

ONLINE LEARNING: THROUGH THE LENS OF THE FIRST-YEAR ENGLISH MAJORS

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the experiences encountered by first-year college English major students in online learning. Specifically, ten students of Davao de Oro State College-Main Campus were selected for the in-depth interview. It was revealed that the experiences of the first-year English majors with online learning were having difficulty to adjust, unstable internet connection and too many tasks. It was also revealed that the ways in which online learning provided help were developing students' skills, easy access in the internet, interaction not limited and getting updated with lessons. The challenges when taking an online English class were different from regular physical class, lowers self-confidence, adjustment on online class, bombarded with school works, difficulty in managing screen time, struggled with internet connection, noise barriers and availability of gadgets. Meanwhile, it was confided that the challenges English major students faced were not fluent in the English language, too many essays to write, having hard time to understand assigned tasks, meeting deadlines, difficulties in comprehending the lessons. The coping strategies employed with the challenges of online learning were borrow cellphones from others, proper time management, self-assessment, adapt to changes, always take notes, use google for additional information and having positive mindset. The ways in handling difficulty encountered in online learning were proper time management, motivate self, having positive mindset and venting out schoolwork problems to others. Intervention programs for an effective online English learning were mental health breaks, group projects, provide engaging activities, English language instruction program, provide instructional videos and some answered that they never experienced any intervention programs. The most effective intervention programs were seminars related to English program, debates, mentoring, adapting to changes, mental health breaks, learning through interaction, teaching language across curriculum, instructional videos. Some of the ways intervention program could improve online learning and engagement between students and instructors were improving learning were developing interaction between students and teacher, making students comfortable in learning, having hard time in online learning, building peer connection, developing language skills and improving academic skills.

Keywords: *online learning in college, first-year English majors online learning experiences, phenomenology*

1. INTRODUCTION

Online learning is considered the newest and most creative study techniques to be brought to the educational sphere. With the use of computers and the Internet, students can now learn online. During the global health emergency, online learning is becoming more and more vital for education since it provides the ability to follow the courses and stay in touch with classmates and teachers from a distance. Nonetheless, several difficulties have been noted in other nations [14]. There are numerous obstacles that students must overcome when learning online [1]. Students encounter numerous problems when studying English online as the learning procedure is handled digitally ([20]; [34]).

Looking into the study of [22] students' expectations on the chances and risks of the difficult circumstances during Germany's first nationwide lockdown were prevalent. The outcome demonstrated the benefits of online learning and teaching, including enhanced flexibility and the ability to manage time and tasks when processing and receiving course materials. Acquired study-related skills and competencies, an anticipated rise in the caliber of online teaching and learning, and an increase in motivation for learning and activities are assessed. The adverse effects that were brought up most frequently had to do with communication and social engagement with other people, especially lecturers and other students.

In Manila, according to a study conducted by [7] college students have a wide range of difficulties when it comes to online learning. Their home learning setting presented the biggest problem, whereas technical literacy and competency presented the least amount of difficulty. The COVID-19 pandemic had the biggest effect on students' mental health and educational experiences. This problem also existed in Davao Region, namely in Davao de Oro, wherein faculty members as well as students faced difficulties because of the abrupt shift to flexible learning in higher education. Basic internet connectivity and access issues increase the likelihood that students may not be able to adapt to the new normal of the teaching-learning process [11].

In addition, problems that First-Year English majors at Davao de Oro State College encounter in their online learning experience indicate that some students struggle with technical difficulties, adaptability, computer knowledge, distraction, and self-motivation. Some students also find it difficult to communicate effectively with their teachers and fellow students, and some choose to stay silent during class. During the conduct of a virtual meeting using Google Meet or Zoom Teleconferencing, the students had the option to turn on the microphone or keep muted and when it was time for them speak, they instantly left the meeting. In checking the student's submitted written output, it is found out to be plagiarized and some students had a poor writing skill by running it with Grammarly application.

Being able to create and convey meaning in spoken and written materials using the English language is known as English language proficiency. In this study, the researcher explored whether online class helps students improve their English language skills.

1.1 Research Questions

The study explored the experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of First-Year English major students. It sought answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of the First-Year English Major students in online learning?
2. What are the challenges of the First-Year English Major Students in Online learning?
3. What are the coping mechanisms utilized by First-year English major students in coping with the challenges of online learning?
4. What are the suggestions of the English major students for the improvement of online learning?
5. What are the intervention programs for effective English learning online?

