

Online Learning Diaries: The Voices of Allied Health Students During Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought an exceptional transformation in the education system worldwide. Literature indicated the impact of COVID-19 on students' online learning experience, yet there is limited study on the online learning experience of allied health students. Thus, the study explored the online learning experience of allied health students. The study utilized the qualitative research method. Thirteen respondents participated in the study and were selected using snowball and purposive sampling methods. A semi-structured interview was done to obtain relevant information about the study. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected data. The result of the study revealed that students have *positive* and *negative experiences* in online learning. Positive experiences include *flexible learning opportunities and fosters learning opportunities*, while negative experiences include *technological factors, teacher factors, student factors, and health factors*. The study revealed that the participants used the coping mechanisms: *student's self-efficacy: optimism and time management, staying connected with God, supporting the system, and social and recreational activities*. The impact of the online learning experience on their career development includes *inadequate clinical competence, worries about the future outcome, and traditional vs. online learning preference*. Despite the accessibility and popularity of online learning in today's world, the study found that allied health students had yet to recognize its value in their professional development.

Keywords: skills-based, clinical learning environment, coping strategies

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has created turmoil in practically every facet of life around the world (Byrnes et al., 2020; Simbulan, 2020). The virus is highly contagious, and an increasing number of cases have been documented globally (Kumar et al., 202; Shereen et al., 2020; Simbulan, 2020; WHO 2020). As a result, freedom of movement is restricted (Simbulan, 2020), and practically every government in the world has pushed lockdown, community quarantine, curfews (Brand, 2020; Chen et al., 2020; Rabe et al., 2020; Simbulan, 2020), and infection control measures (Brand, 2020; Chen et al., 2020; Rabe et al., 2020; Simbulan, 2020). (Kumar et al., 2020; Rabe et al., 2020; WHO, 2020). In the Philippines, an increase in COVID-19 cases due to localized transmission (DOH, 2020; WHO, 2020) forced the government to place the whole island of Luzon under enhanced community quarantine (ECQ), which included the suspension of mass meetings, mass

transportation, classes, and work (Romero & Mendez, 2020; Simbulan, 2020). Similarly, the continuing rise of COVID-19 cases generated certain issues (Rabe et al., 2020; Tria, 2020), and it produced the greatest amount of disruption in the educational system in history, affecting about 1.6 billion students worldwide (United Nations, 2020). The COVID-19 epidemic appears to have had a huge impact on the world, particularly the educational system. Classes at all levels have been suspended to reduce the risk of localized viral spread. Students and teachers are also challenged in terms of how knowledge can be delivered.

Education is an important element of a person's life since it propels them forward (Schleicher, 2020; United Nations, 2020). Due to the lockdown, all learners were told to stay at home, which prohibited face-to-face learning (Rabe et al., 2020; Simbulan, 2020). As a result, the education industry has grown more creative in its delivery of high-quality education (Schleicher, 2020; Tria, 2020; United Nations, 2020). Different schools and universities used a variety of strategies to fund teaching, research, and service (Simbulan, 2020). Digital learning took place in colleges and universities as a result of the COVID-19 school lockout (Adarkwah, 2020). Over three million higher education students in the Philippines were affected by the move to remote learning, which used both synchronous and asynchronous modes (Nicholls, 2020). Teachers and administrators adapted to new educational principles and devised new ways to encourage students to learn (Schleicher, 2020; United Nations, 2020). Everyone acclimated to the usage of electronic gadgets and internet technologies since it was the only way they could access new media tools (Simbulan, 2020). However, both learners and teachers faced additional dangers, issues, and challenges as a result of the new way of learning (Tria, 2020), particularly learners with restricted access to digital learning resources and internet access (Schleicher, 2020; Simbulan, 2020). Hence, flexible learning is recommended, where they can contact learners in any mode of communication possible (Simbulan, 2020). The impact of COVID-19 on education has resulted in a number of modifications. Learning institutions were robust in the new normal and were able to restart operations through online learning, despite the pandemic's effects. However, both teachers and students are said to be having issues with online learning.

The transition from traditional face-to-face learning to online learning is practical to lecture-based classes (Calhoun et al., 2020). It had a big impact on health professions education institutions, where laboratories and clinical learning experiences undergo a much more challenging virtual learning (Arandjelovic et al., 2020; Byrnes et al., 2020; Calhoun et al., 2020). Many universities with allied health sciences established virtual curricula to continue their education, although it might bring difficulties in the future if they lack actual clinical exposure (Byrnes et al., 2020; Calhoun et al., 2020). They consider clinical duties as the foundation of medical training (Arandjelovic et al., 2020). A clinical learning experience is critical for allied health students, and health professions education institutions have adopted virtual learning experiences related to clinical learning. The majority of the research focuses on students' perceptions of COVID-19 and its impact on their education. The study was conducted to address the lack of literature on the overall experience of allied health students on online learning as it is not sufficiently explored in the Philippines. Hence, the aim of the study is to explore the experiences of allied health students in their online learning. In order to address the purpose of the study, the following are the research questions: How did students describe their online learning experiences; what are the coping

strategies used by allied students in dealing with online learning; how did these experiences have an impact on your career development?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study was conducted using a qualitative phenomenological research method to explore the experiences of allied health students in their online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The qualitative study allowed the researcher to collect data from individuals who experienced the phenomenon, such as feelings or thought processes that are hard to extract or learn about through conventional research methods (Creswell, 2018; Corbin Strauss, 2014). For the present study, the researcher explored the participants lived experiences (Jones, Torres, & Armino, 2016) in their online learning. Data was collected through interviews.

Population and Sampling Technique

The study was conducted in one of the universities in Cavite. Snowball sampling was used in this research where the researcher asked other participants to recommend other allied health students who are currently enrolled in online learning. Polit and Beck (2017) mentioned that snowball sampling is used when there is a broad population or community group, where early informants were asked to refer other study participants who meet the predetermined criterion. Purposive sampling was also used for the selection of individuals who will participate in the study meet a predetermined criterion (Polit and Beck, 2017). The selection of participants was based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) students who experienced online learning program; (2) students enrolled in allied health sciences program; (3) students ages 18 and above, and (4) students who can understand properly on what is being asked of them and can articulate themselves in a way that can be clearly understood.

There were 15 interviews in total, with each lasting between 30 to 45 minutes. Females made up 73.33% of the participants, while males made up 26.67 %. The participants ranged in age from 19 to 24, with an average age of 22. Table 1 shows some of the characteristics of the participants.

Table 1: Participant's Demographic Profile

Participants (Pseudonym)	Age	Gender	Year Level	Program
1 Samantha	20	Female	2	BS Nursing
2 Zion	19	Male	2	BS Nursing
3 Alexa	21	Female	3	BS Nursing
4 Anna	21	Female	3	BS Nursing
5 Jenny	20	Female	3	BS Nursing
6 Ely	20	Male	3	BS Nursing

7	Mario	21	Male	4	BS Nursing
8	Mason	25	Male	4	BS Nursing
9	Sandra	20	Female	4	BS Psychology
10	Joy	20	Female	1	BS Nutrition and Dietetics
11	Amanda	21	Female	3	BS Medical Laboratory Science
12	Lorraine	21	Female	3	BS Medical Laboratory Science
13	Rose	24	Female	6	Doctor in Dental Medicine

Instrumentation

The researcher used a semi-structured interview guide consisting of a list of prepared questions related to the research questions. The researcher asked open-ended questions to ensure that respondents would give their extensive perspectives about their online learning experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data Gathering Procedures

The researcher approached allied health students who met the criteria and invited them to take part in the study. They were approached individually via Facebook Messenger, email, and Microsoft Teams. The interview was set up after the invitation was confirmed. Prior to data collection, they have informed of the study's purpose as well as their ethical rights.

