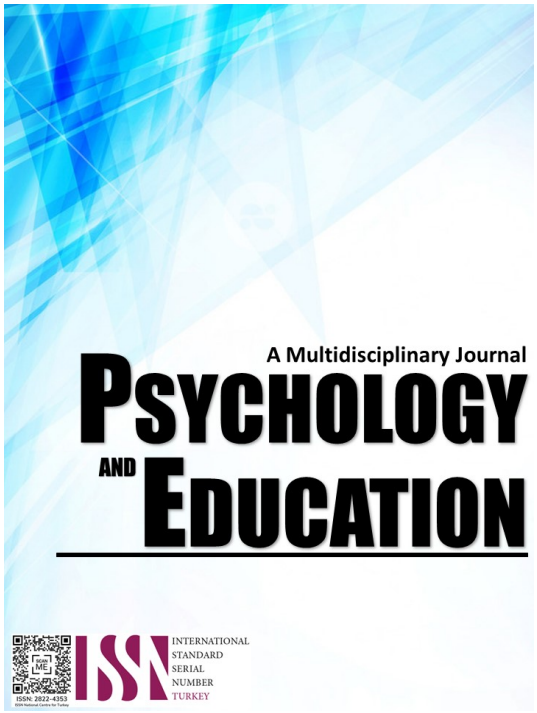
ACADEMIC CHALLENGES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG SELECTED COLLEGE STUDENTS DURING THE PANDEMIC



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Research Article

Academic Challenges and Psychological Distress Among Selected College Students During the Pandemic

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Abstract

This research study aims to assess the Academic Challenges and Psychological Distress of selected college students from Emilio Aguinaldo College – Manila. Researchers relate to such a topic because it covers their experiences regarding the challenges they have experienced first-hand. This study will also emphasize a perspective of students' stressors that could potentialize distress towards online education. This research study utilized a correlational design with a self-made online questionnaire to assess the challenges and distress of college students. Two hundred thirty-seven participants voluntarily joined the online survey. The respondents were college students from the School of Arts, Sciences, and Teacher Education. The researchers used a controlled quota sampling to determine the ideal population and sample size. The results of the study indicated that online learning did not challenge students academically since they were technologically literate. But facilitating online learning was indeed a challenge for them due to distractions and internet connectivity. Consequently, the students' distress was caused by academic stress and burnout. Additionally, lack of motivation and fear of being academically delayed also aggravate further stress. The findings of this study support the need for educational institutions to provide special attention and intervention due to increasing stress associated with online learning.

Keywords: Psychological Distress, Emilio Aguinaldo College, Academic Challenges, Adjustment To E-Learning, Online Learning Distractions, Challenges Specific To Technology Literacy, Challenges In Internet Connectivity

Introduction

It has been nearly two years since the outbreak of the pandemic caused by the spread of COVID-19. It is still a concern for the country's socioeconomic status along with the individuals' mental well-being. In March 2020, a Memorandum from the Executive Secretary implemented guidelines on the imposition of an Enhanced Community Quarantine (Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines, 2020). The memorandum at that time was solidified by an announcement from President Rodrigo Duterte at Malacañang, which marked the start of the national quarantine, stating on national media that Luzon, the home of most of the Philippine population, would be placed under enhanced community quarantine as per IATF Resolution No. 31 along issued Executive Order No. 112 (Department of Health, 2020). Metro Manila being the country's pandemic epicenter and premier economic hub served as the pilot of the system being implemented during the ongoing pandemic (Ranada, 2021). Drastic measures have been conducted for all aspects of the Filipino community, initially the livelihood and employment of the country. Not only was the safety of workers and administrators were ensured, but also the learners and educators as well. Suspension of classroom teaching was later discontinued. However, to sustain education and curb viral transmission, it became necessary for a sudden transition in the country's educational setting.

The current pandemic caused most universities in the Philippines to move to online learning. The Philippine Commission on Higher Education (CHED) advised the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to pivot to conducting virtual classes as their primary means of curriculum delivery as per CHED Memorandum Order No. 4, disseminating guidelines on the implementation of flexible learning (CHED, 2020). According to Abisado et al. (2020), local universities and colleges struggled to design flexible learning methods to mitigate virus spread, a framework for implementing flexible learning procedures can be delivered through an a/synchronous course consisting of fully online, blended learning, flipped classroom, and distance learning. But the students' perceptions of such a transition exposed nuances not only to the preparedness of different universities but also to the students as well. The massive action on e-Learning classrooms was the decision of almost all the HEI's in the Philippines amidst this crisis, however, the Commission on Higher Education declared leniency so that students could cope with the requirements set by their professors (Reyes-Chua et al., 2020). Consequently, the learning experiences of students varied among schools and universities nationwide. Citing challenges and difficulties that the students had

endured for over a year, specifically unstable internet connection, limited access to gadgets, and lack of area to study at home (Abisado et al., 2020). These were some of the reasons that made students conscious in regard to the impact of academic year loss or challenges during the outbreak. Moreover, understanding the psychological factors that lead to such differing interpretations of and responses to challenges is important (Aditomo, 2015).

Academic challenges can be defined as problems that affect students' school performance such as struggling to balance academic demands with work, responsibilities, and social experiences (Kokemuller, 2021). Although online education is one of the best options as an alternative for physical class during the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the students are experiencing a setback due to this transition. Academically, although students can still possibly learn anything online, learning itself may be less than optimal especially in courses that require face-to-face interactions (Barrot et al., 2021; Franchi, 2020). One of the challenges that learners face towards online education is the lack of interaction and perceived support from the instructor which is equally important in both online and face-to-face delivery modes (Gillett-Swan, 2017). According to Telles-Langdon (2020), transitioning an in-person course to an online format can provide challenges for both instructors and students. Some of the challenges were technical problems in adapting to online learning (Mishra et al., 2020), difficulty to maintain attention in an online context due to significant barriers such as boredom, isolation, lack of time to follow different subjects, and self-organizing capabilities (Liang et al., 2020; Mishra et al., 2020). According to Carolan et al. (2020), instructors, on the other hand, emphasized that in designing courses, isolation was a significant problem. Instructors also indicated that an appropriate balance of student-centered and collaborative learning was needed to enhance student peer engagement and collaboration during online learning.

A study suggested that students can be resistant to the adoption of online courses because of several barriers. This includes perceived innate barriers to students' success in adjusting to online learning such as online learning distractions, technology literacy; individual's ability to assess, acquire and communicate information in a fully digital environment, and imbalanced internet connectivity which is a prerequisite to the effectiveness of e-Learning (Hossain et al., 2021). The pandemic heavily affected students' social life along with their financial conditions. Whereas their emotional health increases with frustration, anxiety, and boredom (Pedrosa et al., 2020; Brooks et al., 2020), they are most likely to be worried about their future education and career (Cao et al., 2020). Subsequently, such setbacks could potentialize psychological distress among university students.

According to Arvidsdotter et al. (2016), psychological distress is a state of emotional suffering associated with stressors and demands that are difficult to cope with in daily life. With the ongoing pandemic, students are most likely to have stress in relation to academics, such as personal uncertainties about academic programs and distance teaching. Several studies have stated that public health emergencies can have many psychological effects on college students, which can be expressed as anxiety, fear, and worry (Wang & Zao, 2020; Mei et al., 2011). Considering the aetiology of students' psychological distress, factors that were associated are fear of academic delay, lack of motivation, academic stress, and burnout (Hossain et al., 2021). Acknowledging the transition and distress experienced first-hand, buffers the effectiveness of e-learning itself alongside expenses for modalities needed to sustain online education (Dutta & Smita, 2020). Such distress appears to be a consequence of the academic demands, prominence of financial worries, family and study responsibilities, and students' self-rated level of academic achievement (Sharp & Theiler, 2018).

