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Stuck in a Lockdown: Filipino Students' Odyssey of Resilience

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Abstract: The COVID-19 outbreak in the Philippines forced schools to close. Many Filipino students were stranded in their dormitories and boarding houses due to government-imposed lockdowns. As the study's impetus, the researchers explored the phenomenon of stranded students during a pandemic. A transcendental phenomenological inquiry was conducted in Northern Mindanao, Philippines, to disclose the experiences of six stranded students. Stranded students' lifeworld throughout the lockdown was documented through phenomenological interviews. The phenomenological reduction technique was used to transcribe and analyze the data. Provisional codes were used to classify critical statements into themes for the initial analysis of the interview data. The research revealed the themes of (a) groping in the dark, (b) journeying towards the light, and (c) welcoming the breaking dawn. The various stages of reality in the life of the stranded students are shown in these topics. They relate the story of how their confinement experience taught them to be resilient, which covers resilience as a process. The paper discusses numerous pedagogical implications of the phenomenon.

Keywords: *Lockdown, pandemic, phenomenology, resilience, stranded.*

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Introduction

The novel Coronavirus that began in China in the latter part of 2019 stunned the entire world as it affected millions of people worldwide in a short period. Flu-like symptoms became an emerging frontier, creating challenges that most people worldwide were caught unprepared for, as it started to spread at a magnitude impossible to halt. This emergence necessitates research to consider novel approaches for investigating such phenomena as this health crisis shows no sign of stopping in the succeeding years.

The rapid spread of COVID-19 globally took sudden changes in all areas, and the education sector is not exempt. Several educational institutions around the globe were forced to close immediately because of the pandemic protocol known as "social or physical distance," which aimed to decrease face-to-face contact and community transmission that may spread quickly in populated areas, like schools (Murphy, 2020). The impacts of the school closures worldwide are so profound that leaders worldwide must learn the lessons that this pandemic reveals around education.

More than a billion and a half pupils worldwide are impacted by school terminations owing to the COVID-19 pandemic (Cahapay, 2020). The unforeseen closure of face-to-face modality, especially in Higher Education institutions, has affected students. Those who have just finished secondary school and aspire to enter higher education will be in a completely new situation. As it is, they, like other actors in the educational system, have no idea at all how long its impact on daily life, costs incurred, financial burden, and learning continuity and international mobility will last.

Many students were stranded in dormitories and boarding houses, uncertain whether schools would open and resume classes. The most critical studies on people's experiences with recent pandemics focus on allied medical areas and educational career contexts (Guillaume et al., 2019; Raymond et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2020). Most research concerning the COVID-19 pandemic has revolved around medical practitioners' plight and how schools need to adapt to the new educational landscape. Scarce were research that focused on learners, who are directly affected by worldwide health concern, specifically those who were not in the comfort of their homes when the pandemic happened. However, it is necessary to investigate the experiences of these stranded students, who are considered vulnerable populations and may be exposed to various challenges (Cahapay, 2020).

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Thus, this study seeks to grasp the textural and structural nature of the stranded students' lifeworld during the COVID-19 pandemic. A lifeworld is a world of lived experiences that includes individual, social, perceptual, and practical experiences (Husserl, 1970). An attitude that affects our daily lives and is influenced by historical, cultural, and social factors. People see things differently (Gadamer, 1995; Heidegger, 1962). Understanding these stranded students' experiences provides a sound basis for schools to establish mechanisms that can respond to, if not eliminate, the risks and challenges that the students face in times like this.

The interpretation of stranded students' lifeworld was grounded on the philosophy of phenomenology. Husserl's phenomenological theory laid down the basic assumptions that he held necessary to determine the nature of reality. In his contentions, the truth is something that is subjectively experienced. As a result, it is assumed that something similar is happening to the students. Their minds also intend to give meaning to the phenomenon of being stranded as it is presented to their consciousness as they experience it.

The present study used a transcendental phenomenological investigation because it has sound, organized, and clear design aspects that guide a comprehensive portrayal of the experience. The in-depth phenomenological interview prompts the students to share their experiences, uncovering what they went through. The textural-structural synthesis from this study embodies the essences at a particular place and time from the participant's perspective, drawing from the researchers' comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Besides, when individuals experience various phenomena, they already have a meaning, which is constituted in the lifeworld. It is understood by analyzing "time, space, body, and the very givenness or presentation of experience" (Harrington et al., 2006, p. 1). Thus, the lifeworld of the stranded students is captured through an analysis of their experiences. It is in the narration of their experiences, noting what they went through. The students' lockdown stories tell of their journey that makes up the essence of their experience, developing resilience in themselves.

Literature Review

Resilience is the skill to cope with life's inevitable difficulties (Polizzi et al., 2020). For Srivastava (2011), resiliency promotes joy. Conversely, insufficient resilience can cause mental health concerns (Mowbray, 2020). Previous studies have shown that resilience improves mental health (Smith & Yang, 2017; Souri & Hasanirad, 2011). Also, the study by Sood and Sharma (2020) revealed that resilience needs to be built among young students through intervention activities. Along this line, the experiences of stranded students during the COVID-19 lockdown provide a reference for planning and designing intervention activities for them.

Rutter (2013) describes resilience as a relatively favorable outcome despite having faced substantial stresses or adversities and as being superior to that of other people who have faced similar challenges. It was pointed out that resilience is more than social competence or good mental health; resilience requires skill in the face of risk.

Van Breda (2018) conceptualized resilience as a process that leads to a resilient outcome. There are three components of resilience: adversity or risk, protective factors, and resilient outcome. He viewed resilience as an outcome where one identifies individuals who have overcome hardships and then looked at resilience as a process where protective factors differentiate resilient individuals from less resilient ones. In the study, stages of experiences in the lifeworld of stranded students follow three parts which seem to be parallel to the cited resiliency components: before, during, and after the lockdown. These three components of resilience are assumed to fall in each phase of the experience.

