begin with the effort exerted by the people necessary, such as teachers and students. In addition, to encourage students in learning, social media platforms, and other online services must employ. Kumar (2013) states that it increases the cooperation of students in learning. This kind of learning is viewed to be a distinct and amenable strategy where learners have chances to review a certain topic or interact with others. However, interacting with other students was the feature missing from the student's new learning modality. Thus, Croft et al. (2015) noted the importance of obtaining various outlooks and experiences to help students learn, as one student participant in their study said it is challenging to learn on your own.

3. METHODOLOGY

The current study is qualitative research. With this, the researchers identified and described the implications of blended learning to junior high school students' lived experiences amidst pandemic. According to Teherani et al. (2015), qualitative research is used to understand the underlying inquiries of social phenomena in natural settings. Such phenomena include how people experience aspects of their lives, how they behave and function, and how their interactions with other people help foster a social relationship.

Likewise, the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used. This qualitative research approach provided researchers the most selected opportunity to understand the innermost reflection of research participants' lived experiences. According to Alase (2017), IPA presents the research participants a chance to tell their story without distortion or prosecution. Significantly, it allows them to express themselves in a manner that is fitted to the context.

The researchers decided to utilize the IPA approach to emphasize the study's primary objective, which is to identify the implications of blended learning to the junior high school student's lived experiences amidst pandemic.

As such, the method is phenomenological for the study dealt with the experience of self. Through this, the researchers were able to investigate the underlying concern of the current study by describing and interpreting the participants' lived experiences based on their own perspectives.

3.1 Participants

IPA studies were conducted on small sample size, thus giving precise analyses of the respondent's personal lived experience. It is explicit in its engagement in analyzing every case's experiences, precedes to turn into general claims (Osborn & Smith, 2015). Each transcript interview underwent a case-to-case review thoroughly.

The study participants were Junior High School students. These respondents were classified through blended learning as their learning modality and are currently studying in Bulacan in school year 2020-2021.

Due to COVID-19, schools decided to redesign their system, which leads to blended learning, becoming the new normal (Ferlazzo, 2020). With this, the researcher selected ten (10) respondents from the community engaged in blended learning amidst pandemic, using a purposive sampling technique.

3.2 Instrument

The researchers conducted an in-depth interview to explore the authentic experiences of the participants. An interview guide is a memory aid that contains interview items that the interviewer plan to cover (Magnusson & Marecek 2015). The researcher created an interview guide to ensure that every topic will be covered in order to gather the information necessary for the study. In gathering the data, all of the responses collected were considered respectively and validated according to the research problem. After the tool's verification, revision, and modification followed before interviewing with the ten respondents of this research.

3.3 Procedures

Various procedures were done in accordance with the fulfillment of the data needed for the study. The researchers have personally asked the selected students in Bulacan to participate in the study as the respondents. The process was done respectfully and without force. Before giving the informed oral consent to the selected students, the researchers told them about the procedure of data collection, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Upon approval of the request, the interview was conducted. The interview process was held in privacy to ensure confidentiality. It was done through either google meet or zoom, whichever the respondents prefer. The method was utilized considering that the study was done during the global pandemic, hence meeting personally is prohibited.

Moreover, the interview process was done one by one to give the respondents privacy and ensure that they could comfortably answer the questions and tell their stories. Hence, alteration of their related stories regarding their lived experiences in blended learning amidst pandemic will be avoided. The questions were asked verbally. The interview was recorded with the approval of the respondents and done using their language. The recorded interview was encoded, and the text was interpreted thoroughly to obtain the necessary data based on the participant's perspectives. This process enables the researchers to collect the junior high school students' lived experiences in blended learning amidst pandemic.

4. RESULTS

After the intricate procedure of gathering the data on the respondents' lived experiences in blended learning amidst pandemic, the summarized responses are presented.

The method is phenomenological, aiming to describe, understand, and interpret the meanings of human life experiences (Bloor & Wood, 2006). Considering that the study dealt with the knowledge of self, the researchers were able to investigate the underlying concern of the current research by describing and interpreting the participants' lived experiences based on the latter's own perspectives.