The researcher conducted one-time semi-structured interviews with individuals using a guide questionnaire with open-ended questions. The interviews were conducted in English, allowing them to express themselves and converse freely. The interview was conducted online using the Zoom program, with participants and the researcher in a comfortable environment with appropriate lighting, excellent ventilation, no distractions, and a good internet connection. Each interview lasted thirty to forty-five minutes and focused on a number of topics related to the study's key research objectives. The Zoom application was used to record the interview. Furthermore, the recorded data were transcribed verbatim in a room with no background noise to facilitate data transcription utilizing Google Doc voice typing or Microsoft 365 dictate, which requires clear sound to write down the interviewee's words into word format. The researcher listened to the video again after converting it to text format to remove transcription problems and ensure accuracy then analyzed.

Data Analysis

After the recorded data were transcribed into verbatim written accounts and comparing the written and audio versions, the files were read and compared with the audio versions of each interview in order to correct transcription errors. The researcher re-read the data then highlighted and examined the data for connections and redundancies. The highlighted information was coded, and then thematic analysis was used in identifying and classifying the online learning experiences of allied health students, their coping strategies, and the impact of their experience on their

professional development. In conducting thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the following are the steps:

- a. *Familiarization with the data.* All of the participant descriptions were transcribed from video recordings of each individual's interview. The researcher read and listened to the interview transcriptions multiple times in order to gain a better grasp of the interview and get engaged in and familiar with its content.
- b. *Coding.* All statements that could be relevant and answer the research questions were underlined, and succinct labels were created (codes). It entails coding the entire data collection and then compiling the codes and any pertinent data extracts into a list of all significant statements for examination at a later stage.
- c. *Generating initial themes.* The researcher analyzed the codes and compiled a list of key larger meaning patterns (potential themes). Data that were connected to the proposed theme or were comparable to each other were grouped together. The researcher next began working on the meaning formation and assessed each prospective topic. As a result, the number of ambiguous and overlapping sentences was minimized.
- d. *Reviewing themes.* The researcher organized the candidate themes and compared them to the dataset. Assuring that the candidate themes create a compelling story about the facts and provide answers to the research questions. The data was then double-checked and reviewed to fine-tune the themes. Splitting, combining, and eliminating themes are examples of this.
- e. *Defining and naming of themes.* The results were combined into an in-depth description of the phenomenon under examination by the researcher. Each theme was thoroughly examined, the scope and focus were chosen, and the story of each was established. As a result, topics were divided into groupings and subcategories and given a descriptive name.
- f. *Writing up.* The researcher thoroughly examined the extensive description of the phenomena, which showed the participants' real experiences in the most straightforward manner conceivable. The data extraction and analytic narrative were woven together, and the analysis was compared to previous research.

Ensuring Rigor and Trustworthiness

In a qualitative investigation, credibility is vital, according to Lincoln and Guba (as stated in Polit & Beck, 2017). Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are all factors. The study's internal validity, reliability, objectivity, and external validity are determined by these criteria. Credibility is achieved through instilling trust in the accuracy and consistency of the findings; dependability refers to the degree to which people can rely on its consistency and stability; confirmability ensures that the findings are neutral and that the participants' thoughts are taken into account rather than the researcher's; thus, biases are avoided. Finally, transferability refers to the findings' ability to be applied in other contexts or to become meaningful to an outsider. (Wa-Mbaleka, 2019; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Polit & Beck, 2017).

To guarantee that the study was trustworthy, the researcher used credibility techniques such as member checking, peer review, triangulation, and reflexivity (Wa-Mbaleka, 2019). Member checking is giving participants preliminary reports of the interview's exact sentences, data analysis, and study results to see if they were correct (Wa-Mbaleka, 2019; Korstjens & Moser,

2018). All participants received their data back to confirm their feedback and agreement. This enhanced the study's credibility by allowing participants to double-check their remarks and ensure that the data collected was correct and consistent with their goals. Soliciting comments from peers who are experts in the field during the data analysis and interpretation phase ensures a peer review process (Wa-Mbaleka, 2019). The researcher solicited comments from four specialists on the subject, and their suggestions greatly improved the data analysis and interpretation. Triangulation makes sure that the finding is supported by using multiple sources, researchers, theories (from interviews, observations, documents, and pictures) (Wa-Mbaleka, 2019) in analyzing the data to ensure its credibility (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Triangulation can be done by unstructured interviews and observation or quantitatively by using questionnaires or structured interviews (Williamson, 2002). In this study, triangulation was accomplished through a combination of observations and interviews and a comparison of observations with interviews. In addition, the researcher questioned fellow students or classmates, as well as teachers, who had witnessed the participants' online learning experience. The usage of multiple sources provided a better understanding and helped to detect any participant conflicts. Furthermore, the researcher practiced reflexivity by removing themselves from their own attitudes, beliefs, prejudices, and preferences, which could have influenced their comprehension of the phenomenon's meanings and contexts (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Students were informed about the research's goal and reassured, both verbally and in writing, that their decision to participate or not participate in the research was their own. They were told of the results' confidentiality and requested to sign a consent form indicating that they accepted to participate in the study. They are free to leave at any time during the interview with no penalties. Their ethical rights to reject and provide information were examined. The participants were assured that their answers would be kept private and confidential and that their responses would stay anonymous. The information gathered will only be used for research purposes and will be destroyed once it has been analyzed and validated. The study's major informants all agreed to take part.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Experiences in Online Learning

Table 2 outlines the answers to the first Research Question. It presents the themes, sub-themes, and categories that emerged from the study regarding the online learning experiences of allied health students. The analysis of the data gathered has come up with two themes, six sub-themes and 15 categories. The data from the 172 meaningful statements led to two themes: positive experiences of online learning and negative experiences of online learning.

Table 2: Online Learning Experiences of Allied Health Students

Theme No.	Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
1	Positive Experiences of Online Learning	A. Flexible Learning Opportunities	1. Integrating Theory-Practice Gap 2. Increased Adaptability to Learning 3. Instant Access to Learning Materials 4. Comfort of Studying at Home 5. Convenient Platforms
		B. Fosters Learning Opportunities	1. Career Development 2. Lifelong Learning
2	Negative Experiences of Online Learning	A. Technological Factors	1. Poor Internet Connection 2. Power Interruptions 3. Platform flaws
		B. Teacher Factors	1. Lacks Technical Skills 2. Delayed Feedback 3. Gives too many Requirements
		C. Student Factors	1. Lacks Social Interactions 2. Limited Resources 3. Difficult to focus
		D. Health Factors	1. Physical Health 2. Mental Health

Strengths of Online Learning.

Several studies have found that undergraduate students benefit from online learning (Rensburg, 2018; Andrew et al., 2015). The following sub-themes were discovered during data extraction: flexible learning opportunities and foster learning opportunities.

Flexible learning opportunities.

Online learning has long been seen as flexible since it allows students to manage their own schedule, work situations, and educational requirements (Sheringham et al., 2016). According to studies, the flexibility of online learning generated independence in learning (Akimanimpaye & Fakude, 2015; Tobase et al., 2017; Minuti et al., 2018), they could study anywhere at any time (Daniel et al., 2019), learning materials could be accessed at any time (Adarkwah, 2020), and they could produce learning for students via the use of technology (Daniel et al., 2019; Rensburg, 2018). From the 34 meaningful statements about the flexibility of online learning emerged six categories: integrating theory-practice gap, increased adaptability to learning; instant access to learning materials; the comfort of studying at home; and convenient platforms.