Bozdag (2020) determined the variables that predict the psychological resilience levels of individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey. It was discovered that psychological resilience is useful in preventing mental health issues like despair and anxiety throughout the pandemic. It was found that people with high educational levels and who effectively guarded against COVID-19 feel safer and have higher levels of psychological toughness as a result.

A group of researchers conducted an online survey to understand the psychological impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on sleep quality, general anxiety symptomatology, and psychological distress. Casagrande et al. (2020) showed a substantial association between psychological distress, generalized anxiety, sleep quality, and COVID-19 symptoms. Findings indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic appears to be a risk factor for sleep disorders and psychological diseases in the Italian population. These findings reveal the need for psychological therapies to lessen the immediate and long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most studies consider resilience as an outcome (Rutter, 2013; Van Breda, 2018). This paper will explore more the construct of resilience on the experiences of students stuck in a lockdown. The study aims to further develop the concept of resilience by adding more layers to it.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used transcendental phenomenology. It is an approach to qualitative research that captures the essence of the human experience (Moustakas, 1994). It is based on letting go of preconceived notions to see phenomena clearly,

allowing their true meaning to emerge naturally and within their own identity. Transcendental phenomenology is appropriate for this study because it aims to uncover the world of stranded students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sample and Data Collection

In this context, the study's participants were purposively selected using the following criteria: a.) they were students enrolled in a state university for the second semester of the school year 2019-2020; b.) their permanent home address is from the neighboring municipalities or provinces and was stranded in the City of Malaybalay, c.) they could be contacted using a mobile phone; d.) they were 18-year-old and above during the conduct of the study, and e.) they were willing to participate and provide honest responses. The basis of purposely selecting participants was taken from the university's office of student services' list of stranded students.

In this study, the purposive sampling technique allowed the researchers to deliberately choose participants due to the qualities they possess. It is considered a non-random technique where the researchers set the criteria to select the people who are fit and are willing to provide the information under knowledge or experience (Bernard, 2002). The researchers also used data saturation to determine the number of participants to interview. Saturation occurs when no new codes appear in the data, according to Urquhart (2013). It determines when a study's data is sufficient to form a valid understanding of the phenomenon.

The researchers used phenomenological interviewing to learn about the stranded students' worlds. An online interview was conducted. It is an accepted research method using computer-mediated communication (Salmons, 2014). Proper protocol in gathering data was observed. The researchers secured the list from the Office of the Student Services to pick the name of the stranded students and requested their contact details. They were contacted through phone or email. Their contact details were kept secure and confidential.

The interview guide was subjected to content validation before the conduct of the study, wherein it underwent critiquing by three experts: a qualitative research expert, a language expert, and a guidance counselor. Their feedback was incorporated into the revised instrument for the study. The improved interview guide has following sample questions: (1) What are the experiences of Filipino students stuck in a lockdown during the pandemic? (2) How did Filipino students cope-up with these experiences particularly in challenges and difficulties? (3) What insights are gained by Filipino students from their experiences being stranded?

The researchers then asked for an appointment with an initial number of six participants for orientation of the purpose of the study. Participants received an electronic or printed informed consent form. Electronic consents were sent via email or Messenger. The augmented interview was approved for recording.

Another appointment was scheduled for the actual augmented interview. The researchers provided a mobile or internet load to ensure that the participants could conveniently share their experiences with minor discomfort. The discussion was facilitated using messenger video-call, zoom cloud meetings, Google Meet, and other online meeting platforms they preferred.

The researchers took precautionary measures, noting that whenever unprocessed emotions came out from the interviews, the guidance counselor would be tasked to facilitate the processing. The discussion would be stopped for the time being to give time to the participant to calm down. Stress and trauma debriefing might be done, if necessary.

The study followed the protocols and the university's ethics review committee's requirements. Since this study requires human participation, all ethical guidelines and data privacy laws were followed, and student concerns were addressed appropriately. The researchers had exclusive access to the collected data.

The researchers explained the study's objectives and methodology to the stranded students. Participants were given informed consent forms to signify their willingness to participate. Connectivity was provided via mobile or the internet, and participants could select their preferred interview modality. Participants' names will not be revealed for privacy. Instead, they were given code names, and their names were removed. The in-depth interviews were conducted with great care under the direction of a guidance counselor who is also one of the researchers to ensure the participants' safety.

Analyzing of Data

The augmented interview data were analyzed by the researchers using Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological reduction. Themes were clustered, and textural descriptions, structural descriptions, and textural-structural synthesis were used. The method allowed significant emerging themes to describe the phenomenon. The descriptions captured the meaning ascribed to the experience.

Afterward, the participants were asked to verify the results. The researchers responded to queries and clarifications. Three inter-coders checked the researchers' themes for consistency. Feedback from the participants and inter-coders backed up the results.

Results

After being stranded in Malaybalay City during the lockdown, participants expressed their feelings, thoughts, and reactions. Themes emerged from the recorded interviews. These emergent themes were namely: (1): *Pre-Lockdown: Groping in the Dark*; (2): *During Lockdown: Journeying towards the Light*; and (3): *Post-Lockdown: Welcoming the Break of Dawn*. Subthemes for the emergent themes were also generated.

Emergent Theme 1: Pre-Lockdown: Groping in the Dark

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the lockdown was seen as the best way to stop the virus from spreading uncontrollably. Schools, universities, public spaces, non-essential businesses, and economic activities were closed, and people's movements were restricted (Baldwin & di Mauro, 2020).