That being the case, the factors mentioned above contribute to the impact of online learning, which foreseeably created a study gap among students. Previous studies mainly focused on a specific factor in academic challenges and a generalized concept of psychological distress. In contrast, in this study, the researchers thoroughly merged all of the possible factors, which are not only limited to one aspect of challenge and distress among students. Thus, the gap has been filled.

The researchers not only aim to identify such inconsistencies in determining the potential psychological distress of students but also specific factors that consequently contribute to academic challenges experienced during online education. The research objective is to determine if underlying factors causing academic challenges in students correspond to their level of psychological distress. Hence, psychological distress associated with academic challenges brought by the COVID-19 related stressors could potentially change students' attitude regarding online learning.

Research Questions

This research sought to determine the relationship between the Academic challenges and Psychological Distress of the selected students of Emilio Aguinaldo College-Manila. Specifically, the study endeavours to answer the following research questions:

1.What is the level of Academic Challenges as perceived by the respondents based on the following factors?
   1.1Adjustment to e-Learning
   1.2Online learning distractions
   1.3Challenges specific to Technology literacy
   1.4Challenges in Internet connectivity
2.What is the level of Psychological Distress as experienced by the respondents in terms of the following factors?
   2.1Fear of Academic delay
   2.2Lack of Motivation
   2.3Academic Stress and Burnout
3.Is there a significant relationship between Academic Challenges and Psychological Distress?

Literature Review

The leading universities and colleges in the Philippines, particularly those affiliated with the ASEAN University Network such as the University of the Philippines, Ateneo de Manila University, and De La Salle University have found innovative ways to fulfil their three-pronged tasks of education, research, and service while remaining committed to their mandated protocols.

According to Simbulan, (2020), as they transitioned to alternative or remote teaching modalities, both synchronous and asynchronous, teachers and administrators were tasked to modify and adjust their course curricula and requirements. Learning management systems like Canvas, Moodle, and Blackboard, as well as applications like Google Hangouts, Zoom, and Skype, were utilized by students and teachers who have access to electronic devices and dependable Internet connections. Students with limited access to computers or experience unreliable Internet connectivity resort to the use of text messaging, e-mail, Facebook Messenger, and Twitter to communicate messages, notes, and resources.

The lack of interaction between students and teachers in online classes is extremely challenging. Different movements or actions or doing other things like eating and browsing social media accounts are some examples of usual behaviours of students during online classes. These behaviours of being distracted, and teachers' inability to control these misbehaviours become tough challenges in online class (Garcia, 2021).

In the article of Joaquin et al., (2020), it was stated that having access to the internet and having learning devices is a privilege and advantage, placing those who cannot afford such in a disadvantageous position in their online class. In addition, despite the widespread internet infrastructure in the Philippines, students in urban areas are also experiencing having limited access to the internet and that leads to a "digital divide" between those who have and do not have access.

Simulations of physical classes in the Philippines has just begun. But for nearly 2 years since the start of the pandemic, classes have been purely done online which greatly affected students in general. New variants that started to spread in the country has become one of the reasons for the full closure of the face-to-face classes during the onset of the pandemic. UNICEF, (2021) considered the re-opening of classes only if the cases and institutions are ready enough to start. This can also be achieved if there is proper protection from the virus. They also urged the government to consider several factors in re-opening of classes. It also can affect not just the economy, but it can also have a higher percentage of out-of-school youth. UNICEF will be ready to act in order to support the re-opening.

According to Cleofas, (2020), every academic year is a new beginning in the chapter of students' lives. A student will encounter many schoolwork and face countless obstacles that may affect one's academic performance either positively or negatively. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, college life in the Philippines was limited because of imposed restrictions by the quarantine. However, despite the fear and frustrations, college student cope during the lockdown through self-reflection, where they re-evaluate their lives and goals. They also become aware of political and social issues they encounter during the pandemic and help each other by sending donations and drives, and through this, they build social connections.

Also, in a narrative analysis of Cleofas, (2020), five Filipino college students disclosed their experience in various setbacks during the pandemic. As stated in the study, participants believed that the pandemic took away their chance to create new friends, enjoy outdoor activities, explore the world, have self-discovery, and make good memories in college. In addition, due to COVID-19 and its impact on their lives, most

participants exhibit feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, and dissatisfaction. Some students worry about their future careers because the knowledge they gain in virtual education might not be enough to prepare them for the real world. Therefore, respondents value hands-on learning experiences and training to acquire the required skills and knowledge for their respective fields.

Lastly, in a news article by ABS-CBN, Bernardo, (2021) stated that a group of students at St. Louis University (SLU) in Baguio City, Philippines, organized a candlelight protest, petitioning to have an academic break. A report from SLU's student council president stated that at least three students who committed suicide fuelled up the protest. The group indicated that students and school officials feel severely stressed as they strive to meet their educational obligations while recovering from a tropical storm devastation. In addition, students experience constant academic pressure and stress due to a load of academic requirements they experience in virtual learning, which compromises their physical and mental health.

According to Li & Lalani, (2020), the pandemic has caused schools across the world to suspend. Over 1.2 billion students are out of school worldwide. Whereas, with the growth of e-learning, education is done remotely and on digital platforms causing it to alter tremendously. With the abrupt shift away from the classroom in many parts of the world, some are wondering if online learning adoption would continue post-pandemic, and how such a shift might affect the global education system.

The impact of online learning has a significant impact on students' abilities to study and the distractions that prevent them from doing so, as well as their motivation and drive for their achievement and resourcefulness. According to Kalman et al., (2020); Clement L. (2016) being at home eliminated distractions from peers; however, many students had increased distractions from family members and found it difficult to find a quiet place to study when at home with their families. Some students also had additional family obligations when everyone was home that limited their time to study.

According to Purnama et al.(2021), the ability to adopt technology, also known as digital literacy, is required for individuals, specifically students Phuapan et al., (2016); Purnama et al., (2021). It will be advantageous for students to deal with online risks if they have a high level of digital literacy Helsper & Smahel, (2020); Purnama et al., (2021). According to one study, digital literacy is an essential skill in utilizing technology as a communication tool in society to access, organize, coordinate, estimate, and provide information (Phuapan et al., 2016). According to the findings of the previous report, there is a need to improve digital skills, particularly communication, teaching, and methodology (Tejedor et al., 2020; Purnama et al., 2021). The logic behind this is that technology literacy can potentially influence the students' academic outcome and achievement (Yustika & Iswati, 2020; Purnama et al., 2021).

The study of Adedoyin & Soykan, (2020) also claimed that provision of equipment was a difficulty for the institutions, faculty, and learners since online learning is fully dependent on technology and internet accessibility. Hence, students with poor internet connections are likely to have weak access to online learning.

According to Conti, (2019)**,** allowing delay of gratification is a form of strength. American psychologists named Jack Block and David Funder have identified that the personality of a person has a comprehensive disposition to prevent drive. People who take-action about their wants regardless of the future are the ones to who do not delay gratification. Delaying gratification has a better aim for girls rather than boys. Girls are most likely to delay any reward system because they are more hopeful for a better reward. Thus, for boys that can be difficult to believe. Determination is different between those two genders. It also can be the reason why girls are more likely to delay gratification rather boys.

Zoom fatigue refers to tiredness or feeling drained with the overuse of video conferencing apps Peper et al., (2021). The Covid-19 pandemic transformed face-to-face class into online education. It became the preferred learning platform for students who want to pursue their studies. However, fatigue is inevitable, so students tend to feel overwhelmed with the new setup, and some of them may even become disruptive. Learning in synchronous online education environment can be exhausting. Teachers and students have responsibilities and duties to have an engaging class. Screen presence, being aware and presentable can create a positive impression. Interaction during class can make the class engaging. Active participation can increase energy level and attention. Staying focused during online classes, like turning off notifications on social media, can reduce disruptions to help student productivity.