2. METHODS

Phenomenological design was used in this qualitative investigation. It examined the experiences, difficulties, and coping strategies of first-year English major students. A qualitative research method for characterizing how people react to a specific phenomenon is phenomenology [19]. Preconceptions and biases on how people see the world, feel, and respond to situations are attempted to be set aside in phenomenological research. It made it possible for the researcher to investigate the feelings, perceptions, and experiences of other people who have witnessed or experienced the event or situation of interest. The researcher's primary focus was on examining the experiences, obstacles, and coping methods of first-year English major students, as the study utilized phenomenology. The seven steps of an interview inquiry report were adhered to by the researcher.

In particular, the researcher decided on the research questions that were answered through interviews. The researcher then designed the study, determined the interviewees, and met the most helpful information to answer research questions. The researcher conducted the discussion following the protocols and guidelines in conducting the interview. After the interview, the researcher transcribed the answers of the participants. The transcribed data was analyzed. Its validity, reliability, and generalizability were also verified.

Themes were generated from the commonalities that were found. An excerpt was used to refer to the answer from which the theme was extracted. Also, the data were scrutinized for any irregularities or unusual responses. Any abnormalities found were shown in the results of the data.

Additionally, the researcher coded the data that was gathered appropriately. One of the most effective methods for condensing the enormous amount of data gathered was coding. To put it simply, coding qualitative data is the process of classifying and giving the gathered information features and patterns. The qualitative data to be gathered helped the researcher to perform in-depth studies of the subject matter. Researchers preferred to probe participants while gathering qualitative data, and by asking the right questions, they would gather a lot of information. The data collected were used to draw conclusions based on a collection of questions and answers.

The researcher's personal judgment and discretion determined the preferred sample for this study, which was based on a single subgroup of Davao de Oro State College first-year English major students, who were all like one another. Ten first-year English major students served as the research participants. They were chosen for the study based on their availability and capacity to supply the necessary data. They were selected based on their official enrollment for the Academic Year 2021–2022, regardless of their age, sex, economic condition, or region. Students enrolled in other courses with English instruction were excluded. In this study, no vulnerable groups were included.

Additionally, purposive sampling was used to identify individuals. There were ten participants, and the researcher utilized Google Forms and Google Meetings for the in-depth interviews, or IDIs, to collect the data. A recording of the Google Meeting was made. Using phenomenology in a qualitative study, the sample size of participants met the criterion because the research design calls for five to twenty-five individuals [10]. Although the sample was found to be insufficient to fully represent the population, it was nonetheless deemed sufficient to illustrate the study's objectives. Instead of attempting to generalize the findings, the researchers aimed to qualitatively explain the challenges faced by college students when learning remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Program Coordinator chose the participants once the researcher has been given permission to carry out the investigation. To participate in the study, the participants had to sign a consent form attesting to their voluntary nature and willingness to provide information as needed. The investigator made certain that none of the participants belonged to any vulnerable groups. This was open to DDOSC-Main Campus first-year English major students as well. Along with being informed about the study, the participants were requested to take part in an In-Depth Interview (IDI) to gather data. It is crucial to stress that since the conversation was centered around individual opinions and experiences, there are no right or wrong responses [12]. Interview transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis. To safeguard the participants' identities during data processing and reporting, pseudonyms were used.

An interview guide created by the researcher was employed in this study as a qualitative analysis technique. To stay organized and make sure all the subjects were covered that were required to answer the research questions, the researcher employed a tool that included a list of inquiries. To make sure the questions accurately measured the issue at hand, the instrument was validated. The purpose of the study was to investigate the experiences, difficulties, and coping strategies of first-year English majors.

Also, the pandemic health measurements presented several challenges for the researcher in terms of data collection; in particular, in-person interviews were not allowed. While conducting the interview, the researcher was obliged to adhere to the health and safety procedures. The investigator considered alternative methods of gathering data, such as conducting in-depth interviews with participants virtually using Google Meeting. The entire interview was recorded by the researcher using Google Meet's recording capability. The maximum duration of each interview was 30 minutes.