When the school had to close its gates and Malaybalay closed its borders, students found themselves in a spot where they had to navigate blindly into the unknown to grasp what was happening. They recounted instances of unpreparedness, skepticism, holding on to the familiar, and fears and frustrations.

Sub-theme 1: Unpreparedness

Students were caught unaware, suddenly finding themselves rooted in a place and in a circumstance in which they were confronted with options that had unfamiliar or unpleasant consequences. They tell of how news of class suspension suddenly broke out.

"The school just suddenly announced that classes were suspended, including OJT." (Participant 2)

"The news of the suspension of classes was just so sudden, then Malaybalay was on a lockdown."
(Participant 2)

"Sudden announcement." - (Participant 3)

With the abrupt change of course in the academic landscape, the students had to undertake considerations before making decisions. While they were still in the dilemma of opting to go home or stay, options ran out. Due to the lockdown, everything was put on hold, and the students could not go home anymore.

"So, I did not have the chance to go home, and there were also many requirements to be allowed entry to our province." (Participant 3)

Some considerations they took were school requirements, finances, and travel details. These mainly comprised their decision to stay as they were still thinking about the unfinished requirements that they still needed to submit. Even though the university had presented alternatives to how students could still comply with their academic requirements, they still decided to stay.

Their unpreparedness for the unknown is shown in that they prioritized their academic requirements over their long-term situation. As was the case, they thought that deadlines for school requirements would still be the same and that there would be no flexibility nor humane considerations relating to what was happening.

"When news broke that there will be a lockdown, I decided to stay since there were activities I needed to finish." (Participant 1)

Some students thought that they could still wait it out on financial considerations. As they still had some savings, they thought they would stay afloat. Thinking about this made them decide to stay amidst the lockdown announcement. Their unpreparedness for what was to come, mainly because everything about the coronavirus was largely unknown, is shown in the fact that they did not anticipate that the situation could worsen or that it would carry on longer than they could have ever imagined. Just like the experience of participant 5, he was confident at the beginning that the amount he had would suffice for the whole duration of the lockdown. The situation proved him wrong.

"When the lockdown started, I was still doing fine because I still had some money in the automated teller machine, so there was still something I could use. But later, I started to worry because my savings were running out."
(Participant 5)

The students also had to contend with travel details if they decided to go home. One basic need was transportation. It was not only Malaybalay that was on lockdown status. There was the implementation of lockdowns almost everywhere, all simultaneously. As a result, public utility vehicles were prohibited from operating. If not, their services were limited to boundaries, making it difficult to travel.

Moreover, travelers must undergo swab tests before being allowed into places. It included the students wanting to go home. Some were unprepared for this, like participant 3. Swab testing meant spending for it, and due to the "no movement" policy because of simultaneous lockdown in most areas, his family could not send any amount for that test.

"Transportation to my place was not available; there were many requirements." (Participant 3)

"That time, there were requirements and a swab test, but I didn't have enough money. My parents also did not have the chance to go to the bank because nobody was allowed to leave their houses."
(Participant 3)

One measure of the academe to lessen the impact of the lockdown on students was the accommodation of alternative modalities. This modality includes modular learning, online delivery of materials and lessons, or printed materials. The initial impression of this alternative learning modality among students was that there were no classes in the face-to-face modality. This modality meant not listening to the discussions in the physical classroom. It was a direction relatively unknown to the students at that time.

"Unpreparedness for the alternative learning modality." (Participant 6)

The unpreparedness of the students is true in most schools. This situation echoes the claim of Bozkurt and Sharma (2020) that "the education system seems unprepared."

Sub-theme 2: Skepticism

Part of the students' conscious decision to stay amidst the announced lockdown in the city was the thought that everything would be fine after a few days or weeks. Since this was a new worldwide crisis, the students were skeptical that the news was trustworthy about the coronavirus and that its effect was massive. Because of this, the students opted to stay, banking on their usual practice of not going home regularly and being used to living alone while studying far from home. They also thought that the lockdown would be short-lived. Again, in the face of the unknown, what happened was the exact opposite of their expectations.

"I thought that everything was fine for me not to go home because I was used to not going home."
(Participant 5)

"Did not anticipate the extension of the Enhanced Community Quarantine." (Participant 6)

Sub-theme 3: Holding on to the Familiar

When confronted with changes, people tend to resist them. Change resistance is a psychological phenomenon that arises from a combination of affective, cognitive, and behavioral factors (Forsell & Astrom, 2012). About this notion, the students expressed sentiments of wanting to experience the usual way of doing things, like graduation ceremonies and classes again.

"For my companion and I, we wanted to have face-to-face graduation." (Participant 2)

"Comparing the circumstances of the time, longing for a face-to-face class." (Participant 6)

Holding on to what is familiar is a usual reason for initially resisting change and being emotional. What is expected is comforting. This emotion can be explained by the mere-exposure-effect notion of Zajonc (1968). The idea is that when a person is constantly exposed to something repeatedly - same person, same image, same object, same experience - the feeling of uncertainty lessens.

Sub-theme 4: Fears and Frustrations

The narratives of the students also indicated their fears and frustrations. For example, participant 6 explicitly mentioned fear. His fear emanated from information he accessed through social media about the virus, particularly with the detail as it was deadly. The specific fear is the virus's effect on people's physical health. The news about many people dying in numerous parts of the globe has rendered the students fearful.

"Fear and we were saddened for everything that has been heard in social media and news about the deadly virus." (Participant 6)

Aside from the fear of the deadly virus, students also have hinted at one of the virus's effects: needing to adopt change. Their questions focus on implementing flexible learning and its implications. The concept of flexible learning was new to them, and they were afraid of changes. This fear may stem from unknown areas where they need to adjust.