According to Granieri et al. (2021), research has found that the crisis setting, and its associated stressors have intensified hostility and stressful events on an individual level. In line with this, these symptoms can increase mental health problems, including anxiety and despair. In the World Health Organization's World Mental Health International College Student Initiative, Karyotaki et al., (2020) evaluated perceived stress across major life areas in college students from 24 universities in nine countries. They discovered that 93.7% of students said they experience stress in at least one area of their life. Furthermore, since students had to deal with loneliness due to the phenomenon, the pandemic has had a particularly severe influence on their social and relationship lives.

Academic-related stress has been shown in the past to affect academic achievement, weaken motivation, and increase the likelihood of dropping out of school. According to a study by Pascoe et al., (2020), students in the secondary and tertiary levels face various constant pressures related to academic responsibilities. Continuous academic stress negatively impacted the students' learning capacity, academic performance, education, employment attainment, sleep quality and quantity, physical health, mental health, and drug use. However, the study stated that the primary goal for modification is to improve students' stress-management skills and talents.

Forced to abruptly transition to an online curriculum, each medical school crafted its own guidelines on learning activities, revised assessment measures, and set promotion policies. Consequently, the learning experiences of students varied among medical schools nationwide. In an open letter posted on social media, the student network of the Association of Philippine Medical Colleges called for the suspension of online learning and termination of the ongoing semester, citing difficulties that the students had encountered, particularly poor internet connection, limited access to gadgets, and lack of study space at home (Baticulon et al., 2021).

The rapid shift to online learning amid a health crisis has generated an unconducive learning environment, which may have an impact on students' performance. Furthermore, students have expressed the difficulty of remote learning schedules conflicting with their home duties. This type of disturbance is common in remote learning since students are required to help with household tasks. This issue may have an impact on university students' academic performance, as evidenced by prior studies that suggest that students' involvement in family tasks harms their academic achievement (Rotas & Cahapay, 2020; Poncian, 2017).

In the study of Barrera et al. (2020), it was revealed in the results and discussion that all the students, including the teachers in Saint Michael college of Caraga have a very good computer literacy skills or basic computer tasks. It was also claimed by Barrera et al., 2020; Blignaut & Els, (2010) that the use of computers for the daily lives have become an important part of being a student wherein it involves their ability to communicate, utilizing their computer system skills, to work with word processing, data management and data sheeting and analysis programs. Another result showed that all their respondents have very good internet or computer-related skills, including audio, video, image editing skills, while their programming skills are excellent as well. Barrera et al.(2020); Dweck et al., (2014) stated that internet and programming skills are useful, especially for the students to make use and make them integrated with the curriculum for all the levels of education.

Distance learning is considered as the new normal form of classes due to the pandemic, and a lot of institutions help to integrate resources needed for the assure continuation of education at this time. Agaton & Cueto (2021) stated that one of the obstacles students face during online classes is the weak internet speed especially in rural areas that results to interruptions and disruptions in following their lessons. Also, it was stated in their study that financially disadvantageous students are the ones who experience difficulties regarding their education engagement. They suffer from digital exclusion, have poor technology management, and increased psychosocial or personal and social function challenges. Digital divide is increasing in developing countries like Philippines, especially in rural areas with poor internet access. Because of the digital divide among students, students who have short access in online class are more likely experiencing serious learning disruptions than those who do have enough internet and technological accessibility (Agaton & Cueto, 2021).

According to Aina et al.(2019) **t**here are many factors in association with the delayed graduation and dropout. The study is about why university students choose to delay their graduation or chose to drop out of school. The result of the study created a theoretical approach to combat or lessen the number of students not able to graduate or decide to drop out of the school. The HCM aims to have the ability to invest on the education especially on the students who are

graduating. Moreover, different factors must be included like family background, institutional settings as well as the number of factors in the organization and the manage

The lockdown due to the sudden outbreak of the virus has greatly affected many people, especially students. It affected not only the way of living of the students, but also the way they feel regarding academics. In the Philippines, among the different manifestations of fatigue, upon further study, it was reported that tiredness or physical exhaustion, lack of motivation, worry, fear and anxiety are most common symptoms (Labrague & Ann, 2020).

As determined by Tee et al.(2020), results showed that one-fourth of their respondents expressed moderate-to-severe anxiety during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines. One-seventh indicated moderate-to-severe stress levels, and one-sixth reported moderate-to-severe depression and psychological effects of the outbreak. According to the study, females are more affected than males. Stress, anxiety, sadness, and psychological damage are more detected among the less educated, unmarried persons, children, and adolescents, and those who do not have children. In addition, students indicated a more substantial psychological impact and more depressive and more stressful symptoms than those respondents who are working. On the contrary, a cross-sectional study was done by Acob et al.(2021) in Region 8, Eastern Visayas, Philippines, with Leyte tertiary students enrolled in private or public higher education institutions as respondents. Findings revealed that students had low to moderate stress levels and mild to severe depression and anxiety, with the majority having normal anxiety and stress levels. Although most students are not stressed, there was a high correlation between gender and stress levels. In conclusion, the study discovered no correlations between depression and the level of stress to the age, sex, marital status, and the family monthly income of the respondents.

Furthermore, the study of Baloran (2020) assessed students' knowledge, attitudes, anxieties, and coping methods. The findings demonstrated students' favourable opinion of the country's adoption of COVID-19 protocols. However, there remained a reluctance to use the online-blended learning technique. The leading cause of this is bad internet connection. That is also the cause for student's opposition to continuing with online study. As a result, it was concluded that inadequate internet connectivity is a significant barrier for Filipino students in a blended learning setup.

Because of the urgency of the COVID-19 pandemic, institutions did not have the time or resources to plan for and adapt a proper, systematic transition, which typically entails a significant amount of capacity building (i.e., providing learning and development opportunities for all involved stakeholders) and change management (i.e., striving to minimize the inevitable resistance and its counterproductive consequences to any institutional changes). Learners who were used to face-to-face interactions had to quickly adjust to online learning and the distance learning environment. Furthermore, the difficulties associated with rapid transitioning to distance learning were exacerbated by the numerous changes and restrictions associated with COVID-19, as well as the resulting psychosocial stressors that learners and educators have been experiencing Rad et al.(2021).

According to Realyvásquez-Vargas et al. (2020); Al-Maskari et al.(2021), academic concerns refer to learning difficulties, lack of attention from teachers, and increasing workload that have restricted students' ability to concentrate during online classes. Several authors around the world have researched students' academic concerns caused by COVID-19. For instance, the shifting to online learning affected students' academic performance and caused a lot of intellectual fatigue due to the increased workload.

According to Purnama et al., (2021), the ability to adopt technology, also known as digital literacy, is required for individuals, specifically students. It will be advantageous for students to deal with online risks if they have a high level of digital literacy (Helsper & Smahel, 2020; Purnama et al., 2021). In the study of Phuapan et al. (2016), it was stated that digital literacy is an essential skill in utilizing technology as a communication tool in society to access, organize, coordinate, estimate, and provide information. According to the findings of the previous report, there is a need to improve digital skills, particularly communication, teaching, and methodology (Tejedor et al., 2020; Purnama et al., 2021). The logic behind this is that technology literacy can potentially influence the students' academic outcome and achievement (Yustika & Iswati, 2020; Purnama et al., 2021).