Integrating theory-practice gap. Half the participants interviewed said that allied health students need to perform actual skills in laboratories in front of their instructors. However, they still believed that even though they are doing it virtually, there is the incorporation of practical skills in theory through case studies.

“But right now, mostly we’re studying case studies. But what’s nice is that the things that you need to do to your patient are still there.” P3

Also, three participants said that there are alternative ways for them to apply the related learning experience in their online learning. They find patients, then interview them online, and they also improvise materials for them to learn skills.

“We still have to do like assessments, but the difference is now that since I’m not going to go to the clinics or hospitals or mental health centers, then for my assessment, I have to go find my own client in a way.” P9; “The CIs are giving alternatives on how to do things for us to apply the skills. Like in our checklist, we need a pregnant woman; instead of an actual pregnant, we used pillows. They allowed us to interview our patients online.” P2; “To learn IV insertion this year, so apparently we’re supposed to learn on a banana peel.” P8

Two participants further expressed that the related learning experience is applied during online learning by watching videos from their teachers, and they will record themselves as part of their return demonstration.

“Our teacher will give a video for us to watch, then we will do our return demonstration by doing a video recording of ourselves. P6; “Our laboratory is cooking. We usually do a video recording of the cooking activity.” P10

Despite the fact that the learning is done online, the students liked how practical skills were used. Similar to earlier studies, even in the absence of face-to-face learning, students can still participate in a range of learning activities to improve their skills (Sheringham et al., 2016). Rensburg (2018) also added learning activities that include case scenarios, where they can integrate theory and practice in the health science context.

Increased adaptability to learning. Half of the students indicate that they learned to adapt to online learning because they can study at their own pace or time, you will learn independence or self-directed learning.

“The asynchronous thing, it’s kind of good because you can do it on your own time...” P1; “In a way, you can set your own time when you want to watch the video and finish your requirements.” P2; “Here, it’s really you who can and will be guiding yourself...” P3; “I prefer to just read it on my own, so in a way, the online class is having the materials there already and is more efficient for me.” P9; “Since the exam or quiz is open for several hours, you can pick the time you want to take the exam.” P10; “I think it’s when the teacher will post the slides beforehand so we can still study it on our own time and at our own pace, so that was helpful.” P13

Though online learning is more popular because students must manage both school and household responsibilities, students still believe that studying at home has advantages since they have complete control over the time they study and have learned to study independently. Same with the result of the study of Blackmon and Major (2012), students perceive that they can balance their own schedule and their studies. Studies also show that flexible learning encourages students’ ability to become independent (Furnes et al., 2018; Minuti et al., 2018; Tobase et al., 2018) and work independently at their own pace (Telford & Senior, 2017).

Instant access to learning materials. Half of the participants mentioned that the advantage of online learning is that they can easily go back to topics in case they need clarifications because you can just download the materials online or watch the pre-recorded videos again.

“The good thing about online, especially the pre-recorded video of the lectures, if you don’t understand something, you can easily go back to the video and study.” P3; “That’s nice about online class; I can go back to the recorded video of the lecture and watch again the topics that I cannot understand.” P5; “While listening to the pre-recorded discussion, you can already answer the activity. I think it is very effective, cause generally, it’s been good.” P6; “I prefer to just read it on my own, so in a way, the online class is like having the materials there already and is sort of more efficient for me.” P9; “Some of our classes are pre-recorded, so we can easily go back to the important topics or information that were mentioned by our teachers.” P11; “When the teacher will post the slides or something beforehand, we can still study it on our own time and at our own pace; that’s helpful.” P13

Many of the participants mentioned that what they like with the asynchronous class is the pre-recorded video of the lecture where they could easily go back to the important topics. Consistent with other researchers that recorded videos of the lecture were preferred by the students because they can review them later (Gierdowski & Galanek, 2020); online learning materials are readily available (Adarkwah, 2020), which help them boost their learning (Gierdowski & Galanek, 2020).

The comfort of studying at home. This describes the online learning experience of students while studying at home. One advantage of studying online, as mentioned by eight participants, is the comfort of studying at home with your family and the convenience of not rushing to go to your classroom. Heap (2017) said that students who study online could choose their own environment where they are comfortable. It also saves time because you don’t have to commute to class and no longer worry about missing class.

“The feeling that you are with your family. You are with them while studying.” P2; “It’s a bit easier here in a way because you’re at home you don’t really have to like rush to your next class. You just have to be on your computer.” P1; “I did not expect studying in AUP while I am here in my hometown. I don’t have to wake up at 7 am just to go to our classroom.” P4; “That’s what I like with online learning, I can be here in our province.” P5; “It’s going to be much more comfortable for me because I can just stay at the dorm, and I could do my work.” P7; “For me, it is comfortable no more hassle in preparing.” P10; “The thought that you are having classes at home. You are in your comfort zone.” P12; “It’s nice because you can still be in the comfort of your room or house and attend lectures at the same time.” P13

Convenient platforms. This describes how the platforms have contributed to their online learning experience. Four of the participants mentioned that MS Teams and iStudy (the university’s official learning management system) are very helpful, efficient, and organized.

“When MS teams came, it was a lot easier for us to submit requirements because we can already see the due dates, and we will just submit it there.” P2; “The MS Teams for me is very flexible among all the platforms that we used.” P10; “We’re very blessed cause we have iStudy, the school’s LMS.

It is very efficient and accessible.” P6; “Studying is really helpful. I think it’s pretty easy to find things.” P9

Three of the participants also mentioned that overall, the platforms or apps used by their teachers are good, efficient, and organized.

“The system that we use right now is Schoology. I think that’s very organized...” P11; “The apps are useful. It’s easy to present the assignments there and join the lectures and the online streaming, so I think the platforms work quite well.” P13; “The platforms that we are using are ok with me. They are very useful, especially the Zoom because it is used for all types of meetings.” P3

It is the responsibility of the instructor or the university to provide students with a safe online learning platform because it is very important in online learning as it helps them organize their classes, learning materials, and the requirements they need to submit (Rensburg, 2018).

Gierdowski and Galanek (2020) agreed that instructors should increase the use of online learning that is friendly and easy to use. It also suggested that online learning platforms should be organized and accessible (Gierdowski & Galanek, 2020) as it builds a connection between instructors and students (Smith & Crowe, 2017).

Fosters Learning Opportunities

Two categories emerged from the 19 meaningful statements on how online education fosters learning opportunities: career development and lifelong learning. With the challenges posed by the pandemic, such as the suspension of face-to-face lessons and duties, online learning can be an alternative option for students to learn (Schaffer et al., 2016).

Career development. This describes how online learning can still help them continue their education despite the pandemic that they are facing. Most of them mentioned that they don’t want to be delayed in their education and they should continue learning. Even though it is online learning, there is still knowledge acquisition.

