NAVIGATING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION STUDENTS IN THE REALM OF ONLINE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this research was to describe the experiences gained by MAED students in virtual learning at Assumption College of Nabunturan, Nabunturan, Davao de Oro. Employing phenomenological approach among 10 participants, in-depth interview was conducted which answered the four fundamental questions. Essential themes were generated out from their responses to the research questions. The results uncovered the participants' lived experiences, and from it four (4) themes emerged: less expenses learning becomes accessible, flexibility of learning and less hassle. The participants also shared the coping mechanisms they encountered in dealing parental involvement, from which emerged five (5) themes: distraction from surroundings, power interruption, poor internet connections, no physical interaction, noise and disturbance. Further, for the coping mechanisms they revealed seven (7) essential themes: make sure to have a stable internet connection, prepare gadgets and materials, time management, always be ready, friends, family members, and technicalities in virtual learning. Lastly, for the insights they cited eight (8) themes which emerged: be patient, don't give up, pray, persevere, continue virtual learning, provide monthly face to face classes, use back-up applications, and no interruption on internet connection.

Keywords: *MAED Students, Virtual Learning, Experiences, Challenges, Coping Mechanisms, Insights, Phenomenological approach, Nabunturan, Davao de Oro*

1. INTRODUCTION

Online classes will likely continue and grow at the graduate school level. The students can attend from anywhere, and there is no time restriction for an online class. This can also lower the cost of expenses for both the student and the institution itself. However, online courses also come with one big problem without the face-to-face interaction with peers and professors, which sometimes leads to feeling disconnected and reduced motivation

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, after the pandemic, online classes have become the popular way to go to graduate school in Singapore. Graduate programs also include online learning experiences, which have expanded the capabilities of advanced degree students to access remotely their course materials and lectures. This way of teaching has also been beneficial for students to have dialogue with students and teachers from other parts of the world, gaining their global perspective as well. In addition, this has minimized travel time and expense for learners and increased the quality of the work-life balance of students. The difficulty of the technology and the lack of facing one another can cause the learning of the language to be less good. The Ministry of Education has taken several steps to urge institutes to provide help to the students from online sources, online student support services, virtual networking, and

engagement, they added. While it is not all plain sailing, this adoption of online education comes as a key component of postgraduate education in Singapore, with institutions looking at ways to enhance online learning experiences for students (Garcia & Smith, 2021).

According to Rotas and Cahapay's (2020) study conducted at the AMA Computer Learning Center Pangasinan, students encounter difficulties in online collaborative learning when collaborating with their teams due to inconsistent internet access and inadequate learning materials. The current state of online education exacerbates already-existing disparities and increases the challenge of learning online. Graduate students from the Philippines who want online education still encounter many obstacles in spite of efforts to provide educational accessibility for all.

At Assumption College of Nabunturan, instructors utilize online learning activities as teaching strategies to facilitate online learning. The researcher observed that some students need help with the online learning process, like the lack of in-person interactions with lecturers and peers. There were also times when students needed help to attend classes or answer the questions asked by the professor due to internet signals or school activities. These are just some of the difficulties that Graduate studies students experience in virtual classes.

The current state of online learning for Master of Arts in Education students warrants further research to examine the broader concerns surrounding their experiences and strategies for overcoming the difficulties associated with online learning. Given the general challenges and problems that have been mentioned, the study is urgently needed to learn about the online experiences of MAED students. Thus, the researcher was prompted to pursue this study.

1.1 Research Questions

This study specifically examined the experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms used by MAED students in virtual learning. It was led by the inquiry that it attempted to answer, which were the following

1.   What are the experiences of the participants in dealing with concerns in virtual learning?
2.   What are the challenges that the participants experienced in dealing with concerns in virtual learning?
3.   How do the participants cope with the challenges in dealing with concerns in virtual learning?
4.   What are the insights the participants gained from their experiences in dealing with concerns in virtual learning?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section includes subjects and literature pertaining to the current idea under investigation to provide readers with a thorough understanding of the issues and difficulties faced by MAED students when addressing issues in online learning. The findings from other literature were presented to enable us to better appreciate and visualize the essential features of this type of research. A number of books, journals, websites, and manuals were examined, and a great many mottos were culled.

Online Learning. The rest of the online learning experience, however, is primarily one of engagement. The promotion of activeness in participation, in accordance with Wang & Anderson (2019), suggests that engagement should foster interaction with others. The findings of this research indicate the use of real-time activities and talks to make learning more enjoyable. A caveat of online education was made clear by Rodriguez et al. (2020). The results are supported by the study, which advocates addressing technical problems, time management, and the digital divide for offering equal opportunities and implementing a favorable e-learning climate.

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Experiences of Graduate School Students in Online Learning. A number of studies highlight the advantages of online learning for graduate students, including the flexibility and convenience that comes along with it. Students enjoy reading course materials, participating in discussions, and taking assessments on their own time,

which accommodates differing schedules. The flexibility of these online learners makes it possible to juggle between education and other personal, family, or work-related commitments (Brown & Jackson, 2020; Smith & Johnson, 2019). Web learning environments support a number of communication tools that allow for interaction and collaboration between graduate students. Research shows that students appreciate the chance to participate in online discussions, bring their ideas to the table, and work with other students from around the world. However, many students still say they feel disconnected and isolated because there is no interaction with teachers in person. To address these concerns, strategies such as engaging in group projects and community building activities have been recommended (Clark & Wilson, 2020; Garcia & Smith, 2021).