Moreover, in the study of Neupane et al., (2020), it was mentioned that students who encounters academic challenges such as struggling to adapt, lack of internet accessibility, self-motivation, and time management in their online class affects how they keep up in their

online classes. In addition, it was stated that the important role of internet defines the readiness of the students in online class. Thus, the researchers claimed that the result of their study has a significant relationship between readiness and internet accessibility of the students during online class.

According to Rahiem, (2021), university students remained motivated to learn despite all the limitations and obstacles they experienced in a year of the Covid-19 outbreak. Encouragement of their support systems like social circle, families, and friends help them to be enthusiastic and determined to accomplish their personal goals. The Covid-19 situation was their first experience attending class remotely. However, motivating oneself is the most challenging aspect of becoming a student, but those challenges are expected in every academic career. Nevertheless, their determination and persistence to achieve their goals made them resilient of becoming motivated.

In 2021, Schmits et al.(2021) sought to assess the predictive effect of socioeconomic and educational contexts on anxiety and depressive symptoms a year after the pandemic, claiming that higher-education students felt anxious and depressed. Due to multiple lockdowns happening, students in higher education have experienced psychological issues such as frustration, stress, and sadness. In addition, students who did not have pre-existing mental health illnesses before the pandemic have become increasingly isolated and withdrawn and showed indicators of poor mental health.

According to Samudra & Matulessy, (2021), the rapid widespread use of the Covid-19 in the world affects the economy and education, where online learning occurs, causing students to have difficulty adapting to the new setup. Students claimed internet accessibility increases the academic stress they experience. Weak signals and expensive internet connection are also the problem each student faces. Therefore, the students' unpreparedness in the new setup has greatly affected their performance in terms of their academic careers.

Synthesis of Related Literature and Studies

Since the outbreak of pandemic, students have struggled with how they will continue their education. Many institutions have been forced to stop their operations due to the spread of the Corona Virus. The lockdown caused by the virus's sudden outbreak has significantly impacted people, particularly students. It had an impact on the students' way of life and how they felt about academics.

The rapid transition from physical to virtual class developed changes and restrictions for every student. Also, student's capabilities to cope with online platforms were difficult for them since the increased workload and the different learning disruptions. Since the adjustment to the online class, it is important to have tools and access to technology which can be a factor to maximize the new learning setup. That is why most students encounter different difficulties such as lack of internet accessibility, affordability of technology because they are not prepared for this adjustment. The importance of the internet defines the readiness of the students in an online class wherein the student's unpreparedness in the new learning setup affects their academic function. Based on the studies, most of the students expressed that the new learning environment has an impact on their academic performance. In addition, they also experienced difficulty in remote learning schedules since they also have home duties.

A lot of learning distractions can affect the students' learning capabilities in online learning. Students should know how to adapt to this learning environment because nowadays they are into digital technology wherein, they can utilize the ability to communicate and make it integrated into their online education. Most students in urban areas have access to the internet but sometimes they experienced internet disturbances while those who are in rural areas usually experience difficulties in their educational engagement and suffer having poor technology management and lack of internet access due to weak connectivity.

That is why students are struggling a lot because of the serious learning distractions. Different academic challenges are exposed to students since the adjustment to online learning. Students' social life also was affected because the pandemic took away their chance to meet new people, a time to explore and to maximize access to the institutions. Different authors' point of view about academic challenges is interconnected since their ideas are mainly on point to academic challenges. They always tend to criticize the major effect of the pandemic on the academic function of the students. The challenges of the students in terms of internet connectivity and technology affordability were also the major factors on why students tend to have academic disturbances.

Students are enthusiastic about online learning, but they are also aware of the challenges and adjustments that come with it. As with other educational changes, it takes time for students to adjust and feel competent in all areas. This study focuses on students' academic

challenges during the pandemic, where online learning necessitates adjustment, patience, and flexibility. When conducted effectively, respectfully, and intentionally, this research can contribute to a positive educational experience.

The gathered writings under Psychological Distress presented multiple foreign and local literature. It was indicated that a reason for students' academic delay was educational institutions invested mainly in graduating students. A local study had indicated the Philippines as one of the five countries in the world that haven't started physical classes right after the pandemic. It was due to the continuing variants of pandemic entering the country. It has been urged that reopening classes lessens the high percentage of out-of-school youth and can increase the country's economy as well. Higher education institutions, especially students at the tertiary level, were the common group who felt anxious and depressed. Students with no pre-existing mental health illness pre-Covid resulted in isolation and feeling withdrawn as the pandemic continued. Stress, frustration, and sadness were the psychological issues associated with their fear of academic delay. Almost all of the studies specified that the less educated and students in adolescence were most likely to have higher levels of anxiety associated with fear.

Lack of motivation has been commonly associated with students' level of fatigue. Attending online classes had different manifestations of fatigue levels. Common denominators were tiredness, lack of interest, physical exhaustion, and worry. Much more of the studies indicated that pursuing an academic career in an online platform will inevitably cause fatigue causing students to be overwhelmed and become disruptive. It was also stated that class engagement is not only a responsibility of the teachers but also the students as well. In contrast, a foreign study articulated that student are still motivated despite the pandemic. Encouragement of support systems, determination, and persistence to achieve academic goals were key factors in students' motivation level. The motivation was indicated as the most challenging factor but is expected in pursuing their academic career.

Ever since the start of the pandemic, academic stressors such as educational obligations, learning difficulties, increased workload, lack of attention from teachers, and perceived stress resulted in academic stress. A common factor was constant pressure due to requirements needed to meet educational obligations in online learning. Consequently, students were stressed in at least one area in their life. Continuous stress negatively impacts their learning capacity and performance causing intellectual fatigue and eventually burnout. Students also had to deal with loneliness and compromised physical and mental health as well. A foreign study indicated that modification of academic workload can ease students' management skills and therefore can lessen the likelihood of academic stress. As stated in the Local Literature, one of the differences between this study and other previous studies is that this study is primarily concerned with the perspectives of the students, how they adapt, adjust, and so on, whereas other studies are concerned with the challenges of the teachers or instructors. Also in the foreign literature, in the context of the post-pandemic, the preferability of students must be considered because the timeline of e-learning is uncertain, knowing that if the new online learning system would drastically continue.

Methodology

In this study, the researchers focused on the correlation between Academic Challenges and Psychological Distress. A correlational design is a type of non-experimental research that can measure relationships between two or among more than two variables, as it also does not involve manipulating variables using a scientific methodology to agree or disagree with a hypothesis (Price et al., 2017). This type of research design was adapted to determine the relationship between academic challenges and psychological distress of selected college students and the difference between the level of being academically challenged and level of distress based on how it is perceived by the respondents.

Lastly, this study utilized an online survey method in assessing the level of academic challenges and level of psychological distress during online learning. This medium helped the researchers to find the direction and strength of the relationship between the variables. Therefore, the researchers can efficiently conduct a fact-finding investigation to accurately evaluate if the academic challenges affect college students' psychological distress.

Research Locale

This research study was conducted at Emilio Aguinaldo College - Manila, specifically at the School of Arts, Sciences, and Teacher Education. The following courses under the School of SASTE are as follows; AB Communication, BS Biology, BS Psychology, Bachelor of Elementary Education and

Secondary Education. Emilio Aguinaldo College is a private non-sectarian educational institution in Manila, Philippines. The researchers identified Emilio Aguinaldo College - Manila as the perfect location for the gathered significant data for perceived academic challenges and perceived distress of selected college students during pandemic.