"Adjustments on the implementation of flexible learning." (Participant 6)

Frustration is also evident in the students' sharing. They expressed how much they still wanted to complete tasks, especially for those with their internship. It was the case of participant 2. He narrated the need and the eagerness to finish their tasks as interns (on-the-job training). However, they were prohibited from reporting physically to the office of assignment as this was one effect of the lockdown implementation and a consequence of class suspension.

"There were supposed to be more [tasks to be done], but it was already my OJT adviser who told us that we could not go to their office. So, we could not do anything anymore; we just obeyed them."
(Participant 2)

The university's shift to flexible learning called for students to learn on the virtual platform. Students' frustrations surfaced as they were used to actual interaction in the classroom. It was a challenge for them since they had to do digital learning. As expressed by participant 5, he has difficulty learning on the virtual platform. It may be explained by the idea that face-to-face instruction has several advantages not afforded by virtual learning (Xu & Jaggars, 2016). Some benefits are immediate feedback on questions or answers from classmates and the instructor, lively interaction among students, direct guidance from the instructor and the like, and the absence of technical interference during online classes.

"I cannot learn well on the virtual platform. I don't know why." (Participant 5)

Furthermore, with the university's implementation of a flexible learning modality, the students were initially given tasks that they needed to do most of the time independently. Aside from this, all subjects reported sending the required tasks almost simultaneously. The bulk of the instructional materials and the abrupt change of modality could have contributed much to the students' frustrations and feeling overwhelmed by the academic demands.

"Overwhelmed by the school's tasks, which led to not understanding the lessons, losing confidence to accomplish tasks, and contemplating quitting." (Participant 6)

The frustrations that these students felt when they were suddenly thrown into the non-face-to-face classes were different from what students in other countries felt. Yet, in the studies of Aristovnik et al. (2020) and Kedraka and Kaltsidis (2020), their student-participants were said to have found the shift to online learning (non-face-to-face learning) quite convenient.

Being rammed into the unknown is like a finger snap that leaves the students groping in the dark. They had to feel their way, guided by their gut feel - of what they think is right, what makes them comfortable, and what they know at that time concerning the virus.

The lack of sufficient knowledge on the pandemic led the students to choose between staying to work on their academics or going home and being with their families. This dilemma took a toll on their decision, where feasible options were forcibly taken out of the equation. Consequently, the students were stuck, locked down in a place where they have friends, acquaintances, and an accommodating community, but far from their own families where they could have gotten solid support, free from worries in aspects that matter most to every person. They had to feel their way in the dark.

Emergent Theme 2: During Lockdown: Journeying towards the Light

Amidst the uncertainty of getting stuck in Malaybalay City during the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), participants had no other way of looking back but to face the present moment and continue their life's journey. The second emergent theme shares the narratives of the stranded participants during the lockdown as they embark on the roads of the new normal. Journeying towards the light is the voyage of students from many confused, fearful, and depressing moments of facing the unknown. Their accounts of experiences and how they changed their ways transcended their doubts and fears unlocked their resilience and potential in facing life's adversities.

Sub-theme 1: Faces of Support

During the lockdown, the participants journeyed through the various support they received from family, friends, teachers, the institution, and the community. They were able to appreciate and see the positive sides of the pandemic during the ECQ period. Countless help came through financial, emotional, social, familial, and environmental forms.

Family support was essential to many of the participants. Getting calls from them made their stay in Malaybalay comforting and relieved their fears, worries, and boredom. Participants espoused:

"My mother is working abroad. I am with my younger brother. My mother always calls and asks how we are doing. I always get motivated whenever I talk to my parents." (Participant 1)

"My family always does the video call." (Participant 2)

"This is the time that I send heartfelt messages to my family. I am not expressive of my feelings to my family, but I motivate myself to reach out to my family and give positive messages because of the lockdown." (Participant 5)

"My parents called and asked whether I would like to stay or if I wanted to go home. They were trying their best to find ways to get me home." (Participant 6)

Participants find support from their parents and family. Hearing from them eases their discomfort and homesickness. Mariani et al. (2020) claim that family support is the most important factor in reducing depressive symptoms. Their findings emphasize the importance of promoting psychological interventions to improve emotional regulation, reduce family separation, and prevent mood disorders in healthy people.

Managing their finances was a challenge to the students stranded in the city during the lockdown. They were worried about their needs and whether their budget would suffice as they stayed in boarding houses. Financial support came in various forms. "Ayuda," or providing food supplies and other needs such as alcohol, facemasks, soap, and drinking water

came. The landlord or landlady extends their support by collecting the monthly rent at a low cost or has let them stay for free. Some teachers and friends raise any amount for support. The participants narrate their experiences of being financially supported by individuals during the lockdown.

"My landlord has helped me. The OSS and SSC also helped. I was able to receive supplies." (Participant 1)

"I had support from the OSS and SSC. They gave us 5 kilos of rice, canned goods, noodles, soap, and shampoo. Some of my friends and instructors also provided their financial support." (Participant 2)

"During that time, our landlord no longer asked us to pay for the rent. There are only two of us in the boarding house. Our landlord understood our situation because of this pandemic." (Participant 3)

"Our landlord did not let me pay for the rent. I only shared the payment for water and electricity. It is okay. I am relieved from other expenses." (Participant 4)

Scholarships and financial assistance from the government were also helpful to the students during the lockdown. The government's programs to support poor but deserving students through scholarship grants have led students to save and share some of the expenses for their families.