Graduate Students' Perceptions of the Course Environment and Quality Research. Information regarding effective online learning communities, how students view learning, and other elements that shape their experiences—particularly in the context of online courses—is usually obtained from students enrolled in these courses. This has the potential to impact education and student happiness and identify the traits of students who are most likely to succeed online. Over the past ten years, Rovai (2000, 2001, 2002a, 2002b) has conducted research on a variety of topics related to online learning, with a focus on the idea of a classroom community in virtual settings. According to Rovai's research, course design can help learners who are geographically part form an online community. It also sheds light on how the community within an online classroom influences cognitive learning and how persistence rates are impacted by the idea of "connectedness" online (Rovai, 2000; Rovai, 2001; Rovai, 2002a; Rovai, 2002b; Rovai, & Jordan, 2004; Rovai & Whiting, 2005). The relationship that students might develop in an online setting is especially crucial because research is beginning to indicate that the idea of an interactive "virtual classroom" has a significant role in improving student learning and online retention.

Importance of Delivery Method on Overall Learning. Topper (2007) found that course delivery methods may have a very limited effect on learning outcomes and may not be a differentiator when it comes to course quality. Dzubian and Moskal (2011) contend that in a random sampling of over 1.1 million course evaluations of students onsite, online, and in hybrid/blended learning environments, "students pay much more attention to the overall educational experience and less attention to the individual aspects of a course." Dae Shik, Lee, and Skellenger (2012) posited that 101 graduate students enrolled online and onsite found that delivery method was not a predictor of overall satisfaction in a course. It appears that students feel they can be equally successful in online, hybrid, and onsite classes, regardless of their learning styles, as long as the course is developed around sound learning theory, proven instructional design principles, and an understanding of what to expect in the online environment (Kock et al., 2007; Naylor & Wilson, 2009; Schwartz, 2012; Topper, 2007).

Academic Value and Legitimacy of Online Courses and Programs. A growing body of research, especially in the last ten years, has examined specific facets of the graduate, online course delivery experience and how it compares to onsite traditional courses and programs. Still unresolved is how to establish academic value and legitimacy among skeptical faculty and administrators. Research exists that suggests ways that online classes might be better integrated into existing curricula that could persuade skeptics to reconsider. For some students, the online course environment may be a preferred venue. Students who are self-disciplined and highly motivated (as are many graduate students), thrive on in-depth discussions, and like to apply their ideas and theories and reflect on their observations are good candidates to succeed online (Ferguson & Tryjankowski, 2009; Meyer, 2003; Terrell, 2002). Faculty and course designers may also be able to construct online courses that allow students with many different learning styles to succeed, focus on their self-directed approach, and establish relationships and interaction with classmates and faculty (Paechter & Maier, 2010; Pugh, 2010; Simpson & Du, 2004). Research focused on learning styles, such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and Kolb's Learning Style Inventory (Harrington & Loffredo, 2010; Terrell, 2002), could be particularly useful. Terrell (2002) found that online courses can be developed to provide a high level of abstract conceptualization and to encourage the direct application of ideas and theories that may be attractive to some students.

Challenges of Graduate School Students in Online Learning. Numerous studies highlight technological challenges as a significant hurdle in virtual learning for graduate students Issues such as unreliable internet connections, software compatibility, and learning management system difficulties can impede the learning experience.

These challenges necessitate institutions to provide comprehensive technical support and resources to ensure a smooth virtual learning environment (Patel & Jones, 2021; Lee & Lee, 2022).

Graduate students may often need to interact with peers, but virtual learning leaves them feeling isolated and less engaged. With in-person communication and body language, it can be easier to create meaningful relationships and have good collaboration. Students, therefore, may feel isolated and disconnected, making it even more necessary to provide virtual opportunities for social interaction and community-building in a digital learning environment (Garcia & Smith, 2021; Johnson & Thomas, 2022).

Coping Mechanisms Graduate School Students in Online Learning. For students in the virtual space, the most developed coping mechanisms occur in graduate students who typically construct their routines to organize their days, set aside dedicated time for study, keep regular hours, create daily or weekly schedules, and separate academic work from personal life. Brown & Jackson, 2020; Clark & Wilson, 2020) - allowing them to balance the new demands of virtual learning and continue to be productive.

Insights of Graduate School Students in Online Learning. In the broader scheme of things, Student Engagement is one of the key aspects of online learning in order to make the educational pursuit successful and how it impacts the overall results. The latter underlines the need to use a set of strategies that promote active collaboration of students and real-time interaction in online mode (Wang et al., 2019). Finally, they discovered that collaborative working, touching base and interacting makes a world of difference to the engagement of students. While online learning is more convenient and offers numerous benefits, it has its own set of challenges. Rodriguez et al. Research conducted by Frescatore et al. (2020), for example, details the challenges for online learning to be widely adopted, including technical capabilities, such as obtaining and setting up the necessary software, time management, navigating around campus, and the persistence of the digital divide. Their insights serve as a context for understanding the barriers MAED students are struggling with and are thus very useful to those aspiring to create informed responses to these problems, both for educators and for institutions.