Population and Sampling

The study obtained enough data to address research questions. Among the selected college students an eligibility criterion deviated the focus group from the general population. The criteria are as follows; (1) College student/s enrolled at Emilio Aguinaldo College – Manila, specifically under the School of Arts, Sciences, and Teacher Education, (2) Selected students should be currently engaged in an online learning set-up, (3) Selected students who have regular or irregular course units can participate, and (4) 18 to 24 years of age. A population size of 497 students was confirmed by a summary enrolment report (see *Appendix G*) given by the Office of Registrar on March 14, 2022. From the given data, using a Qualtrics calculator which is a free online tool that offers an online sample size calculator (Qualtrics AU, 2020), the ideal sample size generated was 217. The research study used controlled quota sampling of the selected college students enrolled in an online learning set-up. The researchers used this sampling method to create a sample involving individuals that represent a population to investigate a trait or characteristic. In gathering 220 respondents, quota samples allow the researchers to observe relationships between subgroups. It also improves the representation of any particular group within the population, thereby ensuring that these groups are not over-represented.

Research Instrument and Technique

The following narrative explains the in-depth conceptualization of the self-made questionnaire used in our research study.

Name of Questionnaire/s

Two self-made questionnaires were developed by the researchers to measure the two main variables perceived by the respondents. First part of the questionnaire is named as Assessment of Academic Challenges, while the second part is named as Assessment of Psychological Distress.

Summary of History

A self-constructed questionnaire was developed for this study by the researchers. Two self-made questionnaires were constructed in order to measure the variables of Academic Challenges and Psychological Distress. In testing the validity of the questionnaire, the researchers consulted three (3) experts in the field of Psychology (see *Appendix C*) to examine the 74-item questionnaire. Mr. Reynold P. Varela, Ph.D., Mr. Keno Alvir Suni M.A., and Mr. Randolfh Nerona, MS were involved in testing the validity of the questionnaire. After analyzing the items, a decision was formulated as to which items or questions were to be retained, modified, discarded, and replaced. Items retained were now placed and used in creating a Google Form for conducting an online survey for pilot study and data collection.

The first part of the questionnaire was labelled as Assessment of Academic Challenges, which consists originally of 36 questions. There were 12 items under the domain of Adjustment to e-Learning, 7 items under the domain of Online learning distractions, 8 items under the domain of Challenges specific to Technology Literacy, and 9 items under the domain of Challenges in Internet Connectivity. The second part was labelled as Assessment of Psychological Distress, which consists of 38 questions. There were 17 items under the domain of Fear of Academic Delay, 10 items under the domain of Lack of Motivation, and 11 items under the domain of Academic Stress and Burnout.

Scoring

The instrument was a four-point Likert scale interpreting 1 as Strongly Disagree, 2 as Disagree, 3 as Agree, and 4 as Strongly Agree. Seven domains were measured in assessing students' academic challenges and psychological distress.

Pilot Study Results/Reliability Result

Table 1. *Cronbach's Alpha Interpretation*

Cronbach's Alpha	*Internal Consistency*
$\alpha \geq 0.9$	Excellent
$0.9 > \alpha \geq 0.8$	Good
$0.8 > \alpha \geq 0.7$	Acceptable
$0.7 > \alpha \geq 0.6$	Questionable
$0.6 > \alpha \geq 0.5$	Poor
$0.6 > \alpha$	Unacceptable

Figure 1. .

Originally, 36 questions were under the Assessment of Academic Challenges. After conducting pilot study, Question number 4, 7, and 9 under the domain of adjustment to e-Learning, were removed due to a weak number of alpha values. If said items were retained, a Cronbach Alpha of $\alpha = 0.576$ was generated, indicating a poor internal consistency. While removal of items 4, 7, and 9 under the domain of adjustment to e-Learning resulted in having a Cronbach Alpha of $\alpha = 0.832$ indicating a good internal consistency. Therefore, three items were removed and 9 items remained. While all questions for the remaining domains were retained. The remaining three domains with their corresponding Cronbach Alpha are as follows; online learning distractions with 7 items (Cronbach Alpha of $\alpha = 0.704$) generated an acceptable internal consistency, challenges specific to technology literacy with 8 items (Cronbach Alpha of $\alpha = 0.868$) generated a good internal consistency, and challenges in internet connectivity with 9 items (Cronbach Alpha of $\alpha = 0.861$) generated a good internal consistency. The overall reliability for Assessment of Academic Challenges, which now consists of 33 questions, results in a Cronbach Alpha of $\alpha = 0.758$, having an acceptable internal consistency. On the other hand, for Assessment of Psychological Distress, all items were retained. The three domains with their corresponding Cronbach Alpha are as follows; fear of academic delay with 17 items (Cronbach Alpha of $\alpha = 0.917$) generated an excellent internal consistency, lack of motivation with 10 items (Cronbach Alpha of $\alpha = 0.934$) generated an excellent internal consistency, and academic stress and burnout with 11 items (Cronbach Alpha of $\alpha = 0.723$) generated an acceptable internal consistency. The overall reliability for Assessment of Psychological Distress, which still consists of 38 questions, results in a Cronbach Alpha of $\alpha = 0.951$, having an excellent internal consistency.

Interpretation

Overall, 71 questions were used as representations of the seven domains under the self-made questionnaire. To measure the construct of Academic Challenges and Psychological Distress, a scoring was established to determine the respondents' level of Covid-19 related stressors associated in online learning.

Table 2*: Scoring Interpretation for Academic Challenges and Psychological Distress*

	Academic challenges
Strongly Disagree	1 – 1.74
Disagree	1.75 – 2.49
Agree	2.5 – 3.24
Strongly Agree	3.25 - 4.00

Figure 2. .

	Psychological distress
Strongly Disagree	1 - 1.74
Disagree	1.75 - 2.49
Agree	2.5 - 3.24
Strongly Agree	3.25 - 4.00

Figure 3. .

Statistical Treatment of Data

In the analysis and treatment of data that were gathered for this study, the following statistical software and analytical tool were used.

Microsoft Excel. Excel spreadsheet organizes raw data into a readable format that makes it easier to extract descriptions needed for data anaylsis (Broman & Woo, 2018). Excel's simple statistical and plotting functions can help researchers gain insight into their data. Moreover, most studies necessarily involve more extensive statistical techniques, which are best accomplished with the assistance of additional

statistical software packages such as SAS or SPSS.

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). SPSS is a collection of software programs packaged together in a single package; this program's primary application is to analyze scientific data related to social science (Noels, 2018). SPSS stores and organizes the provided data before compiling the data set to produce appropriate output. Some of the statistical treatments that will be used but not restricted to are mean, standard deviation and Pearson R.

Measure of Central Tendency. The researchers can use central tendency measures to determine the typical numerical point in a set of data (Frost, 2018). The purpose of central tendency is to provide an accurate representation of the full data set. It is defined as "the statistical metric that identifies a single value as representative of an entire distribution. It is the single most typical/representative value from the collected data. The three most commonly used metrics of central tendency are the mean, median, and mode.

Standard Deviation. A standard deviation is a statistic that measures the distribution of a data set pertaining to its mean. By calculating the deviation of each data point from the mean, the standard deviation is calculated as the square root of the variance (Hargrave, 2022). If the data points deviate from the mean more, there is a higher deviation within the data set; thus, the higher the standard deviation, the more spread out the data.