"I have my scholarship. When the lockdown started, I had my savings on the ATM Card, so I still had some money to spend for my needs. When the situation worsened, I no longer had money, and my family was also affected since they lost their job, and no-work-no pay, I struggled financially. That was when I contacted the number given by OSS, and help kept coming in from the OSS and teachers. My financial problem was solved." (Participant 5)

"I am a beneficiary of the UNIFAST- Unified Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education. I received P20,000, half of which I sent to my mother. That was a great help for me." (Participant 6)

Unified Financial Assistance System for Tertiary (UNIFAST) Education Act is the law that supports student financial assistance programs for tertiary education. This assistance did not stop even during the pandemic. It helped the student-beneficiaries survive the lockdown.

Students are social beings. They find joy interacting with classmates, board mates, and friends. They were prevented from doing so under restrictions of the lockdown. Students below 21 years old were not allowed to leave their boarding houses. Physical distancing was implemented. However, with the aid of technology, stranded students communicated and reached out to others, easing their loneliness and hopelessness. Social and emotional support flowed during the lockdown.

"We communicated through messenger, social media, especially when we talked about requirements. Most of my classmates were asking me how to do it." (Participant 5)

"I asked for help from my classmates. That's why I did not find it difficult. It was about a group task, and I communicated with my groupmates, so we made it. Thanks to technology." (Participant 3)

"I communicate with them through messenger, text, and call. There are incidents where many are reaching out. The student officers were asking for students who needed help through Facebook. Our clinical instructors also reached out to us to help." (Participant 6)

"We always communicated because our classmates were also worried about us who stayed in Malaybalay. They did not stop contacting us. The Bukidnon State University staff also communicated with us who were stranded." (Participant 2)

Facebook, Messenger, text messages, video calls, and other online communication platforms were the means of participants' social and emotional support. The participants were aware of the need to practice physical distancing to mitigate the spread of the virus. With that, they worked out ways to get socially connected through digital means. Okabe-Miyamoto and Lyubomirsky (2021) emphasized that it is essential to note that physical distancing is not the same as social isolation.

Participants who stayed in a supportive environment also provided comfort and reassurance that everything would be all right, even during the lockdown. They found families in the hands of those who took care of them, who stayed with them even if they were not connected by blood. They found comfort in another person's home.

"It was okay because I stayed in a positive environment. I could feel the warmth of the people. Even if we were not blood-related, they showed their care and concern. I could feel welcomed in their house, so it was not hard for me." (Participant 5)

"In my friend's house, there is a big difference. There is a difference when you are alone and not alone. That time, I was not alone. I'm with his family for the rest of the month. That was one month and two weeks, to be exact. We have something to spend on or food for us, which we shared. I could talk, mingle, and enjoy a house party with them. We cook, play basketball, and relax outside the house. If I did not stay with my friend, I would probably be in the boarding house, lying so weak." (Participant 2)

"Only the caretaker and I are staying in the boarding house. She works in the morning. We see each other in the evening. I often ask her to buy some of my needs because I cannot go out. We clean the house together, make a bonfire in the evening, and talk about life and the pandemic. I relied much on our caretaker, and I could talk to her while doing things together just to pass the time. I am very thankful to Ate." (Participant 6)

These testimonies of the students are similar to the results in the study of Sarmiento et al. (2021) where they found that the university students who were together with people other than their parents had high and solid resilience.

Sub-theme 2: Resilient Strategies: Bouncing Back from the Challenges

The students stuck in the city faced several challenges and difficulties during the lockdown. These challenges led to their various coping methods, making them more resilient to the new normal.

The stranded students have found many ways to ease their boredom and loneliness from being isolated in the social world by using technological gadgets, watching films and movies, playing music, and engaging in social media and online games.

"Whenever I feel bored, I would buy a load for my cell phone and watch movies or videos on YouTube." (Participant 4)

"I engage in activities to manage my feelings like watching dance videos. I love dancing and listening to jazz music. These activities are relaxing for me." (Participant 5)

"During that time, I had a lot of Korean dramas and Netflix. I played music with my guitar. I always sang with the family of my friend." (Participant 2)

"I watched movies like Prison Break, the movie series, and listened to Maroon 5 songs every day. I am a die-hard fan of the band." (Participant 1)

"I played online games like Call of Duty." (Participant 2)

"My activities mostly were on my cell phone, computer, the popular Tiktok...they give me entertainment. Watching Korean dramas and many others." (Participant 6)

Watching movie series and films, listening to music, and engaging in social media platforms were the participants' favorite activities. These undertakings were found to have relieved them from boredom and loneliness. Researchers have found that these activities can relieve an individual's stress. Movies have psychological benefits as well as entertainment benefits. Film therapy is a relaxing and soothing activity (Alcala, 2020).

According to Labbe et al. (2007), listening to classical or self-selected relaxing music after a stressful event reduces anxiety, anger, and sympathetic nervous system arousal and increases relaxation compared to silence or heavy metal music. Moreover, music listening is one of the most effective coping strategies for young people. Music listening was as effective as exercise, sleep, and moving as a stress coping strategy (Vidas et al., 2021).

Due to the enhanced community quarantine, most participants learned time and financial management. With the flexible learning modality system, they took the requirements one at a time to refrain from being overwhelmed with school tasks. They also learned to budget their expenses to withstand the challenges of providing for their own needs.

"I was not in a tough situation because I could pass all the requirements. I managed to submit the requirements before the deadline." (Participant 5)

"Instead of spending money for the load, I spent it on food, to buy for my viand. I must budget." (Participant 1)

"Be thrifty... because the worst things can still happen." (Participant 3)

"Aside from the amount my mother sends me, I also earn. I am an electronics student, so I do some repairs. My friends let me repair some of their things, paying me. That was my budget for food, water, and electricity. I had to budget everything to make it enough." (Participant 4)

Participants were able to reflect on what is more important, on what matters during the lockdown. They were able to prioritize what to buy first and do first. Setting their priorities and managing their time and expenses is one skill that led them to become resilient.