Thematic analysis, which entails going over a data set and searching for patterns to identify themes, was used to analyze the data. A deductive method was applied to the data collection to analyze the findings. The deductive method of qualitative data analysis involved the researcher's interpretation of the data using a pre-established framework. The researcher utilized transcription to make sense of the specifics after gathering data in the field. The transcription process was the first stage of data analysis. The process of turning all the data into text was called transcription.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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

Experiences with Online Learning. The emerging themes in this structured theme were having difficulty to adjust, unstable Internet Connection, and too many tasks. These were the experiences encountered by the First - Year English Major Students in their online learning. The findings revealed that there were many difficulties

emerged in the implementation of online learning. First -Year English Major Students struggled about the sources of learning materials coupled with the learning gaps that needed to be filled in. Aside from that, they needed to adjust to the characteristics of learners challenged with low comprehension skills and a lack of interest in learning.

A significant number of university students have encountered substantial workloads because of the absence of a designated study timeframe. Certain instructors may allocate subjects to be covered within a week, regardless of the potential complexity of the discussions [13].

Moreso, rural university students encounter comparable challenges. The primary obstacle they have is the difficulty in establishing a network connection to access the internet or online platforms while having access to devices such as computers [2].

Ways in which Online Learning Provided Help. The new learning modality brought a lot of difficulties for students yet still brought positive impact for them. The study revealed that it helps in developing their skills, easy access to the internet, interaction not limited, and getting updated with lessons were the ways in which they enjoy online learning. It was revealed that despite the negative experiences the First-Year Major in English Students encounter, they still enjoy some of the features of online learning.

The abruptness of the change posed difficulties for both teachers and students, resulting in a challenging and impromptu encounter that required intuition and improvisation[6]; [21]. Nevertheless, the majority of individuals are capable of adjusting and acquiring knowledge owing to the adaptable environment, transfer of digital competencies from social and occupational settings, personal accountability for time management, and the availability of educational resources until the conclusion of their program [29]. Making interactions not limited to learners and getting updated with lessons helped greatly in doing online learning. It served as ways for students to appreciate learning via online and helped them develop their skills as well.

Quality of Internet Connection. The emerging themes were very difficult, difficult, and easy. The findings revealed that the quality of internet connection is different depending on the area where the student resides.

Research reveals that the utilization of the Internet in higher education institutions enhances educational progress using smartphones, tablets, laptops, and other technical devices. However, the primary challenges faced by students the inadequate internet connectivity and costly connection fees. The internet has facilitated the globalization of education, allowing students from any geographical area to access learning opportunities [3].

Challenges When Taking an Online English Class. The emerging themes were online class different from regular physical class, lowers self-confidence, adjustment on online class, bombarded with school works, difficulty in managing screen time, struggled with internet connection, noise barriers, and availability of gadgets. The result showed some research informants found that adopting the use of technologies in learning English lessons was difficult for the students.

This study provides evidence that students experience constraints and fatigue due to the current structure of distance learning. Many students contend that the educational standard has declined due to their independent study, with no guidance from teachers, for most of their academic pursuits. This results in a significant number of students acquiring minimal knowledge, particularly because not all students can effectively and efficiently learn on their own without substantial direction and support from mentors. The students are discontented with the apparent focus of online schooling on meeting academic requirements rather than serving as a platform for learning [18].

Challenges English Major Students Faced. The emerging themes were not fluent in the English language, too many essays to write, having hard time to understanding assigned task, meeting deadlines, and difficulties in comprehending lessons. The selected themes indicate major obstacles encountered by students, potentially First-Year English Major students, in their academic endeavors.

English major students specializing in language studies had a multitude of tough challenges. In addition to an unreliable internet connection, most students face difficulties due to their limited English-speaking skills and poor comprehension, which they believe has negatively impacted their academic achievement [33].

Level of Difficulty in Using Distance Learning Technology. The emerging themes were easy and difficult. Participants shared their views about how hard it is to use online learning technology in their studies.

It is imperative that students have access to technology, a dependable internet connection, and a tranquil environment in order to participate in remote learning. But not every student pursuing a higher degree has access to these resources [35].

Coping Strategies Employed with the Challenges of Online Learning. The emerging themes were borrow cellphone from other, proper time management, self-assessment, adapt to changes, always take notes use google for additional information, having a positive mindset.