“Just because there’s a pandemic doesn’t mean I should stop my education. I want to become a nurse. I should be able to do that.” P1; “Right now, online learning is still an advantage because we don’t need to stop learning.” P4; “At first, I was thinking to stop studying. But I will not waste the opportunity of online learning.” P5; “With the online class, we felt that learning is still continuous, and learning did not stop.” P6; “Even though it’s online, I probably will enroll as much as I don’t, but that’s only because I would have to wait another year to finish my education, right?” P7; “It’s a win-win situation. You’re doing something with your life, and you’re learning at least.” P8; “But the good thing is, after all the online classes I have attended, I can still apply the things I have learned.” P11; “If learning is continuous, at least our brains are still working. By God’s grace, we are still learning.” P12

In the study done by Blackman (2012), a number of students agree that online learning allows them to gain access to education. Students can also access education from all around the world through online learning (Barnard-Ashton et al., 2017).

Lifelong learning. Most of the students mentioned that aside from the knowledge they acquired from the topics, they also gained lifelong learnings from their online learning experience. They believed that these lifelong learning would be applied when they become professionals someday. Andrew et al. (2015) mentioned that students who are highly satisfied with learning can enhance retention of students and can facilitate lifelong learning.

“Online learning will help you develop your time management.” P2; “I am now starting to learn time management because you really need to cope up.” P5; “Maybe right now, for me, I feel like I am getting goal-driven. I am encouraged to set goals for each day and to finish tasks day by day.” P3; “These experiences taught me how to deal with different situations because this was how I was trained as a registered nurse or a health care provider.” P6; “In my career, this will teach me how to take care of myself, and it’s helping me to identify when I’m stressed and when I am not.” P7; “The good effect would be, we will have lifelong lessons like learning must be flexible, and learning must not be stagnant.” P10; “I believe the patience, hard work, and positivity were developed. Even if the situation is this so dark, we still need to work hard cause no one knows of what the fruits of our labor will be today.” P12; “I think it helps us to try to be more organized and on time as well, and I think it ends up being useful to be able to experience this.” P13

Weaknesses of Online Learning

During extraction, the following sub-themes emerged: technological factors with three categories; teacher factors, student factors, and health factors. Despite the positive outcomes of online learning, challenges still arise (Adarkwah, 2020; Almaiah et al., 2020; Rensburg, 2018).

Technological factors

Technology has been part of online learning as it is necessary for the success of online learning (Almaiah et al., 2020), and the lack of technology and infrastructure is recognized as a barrier in online learning (O’Doherty et al., 2018) as it makes learning effective (Adarkwah, 2020). The 23 meaningful statements extracted led to three categories: poor internet connection, power interruptions, and platform flows.

Poor internet connection. This describes the participants’ challenges with internet connection. Some of the students perceive that this is their major challenge in their online learning experience. Due to weak internet connection, there are students who miss attending synchronous classes, taking examinations or quizzes, and submitting their requirements on time. Others, on the other hand, must purchase internet data in order to connect to the internet.

“You know, sometimes like there’s a there’s a period of time where I didn’t have an Internet connection.” P1; “Our internet connection is unstable. Sometimes I have missed classes, especially my minor subjects.” P2; “My challenge was the internet connection. We only have prepaid data, and we have to buy load every time. And it was hard when we have online meetings.” P3; “My biggest challenge right now is the internet connection. Usually, from 7 pm-9 pm, the internet connection is very slow.” P4; “There are problems with the internet connection, you cannot update all the time. You cannot finish any requirement, and you cannot join synchronous classes.” P5; “But when I reached the place, there was no good internet connection. It’s hard to join online classes” P6; “Internet connection sometimes. Especially, with eastern sometimes it is really slow...” P7; “When I was in the Philippines, I didn’t have the connection.” P8; “Another challenge that I also face is the internet connection. We spend 50 pesos load every day, and it’s very expensive.” P10; “Sometimes

if the LMS is not the problem, it would be the internet connection.” P11; “If there is no internet connection, it really gives us some problems.” P12; “During exams, if the Internet isn’t quite good, then it can have problems if you’re trying to move between the questions.” P13

Unstable internet connection is a major challenge faced by most students. In line with the study of Rensburg (2018), it mentioned that most of the studies had encountered unstable internet connectivity, and some didn’t really have access to a quality internet connection. A study done by Demuyakor (2020) identified that the high cost of internet data for students who are outside China is another issue. Poor internet connectivity may hinder the online broadcast of lectures to students (O’Doherty et al., 2018) and therefore affect the quality of learning (Adarkwah, 2020).

Power interruptions. Aside from the unstable internet connection, another weakness of online learning is when they experience power interruptions. Some of the students mentioned that they experience power interruptions in their place, and it affects their online learning. Electricity is one of the foundations of online learning, and according to Sentaro Recto (as cited in Baclig, 2020), about 2.3 million students who are under a distance learning system in the Philippines are affected by power interruptions, and some do not have access to electricity. Same with the study of Adarkwah (2018), he mentioned that the lack of electric power had affected the students’ learning.

“Challenges with the internet connection or if there are power interruptions here.” P2; “Internet connection and power outage. Those are my major challenges.” P4; “You need to submit ahead of time because we experience power interruptions.” P5; “There were times that there was a power outage in our place, and I cannot join online classes or submit my requirements on time.” P6; “Now I’m hearing that electricity will be out for a few hours to on Thursday.” P9

Platform flaws. This talks about the online learning platforms used by the university. It was previously mentioned in this study that students view that the online platforms are efficient and organized. But they also encounter some technical issues which affect their classes, especially their exams.

“MS teams, it’s specifically made for laptops, but not everyone has a laptop, so it’s a bit difficult to use MS Teams on the phone too.” P1; “The difficulties we have encountered in MS Teams is that it is sometimes very slow. At times the laptops also lag because of the slow MS Teams.” P2; “I found the LMS hard to use because I feel uncomfortable since they are new to us and we never used them in the past.” P3; “At times when the iStudy will crash. You will feel nervous because the requirement or exam might not be submitted because of the technical problems in iStudy.” P5; “I think my only complaint about iStudy would be that it’s kind of not really flexible like if there is an exam or something...” P9; “We use schoology. At times it is not working well. While in MS Teams, even teachers are having a hard time logging in.” P12

Half of the students encountered online platform learning errors. Students suggest that teachers should ensure that the LMS should be easy to navigate (Gierdowski & Galanek, 2020). Also, students and teachers should know how to manipulate their online learning platforms in

case problems arise (Rensburg, 2018) because it could create obstacles in its implementation to students (Almaiah et al., 2020). Adarkwah (2020) also added that students cry if there is a breakdown of the online platform.

Teacher factors

This describes the things that students encounter with their teachers that was made their online learning experience challenging. From the 21 meaningful statements, three categories emerged: lacks technical skills, delayed feedback, and giving too many requirements.

Lacks technical skills. This describes the lack of technical skills among teachers. According to the participants, they have teachers who are not used to utilizing the technology, and at times they are having a hard time. Especially with the use of online learning platforms. There are times that they are confused about where to submit their requirements because their teachers use different platforms. The platform in each subject depends on the teacher to where they are comfortable. There are also students who have difficulty keeping track of the announcements.

“Our CIs encounter technical problems as well. They are also having a hard time using the technology.” P2; “The tools that we use in online learning are good but too many. It’s really confusing because they use too many apps because not all teachers use only one platform. They use what they are comfortable with.” P5; “But there are times that it is confusing, cause with the different teachers, different subjects... they have different platforms. Like other teachers would prefer MS teams and others would prefer to use Google meet and others use Zoom.” P6; “Actually, we use a lot of platforms. Because we have teachers who are not used to using one platform so they will use the tool where they are comfortable with so that it is not hassled for them.” P10; “But it would have been easier if everybody always uses the same platform because sometimes even within one class the teacher would be using multiple platforms so sometimes it would be a bit difficult to keep track.” P13

Rensburg (2018) emphasized that the ability of educators to transfer a high standard of knowledge in online teaching is affected if they are not equipped with the use of technology. Educators should be familiar with the online landscape because they are the ones who will guide and give directions to their students (Camacho et al., 2016). Adarkwah (2020) identified that lack of ICT skills and rejection to e-learning by faculty are barriers to online learning. According to Gierdowski & Galanek (2020), students suggest having a consistent organizational LMS to avoid confusion to students of where to find the files and to submit assignments. It is also a helpful time-saver for them.