Adaptation to Online Learning Environments. Before defining the contours of online learning in order to appreciate how the MAED students adapt, etc. At the core of this are the concepts and principles that characterize online learning environments (Anderson & Dron, 2019), including the nature of asynchronous and synchronous interactions, as well as the importance of collaborative learning and technology. Based on this background knowledge, I started to inquire about the experiences of MAED students. Because adapting to this type of learning environment is a process many MAED students go through the process in various capacities. Wang et al. A study by Esfahani et al. (2020) explored adaptation strategies as a whole and classified them under three different dimensions: cognitive, metacognitive, and social-affective. The findings provide insight into the various approach's students take to this adaptation - primarily in the realm of time management, goal setting, and building a community.

Learning Experience and Quality. Online learning occurs in richly complex environments characterized by course-design differences, varied instructional methods, and differing levels of technology use. Wang and Lee (2019) did a meta-analysis of four studies that examined factors influencing online learning effectiveness. This only suggests that creating positive learning experiences for students will always boil down to instruction design, learner engagement, and delivery and use of powerful messages.

Student Engagement and Motivation. Numerous aspects have an impact on an overall learning experience in online (very much like blended) environments ranging from course design (length, sequence, approach to course) through instructional methods to technical support and beyond. Wang and Lee (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of studies that have investigated factors that influence the learning outcomes of online learning. Their work highlights the significance of instructional design, learner engagement and communication through effective pedagogy to deliver engaging learning experiences for students.

Future of Online Learning in Education. Among the primary contributing variables was the increase in online learning, with pertinent styles and progressions influencing its immediate development. Thompson and Robinson (2019) explored the potential use of immersive, interactive learning environments via Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) within online education. They suggested that these technologies could change how

MAED students engage with content to enhance their comprehension of educational concepts and advance their research prerational abilities. Yet, as things are improving, challenges persist in online learning. In a review of the challenges that may be faced by MAED students in online programs, Carter and Davis (2020) discuss questions of lack of digital divides, access to the internet, and tech support, among other concerns. The challenge faced, and that must be further explored for any online learning to be inclusive and accessible, is in the solutions.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Participants

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research approach to investigate the virtual learning experiences of MAED students. In essence, this approach helped to gain a deeper comprehension of the phenomenon that the participants were describing (Creswell, 2014; Giorgi, 2012).

According to phenomenology, in order to comprehend human experiences, one must use interviews to immerse oneself in the ideas and insights of others fully. It enables a culmination of interpretation of their experiences because these would be the actual lives of the participants, all of whom have dealt with the issue of dealing with parental engagement in schools (Creswell & Creswell, 2009). For example, it would entail the real construction of meanings through their lenses, and it would give the researcher a way to visualize the participants' circumstances from the phenomena they experienced through their shared experiences (Giorgi, 2012).

3.2 Research Locale

The study was conducted at Assumption College of Nabunturan (ACN) in the Municipality of Nabunturan, Davao de Oro, the province's capital. The capital of the Philippine province of Davao de Oro is Nabunturan, also known as the Municipality of Nabunturan. It is a first-class municipality. As per the 2020 census, the population of this place is 84,340. Nabunturan was formerly a barrio within the Municipality of Compostela. The word "Nabunturan" means "surrounded by mountains" in English, and the name comes from the Cebuano word buntod, which means "mountain." In terms of civil affairs, the early settlement was overseen by the Municipal District President of Compostela, although it was headed by a headman known as Bagani.

3.3 Research Participants

In determining the research participants of this qualitative-phenomenological study, Creswell (2013) suggests eight to fifteen participants. Therefore, in this study, there were 10 participants for the In-Depth Interview (IDI).

Furthermore, the inclusion criteria for the selection of participants were the following: (a) the participants must be students of Assumption College of Nabunturan in the School Year 2022-2023, (b) enrolled under the program of Master of Arts in Education (c) and able to finish at least one semester as MAED students using virtual learning.

3.4 Instruments of the Study

For a qualitative study, the researcher herself was the main instrument for data collection. The researcher recorded, took down notes, and conducted the interview. Additionally, the researcher used an interview guide validated by panel members. This was the list of questions asked of the participants during the interview. The researcher asked questions about the experiences of the participants to set the mood of the conversational partners, the challenges they encountered, how they coped with them, and their insights gained in dealing with online learning. The researcher practiced extreme caution by using open-ended questions.

3.5 Procedure

The procedure of gathering data required a number of tasks for the qualitative researcher. Before leaving after the research study, the researcher followed strict procedures for gathering data and participated in a number of events.

First, the researcher ensured that the study adhered to proper research protocols, thus submitted the research, and underwent review and checked by the thesis adviser and the panel.

Second, the researcher asked the permission and consent of the College Administrator of the Assumption College of Nabunturan, the Dean of the Graduate School, and MAED students to conduct the study. The researcher prepared the materials and tools needed for the data gathering, such as the interview guide, audio recorder, and field notes.

Third, the purposive sampling technique was used to identify individuals. Some of the participants were recruited and contacted through the help of gatekeepers. The gatekeepers, therefore, asked to read and sign a confidentiality and non-disclosure agreement form. The researcher ensured that the selected participants met the criteria and had experienced in dealing with school management. The research objectives and the entire methodology were explained to the selected participants. Informed consent forms were also emailed to the participants, who were asked to e-sign the forms if they agreed to the terms that stated their participation would be voluntary and free from coercion and that they would be willing to share their knowledge as needed for the study.