4.1 Positive Experiences

This theme discusses the desirable aspect of blended learning that the respondents had experienced. Most of the selected junior high school students shared how blended learning positively affects them, as indicated in their lived experiences with it amidst pandemic. Table 1 presented the significant themes under positive experiences, which includes: self – reliance, self – directed learning, and personal growth.

Table 1. Positive Experiences Themes

Positive Experiences	Frequency
Self – reliance	8
Self – directed learning	7
Personal Growth	5

4.1.1 Self – reliance

Most of the respondents said that blended learning taught them to be independent in their studies and rely on their own understanding in the lesson. They added that blended learning helped them build their confidence to rely on their ability and resources than seek it for others. Student no. 10 shared her own experiences wherein she said:

"... kapag sa module ikaw ang magbabasa mismo e, walang mageexplain sa'yo, depende kapag hindi busy 'yung magulang gan'on, matutulungan ka... 'yun."

She further explained that she felt happy with the opportunity given to her as it gave her the chance to prove that she is also capable of studying and rely on her own resources. Likewise, Student No. 3 shared the same sentiment:

"Natuto po akong umitindi mag-isa, yung para pong kaya ko na pong aralin yung buong topic ng mag-isa lang po gamit po yung google. Mas okay na po yun kaysa mag-tanong."

These data supported the study of Aladwan (2018) wherein a total of 250 students who have taken blended courses were chosen as a sample to answer an online questionnaire that contains topic such as the knowledge and attitude toward blended learning. The results pointed out that the students find blended learning more efficient than the traditional method when it comes to improving their knowledge and skills and their ability to take responsibility for their self-learning.

4.1.2 Self – directed learning

Another common theme that emerged was the report of the developed self – directed learning. For the respondents, what they like about blended learning is that it allows them to control their studies. Specifically, it enables them to study their lessons whenever they want to or answer their activities at their most convenient time. According to Student no. 9:

“yung pinaka nadadalian yung kahit anytime pwede kong sagutan yung modules kasi nag bigay sila nang two weeks para sagutan yung modules wala silang sinabi na kaylangan pag ganto tapos na yung module”

Likewise, student no. 6 said:

“Medyo nadadalian ako sa oras... sa oras ganon kasi hawak ko 'yung oras ko kung kailan ko gustong magsagot”

Hence, these experiences supported Shantakumari & Sajith (n.d) study wherein a total of 70 students were selected to complete the questionnaire. The research findings showed that students find blended learning to be a less stressful and even more efficient method of learning compared to the traditional one when it comes to the process. Significantly, due to a flexible schedule offered by blended learning, they were able to meet their objectives in a desirable duration.

4.1.3 Personal Growth

For the participants, blended learning has brought them better realizations on their education. Implementing blended learning as 'new normal' in the educational system significantly taught them to be persistent and strive harder in their studies no matter how challenging the situation is due to the pandemic.

Student no. 8 shared:

“...parang mas nagiging matiyaga akong mag-aral kasi dito kailangan mo din talagang hikayatin yung sarili mo or tulungan yung sarili mo pagdating sa pag-aaral sa mga lesson mo kasi wala ka naman nang ibang aasahan kung hindi yung sarili mo”

She added that this opportunity made her realize that she can get serious when it comes to studying. Likewise, Student no. 1 shared the same sentiments:

“...siguro kung ano lang 'yung mga naituturo noon sa mga... sa akin bilang estudyante ay yung mas nagiging doble yung pagpursigi ko sa pag-aaral kasi nga mas mahirap 'yung sitwasyon ngayon”

These findings supported the study conducted by Ward (2019). This is an action research that further studies the impact of blended learning on student motivation and engagement. The researcher chose two heterogeneous classes of fifth-grade students as the participants. The findings revealed that the experimental class was more engaged and motivated to achieve more excellent knowledge of social studies. Additionally, the results showed that they also reported higher post-test scores or more remarkable academic growth in fifth-grade social studies.

4.2 Negative Experiences

This theme discusses the problematic aspect of blended learning that they experienced. Although the purpose of implementing blended learning is to continue education regardless of the hardship brought by the pandemic, the road of involving digitalization in education and lack of presence of the necessary person like teachers and classmates has not been easy, nonetheless. Amid the positive approach of blended learning in some students in the Philippines, difficulties emerging in technology are still an issue in some areas. Listed in Table 2 are the subordinate themes found within the interviews, which include: difficulties in actual engagement, delayed-priorities, conflict in workload and submission, and academic dishonesty.