Delayed feedback. This describes the online learning experience of students where they need prompt feedback from their teachers. This is to check if they are learning from the requirements they have submitted. Some students perceive that the presence of a teacher in performing skills is important because they can give prompt feedback.

“There is no CI that will monitor us and give prompt feedbacks.” P2; “In online learning, there is no immediate feedback from the teachers you are not aware if you are doing the right thing.” P5; “I think that the biggest challenge right now for professions like us that are skills-based is we need constant monitoring, we need constant training, we cannot do that right now.” P6; “No one is checking, but even if they do, ma’am, even if they’re going to correct this, it’s going to be like on like a conference call. It’s hard.” P7; “Right now, during online, our teacher cannot correct us

immediately and at times no more corrections. We do not know if we are doing it right or not.” P10; “For me, it is also hard if there are certain topics that you do not understand, and it seems difficult to ask the teacher cause at times they are not available and do not have an internet connection.” P12

The instructors who are present or accessible have a strong influence on the student experience in learning (Blackmon and Major, 2012), as they can give the needed direction to students (Skordis-Worrall, J, 2015). Students expect that instructors give prompt feedback during online learning (Rensburg, 2018). A lack of immediate feedback from instructors and peers can be a challenge in an online environment which could affect learning outcomes (Ramos-Morcillo, 2020; Skordis-Worrall et al., 2015). The participants experienced delayed feedback from their instructors. Same with the study of Blackmon and Major (2012), the students experienced a lack of contact with their professor, which made them uncomfortable, and their online learning suffered. Skordis-Worrall et al. (2015) added that students feel isolated when they feel confused or uncertain with the topics. Also, students may become confused and overwhelmed with their way in the maze of information overload; that’s why it is important that teachers are there to guide them (Ateya et al., 2015).

Gives too many requirements. Many of the participants said that their instructors gave plenty of requirements that made them face the computer all day, and most of their time was spent doing their requirements. Some students mentioned that if you have a lot of minor subjects plus major subjects, all of them will give requirements, and they are not aware that all of the teachers gave requirements at the same time.

“There are a lot of requirements at the same time. Some teachers do not know each other, so if all our teachers will give requirements, they require us to submit on his/her schedule.” P2; “The whole day doing the requirements... almost all that we do are paper works, and even duty time, they are all paper works.” P3; “I have to wake up at 9 am until midnight sometimes until morning, just to finish my requirements for that day.” P4; “We have difficulties with the requirements. We thought like, ‘why do teachers are bombarding us with so many requirements aside from the scheduled online classes?’” P6; “I’m always in the computer because we have a large number of requirements.” P7; “Downside to that is the homework; there’s a lot of requirements to turn in.” P8; “I believe we can still learn from our requirements; however if it is a lot, but the students tend to lose focus.” P10; “We are already bombarded with the things we need to learn... You can’t be left behind because every day, new requirements or topics will be added.” P11; “It is also hard when is all teachers will give us requirements at the same time.” P12

Most of the students struggle with the workload they experience in their online learning due to plenty of requirements. As mentioned by Tartavulea et al. (2020), it is expected that the use of online formative assessment is significantly high during the pandemic, but giving of homework and projects are the most exercised. But according to Galloway (as cited in Stenger, 2018), too many requirements can actually limit the learner’s ability to learn, and their study suggests that if students tend to become overloaded, they feel more stressed and experience physical problems like sweating, headaches, stomach problems, and sleeping difficulties.

Student factors

This describes the felt need that the students themselves experience may hinder them from learning online. From the 28 meaningful statements, two categories emerged: lacks social interactions and difficulty to focus.

Lacks social interactions. This talks about the lack of communication between learners and their classmates or friends and between learners and educators. Four of the participants mentioned that they feel relieved if there is face-to-face interaction with their classmates after classes who will sympathize with you if you fail the exams, or you can personally meet them after class and make assignments together. They also love interacting with their classmates because they can also review exams together, and they learn more when there is interaction.

“Right now in online, you feel alone. You cannot talk to them face-to-face.” P2; “For online classes, if our schedule is full, like if it is the whole day like we only have to face the computer and mostly no interactions aside from family.” P3; “In the online class, you cannot hang out with your classmates after a very tiring day.” P6; “I feel like I’m alone, and I feel like I am isolated. I can’t absorb it alone. For me, I feel like I don’t have classmates.” P11

Four students also mentioned that they could not directly ask their teachers during online class because they felt embarrassed thinking that they might distract the whole class.

“I prefer to watch the pre-recorded video of the lecture and finish my requirement in the evening, but if I have clarifications, I feel embarrassed to ask my teachers late at night.” P11; “You can’t really communicate. It’s hard to convey the actual skill through a screen.” P7; “For me watching videos, for example in YouTube is not effective for me. That is not my learning style. I learn more when there is interaction in class or in a classroom setup.” P10; “In online, it is embarrassing to voice out. I feel uncomfortable interrupting the teacher. I feel afraid cause I might be disturbing the teacher in her discussions.” P12

Participants in the research of Adarkwah (2020) view that poor internet connection during synchronous classes can hinder communication between students and teachers. They also added that the effectiveness of the course is negatively affected if there is a lack of student-student and teacher-student interaction. O’Doherty et al. (2018) added that the lack of interaction is perceived to have a lesser active exchange of ideas and shared knowledge. Like what some of the participants in this study are telling, they feel that they are not learning because they lack social interactions with their classmates and teachers.

Difficult to focus. Students mentioned several types of distractions like the noise from the environment or the animals, students, and teachers get easily distracted during synchronous class, and other essential things; that’s why it is difficult for them to focus.

“Then there are also places that are not suitable for online learning due to some noise like the chickens. If you have synchronous class and your teacher will ask you something, and if it is noisy you cannot concentrate, and for example, you are reporting, you cannot report well because of the background noise.” P2; “I think what is hard in online learning is the part that we cannot ask the teacher instantly. If I will interrupt the teacher, it’s a bit embarrassing. Then everyone will lose focus.” P3; “I think there are a lot of distractions. Like watching a pre-recorded video, if I stop it for

a while, then I will do some stuff like I will browse my phone. If I will record my checklists, there are factors that you can't control, like the barking of the dog, or like for example, and you will ask someone to help hold the camera and record the video as you will perform the checklist." P6; "My experiences so far would be the fact that it's so easy to get distracted in class... especially when it's a synchronous class very easy to get distracted." P7; "It's a lot harder to focus still cause of a lot of distractions it's not only the device see I'm in my own room, so I get distracted by my bed I want to go to my bed or sometimes when I get hungry I get permission I just take my computer and go downstairs and make food." P8; "I have class, then those with me here at home also have a class, and our house is small, if all of us have class at the same time, you can hear their classes too. Then your teacher will ask you, "who is that talking?" Then, if there are chickens or dogs outside, they are also noisy. We also have kids at home who are also noisy. Another challenge is the household chores, and you need to help, especially if there is no one to take care of it since our parents are also working. Usually, we need to finish the household chores first before we do our requirements." P10

According to research, students experience noise at home, and there are several sources of noise identified like the noise of the people at home, television, inconsiderate neighbors with loud music, and strangers. More than that, there is also noise created by animals (roosters, dogs, etc.) and vehicles and other noise from machines. These noises can negatively affect the student's ability to learn (Diacio, 2014). The impact of noise disturbances on student performance levels is declined (Buchari & Matondang, 2017).