Fourth, the individual in-depth interview was held in person at a specified time agreed upon by the participants after having read and signed the consent letters. The guide questions for the interview were validated before the conduct of this study. To meet the needs of this study, the researcher established a series of scheduled meetings with the participants following dates that would be most convenient for them through virtual meetings. Participants of the survey were sent with meeting links at a time most convenient to them for interviews. Their role and rights were thoroughly explained before the interview, and compensation was provided for their inconvenience. All the proceedings were recorded to ensure validity and reliability in the conduct of the study.

Fifth, the recorded interviews were stored in a flash drive, secured with a password, to be ready for transcription. The drive was stored in a secure and locked storage place that was accessible to only the authorized person of the study, who would be the researcher. It was uploaded to Google Drive, which is not viewable to the public, for additional security and backup. All the responses were transcribed verbatim to ensure a greater degree of accuracy during the data analysis. After the study was conducted, all the data were and would be stored and kept for three years, after which all would be destroyed and disposed of to prevent unauthorized people from using and accessing the files.

Lastly, a thematic analysis was conducted. The participants' responses were analyzed thoroughly based on the core ideas. An analyst assisted the researcher in ensuring the correct analysis of the data.

3.6 Ethical Consideration

The 1979 Belmont Report's guiding principles served as the foundation for the steps taken to ensure ethical considerations in this investigation. Respect for people, beneficence, and fairness were recognized as basic ethical considerations that the researcher followed (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects in Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979).

The researcher guaranteed that the research participants were duly chosen, as specified. Therefore, the participants were given the study's results to assure fairness and no harm.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the discussions, conclusions, and recommendations of the study that explored the experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights used by MAED students in virtual learning. This study was conducted at Assumption College of Nabunturan, Nabunturan, Davao de Oro.

4.1 What are the experiences of the participants in dealing with concerns in virtual learning?

The answers to the first significant study question**, 1.1 "What are the participants' experiences in dealing with concerns in virtual learning?"** are presented in this section. For this main study question, data and information were gathered using three particular research questions. The purpose of the questions was to learn more about the research participants' comprehension of MAED students' experiences with virtual learning.

4.1.1 Experiences in Dealing with Concerns in Virtual Learning.

This section's themes were derived from the particular study question 'What are your experiences in dealing with concerns in virtual learning?' The response generated was less expenses.

Less Expenses. This theme constituted the primary experience of MAED students in virtual learning. This encapsulates findings from the study on the lived experiences of MAED students in virtual learning, revealing a pervasive narrative of financial relief among participants. Students consistently expressed a sense of cost savings related to commuting, textbooks, and other traditional academic expenditures, underscoring the transformative impact of virtual learning on alleviating financial burdens for this cohort. Informant 2 pointed out:.

Informant 2 pointed out that;

One of my experiences during virtual learning at the time when the pandemic started was quite positive. It was beneficial because it provided flexibility in terms of time; you could enter your class at the designated time without the need for a physical commute. It was convenient, especially considering the distance you would have to travel. You did not have to worry about traveling far every morning.

This was supported by informant 5, who also shared;

My experience with virtual learning, ma'am, was exciting, albeit a bit nerve-wracking, especially during reporting with Ma'am Patria. Nevertheless, it was better because it allowed me to spend less on transportation.

4.1.2 Advantages of Being a MAED Student in Virtual Learning.

This section presents the results to the specific research question 1.2 'What are the advantages of being a MAED student in virtual learning?' under the 1st major research question 'What are the experiences of the participants in dealing with concerns in virtual learning?' The theme was learning becomes accessible.

The results revealed highlights the professional development and skill-building aspect of these roles. Teachers-in-charge often have the opportunity to gain practical, hands-on experience in managing school affairs. They deal with real-world challenges, such as handling administrative tasks, resolving conflicts, and making decisions that impact the school's daily operations.

Learning Becomes Accessible. The results revealed illuminates a transformative aspect within the experiences of MAED students in the realm of virtual learning. This underscores how the virtual modality has rendered education more accessible, enabling participants to engage in coursework from diverse geographical locations. Students expressed a newfound sense of inclusivity, emphasizing the positive impact of virtual learning in breaking down geographical barriers and providing opportunities for a broader and more diverse educational experience. Informant 3 stated;

An advantage in terms of learning is its accessibility anytime, anywhere. You can learn and attend your classes even if you are at home or if you have other tasks to do; you can still join the class. One significant advantage is the accessibility it provides

Informant 4 also added;

Its advantage is especially noticeable when you have assignments; you can do research directly. The instructor can give you assignments online, and you can immediately answer them. It's very accessible, especially when discussing—you can use either your laptop or cellphone for research as long as you have internet

Likewise, informant 10 substantiated by saying;

You can search on Google, especially for reports; you can get ideas based on your topic. It also helps you save financially because you can do it right from your home.

4.1.3 Most Benefiting Part as a MAEd Student in Virtual Learning.

The findings for the particular study question are presented in this section. **1.3 'What do you think is the most benefiting part as a MAED student in virtual learning?'** under the first major research question 'What are the experiences of the participants in dealing with concerns in virtual learning?' The themes which served as results, flexibility of learning and less hassle.