Spearman's Rho. Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient is a statistical measure of the strength of a two-variable association. Spearman's correlation is a nonparametric form of Pearson's product-moment correlation that is typically used for a very brief series of observations that do not follow a normal distribution pattern (Laerd Statistics, n.d.). Spearman's rank correlation, like other correlation coefficients, defines a mathematically co-varying connection between two datasets (Allen, 2017). The p-value shows the probability of getting our results if our variables did not have a connection. A p-value of less than or equal to 0.05 indicates that our finding is statistically significant and that the difference is not attributable to chance alone.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers submitted their research proposal and waited for the approval and ethical review of the panelists of the Thesis Review Committee. Selected college students of the department were guided by a seven-minute video, explaining the purpose and procedure of the study. The following guidelines were also put into place for the research study; (1) The respondents will not be exposed to physical risk but minimal risk due to the discomfort and time spent in answering the online questionnaire. (2) The participants' responses to the questionnaire will be anonymous and purely be used for the development of research only. (3) The respondents have the right to discontinue or withdraw from the research study at any stage without further explanation. (4) The respondents will receive an informed consent letter (via e-mail and/or Facebook messenger or depending on the reference of the target respondents) for their participation and would not be forced to comply in the study. (5) The data gathered from the respondents will be private and confidential except in cases where researchers are legally obligated to report specific incidents. (6) The researchers will discredit any form of misconduct such as falsifying data, manipulation of data analysis, or misrepresenting resulting in research reports. (7) The researchers ensure that any form of personal bias nor personal conflict of interest will be disregarded in the study being conducted. Once students have finished the seven minutes video, consent for their voluntary participation will be asked, and may proceed in answering the online survey questionnaire presented through Google Form. (8) Lastly, following RA No. 10173 or the Data Privacy Act, Researchers would use none of the information provided other than the intended purposes for research study, such as gathering data from an online survey, notes, and documents.

Result

Research Question 1: What is the level of Academic Challenges as perceived by the respondents based on the following factors?

1.1Adjustment to e-Learning
1.2Online learning distractions
1.3Challenges specific to Technology literacy
1.4Challenges in Internet connectivity

Table 3. Sub Variable 1.1

Adjustment to E-learning	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*	*Rank*	*Verbal Interpretation*
I am easily adjusted to the new learning system, specifically online learning	2.690	0.746	2	Agree
Through the help of online classes, I was able to understand the context of the lessons	2.565	0.695	5	Agree
I prefer online learning than face-to-face learning	2.063	0.938	7	Disagree
I often feel that my online class instructors effectively taught us the lessons	2.647	0.662	3	Agree
I can easily follow the instructions during online learning	2.594	0.704	4	Agree
I could manage my time well during online learning	2.647	0.871	3	Agree
Face-to-face class is more costly than online class	2.874	0.880	1	Agree
It is easier to learn in online class than physical class	2.00	0.827	8	Disagree
It is more convenient for me to study at home	2.493	0.972	6	Disagree
OVERALL	2.51	0.81		Agree

Figure 4. .

In terms of Adjustment to e-learning with the highest mean of 2.874, interpreted as agree. The respondents distinguished that face-to-face class is more costly than online class. Students spend more during face-to-face class than in an online class setup (transportation cost, course materials, etc.). Respondents have also agreed that they have adjusted from transitioning to online class, as they felt that instructors still effectively taught their lessons in an online setting. This could be since most instructors still use the same curricula and learning outcomes meant for face-to-face teaching (Sundarasen et al., 2020). Respondents have also added that they can manage their time well and easily follow the instructions given to them during online learning. However, the study of Shrestha et al., (2021) indicated that students had difficulty understanding their lessons and found online classes having limited time to manage as well.

On the other hand, with the lowest mean of 2.00, interpreted as disagree. The respondents stated that it is not easier to learn in online class than in physical class. This may be due to the fact that when respondents were asked in terms of preferability, face-to-face class was still preferred. The study of Nepal et al. (2020) also stated that if students were to choose between online classes and traditional teaching, most of the students still preferred traditional classroom teaching. Respondents also added that their home is not a suitable and convenient place to conduct online classes, which gives them a hard time to navigate towards online learning. The sudden discontinuity of face-to-face classes had a negative impact in their life and studies upon transitioning to e-Learning (Begum et al., 2020; Goldstein, 2020).

Table 4. Sub Variable 1.2

Online learning distractions	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*	*Rank*	*Verbal Interpretation*
Sometimes I'm more distracted looking at my social media than listening to online classes	3.05	0.845	1	Agree
My home environment is not suitable for studying	2.814	0.879	3	Agree
I have trouble balancing my household chores and online learning activities	2.814	0.831	3	Agree
I delay some of my work so I can rest for a short period of time	2.836	0.817	2	Agree
I tend to chit chat with my friends or	2.509	0.889	5	Agree

Figure 5. .

classmates during online class				
I tend to play online games during online class	1.986	0.884	6	Disagree
Sometimes I binge watch movies or YouTube before doing my school activities	2.645	0.922	4	Agree
OVERALL	2.66	0.87		Agree

Figure 6. .

In Online Learning Distractions, with the highest mean of 3.05 interpreted as agree, the respondents are sometimes more distracted looking at social media than listening to online class, which consequently is also a part of their rest for a short period of time. It is undeniably true that social media has a huge impact on students. This means that students are easily distracted during online class and having an online class at home seems difficult since it is fully dependent on the electronics. It is supported by Akpinar (2021), who claimed that due to a wide array of distractions, it is highly expected that students will be distracted when utilizing the internet as a learning tool. The results suggest that students are more likely to be entertained on social media than listening to an online class lecture.

On the other hand, with a lowest mean of 1.986 interpreted as disagree, the respondents do not tend to play online games during online class. The results suggest that despite students having difficulty in concentrating on academic work due to various sources of distraction (Son et al., 2021), online games may not be a source of distraction for them during online class. However, in the study of Purnama et al. (2021), students have also engaged not only in social media but also in playing games and listening to music.

Table 5. Sub Variable 1.3

Challenges specific to Technology Literacy	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*	*Rank*	*Verbal Interpretation*
I cannot use technology tools to process data and report results to support online course content	1.945	0.693	4	Disagree
I do not know how to arrange and maintain document/files required for online learning management	1.945	0.726	4	Disagree
I am not knowledgeable in using Zoom, Google Meet, Google Classroom and as such, for attending synchronous class	1.845	0.755	7	Disagree
I cannot utilize technology tools and information resources to increase online learning productivity	1.877	0.647	6	Disagree
I cannot use online learning tools for collaboration and communication among students and also with teachers	1.927	0.743	5	Disagree
I am not competent in using digital learning resources	2.073	0.773	3	Disagree

Figure 7. .

I do not know how to fix my activity files if they get corrupted	2.305	0.877	1	Disagree
I rarely volunteer in creating PowerPoints in group reports because I cannot utilize its full use	2.159	0.859	2	Disagree
OVERALL	2	0.76		Disagree

Figure 8. .

In Challenges Specific to Technology Literacy, with the highest mean of 2.305 interpreted as disagree, most of the respondents know how to fix their activity files if it gets corrupted. Respondents also know how to arrange and maintain documents/files required for online learning management. They know how to utilized technology and online learning tools. According to the study of Cadiz-Gabejan & Takenaka

(2021); Leonard, (2019), to ensure one has a grasp of basic computer literacy, ensure that he is capable of the following: turning a computer on and off, using an operating system, operating software applications, using the internet, and navigating a computer using menus and search functionality.

On the other hand, with a lowest mean of 1.845 interpreted as disagree, most of the respondents are capable and knowledgeable about using online learning platforms for their online classes. Students are capable of using online learning tools for collaboration among students and also with their teachers. Also, they are competent in using digital learning resources. This study was supported by Cacheiro-Gonzalez et al., (2019). Among the most important functions of online learning platforms are forums that allow student-teacher communication and collaboration in an asynchronous way, web conferences that allow video, audio and written communication, and chat, where users can send messages and receive responses in real-time. According to Basar et al., 2021); Fauziana (2020), students can revisit their lessons by re-watching recordings made by the educator, and obtain information from books or using the internet to strengthen their knowledge.