Showing compassion and helping others were also highlighted in the students' narratives. They found satisfaction and joy in being able to help others in times of the pandemic.

"It was ironic that I am advising my classmates on what to do, even though I am experiencing difficulties brought by the lockdown. They are very emotionally problematic even though they were with their family because they were not independent. Like, they could not work on their own." (Participant 5)

"We called our instructors. They had agreed. We had classmates who did not have internet signals in the hinterlands, and we considered them. There were subject requirements which were modified." (Participant 1)

"I had a friend staying in another boarding house, and she was so emotional, so I chatted with her frequently. I also helped her find a private car that she hired to go home because she lived far away, and Bukidnon State University had no means of contacting her family. We just helped each other, giving and taking. If she doesn't have a load in her cellular phone, I provide her with it." (Participant 3)

"We became closer because I could go to their houses and roam around. I cooked some food and went to their houses. But some of my friends couldn't cope with the pain because they weren't used to this. I was also the class president that semester, so I thought that one of my tasks was making them happy. I sent an internet load to them, and we played some games. We were even able to have COVID birthdays." (Participant 2)

Prosocial behavior is helping and caring for others. Many have studied this behavior during the pandemic. Volunteering increased life satisfaction. More positive affect (i.e., well-being) after prosocial spending. Prosocial behavior among stranded students during a pandemic appears to help. It's likely that participants' helping behaviors made them more resilient and better people. Participants also engaged in physical activities. During the pandemic, researchers found that daily exercise improves well-being (Okabe-Miyamoto & Lyubomirsky, 2021).

"We should engage ourselves in physical fitness activities. If you involve yourself in physical activity, you will feel lighter, and your mind works well." (Participant 5)

"Sometimes, since the boarding house is wide, I can exercise, do indoor exercises, not much outdoors." (Participant 3)

"If I don't have a cellphone load, I sleep, I rest my body." (Participant 3)

"I clean the boarding house...the boarding house is so big that cleaning can already be a form of exercise." (Participant 6)

Exercising during the pandemic has been linked to better health. Those who exercised nearly every day reported good moods. Similarly, increasing exercise and gardening decreased depression and anxiety while increasing life satisfaction—those who exercise more during COVID-19 report being happier (Helliwell et al., 2021).

Praying to God, and believing that someone powerful would help individuals in adversity, made the participants more hopeful and optimistic. They think that everything will fall into place with God, problems will be resolved, and the pandemic will eventually end. Participants shared:

"Our life should be incorporated with the Lord. We should live with God in our lives. In times of difficulties, let us always pray, seek help from Him." (Participant 5)

"Always pray. I was not sad because I entrusted everything to God. I always prayed." (Participant 3)

Spiritual experiences and resources provide a sense of strength and help find meaning in life (Wills, 2009). Researchers confirmed that greater spiritual and meaning-based coping reduced the negative effects of coronavirus stress on subjective well-being. During the coronavirus pandemic, meaning-based coping and spirituality processes appear to reduce the negative effects of stress on well-being. Interventions focusing on spirituality and meaning-based coping are urgently needed to improve young adults' mental health (Arslan & Yildirim, 2021).

Generally, the stranded students are resilient individuals who learned to adapt to challenging circumstances such as the pandemic. They are more adept at technological tools and resources, becoming more mature individuals regarding money spending, time management, helping others, and becoming open to receiving and providing support.

People with resilience can handle stress better. Indirect pandemic stressor exposure will be managed. Stressors included the threat of death and academic challenges caused by COVID-19. Helping students realize their inner potential is more important than supporting them once they show signs of distress and negative mental health outcomes develop (Sood & Sharma, 2020). Romorosa et al. (2022) cited that a resilient Filipino student achieved balance amid responsibilities by a solid support system, a high level of courage and self-efficacy, and faith in God's providence.

Emergent Theme 3: Post-Lockdown: Welcoming the Break of Dawn

The familiar post-lockdown narratives that ring loudly to these students are their insights and suggestions for crisis-responsive actions. These accompany them as they welcome life after being stuck. The journey shaped their post-lockdown lives. The stories tell of learning and growth, with a common thread of new beginnings. Like the break of the dawn, a time when it begins to grow light after the night, these students approach new beginnings after the period of constant grope and traction. Welcoming the break of the dawn is seeing the light that incandescence its way towards a new front.

Sub-theme 1: Insights and Realizations

As they continue their life after being stranded, these students are now assimilating to the new environment, armed with insights, learning, and takeaways. Schwerdtle et al. (2017) expounded those patients experienced a stressful physical and mental response during a public health crisis. They also gradually obtained positive elements.

Perhaps more than ever, the need for students to acquire financial literacy to navigate this uncharted economic crisis is heightened. It could not be undermined, especially in surviving lockdowns where mobility is restricted. Financial literacy, which refers to using knowledge and skills to manage resources effectively (Mandell, 2008), is needed, especially with allowances and family support interrupted due to stringent community quarantine protocols and some money transfer establishments implementing scheduled operations. Having personal savings, skills to budget their money, and discernment to decide on needs over wants, as areas of financial literacy, are gained by the students. It is resonated in statements like:

"We always ask for money from our parents. Now, I realize it is difficult to look for money. If we earn, it is also difficult to budget. We need to budget and spend wisely." (Participant 3)

"Always be prepared in life, especially in the financial aspect. We have to anticipate challenges that may come." (Participant 4)

"It is a challenge to spend wisely. We have to be thrifty since we do not know that the worst is yet to happen." (Participant 2)

Financial knowledge can help these students better manage their spending in times of hardship while some factors are beyond their control. Student loneliness may have been fueled by restrictions on in-person interactions and social isolation. Lessening one's ability to stay present and connected in socially and physically distant spaces was echoed in these students' responses.