Flexibility of Learning. Participants frequently emphasize the significant benefits of flexible scheduling, which enable them to successfully juggle their academic endeavors with personal and professional obligations. The qualitative data underscores how this flexibility not only accommodates diverse lifestyles but also enhances student engagement and overall satisfaction with the learning experience. Informant 1 expressed;

The most beneficial part for me in virtual learning is that it provides a relaxed and flexible learning environment. Sometimes, if the teacher gives a favor or if there is an important school-related task, they can adjust the class schedule. There is a small expense, less transportation cost, and the modules are virtual. Moreover, if there is a part of the class that is difficult to understand, you can always go back and review the recorded audios

This was supported by informant 6 who uttered;

In my case, being assigned in the countryside allows me immediate access even if I do not have to go down. Despite being in the rural area, I am still given the opportunity to start my master's degree.

Less Hassle. The theme permeates the narratives of MAED students navigating virtual learning, reflecting a qualitative perspective on the streamlined and convenient aspects of this educational modality. Participants consistently express a reduction in day-to-day hassles associated with traditional education, citing fewer logistical challenges such as commuting and scheduling conflicts. This qualitative insight underscores how virtual learning contributes to a more seamless and stress-free academic experience, allowing students to focus more on their studies and less on the extraneous demands of a conventional learning environment. Informant 2 expressed;

Similarly, as I mentioned in the second question, ma'am, it is advantageous that we do not have to exert much effort, especially if the town of Nabunturan is quite far from Trento. We cannot travel, so we can save on transportation expenses. Also, we do not have significant expenses for the load needed for connectivity during classes

This was supported by informant 3 who uttered;

For me, accessibility is really the most beneficial part because it is hassle-free when it comes to learning. You do not have to spend on transportation or go to a specific place to pay for fares. As long as you have an internet connection, it is all you need.

Informant 10 who claimed;

For me, during my time studying in 2021 when I was pregnant, it was truly beneficial, ma'am, because even though I was just at home, I was still able to continue my education. If it were not for online classes, I would have to stop because the travel alone is already quite challenging

4.2 What are the challenges that the participants experienced in dealing with concerns in virtual learning?

This section presents the results to the second major research question 'What are the challenges that the participants experienced in dealing with concerns in virtual learning?' Three specific research questions were used to collect data for this question highlighting the challenges that the participants experienced in dealing with management in schools.

4.2.1 Challenges Encountered in Dealing with Virtual Learning.

The themes derived from the responses of the research informants to the specific research **question 2.1 What are the challenges you have encountered in dealing with virtual learning?'** are presented in this section. The themes were: distraction from surroundings and power interruption.

Distraction from Surroundings. Participants consistently highlight the challenge of contending with distractions in their home environments, such as family activities or external noise, impacting their concentration during virtual classes. This qualitative insight underscores the need for effective strategies to manage and mitigate distractions, shedding light on the nuanced dynamics students face in maintaining focus within the digital learning space. Informant 3 had this to say;

Sometimes, my neighbors play karaoke loudly when I have a class, and you can also hear the sounds of roosters, cats, and dogs.

This was also affirmed by informant 4 who stated;

Among the challenges I encountered in virtual learning is the unpredictability of power interruptions and internet downtime. These issues can lead to being cut off from the class or having to leave the session. Additionally, there are distractions because you are in your own home.

Power Interruption. As the result showed, the theme emerges as a significant challenge in the qualitative exploration of MAED students' experiences within the realm of virtual learning. Participants consistently narrate instances where sudden power interruptions disrupt their engagement in virtual classes, underscoring the vulnerability of this learning modality to external infrastructural factors. This qualitative insight highlights the need for contingency plans and technological adaptations to mitigate the impact of power interruptions on the continuity of virtual education. Informant 1 cited;

So, the difficult part of these challenges is when I have to leave the virtual class due to internet connection or power interruption, causing a struggle to catch up with the discussion that I missed.

There were times when power interruption happened during class discussion, meanwhile, informant 2 revealed:

It can be quite challenging, ma'am, like when you are in the middle of a report and suddenly lose the signal. You feel a bit anxious, wondering how to reconnect and continue with what you were saying. It becomes even more difficult when your signal is unstable. It is better and more convenient when your connection is stable.

Informant 4 also revealed:

The most challenging situation is when there is no signal, a power outage, especially if you are using Wi-Fi, and you are in the middle of your report. The combination of no signal, internet connection issues, and a power outage makes it really difficult.

4.2.2 Most Difficult Part in Dealing with Virtual Learning.

This section presents the results to the specific question 2.2 'What do you think is the most difficult part in dealing with virtual learning?' After subjecting the responses to content analysis, the theme drawn was poor internet connections.