Table 2. Negative Experiences themes

Challenges	Frequency
Difficulties in Actual Engagement	10
Delayed - priorities	8
Conflict in Workload and Submission	5
Academic Dishonesty	4

4.2.1 Difficulties in Actual Engagement

Most of the respondents emphasized their difficulties in actually engaging themselves during online discussions and self – studying their modules. The majority said they were having a hard time adjusting due to the sudden change of learning mode. According to Student no. 3:

“Mahirap yung sa live stream kami eh di naman kasi... di naman kami ganun dati. Tapos hindi po masiyadong naiintindihan yung itinituro kapag po duon sa live stream. Kasi po hindi naman po kasi kami makakapagtanong dun.”

She explained that she had a hard time understanding their discussion through live streaming. However, she cannot ask questions to their teachers because she thought interrupting their teachers while discussing is not right. Moreover, when it comes to self – studying, Student no. 8 said:

“Sa karanasan ko, mas hindi ako natututo kasi mas maganda pa rin talaga ‘yung mas... mas naeexplain ng mga teacher yung lesson na kailangan naming aralin, kesa sa sarili lang namin na hindi namin... hindi ko sure kung habang inaaral ko yung modules namin tama ba ‘yung inaaral ko o tama ba ‘yung pagkakaintindi ko dun sa lesson.”

These findings contradicted the study conducted by Rabacal (2018), which aims to identify the impact of blended learning in graduate students' academic performance. The results showed that blended learning took part in enhancing both the viability and productivity of significant learning outcomes.

4.2.2 Delayed – priorities

Most likely, the settings of blended learning took place at home. Thus, the freedom of the students often out of control and usually caused them to devalue their studies. According to Student no. 9:

“yung pag set po nang sched kase po lagi po akong nag cecellphone mahirap pong kontrolin yun kasi na po-procastinate ako dun sa mga ginagawa kong modules kaya mas lalo akong natatagal bago ko sagutan yung modules”

Student no. 1 also shared the same thought:

“Yung ano po... yung iba po kase hindi nag bubukas nang modules nag cecellphone nalang or kung ano-ano ng ginagawa”

These results supported the study conducted by De Guzman (2015) wherein the results indicated how the impact of blended learning in the students' expository writing skills was negatively perceived by the latter. The research findings revealed the students' dissatisfaction with online tasks and added that they were having difficulties paying attention to their studies whenever they were using gadgets due to the temptation to access websites, applications, or programs that were not needed for their studies

4.2.3 Conflict in Workload and Submission

Most of the participants shared their experiences regarding the conflict in workload and submission. According to them, blended learning provided a one-click-away system, making it easier for their teachers to give them activities even at the last minute. They added that they have many subjects also, and all those subjects have related activities and homework to be passed in a limited time. Specifically, Student no. 3 said:

“Minsan po napupuyat, kasi po minsan bigla pong magpapasahan eh marami po kasi kaming inaaral kada subject, hindi pa po namin masiyadong naiintindihan kaya isa isa po naming inaaral tapos mabilis pa po yung deadline, ganun po.”

Moreover, there were times when their teachers suddenly asked them to pass their activity, which caused them to felt rushed. Specifically, Student no. 4 said:

“Sa ano po... nara-rush po. Minsan po kasi ano late na po sila nagsasabi.”

These findings supported the study conducted by Gedik et al. (2012), which was undertaken to elicit students' perceptions regarding blended course design's most facilitative and most challenging features. The results regarding the Blended Learning Environment (BLE) barriers revealed that the students complained that their workload became heavier than usual, enormously, that workload increased came along with the start of the project assignment. Moreover, as their semester continues, they perceived the overall course load to be too heavy, and they viewed the BLE as causing significant time devotion.