Even though some students had to share the devices with their siblings or other family members, they managed to adapt and gain information. Furthermore, the presence and regularity of gadgets in their environment have influenced their behavior to utilize electronic communication devices for educational purposes [4]. As a result, the students were able to participate and improve their competence in using technology for distance learning.

Including digital technology into the process of teaching and learning aims to discuss a few of the drawbacks of previous distant learning approaches and conventional on-campus instruction [5]. It is crucial to incorporate coping mechanisms that promote student autonomy, enhance self-control, and challenge the traditional notion of students as passive, dependent, inflexible, isolated, and lacking in reflection [27]; [32].

Handling Difficulty Encountered in Online Learning. The emerging themes were proper time management, motivate self, having positive mindset, and venting out schoolwork problems to others. These were the coping strategies the participants used to deal with the difficulties of distance learning. These techniques have been used by participants to get past the challenges of online learning, emphasizing the need of being proactive in managing time, maintaining motivation, developing a positive outlook, and enlisting outside help to successfully overcome academic roadblocks in the context of online learning.

However, students utilized a range of tactics to surmount the difficulties encountered in online education. To address the issues related to the home learning environment, students employed various strategies. These included engaging in conversations with their family members, relocating to a more peaceful setting, studying during late hours when other family members were already asleep, and seeking guidance from their peers and teachers. In order to surmount the obstacles pertaining to learning materials, students resorted to various strategies. The many approaches adopted by students corroborated previous findings on their proactive mindset in addressing both academic and non-academic matters within an online learning environment [15].

Aid Coping Strategies Provide in Online Learning. This structured theme elicited five emerging themes; providing clarification, consideration from instructors, supportive instructors, do recording of online discussion, and encouragement from instructors. Together, these components establish a nurturing educational setting that tackles obstacles and assists students in understanding the intricacies of online learning. The significance lies not only in the technology components of online education but also in the human and instructional factors that greatly impact students' achievement and welfare in the virtual learning environment.

A methodical approach to teaching that builds on learners existing knowledge and experiences to help them acquire new abilities. The digital divide between students will widen and negatively impact their education, as some schools have been able to supply children in need with digital technology, while others have not been able to do so properly [24].

Moreover, the individual approaches that students use may have been influenced by several aspects of their environment, including the resources at their disposal, their personal characteristics, family dynamics, relationships with peers and teachers, and their natural abilities. In order to broaden the scope of this study, researchers could conduct additional investigations in this field to examine the manner in which various elements influence individuals' utilization of specific methods, and to delve into the underlying reasons behind these patterns [7].

Suggestion for Changes for the Improvement of Instruction in Online Learning. The responses elicited four emerging themes, instructors to provide recorded discussions, extension of deadlines, no suggestions so far, and gradual giving of activities. The highlighted themes indicate a need for more adaptability, ease of access, and careful timing in online learning teaching. These insights offer significant recommendations for educators and institutions aiming to improve the online learning experience by addressing the specific issues and preferences stated by students.

Essentially, accommodating learning interest involves reducing the amount of organization in courses, allowing debates and concepts to unfold naturally, and then pursuing them to determine their direction.

Additionally, it aids in the advancement of high-quality education by ensuring that the learner's mind remains in a serene atmosphere devoid of external apprehension. Teachers encountered difficulties in devising suitable lesson plans, providing personalized and tailored instruction, and designing effective learning activities [23].

Ways Teacher Best Assess Students in Online Learning. The themes emerged were provide videos as additional Learning Material, be considerate, provide assignment, provide corrections, extend the deadlines, teachers stick to their teaching schedule and make lessons understandable to students. These themes indicate that a comprehensive approach to evaluation is crucial in online education. This encompasses a combination of diverse multimedia tools, instructors who possess comprehension and adaptability, consistent assignments and feedback, and from delivering a meticulously organized teaching timetable. By integrating these components, instructors can establish a more efficient and nurturing online learning experience for their students.

Enhancing face-to-face learning in the early years of a student's education is essential if they are to develop strong cooperative skills [16]. This motivates educators to use more autonomous preparation and supervision of their students' group projects in addition to efficient interpersonal interaction and assistance [17].

Given that higher education institutions now primarily utilize online learning platforms for teaching, it is crucial to recognize the advantages and difficulties associated with the teaching methods adopted by university lecturers during online instruction. Multiple writers have shown that students acquire information and achieve greater learning outcomes through online learning as compared to traditional face-to-face learning [28]. Similarly, [9] found that professors acknowledged the potential advantages of online learning in terms of enhancing the educational process, fostering collaboration and communication with students, offering flexibility, and improving students' comprehension of lectures.