Social literacy is considered the person's ability to understand and interact within a social context. It is seen how students connect effectively with those around them in a face-to-face or digital environment. The significance of social literacy is now placed in the spotlight with relevant literature indicating how prolonged social isolation, characterized by the objective lack of interactions with others (Leigh-Hunt et al., 2017), has been driving the emergence of anxieties, panic, and worst, depressive symptoms.

"I realize the importance of reaching out and that it is okay to seek help from others. It is good to communicate and share your thoughts with others." (Participant 6)

"I found pleasure in responding to my classmates' messages. I felt that I was able to help them." (Participant 4)

"We must not be ashamed of asking for help from people, especially when we are in dire need, as long as we do it most appropriately. That will let us survive. No man is an island, and we need each other to survive. I realized that we need to build relationships with other people because having built a relationship with people would make it easier to approach them in situations like this pandemic where we need help." (Participant 4)

"I asked for help from my classmates, so I did not experience too much difficulty. As for the school requirements, these were not much of a problem because my classmates also helped me." (Participant 3)

From the vignettes above, it can be gleaned that recognizing one's need for help and interdependence with each other should be accepted in times of social isolation. Instead of wallowing in loneliness, one's social skills enable one to do many things. They can reach out to others, share each other's burdens, draw strength from one another, and exhibit empathy in areas of social literacy that students should cultivate to survive prolonged isolation. Further, equipping students with social literacy allows them to devise creative ways to interact and uplift one another in this time of uncertainty. While social restrictions are necessary to prevent COVID-19 spread, it is important to remember that social distance does not equal social isolation.

Alongside social literacy is the student's learning of the importance of emotional literacy. Goleman (1995) defined emotional literacy as the ability to recognize one's feelings and those of others and respond to emotions displayed in socially appropriate ways (Goleman, 1995; Sorin, 2004). When stuck in isolation, the student's ability to handle emotion is premium. It does not necessarily refer to the absence of negative emotions but the skills to recognize them and act appropriately.

"Airing out concerns may not be good sometimes, but it is one way to release one's feelings and issues." (Participant 6)

From participant 6, self-awareness as one of the domains of emotional intelligence was depicted. In times of crisis, many emotions may spring from external factors. The need to acknowledge one's emotions as a relief and the capacity to act on them must be developed to better prepare students for future disasters/crises. Further, as one domain of emotional intelligence, emotional control can be gleaned from Participant 6's statement. Emotional control, which pertains to the resilience to self-manage your emotional reactions, holds a heavyweight in surviving emotional distress.

"It is actually up to us if we let our emotions control us. It solely depends on how we handle it, whether we let stress, anxiety, and depression control us or look for ways to cope. Everything is in our hands." (Participant 6)

"Remind yourself that after the rain, there is a rainbow. Always take things positively." (Participant 1)

One of the things I learned during the pandemic is that technical skills are beneficial. It is one of the skills we need in the 21st century." (Participant 3)

Indeed, being stuck takes a massive toll on one's emotional and psychiatric well-being. However, when a student is socially literate and possesses the necessary emotional domains, groping in the dark and journeying towards the light may not be a herculean feat.

Sub-theme 2: Suggested crisis-responsive actions

Undeniably, the pandemic wreaked havoc on the individual lives of these stranded students and the entire educational community. Considering these stranded students' experiences, challenges, and learnings, suggestions on how the institution can better prepare for a similar phenomenon also arose as a theme representing the breaking dawn phase of their journey.

Institutional programs responsive to disasters and educational distractions like a public health crisis were suggested. Though there are no one-size-fits-all actions for disaster preparedness, proactive mechanisms coming from the suggestions of the people who were in the throes of actual phenomena may be helpful.

These crisis-responsive programs include catering to the stranded students in a school accommodation to ensure safety and better monitor these students. This action will allow the school to assist better, especially if the students are within the school's premises or a school-secured facility.

"I suggest that Bukidnon State University should gather the students and house them in the school so they could monitor them better. Also, the students are intact, and if ever the parents will fetch them, they could just fetch them in school." (Participant 1)

During a crisis, improving communication, transparency, and trust is critical. Thus, communication can help decipher challenges, myths, and misinformation (Adly, 2022). Establishing a communication system that is steadily accessible and is designed to provide updates and advisory to all students is also suggested. This suggestion is not far from establishing contacts with the students' localities. Communication may also extend to these localities if the aim is to facilitate the travel of these students back safely and smoothly to their homes.

"It may also be better for the Office of Student Services to have a specific mobile number, sort of a hotline, for students to save on their phones. So, in times of need, students have a number to call. Alternatively, the school must have a mechanism to send messages to all students, like in other schools." (Participant 2)

"Communication is the key. Continue the program conducted by the OSS on communication, providing needs for the stranded students; create a hotline which is useful in times of crisis." (Participant 6)

"They should also have a team, like a task force whose main task is to manage situations like this. It will enable them to have a faster response." (Participant 4)

The vignettes highlighted specific actions such as establishing 24/7 hotlines and regular mobile advisories. It would also imply the improvisation of social media presence and strengthening the use of different communication channels to assure a broader reach of information dissemination, especially with crisis-related updates. Moreover, it suggests that personnel responsible for contacting and monitoring stranded students be present.

Moreover, there is a need to consider the organization of disaster/pandemic relief funds. As recounted, the stringent community movement protocols may interrupt sending allowance to these stranded students. Moreover, financial concerns may spring from the unavailability of basic needs. Hence, the organization of relief funds would assure that assistance to these students will be delivered fast and efficiently.