4.2.4 Academic Dishonesty

Another common theme that emerged is the academic dishonesty. Few stories were shared related to this topic, and students identified possible reasons why. According to Student no. 8:

“halos ano po walang natututunan yung mga estudyante ayun po. Wala na masiyadong naiintindihan minsan yung ibang estudyante kaya puro kopya nalang hindi na sila nag sisikap”

Further, Student no. 5 shared her own experience. She said:

“Mas madali akong nakaka kopya kapag blended learning. Kapag on the spot po ayoko nakokonsensya ako”

She added that internet made it much easier for her, indicating that she can search whenever she wanted to so there's really no need for her to study harder. These experiences supported the study of Mellar et al. (2018). This study was conducted to explore the higher education Teacher's perception of the prevalence and types of cheating that possibly occur in their courses. Using student authentication and authorship checking systems to address cheating and plagiarism, the result revealed that, in both face-to-face and inline assessment, the most common categories of cheating were plagiarism and ghostwriting, followed by copying notes from other students, and lastly is impersonation.

4.3 Challenges

This subordinate theme discusses the risks and difficulties that blended learning had brought them. Listed in Table 3 are the subordinate themes found within the interviews: adapting contents/lessons for blended learning, lack of resources, technological issues, self-conflict, conflict in setting priorities, conflict with communication, and weakened relationship.

Table 3. Challenges themes

Challenges	Frequency
Adapting contents/lessons for blended learning	10
Lack of resources	8
Technological issues	7
Conflict in setting priorities	5
Weakened relationship	4

4.3.1 Adapting contents/lessons for blended learning

Teaching and learning in the new normal are different from traditional learning. The shift of environment and platform are unfamiliar and, most significantly, the new pace of learning is unprecedented. Adapting contents or lessons for blended learning had brought difficulties, especially for students, given that not all students are fast learners. This is reflected in Student no. 6's statement below:

“Yun nga. Nahihirapan akong sumabay sa lesson minsan kasi mabilis magturo 'yung teacher”

Further, she said:

“...kasi 'di ko alam kung paano sasagutan yung mga activity namin kapag 'di ko maintindihan yung lesson kaya tingin ko nga mababa grades ko ngayon.”

Student no. 8 had the same worries. She said:

“...hindi ko naman kasi talaga naintindihan, kunyari nagfespace—nagvivirtual learning, hindi ko naintindihan, hindi ako nakakasali, hindi ko masasagutan 'yung mga module, d'un talaga.”

These data were supported by Winstead (n.d) in his article in which he stated that learners fall behind the course flow as of the use of lecture recording as the means of teaching. In addition to this, Kenney & Newcombe (2010) added that getting students involved in the new format as some of them doubts and not used to self-paced learning is also one of the significant challenges.

4.3.2 Lack of resources

Few of the requirements to experience smooth virtual communication, especially in blended learning, are technologies, gadgets, and stable internet connection. Another common theme that emerged is the lack of resources needed for blended learning. According to the respondents who identified themselves as less-fortunate, blended learning is challenging but providing necessary materials to cope with it is much more challenging. According to Student no. 9:

“Para sa akin po yung tingin ko po yung blended learning para sa ibang tao lang yon. Parang for other people okay lang yon dahil meron silang enough na materials sa bahay para maintindihan yung lessons pero para po sa amin, sa iba hindi siya effective”

She explained that blended learning could not consider the situation of all students, especially on the availability of the materials needed to understand complex subjects. She added:

“Marami po akong nakausap na blended learning yung sytem nila at nag cocomplain po sila na hindi talaga nila kaya lalo na po sa math, science, physics ganon puro computations puro formula ganon”

Student no. 8 shared the same thoughts:

“Sa internet connection kasi minsan imbis na pangkain na lang namin, pinangloload ko. Nagagalit si mama pero wala naman kaming magagawa, kailangan talagang gawin yon kasi... kailangan mong gawin yon para sa pag-aaral mo.”

Challenges of Blended Learning Models (2015) supported these data stating that blended learning requires a prerequisite to use a computer, tablet, or laptop that needs an internet connection. Moreover, Barbour et al. (n.d) added that various countries still report a digital divide wherein, when considering the internet connection, several children do not have enough means to access the internet, especially those in the rural areas or areas with a high poverty rate.

4.3.3 Technological issues

The use of technology is quite a trend today, however, not everyone have access and literate. And since the country where the participants live in can barely afford things such as education regarding technologies and most especially stable internet connection, it is not surprising that students will experience challenges in blended learning. Student no. 8 was asked regarding the problems she faced as a student, and she answered the following emphasizing her struggles with internet connection:

“Doon talaga sa ano... sa internet, kasi 'yun talaga 'yung kailangan na kailangan mo e, para dito sa style ng 'pag... ng pag-aaral natin ngayon. D'un talaga 'ko nahihirapan.”