Support Needed to Be Successful in Online Learning. The themes emerged were financial support, support from teachers, mental support, and moral support. The identification of essential themes about the support required for success in online learning underscores the complex nature of the obstacle's students may confront in this educational environment. In general, the achievement of students in online learning seems to depend on a comprehensive support structure that takes care of their financial, intellectual, mental, and emotional requirements. Institutions and educators can improve the online learning experience by employing techniques that fully satisfy these support requirements.

An extensive array of support interventions tailored to assist students at various levels indicates the necessity for an integrated, comprehensive approach to student assistance. An effective approach would entail the formulation of targeted policies and programs, as well as the incorporation of dedicated support units and specialized knowledge throughout the organization [31].

Implementing comprehensive support techniques and services that encompass all facets of the university experience, including administrative, educational, pastoral, and personal components, have significant potential in promoting student success [8].

Intervention Programs for an Effective Online English Learning. The emerging themes were never experienced intervention program, mental health breaks, group projects, provide engaging activities and English language instruction program. The identification of crucial themes about intervention programs for successful online English learning offers significant insights into the varied requirements of learners in this setting. Overall, comprehensive intervention programs for online English learning should incorporate various strategies, such as addressing prior experiences, integrating mental health considerations, fostering collaborative projects, offering captivating activities, and implementing a meticulously designed language instruction program. This holistic strategy is expected to enhance the effectiveness and quality of the online English learning experience for students.

Most Effective Intervention Program. The emerging themes were seminars related to English program, debates, adapting, mentoring, adapting to changes, mental health breaks, learning through interaction, teaching languages across curriculum, instructional videos, and mental health breaks are not applied properly. A comprehensive intervention program that incorporates structured seminars, debates, adaptive mentoring, learning through interaction, integrated language instruction, and well-executed mental health breaks seems to be the most

efficacious strategy for facilitating English learning. By comprehensively addressing multiple facets of the learning process, this approach offers students a more all-encompassing and encouraging educational experience.

Hence, in facilitating English learning, effective teacher intervention involving task organization, questioning, and guidance at various phases will stimulate students' critical thinking. Effective intervention in the instruction of the English language at the university level not only enhances students' proficiency with language but also fosters the growth of their capacity for critical thinking, including interpretation, analysis, explanation, inference, evaluation, and self-calibration [36].

Ways Intervention Program Improve Online Learning Engagement Between the Students and Instructor. The emerging themes were help in improving learning, develop interaction between students and teacher, made students comfortable in learning, having a hard time in online learning, build peer connection, develop language skills and improves academic skills. In order to optimize online learning engagement, intervention programs should incorporate a diverse array of tactics. These may comprise providing specialized academic assistance, fostering peer connections, facilitating communication between students and instructors, establishing a conducive learning environment, addressing obstacles, and improving language and academic proficiency. These recurring themes enhance the level of engagement and support provided during online learning.

Similarly, students who had high overall perceptions of social presence scored well in terms of perceived learning and enjoyment with the instructor, according to [30]. They cautioned that paying close attention to the interactions that take place between students and their teachers is crucial. Therefore, for better student learning and, eventually, retention, active learning and student participation are essential.

4. CONCLUSIONS

When it comes to online learning, first-year English major students are likely encountering difficulties in adjusting and adapting into the realm of online education. Efficient learning relies on several characteristics, such as the ability to adjust to new circumstances while still sustaining interactive engagement with instructors. To give children the help they need during this crisis, it is imperative to consider the unique restrictions of learning. Some English language learners expressed dissatisfaction with the online learning method due to their inability to achieve the expected level of proficiency in language acquisition in such a manner [26]. It is quite difficult to use and implement these tactics in remote locations because there is a lack of internet connectivity and a shortage of gadgets. In this way, to lessen the difficulties that college students majoring in English face in their studies. Additionally, since there are a lot of students and classes to manage when studying English online, the instructor needs to regularly adjust the structure and subject matter of the learning exercises. Students also need a mentor to help them through each step of the online learning process [25]. Finally, every school needs to have enough resources and support to provide high-quality instruction.

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