Poor Internet Connections. This theme highlights the acute challenges associated with virtual meeting and tackling various problems during their initial tenure in such roles. Through qualitative insights, it becomes evident that the challenge of sluggish internet connectivity significantly impedes the seamless integration of virtual education, shaping an overarching narrative of frustration and hindrance in the pursuit of academic excellence. Informant 2 narrated the difficulties of MAED students in virtual learning;

During the time when we had virtual classes, especially at the beginning of the first semester, it was really challenging because we were all struggling to figure out how to navigate it. During attendance, I felt anxious about how to log in, as missing a class was not an option. Another concern was the signal; I was confused, especially in our area where the signal was somewhat weak. So, I was puzzled about determining the right internet load for the class session

For her part, informant 3 shared;

In my experience handling my virtual learning, ma'am, there was a time during my reporting when suddenly there was a power outage, and I lost my connection because we only had a peso wifi at home. So, I had to quickly find a signal to get back online.

Informant 9 also added;

My experience was really challenging, especially with the lack of signal in Cagan. But despite the difficulties, I made an effort, setting it as my inspiration to navigate through virtual learning

4.2.3 Disadvantages of Being a MAED Student in Virtual Learning.

This This section presents the results to the specific question **2.3 'What are the disadvantages of being a MAED student in virtual learning?'** After subjecting the responses to content analysis, these themes were drawn: no physical interaction and noise disturbance.

No Physical Interaction. Participants consistently express a sense of isolation and a longing for the interpersonal dynamics inherent in traditional classroom settings, highlighting the absence of face-to-face interactions with peers and instructors. This qualitative insight sheds light on the social and emotional dimensions of virtual learning, emphasizing the importance of fostering virtual environments that facilitate meaningful connections and collaborative engagement among students. Informant 1 noted;

Since it is virtual, there is no face-to-face interaction with your classmates, so you do not have the opportunity to ask questions directly. However, the advantage is that if someone is having difficulty catching up in the class, they can still ask questions.

On the same vein, informant 7 also revealed:

It is really different when you can personally interact with your classmates and teachers. Also, the bond becomes deeper when there is face-to-face interaction.

Noise Disturbance. The theme emerges as a noteworthy aspect in the qualitative analysis of MAED students' experiences in virtual learning. Participants consistently articulate challenges related to noise disturbances in their home environments, ranging from household activities to external street sounds, significantly affecting their ability to concentrate during virtual classes. This qualitative insight underscores the importance of creating strategies or designated spaces that mitigate noise disruptions, highlighting the need for adaptable solutions to enhance the overall effectiveness of virtual learning environments. Informant 6 noted;

It is easily disturbed by the surroundings, and I also get distracted by household chores, ma'am.

On the same vein, informant 10 also revealed:

It is really necessary to have personal space where you're alone because it is easily disturbed, especially with the noise around. Sometimes, during my reports, when there is too much noise, I quickly mute myself, and it surprises them how suddenly quiet I become. The surroundings can be distracting, so it's important to be in your comfortable space.

4.3 How do the participants cope with the challenges in dealing with concerns in virtual learning?

This section presents the results on the viewpoints of the research participants of their coping mechanisms with the challenges as MAED students in virtual learning. This was the gist of the third major research question, 'How do the participants cope with the challenges in dealing with concerns in   virtual learning?' Five specific research questions were utilized to gather data and information.

4.3.1 Preparations in Dealing with Concerns in Virtual Learning.

In this section, the themes created were from the responses to specific research question 3.1, 'What are your preparations in dealing with concerns in virtual learning?' The following were the themes: make sure to have a stable internet connection and prepare gadgets and materials.

Make Sure to have a Stable Internet Connection. Participants consistently stress the critical importance of a reliable internet connection for seamless engagement in virtual classes, emphasizing the impact of connectivity on their overall learning experience. This qualitative insight underscores the necessity for proactive measures, such as investing in robust internet infrastructure and backup plans, to ensure a consistent and uninterrupted virtual learning environment for students pursuing their academic goals. Informant 3 narrated;

Of course, before the class, make sure that the internet connection is stable and that you are in a place where, in case of disconnection, there is immediate support available.

Informant 4 mentioned about planning. She unveiled;

First, I check my internet connection and assess if my data load is sufficient for the entire session if it stretches for the whole day.

Prepare Gadgets and Materials. This theme emerges as a crucial element in the qualitative exploration of MAED students' experiences in virtual learning. Participants consistently highlight the need for careful preparation, ensuring they possess the necessary gadgets and materials to actively engage in virtual classes. This insight underscores the importance of technical readiness, emphasizing the role of students in proactively organizing their digital tools and educational materials to optimize their virtual learning experience. Informant 8 narrated;

My preparations include loading credits, charging my devices beforehand, and mastering my reports, ma'am.

Informant 9 also unveiled;

I will pay for the WiFi in advance, and I will make sure that my cellphone and laptop are fully charged.

4.3.2 Strategies Used in Dealing with Concerns in Virtual Learning

Presented in this section are the themes drawn from the responses to the specific question 3.2, 'What strategies did you use in dealing with concerns in virtual learning?' The theme created was time management.

Time Management. This theme emerges as a pivotal aspect in the qualitative exploration of MAED students' experiences within the realm of virtual learning. Participants consistently underscore the challenges of effectively managing their time in a virtual setting, grappling with the need to balance academic responsibilities alongside personal and professional commitments. This insight emphasizes the importance of honing time management skills, as students navigate the dynamic landscape of virtual education, striving to optimize their learning experience and meet the demands of their multifaceted lives. Informant 6 had this to say;

Time management is the key, especially when handling multiple tasks.