Correspondingly, also pertaining to the slow internet connection, Student no. 10 added:
"Ayon minsan hindi nakakaabot ganon kasi mabagal magloading hindi agad nakakapasok sa zoom ganon, sa google meet."

One of the technological issues discussed by participants is the illiteracy in terms of using the technology or gadgets. Student no. 6 said that there were times when she wasn't able to participate on their discussion because of the slow internet connection, lack of materials needed, and incompetency of using gadget. Specifically, she stated:
"Wala naman kasi kaming laptop at wifi tsaka hindi rin ako ganon kagaling sa cellphone."

These data supported the study of Hunt (2016) wherein he pointed out that one of the critical problems is the literacy in using technology as not all digital resources are easy to use and reliable. Moreover, poor internet connection has to lead to frustrations and negative impacts on students' learning as it inhibits students' ability to engage in online discussions (Akpan, 2015).

4.3.4 Conflicts in setting priorities

The shift of the environment and surroundings from teachers and classmates to family and neighborhood was sudden and unpredicted. This rapid change also carried different and much more loaded responsibilities. Considering that both personal and school duties brought conflict in setting priorities that later on affected the student's academic performances. Student no. 8 shared a similar experience, as she expressed:

"...kasi parang 'yung isip mo nahahati kung ano ba 'yung una mong kailangan gawin, 'yung problema mo ba sa bahay o 'yung una mong uunahin 'yung pag-aaral mo, 'yung kailangan mong sagutan tapos 'yung deadline malapit na e hindi mo nga naintindihan 'yung lesson kaya parang 'yung... 'yung attention mo nahahati. Attention ko nahahati."

Student no. 6 shared the same hardships as she said:
"Mahirap pagsabayin 'yung pag-aaral at gawain sa bahay..."

These challenges supported the study of Cohen et. al (2012) wherein they proved that family responsibilities, and learners' hours of employment interfere with the learners' learning process. In addition to that, Packham et al. (2004) observed that time conflict regarding family issues, management support, and employment status turned out to be a common factor why students fail and drop-out.

4.3.5 Weakened relationship

The pandemic brought everyone apart. The only way that people use to communicate is through social media and other virtual platforms. Although, the only problem in this type of communication is that there is little to no assurance that there will be constant relationships and communications among them, which can severely affect the students' performance, especially if they try to reach out their instructors for the lessons they do not understand. This can be observed in Student no. 10's statement below:

"Mahirap. Kasi 'yung teacher mo hindi mo gaanong naaapproach. Kapag meron kang tanong hindi mo agad maitatanong, mag-aabang ka pa ng... kung kailan siya free kasi busy din 'yon. Tapos... mahirap mag self-study kaya wala ka talagang matututunan"

Student no. 5 added that a relationship with friends is essential, especially at this time. She added that to study through blended learning, they can be of help when a topic became confusing. Specifically, she stated:

"...kailangan mo talaga ng kaibigan kahit hindi mo naman kaklase kahit kaibigan mo lang kasi mahirap ngayon eh."

Lynch & Dembo (2004) supported these findings. In the study they conducted, they stated that to keep up and learn effectively, learners needed to seek conducive support from teachers and peers through email, chats, and face-to-face meetings.

4.4 Coping Mechanism/ Strategies

This theme presented selected Junior Highschool students' strategies on how they cope with their new learning modality of blended learning. Table 4 below shows the subordinate themes observed in the interview, which include: seeking social support, planful problem solving, self-study, and seeking technological aid.

Table 4. Coping mechanism/Strategies themes

Coping Mechanism/Strategies	Frequency
Seeking Social Support	9
Planful Problem Solving	5
Self-Study	4
Seeking Technological Aid	4

4.4.1 Seeking Social Support

Most of the respondents cope with seeking social support in terms of learning. It is stated that interacting with other students was the feature missing from the students' new learning modality. The following findings gave importance to having someone to communicate with in blended learning in a time of the pandemic. Corresponding to Student no. 8's statement:

"Medyo mahirap talaga makisabay, buti na lang may mga kaklase ako ngayon na kaibigan ko na talaga dati pa kaya kahit papano nagtutulungan kami para masagutan or maintindihan namin yung mga lesson na pinag-aaralan namin."