Table 6. Sub Variable 1.4

Challenges in Internet Connectivity	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*	*Rank*	*Verbal Interpretation*
I am not able to access a reliable internet connection during online class	2.395	0.784	7	Disagree
I personally encountered the delay of submitting my paper works due to an imbalance in internet access	2.827	0.832	4	Agree
Most of the time, using mobile data cannot support attending an online synchronous session	2.845	0.851	3	Agree
Unstable internet connection at home makes it difficult to comply with online learning	3.114	0.823	1	Agree
I am living in a place where the internet signal is low	2.527	0.862	6	Agree
Low internet access makes	2.932	0.855	2	Agree

Figure 9. .

it difficult for me to understand our lecture				
I often get left behind with lectures due to poor internet connection	2.564	0.902	5	Agree
Most of the time I am late in attending classes because my internet is unstable	2.395	0.898	7	Disagree
Choppy voice due to unstable internet connection affects my confidence to speak during online presentations	2.827	0.880	4	Agree
OVERALL	2.71	0.85		Agree

Figure 10. .

In Challenges in Internet Connectivity, with the highest mean of 3.114 interpreted as agree, the respondents experienced unstable internet connection at home that makes it difficult to comply with online lectures. The report of Speedtest Global Index ranked the Philippines as 111th in mobile data speed and 86th under fixed broadband, showing that internet connectivity is not as fast compared to other countries (Pastor, 2020). This may reflect the idea that students personally experienced delays in submitting paperwork due to an imbalance in internet access. Adding also that most of the time, mobile data cannot support synchronous classes, whereas students relied upon mobile internet data to attend their online classes (Nepal et al., 2020).

On the other hand, with the lowest mean of 2.395 interpreted as disagree. Majority of the respondents have reliable internet connections during online class and are present during their synchronous classes. However, despite reliable internet sources such as broadband/wifi and mobile data, the challenge was still slow internet speed (Shafiq et al., 2021). Additionally, respondents have agreed that they reside in areas where the signal of the internet is low. Slow internet connection is the major cause of internet activity interruption, which ultimately affects the online class activity for college students (Shafiq et al., 2021), therefore having problems of intermittent connectivity.

Research Question 2: What is the level of Psychological Distress as experienced by the respondents in terms of the following factors?
2.1Fear of Academic delay
2.2Lack of Motivation
2.3Academic Stress and Burnout

Table 7 Sub variable 2.1

Fear of Academic Delay	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*	*Rank*	*Verbal Interpretation*
I am afraid that I may not graduate on time due to the loss of my parents' job	2.468	0.962	15	Disagree
I fear that my academic life would be pointless if I get delayed	2.805	0.862	8	Agree
I fear that my efforts won't lead to the results needed for me to pass in my subjects	2.859	0.893	5	Agree
I fear that I often tend to overthink things if I don't get perfect or high grades or scores	2.855	0.831	6	Agree
I feel afraid when I do not pass my activities on time	3.055	0.774	2	Agree
I fear that I am not competent enough	2.727	0.843	11	Agree

Figure 11. .

to do any of my school works				
When I think about school, I seem to be a little uneasy	2.791	0.795	9	Agree
I fear about panicking and embarrassing myself in academic situations	2.868	0.915	4	Agree
Attending synchronous classes made me feel anxious	2.455	0.862	17	Disagree
I am afraid or conscious about participating in academic-related activities for no particular reason	2.632	0.842	13	Agree
I feel anxious when my professor tells us to open our cameras during class	2.591	0.910	14	Agree
I fear that I'll panic when presenting a report	2.691	0.944	12	Agree
I feel tense when answering an exam with limited time	2.955	0.895	3	Agree
I feel anxious when my name gets called or mentioned	2.741	0.897	10	Agree
Multiple deadlines in different subjects makes me feel anxious	3.064	0.874	1	Agree

Figure 12. .

Being required to participate in online activities or events triggers my anxious mannerisms such as biting my nails or lips	2.477	0.914	16	Disagree
During recitation I get anxious and feel completely relaxed when our online classes are over	2.832	0.909	7	Agree
OVERALL	2.76	0.88		Agree

Figure 13. .

In Fear of Academic Delay, with the highest mean of 3.064 interpreted as agree, majority of the respondents agreed that multiple deadlines of schoolwork in different subjects make them anxious. This may reflect the idea of overwhelming feelings due to multiple deadlines to accomplish and the fear of not being able to pass their tasks on time. Students are expected to meet multiple deadlines to prevent academic delays. The students also agreed that their effort will not lead them to pass in their subjects. Thus, such delays make the students feel anxious and their academic life would be pointless if they got delayed. A Bangladesh study stated that possible academic delay may consequently cause distress in students, along with job insecurity triggering anxiety due to COVID-19 induced academic uncertainty (Hossain et al., 2021).

With the lowest mean of 2.455, attending synchronous class does not make them feel anxious. Same results with the study of Cao et al. (2020), despite students transitioning to e-Learning, most students had no symptoms of anxiety. However, the results also showed that despite not being anxious attending online class, whenever their name gets called is where the anxiety starts to arise.

Table 8 Sub Variable 2.2

Lack of Motivation	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*	*Rank*	*Verbal Interpretation*
In my academics, I felt like I had nothing to look forward to	2.391	0.850	9	Disagree
When teachers assigned a/synchronous activities, I feel demotivated	2.314	0.798	10	Disagree
I couldn't seem to get excited about schoolwork	2.709	0.820	4	Agree
In my online courses, I struggle to maintain a sense of compliance	2.664	0.797	5	Agree
I easily feel unmotivated because I lack a support system from my friends and family	2.409	0.874	8	Disagree
I sometimes feel like giving up on my academics	2.6	0.943	7	Agree
I feel drained after doing my activities	2.9	0.886	1	Agree
I feel drained after attending synchronous class	2.859	0.867	3	Agree
I could not seem to feel any positive feelings in online classes	2.627	0.895	6	Agree
I feel obligated to study to pass and not to learn	2.882	0.981	2	Agree
OVERALL	2.64	0.87		Agree

Figure 14. .

Figure 15. .

In Lack of Motivation, with the highest mean of 2.9, interpreted as agree. The respondents feel drained after doing their activities. This may support the idea that students are only complying with their schoolwork just to pass. Given the fact that they do not feel any excitement about schoolwork, they also feel drained after attending synchronous classes. According to Mauliya et al., (2020); Carnegie Mellon University (2019) students feel less motivated when attending online classes because they do not believe their efforts will improve their performance and that they have other priorities more preoccupying their attention.

Furthermore, with the lowest mean of 2.314 interpreted as disagree, the students are motivated when instructors give them activities. The study of Carlén (2021) stated the most significant type of motivation is intrinsic motivation, wherein an individual performs something simply because they want to. These results suggest that students are only motivated by the idea of having or doing schoolwork, but they feel drained and do not feel any excitement in the process or after doing their schoolwork.

Table 9 Sub Variable 2.3

Academic Stress and Burnout	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*	*Rank*	*Verbal Interpretation*
I often struggle to rest every synchronous activity given during online class	2.75	0.774	6	Agree
I enjoy being in charge of a situation that requires a lot of thinking in order to achieve academic success	2.668	0.779	8	Agree
I find satisfaction in working hard and studying for long hours to meet my academic demands	2.7	0.728	7	Agree
It's enough for me that my output is acceptable, regardless of how I've achieved it	2.845	0.698	4	Agree
After completing an academic task that needed a lot of mental effort, I feel relieved rather than satisfied	3.109	0.726	1	Agree
I easily get pressured when I do activities in a group	2.75	0.847	6	Agree
I am pressured to maintain a good grade	2.932	0.876	3	Agree

Figure 16. .