Moreover, informant 9 pointed out;

I manage my time, and if there are assignments or activities given, like statistics, I do not postpone them to avoid cramming when the deadline approaches.

4.3.3 Solutions Employed on the Challenges Encountered

Presented in this section are the themes drawn from the responses to the specific question 3.3, 'What are the solutions you have employed on the challenges you encountered   in dealing with concerns in virtual learning?' the theme generated was always be ready.

Always Be Ready. This theme emerges as a crucial element in the qualitative exploration of MAED students' experiences in virtual learning. Participants consistently highlight the need to be prepared at all times, emphasizing the unpredictability of virtual class demands. This insight underscores the students' proactive approach in maintaining readiness, as they navigate the diverse challenges inherent in the virtual learning environment, ensuring they can actively participate and contribute effectively to their academic pursuits. Informant 1 cited;

It is It is not really nerve-wracking if you prepare well and submit assignments on time, ma'am.

Nevertheless, informant 10 also shared;

Always be ready when it comes to class, and if ever there is a power outage or no signal, find an area where you can get a signal and connect with your friends to inform the instructor about your situation and what's happening.

4.3.4 People who Helped in Coping with Challenges in Dealing with Concerns in Virtual Learning

Presented in this section are the themes drawn from the responses to the specific question 3.4, 'Who helped you in coping with challenges in dealing with concerns in virtual learning?' The themes generated were friends and family members.

Friends. The theme means that participants consistently express the value of building and maintaining friendships with fellow students in the virtual space, emphasizing the role of peer support in coping with the challenges of remote education. This insight sheds light on the social dynamics of virtual classrooms, where friendships contribute not only to a sense of camaraderie but also serve as valuable networks for collaborative learning. Participants often highlight the positive impact of these virtual friendships in creating a supportive community that enhances their overall educational journey. Informant 2 mentioned;

Oh, this one! Of course, my friend MC! Especially during my reporting, when the signal is weak, the professor would say, 'Next Saturday instead, please.' So, next Saturday, I go to MC's place to seek help because his connection is strong.

Nevertheless, informant 9 also shared;

My friends and the parents in the community, ma'am, are really supportive. Whenever they see me, they immediately share their WiFi with me, and they even provide me with a chair and table. I stay there because it is far for me to keep going back and forth to Montevista, so I do my online classes there.

Family Members. Participants consistently acknowledge the pivotal role of family members in shaping their virtual learning environment, from providing emotional support to creating conducive spaces for studying at home. This insight highlights the intertwining of familial relationships with the academic journey, emphasizing how family members become essential pillars of support in navigating the challenges of remote education. Participants often express gratitude for the understanding and encouragement they receive from family members, showcasing the symbiotic relationship between familial dynamics and the pursuit of academic goals in the virtual realm.

Informant 6 said;
My family ma'am.

Moreover, informant 7 uttered;

My family, understanding instructors, and friends, ma'am.

4.3.5 Assistance Sought to Help with the Challenges in Dealing with Concerns in Virtual Learning

Presented in this section were the themes drawn from the responses to the specific question 3.5, 'What assistance did you seek to help you with the challenges in dealing with concerns in virtual learning?' the theme generated was technicalities in virtual learning.

Technicalities in Virtual Learning. The theme surfaces as a salient aspect in the qualitative exploration of MAED students' experiences within the realm of virtual learning. Participants consistently articulate the challenges associated with various technical aspects, such as software glitches, internet connectivity issues, and navigating virtual platforms. This insight underscores the intricate nature of virtual learning, where participants grapple with the technical nuances that may impact the fluidity and effectiveness of their educational experience. Despite the challenges, participants often demonstrate adaptability, highlighting the resilience required to navigate and overcome the technical intricacies inherent in the virtual learning environment. Informant 1 narrated;

I ask all my friends, my family, instructors, just like how you address problems, such as when presenting a report and you do not know how, or your friends know, you can ask for their help. So, if your family knows how to fix the internet or if you are running out of load, you can request them to load for you if you do not have any.

Moreover, sharing of expertise from friends was mentioned by informant 6 who uttered;

Sometimes, I struggle, especially when sharing my slides on a laptop because it takes longer to load compared to a cellphone. Perhaps, my assistance is to learn more about Microsoft Teams.

Informant 9 supported this by saying;

I think what I need is for those who are not yet familiar with Microsoft Teams, I should add them in advance before the class starts so that I will not be struggling later on.

4.4 What are the insights the participants gained from their experiences in   dealing with concerns in virtual learning?

This section presents the results on the viewpoints of the research participants of their insights with the challenges of being reading program implementers. This was the gist of the fourth major research question, 'What are the insights the participants gained from their experiences in   dealing with concerns in virtual learning?' Five specific research questions were utilized to gather data and information.

4.4.1 Insights given to Other MAED Students Who Are Dealing with Concerns in Virtual Learning.

In this section, the themes created were from the responses to specific research question 4.1, 'What can you share to other MAED students who are dealing with concerns in virtual learning?' The generated themes were- be patient, don't give up, and pray.

Informant 1 stated;

So for the other MAED students if you have problems on dealing with concerns in virtual learning, you have your patient and calm attitude towards it.

.   Informant 5 stated;

I always remind myself to keep going, not to get tired, just play around, and if there is something I cannot grasp, I would ask and inform the instructor. So far, my instructors have been very approachable.