Related to Student number 3's assertion:

"Mas natuto po ako ng may katulong na iba."

She added:

"Kasi mas naiintindihan ko po. Kasi po kapag ako lang mahirap po intindihin. Hindi ko talaga kakayanin"

These findings supported Croft et al. (2015) study, which gives the importance of obtaining various outlooks and experiences to help students' learning. Based on the result in student experiences, one student said it is hard to motivate oneself to study conceptual stuff when you are on your own and suggested that arguing or debating would have made it easier. Additionally, it is indicated that the strength of discussing ideas with fellow students was a necessary factor that may be missing in online learning.

4.4.2 Planful Problem Solving

Half of the respondents answered that a planful problem-solving strategy developed through planning and analysis, such as having a schedule or making tactics, helped them maximize their time to understand their lesson fully. Student no. 9 stated:

"yung sa positive po yung nakakayanan kong gumawa ng sariling sched kung kelan ko gustong pag-aralan yung isang subject lalo na yung sa math kunware nag-aalot ako nang time para pag-aralan yon hindi katulad nung sa tradional na araw araw pinag-aaralan yon na medyo nakaka-loka yung ganon ..."

Student no. 6 also shared her application of this strategy. She stated:

"Nagsasagot po ako pag-ano pag-tapos ko na po gawin yung mga gawaing-bahay. Less-distraction po kasi kapag...kapag-ganun."

Correlated to the study entitled Blended Learning: Skills (n.d), research suggested that students should have a habit of consistent and specific timetable deposited each week for their studies online to become an efficient online student. Likewise, for the students in general, an orderly, structured routine schedules and encouraging environment at home such as the time plot for academics, leisure, working on projects, and family meetings can help calm the brain as it works better if the environment is well-organized (Gonser, 2020). Thus, to make the students' engagement in blended learning successful, the process must begin with the effort exerted by the people necessary, such as teachers and students.

4.4.3 Self-Study

In the literature review of Hesse (2017), the research showed that student engagement, student achievement, and positive perceptions of learning increased upon using blended learning. It eventually causes students to develop an ability to self-pace and self-direct as a beneficial impact of using blended learning. Reflected in the Student no. 3 statement:

"Ah... okay naman po, ano naman po minsan nagse-search po ako sa google, dun na lang po ako minsan kumukuha ng sagot kapag hindi ko po masiyadong naiintindihan yung tinuturo po sa amin. Dun po ako nagre-research ng topic namin tapos po pinag-aaralan ko na lang po mag-isa."

Corresponding to Student no. 10 statement:

"Ano, uhm... ayon kahit papa'no may natututunan naman kaso kailangan mo lang mag-ano, mag-self study gan'on, lalo na 'pag mahirap 'yung topic."

4.4.4 Seeking Technological Aid

To encourage students in learning, social media platforms and other online services must employ. The availability of these materials would help increase the cooperation of students in learning (Kumar, 2013). This kind of learning is also viewed as a distinct and amenable strategy where learners can review a particular topic or interact with others. Reflected Student no. 2's statement:

"Mas mahirap po, kasi minsan po sa mga copy po na ibinibigay nila wala po dun yung—kunwari po may sasagutan ka sa module tapos wala po dun yung kung paano mo makukuha yung sagot, kailangan mo pa po mag-search tungkol duon ganun. May mga QR code po na nakalagay na kailangan pa din po ng internet"

Similar to the statement of Student no. 1:

“Uhhh para sa akin pag nanonood po ako sa youtube. Kapag po hindi ko na talaga maintindihan tapos wala...walang magtuturo dun po kami nag-sesearch”