Health factors

From the 16 meaningful statements of the participants, the data came up with two categories: physical and mental health. Students mentioned that their physical and mental health is greatly affected during their online learning. Mheidly et al. (2020) reported that facing screens, computers, tablets, and smart devices can increase stress and anxiety.

Physical health. This explains that students' online experiences brought negative effects to their physical health. Almost all the participants felt tired and drained, and they experienced headaches, backache, muscle aches, posture changes, eyestrain, lack of sleep, sometimes nausea, and sometimes they skipped meals just to finish the things that needed to be done.

"I will just stay awake the whole night. There are times when I will continually not get enough sleep, and I feel nauseated when getting up." P2; "For online classes, I have to face my computer for a very long time, it affects me physically... I experience neck strain and backaches, and it also causes eyestrain." P3; "It is really tiring. I feel exhausted. I always feel like I want to sleep, but you need to stay awake because you need to finish your requirements. My sleeping pattern is altered." P5; "At the end of the day, maybe due to the radiation and you usually have one position while watching the video, it is really physically and mentally draining." P6; "My posture and back. Also, I eat one meal a day because I often have classes and I have to do my requirements, so I only eat like supper because the morning when I wake up, I'm just going straight into class... another bad thing another negative experience is lack of sleep because I will often have to like if I want to do requirements with my friends." P7; "There are times where maybe I might, you know, get muscle aches because of the way I position myself." P8; You cannot eat, like one time I experienced, I was not able to eat the whole day, and I didn't get enough sleep. You will sleep late at night because after the class, and you still need to finish your requirements. Then, you will wake up again early in the morning, and you will face the computer again. Actually, last night my eyes are already bleeding due to eyestrain." P10;

“Tired, drained, and I also experience a headache.” P11 “It is so tiring, and I feel drained. I also have difficulty staring at the screen for a long time because my head and eyes hurt.” P12

According to Galloway (as cited in Stenger, 2018), too many requirements can actually limit the learner’s ability to learn, and there suggests that if students tend to become overloaded, they feel more stressed and experience physical problems like sweating, headaches, stomach problems, and sleeping difficulties. Digital eyestrain can also happen if there is prolonged exposure to digital devices, which is now considered a public health issue (Mheidly et al., 2020).

Mental health. This describes the impact of the online learning experience on mental health to students. Mental stress is linked with online learning; adding up other stressors like the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic can lead to burnout and exhaustion (Mheidly et al., 2020). Furthermore, according to Galloway (as cited in Stenger, 2018), too many requirements can actually limit the learner’s ability to learn, and this suggests that if students tend to become overloaded, they feel more stressed. Prolonged screen time increases stress and anxiety. However, some research suggests that there are benefits to the use of cell phones and explains that it can help relieve stress rather than cause it (Mheidly et al., 2020). Five students mentioned how their mental health is affected by online learning.

“I can really feel the physical tiredness, and I also feel mentally drained.” P3; “Cause if you really feel depressed at the start, you will really have a hard time to cope up with it. ...it is really physically and mentally draining.” P6; “The only thing now is a mental battle that’s my challenge.” P8; “Instead of just being physically tired, you also become stressed.” P5; “But the only challenge is the mental struggle.” P10

Coping Strategies

Table 3 provides the answers to the second Research Question. It presents the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the study regarding the coping strategies by allied health students in dealing with online learning. The analysis of the data gathered has come up with four themes and three sub-themes. The 53 meaningful statements led to four themes: student’s self-efficacy, staying connected with God; support system; and Social and recreational activities.

Table 3: Coping Strategies Used by Allied Health Students in Dealing with Online Learning

Theme No.	Theme	Sub-themes
1	Student’s Self-Efficacy	1. Optimism 2. Resilience 3. Time Management
2	Staying Connected with God	
3	Support System	
4	Social and Recreational Activities	

Student’s Self-Efficacy

During extraction, the following sub-themes emerged: optimism, resilience, and time management. According to Almaiah et al. (2020), self-efficacy is an important factor in

determining the adoption of an online learning system in educational institutions. Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in his or her ability to execute certain behaviors in a given situation (Bandura, 1997).

Optimism. This explains how the students practiced positivity to overcome the challenges in online learning. Half of the students stated that they just understood the situation and moved forward. They avoid negative thoughts and think about the future.

"I seem to be becoming open-minded. I look at this situation in a different perspective. I just think that I will be graduating soon, and this is for my future. I also think that I am not the only one who experiences this situation, and I believe Jesus is coming soon." P4; "I believe we need understanding. If you will not understand, the negative feelings will just continue. The way you look at things, the way you perceive our situation right now, if you will not understand it, if you will not look at the brighter side of the situation like this online class, this is what they did to suffice what should be there that can't be done due to the situation." P6; "I think they enjoyed the experience of asking and just talking about better things." P7; "Personally, I honestly just take a look at the bright side of things." P8; "Because at times when we feed ourselves with negativity, usually, that would be our outlook in life. If you will put in your mind that online classes are hard, but actually it is not that hard you just have some struggles due to major adjustments." P10; "I believe it is through positivity, time management, and knowing your priorities." P11; "Maybe in the future, if we were in the real world already, and we face situations like this, we will not be discouraged again because we already know how to handle it." P12

Having a positive attitude is somewhat hard to maintain if an individual is placed in a difficult situation. However, nurturing a change in attitudes is one of the most important solutions in the development and operation of online learning education (O'Doherty et al., 2018). Peng, Tsai, and Wu (as cited in Omar et al., 2012) suggest that several studies revealed that attitude and self-efficacy had been recognized as essential factors to learners' drive and interest to learn. The positivity of the participants led them to continue learning despite the challenges that they were facing. Sun et al. (as cited in Omar et al., 2012), if learners do not fear the difficulty in information technology or if they have a positive attitude, the more they will be satisfied and successful in online learning.

Time Management. This describes one of the coping strategies done by the students is by prioritizing the things they need to do and expressing the importance of time management.

"In a way, you can set on your time when you want to watch the video and finish your requirements." P2; "Listing the things that I have to do and prioritizing the things that need to be done." P3; "What I also do is that I have a piece of paper, then I list down the things that I have to do, and I mark the things that I have done." P5; "If before, we usually say that we manage our time, but right now, I manage my time even more." P10; "I believe it is through time management and know your priorities. ...we really need to prioritize the things that we really need." P12

Self-discipline and responsibility are advantages of studying online. One way of keeping a student focused on online learning, especially on deadlines, is through time management (Heap,

2017). Furthermore, a study done by Ramos-Morcillo et al. (2020) revealed that time management is beneficial for having good mental health.

Staying Connected with God.

The findings indicate that staying connected with God is one way of surviving the challenges in online learning.