Pray. This emerges as a deeply personal and spiritually significant aspect in the qualitative exploration of MAED students' experiences within the realm of virtual learning. Participants consistently highlight the role of prayer as a source of solace, guidance, and strength during challenging times in their academic journey. This qualitative insight underscores the diverse coping mechanisms employed by students, showcasing the importance of faith and spirituality as integral components in navigating the complexities of virtual education. The theme of prayer serves as a poignant reminder of the multifaceted support systems students draw upon, including their spiritual beliefs, to navigate the lived experiences of virtual learning. Informant 7 stated;

Just pray and sacrifice because it is for our own good.

Meanwhile, informant 10 said;

Praying is really essential, ma'am. If you do not have trust in the Lord, even small conflicts can be challenging. So, through prayer, everything is surrendered.

4.4.2 Advice Given to Other MAED Students Who Experienced Challenges in Virtual Learning.

The theme created in this section was from the responses to the specific research question 4.2, 'What advice will you give to other MAED students who experienced challenges in virtual learning?' The theme generated was: persevere.

Informant 3 narrated her view about taking challenges lightly, she said;

They should just endure the challenges of virtual learning, even if they experience difficulties. If they want to graduate, they should persevere and continue their pursuit.

Moreover, informant 4 added;

Just keep going because it is more convenient now that you can enroll and study from your home since it is virtual. The only thing you need is money. Money is all you need, but you can save more because you do not have to spend on transportation; you just need to buy load.

4.4.3 Recommendations Given to the Assumption College of Nabunturan Authorities Regarding the Concerns in Virtual Learning.

The results in this section were taken from the responses to the specific research question 4.3, 'What recommendation will you give to the Assumption College of Nabunturan   authorities regarding the concerns in virtual learning?' These were the themes drawn from the responses: continue virtual learning and provide monthly face to face classes

Informant 1 mentioned;

I recommend to Assumption College of Nabunturan that they should continue their virtual learning, because it will help a lot of students, especially for those studying from far places.

The theme advocates for a hybrid model that combines the benefits of virtual flexibility with the value of in-person engagement, emphasizing the importance of finding a harmonious blend in the delivery of education. This was what informant 4 said;

They should also allocate time, even if it is just once a month for face-to-face interaction. This way, if there is something they do not understand in the virtual setting, they can ask questions because there are students who feel shy. They can rely on the fact that at least you are online, and they can trust that even if they do not listen, you will still be there.

Also, informant 7 said:

Microsoft Teams is good, ma'am. Perhaps, if it is possible, having a face-to-face and blended approach would be great, especially if there is no pandemic. It will not be like the time during the pandemic.

4.4.4 Suggestions to Help Improve the Concerns in Virtual Learning of MAED Students.

The themes in this section were from the responses to specific question 4.4, 'What suggestions can you give to help improve the concerns in virtual learning of MAED students?' The theme was: use back-up applications.

This was what informant 3 said;

Maybe, they could develop the use of other apps that are accessible to everyone, not just Microsoft Teams, as Teams tends to have a slow loading time and requires a strong internet connection.

Also, informant 5 said:

I hope there will be another access aside from Microsoft Teams because Teams can be quite heavy, and it consumes a lot of data.

4.4.5 Hopes and Aspirations as a MAED Student in Dealing with Concerns in Virtual Learning.

The theme in this section was from the responses to specific question 4.5, 'What are your hopes and aspirations as a MAED student in dealing with   concerns in virtual learning?' This was the last specific research question for the 4th main research question. The theme was: no interruption on internet connection.

The theme means that participants consistently emphasize the necessity for a seamless and uninterrupted internet connection to foster a conducive learning environment. This underscores the profound impact of connectivity stability on the overall quality of virtual education, highlighting the challenges and frustrations experienced when facing interruptions. The theme serves as a crucial call for the enhancement of digital infrastructure to ensure a reliable internet connection, emphasizing its paramount importance in facilitating effective and uninterrupted virtual learning experiences for MAED students. Informant 2 stated;

As a virtual learner, your main concern is during reporting and when there are submissions and activities. There should not be any signal interruption, especially during deadlines, similar to exams with time limits. The internet connection should always be strong so that you can submit everything on time. I have experienced submitting late, but luckily, ma'am accepted it.

Further, Informant 6 supported this by saying;

A seamless internet connection is a necessity in today's virtual learning landscape. It eliminates the stress and frustration caused by disruptions, allowing students to focus on their studies without worrying about technical issues.

5. CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the discussions, conclusions, and recommendations of the study that explored the experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights used by MAED students in virtual learning. This study was conducted at Assumption College of Nabunturan, Nabunturan, Davao de Oro.

There were 10 participants in this study, which was enough to saturate information gathered from the studied group who were MAED students. They served as the sources of data and bits of knowledge about the phenomenon that was being investigated.

The research used a qualitative phenomenological design because it needed a full examination to comply with the reliability and transferability concerns in qualitative studies. By conducting one-on-one interviews with research subjects, the researcher could conduct a thorough inquiry and use participant observation to triangulate the data and information.

The presentation order for this chapter was determined by arranging the research questions in the interview guide in that order. The study's findings were the issues that were emphasized in the discussions section and supported by relevant research and literature.

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