4.5 Grounded Theory from the Findings

Based on the results, Junior High School students lived experiences in the implication of blended learning amidst pandemic is a balancing act; students experience both advantageous and challenging circumstances at the same time. The blended learning system enables students to have a sense of independence, confidence, and self-growth that allowed them to study almost just by themselves, to be persistent, and strive harder in their studies no matter how challenging the situation is. Despite having factors that potentially made students grow better, there were also trials and unfavorable factors that led them to encounter difficulty studying. These factors include problems with overall understanding of the lesson and participation in classes, weakened relationships and communication, and struggles with technology. However, these can be avoided or at least lessen the difficulty through coping mechanisms like seeking social support from friends and classmates to catch up to lessons, planful problem solving that comprises techniques and tactics in studying, self-study, and seeking technological support to better understand confusing topics. These coping mechanisms helped students adapt effectively to the new pace of learning, which helped them become fruitful and efficient. However, the students still felt dissatisfied with the blended learning due to the several difficulties it brought. Thus, based on the findings, the researchers concluded that blended learning has undesirable implications to junior high school students' lived experiences amidst pandemic, indicating that the traditional school system is still highly-preferred.

5. DISCUSSION

A sudden change from traditional learning to blended learning as the 'new normal' for learning-teaching modality brought by the pandemic has never been easy, according to the respondents. Although some of them were able to receive support from their parents, other difficulties still emerged. For the students who identified themselves as financially incapable, it became much harder for them to deal with different challenges besides this. Thus, they resorted to adjustments needed to cope with these challenges brought by the sudden changes.

All of the respondents had diverse lived experiences on their engagement in blended learning amidst pandemic. On the positive side, blended learning allowed them to do things beyond their capabilities, such as relying on their own understanding of the lesson, comfortably making decisions for their studies, such as when they want to do their homework or decide what to prioritize first, and to be motivated.

Regardless, several unpleasant experiences still occurred. One that took place is the student's actual engagement in the process of blended learning. Most students had a hard time actually engaging themselves in the process, such as online discussion and self-studying. According to them, there were moments while self-studying that they questioned themselves if how they understood the lesson is accurate. Moreover, due to better access to phones and other gadgets, students were most likely to procrastinate. They tend to prioritize their devices first before their studies. In terms of workload and submission, students had a hard time complying. According to them, they had a lot of subjects, and each of those has respected activities and worksheets to be answered and passed within a week or two. Because of this, it is either they will spend answering those until morning or have a late submission. Another case that happened is academic dishonesty. According to the respondents, not being able to fully understand their lesson due to several instances was primarily the reason they did so.

In terms of the challenges, most students still find learning harder without the presence of their teachers. One of the significant concerns of the students is adapting their lessons. According to them, they had a hard time understanding their classes as well as relying on their knowledge from self-studying when answering worksheets. The availability of resources like internet connection also negatively affected the experiences of the students. They added that during the discussion in an online meet, however, factors such as internet connection and refuse to ask questions in teachers had a similar outcome. Because of this, they spend longer time studying the lesson. For some students, setting priorities and the weakened relationship was also a problem. These occurrences made the student's coping mechanisms played an essential role in helping them get through all the difficulties. Most of the students said that seeking support from their friends helped them cope with the hardships of blended learning; some created plans or schedules and relied on themselves; while others noted that technology also helped them with their studies. These coping mechanisms made them capable of facing the struggles of blended learning and continue their studies amidst pandemic. However, the students still felt dissatisfied with the blended learning due to the several difficulties it brought.

6. CONCLUSION

The study's scientific findings determined the following conclusions: (1) Blended learning implications are mostly negative, especially to the lived experiences of Junior High School students amidst pandemic. (2) Junior High School students are most challenged in adopting a lesson and lacking resources. Due to the sudden changes, they resorted to adjustments, but conflicts such as not having enough sources necessary for blended learning requirements still emerged. (3) Most Junior High School students need to seek social support to cope with blended learning amidst pandemic.

Furthermore, the researcher recommends government and private institutions to implement better education orderliness and assistance. It will help students effectively adapt to the environment of blended

learning and provide the necessary requirements needed through the assistance given. Teachers must strengthen student-to-teacher communication to avoid weakening the relationship primarily stabilized in school. Parents need to support their children's school performance. This may help the student to easily cope with the new environment given by blended learning. Lastly, the students must exert effort to understand the current situation. Indeed, studying amidst pandemic is hard, however, looking beyond the difficulties and focusing on the opportunities and personal growth it brought is better. Thus, future researchers can employ these scientific findings particularly in the lived experiences of Junior High School students in blended learning.

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