“I really resulted to prayer and trust in God. Also, hoping and praying for a better future. As of now, we can just really do our best in our situation and trust God that someday it will be better.” P3; “My number one way of coping is praying.” P4; “Right now, during the sabbath, I really experience peace, and that’s one coping mechanism. I think the other one would be Bible study, so me and my friends after going through like that revival experience.” P7; “God lets the world run its course, but God never will never leave you alone and pray for focus and pray for the situation for God to resolve it.” P8; “We need to pray because we cannot do it on our own; we are very limited. We need a Higher Being, who is very powerful who can control the situation that we cannot handle.” P11; “That’s why we really need courage and trust in God. Even though it is dark, and you can’t see, keep walking.” P12

The participants in the study of Byrd (2016) believed that when students encounter challenging times, they usually rely on their faith to help them go through. In Christian education, the incorporation of faith with learning is vital. But in online learning, it seems to be a challenge to educators to successfully implement the integration of this principle. Since there is a geographical distance between the students and the teachers, it will be difficult to nurture. But if it will be nourished, even students learn independently, the more it is needed to sustain a strong faith presence in the online classroom (Casimiro, 2018). The result of the study proves that even though students have online learning, they still manage to stay connected with God.

Support System.

Nine participants mentioned that support from family, friends, classmates, and teachers is very important to get through the challenges of online learning. Two of the participants stated that they get support from their family by excusing them from housework, especially when they have class or hectic schedules.

“I believe it is easier if your family is very supportive when it comes to your online learning.” P3; “For me, both my family and friends have helped me a lot. With my family, they understand that my schedule is really hectic. So, they excuse me with the household chores.” P12

Nine of the participants also believed that support from their friends/classmates or staying connected with friends/classmates helped them cope because they can vent out or they can ask questions. Four of the respondents mentioned that supportive and understanding teachers are also helpful in overcoming the challenges of online learning.

“I believe it is also helpful to have a support system, and you have friends that even though you don’t see each other during this pandemic, you are still connected with them, and you can say and exchange your challenges and experiences.” P3; “There are times when I will chat with my friends and ask them if they have already submitted the requirement so that I’ll be motivated.” P5; “I can talk to my

very close friends like two or three together at the same time we can just do some talking and catch up.” **P8**; “Working together with my classmates is helpful to make sure that we get everything done together.” **P13**; “I message them when I can, or I asked some of my classmates.” **P9**; “I also have some friends where I could share my struggles, especially if my internet connection is lost. At times I call my teachers and tell them that I don’t have an internet connection.” **P4**; “I talk to my friends about the struggles we face right now; I will later realize that I am not alone, and they are also struggling with online classes. We also have teachers that are very considerate.” **P12**; “My CIs in minor subjects are very lenient. And being able to spend time with my closest friends and in the presence of God... and these beautiful things about the Bible.” **P7**; “I have friends and we usually talk about these struggles and I believe I am not the only one experiencing these challenges. Our teachers are also flexible and understanding and willing to cater to the requests of students.” **P6**; “Our CIs are very considerate because if we do not have available materials, they will tell us to improvise and do all the possible things.” **P2**

According to UNESCO (2020), mental health support to students is important to fight the negative impacts of the pandemic. Important measures that families may consider to protect their children’s mental health is by utilizing social media to stay connected with friends and peers. Furthermore, studies show that social support from family, peers, and instructors has a significant impact on the quality of online learning. It should provide a positive and encouraging atmosphere during the online learning course (Elumalai et al. 2020). Mheidly et al. (2020) also added that providing opportunities to communicate their feelings and mental struggles is important to get proper help and support. It seems that some of the participants were able to get support from their families, peers, and teachers. They view them as the support system that helped them get through with online learning difficulties.

Social and Recreational Activities.

This describes the diversional activities done by students to balance lives from the hurdles of online learning activities. Seven students mentioned that after the tiring class the whole day, they usually do other things for them to relax. Some of them watch movies online, some browse their social media, and others join online groups like bible study groups and small groups; others divert through music or doing house works.

“Every day, it’s the same thing; I’ll go on Netflix or YouTube after all of my stuff is done.” **P1**; “I browse my Facebook, or sometimes I walk outside with my childhood friends, and we play in the stadium.” **P5**; “My coping mechanism is through music, and we also have a bible study group.” **P4**; “I think the other one would be Bible study so me and my friends after going through we have revival experience.” **P7**; “There are also small groups in AUP that are still active even though online. So I still join them to divert and relax.” **P10**; “I can go out for a walk and exercise. My other coping skill is sleeping.” **P8**; “I sleep or do some household chores; at times, I go cycling or walking. I also interact with our pets to at least relieve the stress.” **P11**

According to Galloway (as cited in Stenger, 2018), some students experience a lack of balance in their lives. They choose to finish their requirements rather than getting involved in social, physical, and restorative activities which could maintain their well-being. UNESCO (2020) emphasized it is important that families should protect the mental health of their children by a healthy diet, encouraging exercise, and getting enough sleep. There are a lot of activities suggested by UNCESO (2020) that they can engage in so that they can maintain their mental health. Mheidly

et al. (2020) also added that implementing healthy practices between online sessions such as breathing, meditation, and yoga lessens stress, increases physical activity, and enhances well-being.

Impact of Online Learning Experience on Allied Health Students' Professional Development

Table 4 provides the answers to the third Research Question. It presents the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the study regarding the impact of the online learning experience on allied health students' professional development.

Table 4: Impact of Online Learning Experience on Allied Health Student's Professional Development

Theme No	Theme	Categories
1	Inadequate Clinical Competence	4. Loss of Confidence 5. Lack of Practical Skills
2	Worried About Future Outcome	
3	Traditional vs. Online Learning Preference	

The analysis of the data gathered has come up with three themes and three sub-themes. The 42 meaningful statements led to three themes: inadequate clinical competence, worry about future outcomes, and traditional vs. online learning preference.

Inadequate Clinical Competence

During extraction, the following sub-themes emerged: loss of confidence and lack of practical skills. The core of medical education is the clinical learning environment (AlHaqwi & Taha, 2015). Competence in the clinical area is developed through hands-on laboratories. It needs preparation, knowledge, and experience (Kay et al., 2018).

Loss of Confidence. This explains the impact of the virtual related learning experience (RLE) of allied health students on their profession. Five of the students verbalized that they feel incompetent to be exposed in the hospital in case they will have a duty. Also, if this virtual RLE will still continue until they graduate, they believe that they are not very confident with the skills they earned virtually.

"It doesn't make me very confident if I have to do this on non-human patients. It feels like I would be more confident with my skills if I actually did it on real-life people." P1; "I think the courage that we have before is reduced because we do not have any actual duty right now." P4; "I feel like maybe we need to have another semester if it's possible just doing duty because honestly, I don't feel confident if I was going to work after." P7; "This virtual learning experience will affect our confidence in doing the procedure." P11; "Right now, we're not really learning everything properly that we need to learn or that will end up not being competent enough." P13

Traditional RLE is suspended at the moment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Kay et al. (2001) said that the advantage of a virtual laboratory is it is available anytime and anywhere, which may also help students learn pre-laboratory activities. However, clinical competence is developed through students' exposure to a large number and various clinical experiences, learning in

authentic clinical settings, self-directed learning, and the establishment of a supportive environment (AlHaqwi and Taha, 2020). It is true that the experience of the participants where they did not experience clinical duties affected their level of confidence.

Lack of Practical Skills. All of the participants said that even though they perform checklists or they see pictures or videos of the skills they need to learn, they feel like they still lack practical skills. Some of the students also mentioned that they had limited resources to perform the skills, and they usually improvised just to perform the necessary skills. Two participants mentioned that traditional clinical exposure is really different since they need to build rapport with an actual patient, and the skills developed in the actual setting are very different.