"We must have a fund ready for situations like this." (Participant 4)

Most people stated that their lockdown survival experiences gave them new perspectives on life. Learnings and realizations pushed them to be better. The lockdown journey phase is fortified with what matters most and serves as their armor in welcoming the break of dawn.

Discussion

This study yielded themes that aptly describe the stranded students' transitional journey to resilience. It spoke of the phases in their journey, aptly outlined into three themes: Groping in the Dark; Journeying towards the Light; and, Welcoming the Dawn.

That students were groping in the dark, which is the theme in first part of their journey, is characterized by uncertainty even in the education system itself (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). This is because the Philippine education system is structured for in-person classes. Less mechanisms were prepared for virtual classes and other learning modalities. Consequently, although the uncertainty, fear, and frustrations felt by the participants are different from previous studies' results (e.g., Aristovnik et al., 2020; Kedraka & Kaltsidis, 2020), this difference may be attributed to the fact that students involved in this present study have not been exposed to online learning, since most of them live in places where internet connectivity is limited. Besides, the university itself has not explored online learning platforms as the main learning avenue before the pandemic. Undeniably, the educational system that countries practice needs to consider future events like this pandemic.

The second phase of the students' journey is on their adjustment and their beginning to grasp the situation they are in. The various adjustments they were able to do built their resilience related to the lockdown they were stranded in. There is a similarity with the students in this study and the university students of Sarmiento et al. (2021), which lies in the fact that these university students, although from different countries, experience the same environmental challenges as having to live independently and learning to adjust in an environment without having to solely rely on their families or parents.

Moreover, the many faces of people's support make the lives of individuals lighter and brighter. During the lockdown period, people's goodness and generosity have let the participants see the silver lining. The myriad of support brings the participant hope and means to survive and thrive journeying through life amidst the pandemic. These support systems made stranded students continue to move on despite hesitations brought by the pandemic.

With the different literacies that the students learned as they groped in the dark and the strategies stranded students needed to perform, they journeyed towards the light that brought them to realizations. These realizations heightened the importance of being equipped with the essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes of financial, social, and emotional literacies.

Conclusions

Exploring the lockdown experiences of stranded students during a pandemic uncovered three significant themes: groping in the dark, journeying towards the light, and welcoming the break of dawn. These themes represent the phases of realities in the lifeworld of the stranded students. At the onset of the lockdown, the students foresee it to happen just for a week. Their fears, frustrations, and skepticism grew when a month passed. They struggled to live with the situation; however, they could withstand the adversities with internal and external support mechanisms. As they looked back on living at that specific point in time, they realized that what they underwent was an experience of learning. It was a journey towards resiliency. The findings of this study reinforced the theoretical framework of resilience by Van Breda (2018).

Understanding these realities of the phenomenon poses various educational implications. The pandemic was seen as disastrous, but it also brought growth opportunities. Due to health and safety concerns, the closure of schools became an initial response to lessen the risk of contagion. However, despite the schools' temporary closure, recent technologies made the continuity of learning possible. Innovation became a buzzword in the academic community. The education sector started to adjust policies and innovate its practices to continue the delivery of services to the clientele.

The students, especially the stranded ones, successfully assimilated to the new environment, armed with insights, learning, and takeaways. As they continue to move forward, those experiences will mark their persona. They are proposing for health-related crisis-responsive programs and policies to be in place to lessen the struggles and anxieties of those who will share similar experiences in the future.

With these results, teachers and school administrators can continue to innovate their practices to be crisis responsive. Flexibility in learning models can be institutionalized like blended learning, hybrid flexible learning, modular learning, and the like. A learning management system needs to be in place so that students will be able to do their learning tasks even if there are unforeseen events. Educational policymakers can also propose measures that are proactive to students' welfare, especially on health and well-being. Student well-being may be enhanced by a supportive and resilient learning community.

The study added further layers to the human experience. The essence of resilience that emerged when students were stuck in a lockdown reflected varied dimensions of resilience. Resilience is not only seen as an outcome but a process as well. The odyssey of Filipino students, when stuck in a lockdown, portrayed resilience as a process, rather than just an outcome.

Recommendations

The government may lead in creating a pandemic-proof community soon. Laws, programs, and policies toward this goal will be a fresh start. Educational institutions may integrate resilience and survival strategies topics in the curriculum to make students aware of unforeseen events and be mentally prepared. Experts may continue their information drive on mental health awareness, stress management, vaccination facts, and others to cope with the pandemic's unprecedented effects. As a community, let us help one another stop the spread of the virus.

Another inquiry may be made using another qualitative research design, a quantitative one, or a mixture of the two to enrich the results and implications in the present study. Another lens may be used for other participants like health professionals, government workers, overseas workers, and the like.

Further research is necessary to continue the idea that resilience is also a process, not only an outcome. This initial result from this study may be further explored by other researchers to come up with a multi-dimensional definition of resilience.

Limitations

This phenomenological study has limitations. The nature of this inquiry is centered on human events as they are experienced in the real world. Taking this phenomenological view of reality, participants view the lifeworld as they appear in their minds, interpret them, or reflect on them. This study is limited to the context and lifeworld of the study participants, and this may or may not include the circumstances and experiences of other participants who may have experienced getting stuck in lockdown.

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Authorship Contribution Statement

Gaylo: Conceptualization, design, analysis, writing, supervision. Añar: Data acquisition, analysis, and interpretation drafting the manuscript. Improgo: Conceptualization, analysis, and interpretation, writing, critical revision of the manuscript. Alugar: Securing technical and material support, data acquisition and analysis, drafting the manuscript.

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