“I feel like it might get in the way of my learning cause I’m not actually doing it on a pregnant woman, or I’m not using the actual equipment I need to be using.” P1; “We did not experience how to care for an actual patient. What we’ve experienced is more on theories. When we do our return demonstrations, it is not the actual skill because we do not have the actual equipment or patient.” P2; “The DR exposure is not that enough. Even with OR duty, we do not have exposure. As well as the materials that we use are also improvised... we might not know how to use that, and probably, we do not know how to move inside the OR.” P3; “I believe actual RLE is really important. For me, not all the theories we have learned will be retained, but when it is applied in RLE, it is easier to retain, and it stays in my mind.” P4; In virtual RLE, since your patient is your relative and at times improvised, you will not be able to practice building rapport. I feel like that we will become half nurses.” P5; “The skills should be practiced accurately, and it really needs an actual training. ‘Coz in this profession, if you make even a simple mistake, the patient’s life can be at stake.” P6; “We actually need to experience it. If I become a nurse in the future and I am thrown in ER right when I get a job the first time, I will be seeing dramatic patients arrive there, and what if I faint as a nurse?” P7; “If you have a virtual experience and the patient is generated, you lose that interpersonal relationship with your patient where it’s not just robotic you get to tell about stories.” P8; “I was hoping to use my practicum as a way to apply my knowledge and also choose what kind of field, now all of it is behind a laptop, so I don’t think I’m getting as much out of it as I should have.” P9; “We do not know if we are doing it right or not. We might be demonstrating skills incorrectly because there is no actual supervision from teachers.” P10; “In Medical Laboratory Science, especially if you will not proceed to Medicine, the tests are very skill-based. We are deprived of the experiences.” P11; “We feel like we are clueless when it comes to the actual setup since what we only know is the theory and the rationale behind it.” P12; “I think it’s quite difficult, especially for dentistry since we need a lot of hands-on practice to learn the skills.” P13

The result of the study supports the research of (Ramos-Morcillo et al., 2020), which states that students the transition of RLE from traditional to online learning will not have a significant impact on their training. Similarly, students in the research done said that skills training before their clinical placements is important because it will help them in real-life situations (Westin et al., 2015)

Worried About the Future Outcome

The findings explain that the impact of online learning on the development of their future profession. Nine students are worried about the result of virtual RLE in their future profession. They feel that they will not be able to perform well in the real setting because they believe that their professions are skills-based and the life of their patient is at stake. They are scared because they feel that the skills they learned in online RLE were not enough.

"I feel scared and inadequate... I feel like we are not deserving cause we did not perform it well." P2; "I am a little bit nervous and anxious. I am scared like, for example, I am already a nurse from an online class, I am scared to really face the patient coz we really didn't experience to have a duty in a certain clinical area." P3; "I believe it has a big effect on our future profession. We really need actual duty because we are handling our patient's life." P4; "I feel scared about the future because the people are expecting too much from us nurses, especially in taking good care of our patients. In online learning, if you will have a lot of mistakes, you could just edit the video, but in an actual setting, you cannot edit it." P5; "Actually, it really scares me because the skills that we really need to develop are vital to our profession." P6; "I'm kind of scared because this was the year I'm supposed to be doing my practicum and really hands-on things like that, and I don't think I'm going to be able to really apply it." P9; "What's scary is that the people that we will be meeting because they are already professionals and you are still a newbie, and then your background is online learning." P10; "I really feel scared because it is the patient's life is at stake, and we still do not know how to handle it." P12; "I think lots of people are worried that right now we're not really learning everything properly that we need to learn." P13

Most of the students are scared about the future outcome if this online learning continues. The result of the study supports the study of Ramos-Morcillo et al. (2020) that students indicate that their future plans, expectations related to getting the degree and work, are affected because of the pandemic. It is the same with the statement of Jenny, 3rd year nursing student, that people expect so much with their profession, especially in taking good care of the patients. The participants believe that this virtual RLE will really affect their professional expectations.

Traditional vs. Online Learning Preference

The findings indicate the impact of online learning in the development of their profession. Seven participants believed that they really prefer traditional learning to be online because their future profession is more skills-based.

"Right now, mostly we're studying case studies. Honestly, almost all the things become theoretical, even the RLE. Cause for RLE, we have cases studies for us to think of." P3; "I think I learn more in RLE because we have applications. Even though it has NCPs, and we wake up early to attend duties. The learning in RLE is better. That's why it would be better to have actual duties." P4; "That is the challenge of a skills-based profession like us. 'coz right now, we can't do it as effectively or as efficiently as in face-to-face." P6; "Still, I wouldn't trade that I would keep some of the aspects, but I would definitely go back face to face." P8; "It is much better if it is face-to-face because it is hands-on. Unlike in online learning, the teacher did not really see the things that we are doing." P10; "We know that skills are developed when practiced, and now we only do virtual RLE." P11; "We feel like we are clueless when it comes to the actual setup." P12

Half of the participants believed that face-to-face is more appropriate in the development of their future career rather than online learning. Although both theory and clinical practice are vital in the development of allied health professions, studies have highlighted the importance of clinical practice (Westin et al., 2015). Similarly, when students are involved in the care of patients, they are more driven to study (AlHaqwi & Taha, 2015) and when they experience various situations in practical settings.

CONCLUSION

The study was done to explore the online learning experiences of allied health students. The result of the study revealed that allied health students have positive and negative experiences in online learning. Positive experiences include (1) flexible learning opportunities: integrating theory-practice gap; increased adaptability; instant access to learning materials; the comfort of studying at home and convenient platforms and (2) fosters learning opportunities: career development; and lifelong learning. Negative experiences include (1) technological factors: poor internet connection; power interruptions and platform flaws, (2) teacher factors: lacks technical skills; delayed feedback; and gives too many requirements, (3) student factors: lacks social interactions and difficulty to focus, and (4) health factors: physical and mental health. The study revealed that the participants used the coping mechanisms: (1) students' self-efficacy: optimism and time management, (2) staying connected with God, (3) support systems, and (4) social and recreational activities. The impact of the online learning experience on their career development includes (1) inadequate clinical competence: loss of confidence and lack of practical skills, (2) worry about future outcomes, and (3) traditional vs. online learning preference.

The findings showed that, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 epidemic, information may still be acquired through online learning instruction. Despite the benefits of online learning, allied health students face hurdles that may make it difficult for them to learn. The majority of allied health students recognize the significance of a support structure as a means of coping with the challenges of online learning. It was also discovered that all of the allied health students believed that online learning education had a negative impact on their job growth due to a lack of practical skills. Because they believe their job is skills-based and requires clinical practice, allied health students continue to favor traditional learning methods. Face-to-face instruction is more beneficial to them than online teaching.

Participants in the study are almost exclusively females, and it would be better if both males and females were equally distributed. Another limitation was the homogeneity of the participants because three of the participants were staying outside the Philippines, and one of the participants was not in the clinical division yet. It will also be better to add more participants and get representatives from each year level in each allied health college.

This study emphasized the importance of a support system in overcoming the challenges in online learning. The researcher recommends that the teachers and administrators should support, understand, and guide students in their online learning journey. It is also recommended that administrators should provide more training to teachers about the school's LMS so that there will be uniformity in the use of online learning platforms. Through that, students will not get confused, and it will help them enhance their learning. Further, the recommendation is about the students' requirements. Teachers should limit their requirements to preserve the mental health of students.

Lastly, replication of this research is recommended with a larger sample and with a diverse population. Additionally, research can be explored using mixed methods, quantitative and qualitative methods for better results of the study.

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