I am not good at managing my time academics	2.7	0.845	7	Agree
I tend to act irrationally when I'm faced with a stressful situation	2.841	0.786	5	Agree
Oftentimes I find myself tired in my academics	3.045	0.775	2	Agree
I feel disappointed toward myself whenever I receive low grades	3.109	0.848	1	Agree
OVERALL	2.86	0.79		Agree

Figure 17. .

In Academic Stress and Burnout, with the highest mean of 3.109 interpreted as agree. Majority of the respondents feel disappointed toward themselves whenever they receive low grades but they feel relieved after completing an academic task. This reflects the idea that students are pressured also when maintaining good grades and doing group activities. Also, students can also find satisfaction in working hard and studying for long hours despite meeting academic demands. Owusu & Essel, (2017) showed that work and studies are the most frequent causes of stress for students. The study of Singh et al., (2020) shows that the pandemic has negatively impacted young people's material conditions, which had long-term consequences for their physical and mental health as well as academic achievement. For many students, COVID-19 has additionally complicated their current plans and changed their mode of functioning. According to Almusharraf & Khahro, (2020) to develop courses, academic institutions consider factors that affect the efficiency of online learning while student satisfaction and other course-related aspects are influenced by the strategies adopted to provide online learning during the pandemic.

On the other hand, with the lowest mean of 2.668 interpreted as agree. Most of the respondents enjoy being in charge of a situation that requires a lot of thinking in order to achieve academic success. This reflects the idea that despite feeling tired, they act irrationally and struggle, they have the feeling of accomplishing their own academic success. A certain amount of stress is an inevitable and useful part of studying. It assists students to work harder, be focused and return to study rather than doing other things. However, if students are too stressed, they cannot study effectively (Yasmin et al., 2020).

Table 10*: Level of Academic Challenges perceived by respondents*

	Mean	*SD*	*Interpretation*
Adjustment to E-learning	2.51	0.81	Agree
Online Learning Distractions	2.66	0.87	Agree
Challenges specific to Technology Literacy	2.00	0.76	Disagree
Challenges in Internet Connectivity	2.71	0.85	Agree
Overall	2.47	0.82	Disagree

Figure 18. .

The table shows that in the domain of Adjustment to e-Learning with the mean of 2.51 appears that respondents agreed they have adjusted from transitioning to online learning, as transitioning to distance learning is the most viable alternative so far (Belgica et al., 2020; Alipio 2020). In Online Learning Distractions with the mean of 2.66 appears that respondents agreed they are distracted in an online learning environment. A study stated that students are distracted from home were reported as a significant impediment to online learning during the pandemic (Ouma et al., 2021; Baticulon et al. 2020), as parents and family members expected the students to help with chores at home and failed to comprehend why the students were constantly on the phone the whole day (Ouma et al., 2021; Agormedah et al., 2020).

In Challenges Specific to Technology Literacy with the mean of 2.00 appears that respondents disagreed because they are technology literate and know to use online learning tools for their online classes. However, in the study of Shrestha et al. (2021), it was stated that some students were challenged in terms of technology literacy but took it as an opportunity to learn.

Challenges in Internet connectivity with the mean of 2.71 appears that respondents agreed that they experience intermittent internet connection during online classes. An Indonesian study reported as well (Ouma et al., 2021; Agung 2020) that unstable and slow internet connection was a hindrance from their participants.

Therefore, the level of Academic Challenges perceived by the respondents with an overall mean of 2.47 was Disagree. According to Suresh et al. (2018), E-learning offers many advantages to learners such as control over the content, control over the time spent learning, and thus the process can be adapted according to the learner needs and objectives of learning, whereas according to Coman et al. (2020), E-learning can highly affect the educational process and student's perception about the use of the online environment in the process of teaching and learning but it important, relevant, and necessary to analyze whether students have adapted to E-learning and whether they are satisfied rather than dissatisfied with this exclusive online experience

Also Singh et al.(2020) indicated that students appreciated the use of online learning during the pandemic. However, half of them believed that the traditional classroom setting was more effective than the online learning platform

Table 11: Level of Psychological Distress perceived by respondent

	Mean	*SD*	*Interpretation*
Fear of Academic Delay	2.76	0.88	Agree
Lack of Motivation	2.64	0.87	Agree
Academic Stress and Burnout	2.86	0.79	Agree
Overall	2.75	0.85	Agree

Figure 19. .

The table shows that in the domain of Fear of Academic Delay with the mean of 2.76 appears that respondents agreed that they feel anxious and feared about their academic function in an online learning setup. In the study of Hasan & Bao (2020) As a result, young students are dealing with two issues: they are anxious about the loss of their common preparations, and they are afraid of losing their academic year or they show fear of academic delay. As a result, the study looked into the link between anxiety and fear of failure

In Lack of Motivation with the mean of 2.64 appears

that respondents agreed that they feel drained about their school work and exhausted achieving good performance in an online learning environment. This supported the study of Aristovnik et al., (2020) wherein students were ultimately worried about issues relating to their potential vocation as learners and investigated, exhaustion, uneasiness, and pressure endured.

In Academic Stress and Burnout with the mean of 2.86, it appears that respondents agreed that they feel pressured to adapt to the new learning environment and feel stressed and burnout on their online activities, as a study suggest that one of the causes of student stress is overall workload (Therisa Beena & Sony, 2020; Corrales et al., 2020)

Therefore, the level of Psychological Distress perceived by respondents with an overall mean of 2.75 was Agree. This support to the study of Browning et al., (2021); Aristovnik et al., (2020) which stated that many people experience increased stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms because of university education's changed delivery and uncertainty, technological concerns of online courses, being away from home, social isolation, decreased family income, and future employment. These effects have been seen in universities all over the world.

Research Question 3: Is there a significant relationship between Academic Challenges and Psychological Distress?

Table 12*: Correlation between Academic Challenges and Psychological Distress*

		Fear of Academic Delay	*Lack of Motivation*	*Academic Stress and Burnout*	*Interpretation*
Adjustment to E-learning	rho (ρ)	-0.135	-0.292	-0.124	Significant
	p-value	0.046	<.001	0.066	
Online Learning Distractions	rho (ρ)	0.421	0.457	0.383	Significant
	p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001	
Challenges specific to Technology literacy	rho (ρ)	0.252	0.308	0.233	Significant
	p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001	
Challenges in Internet Connectivity	rho (ρ)	0.338	0.361	0.292	Significant

Figure 20. .

Table 12 shows, On the test of relationship, the result indicated a significant relationship between Academic Challenges and Psychological Distress of the students. Specifically, Adjustment to E-learning has shown a negative correlation to the domains of Psychological Distress, which means that the higher the adjustment of the students, the lower the distress they may experience. Another is on the positive relationships found with Learning Distractions, Challenges Specific to Technology Literacy, and Challenges in Internet Connection to the domains of Psychological Distress.

Adjustment to e-Learning has shown a negative correlation to the domains of Psychological Distress. This finding is supported by Khawar et al. (2021), if students were adjusted to online learning, then the value of psychological distress decreases. Based on the current study's data, if college students were adjusted or satisfied, this increases the level of adjustment in which lowers the distress students experience, implying a negative correlation between Adjustment to e-Learning and Psychological Distress. There are reasons for mental stress among students. Possible adjustments to e-Learning that causes students' academic stress were uncertainty regarding how exams will be taken, and grades given on the basis of online exams. The study of Shafiq et al. (2021) emphasized that adjustment to online learning created more mental stress as students were not used to such systems of education resulting in possible distress.

Academic challenges enhance Psychological Distress or rather are influenced by challenges towards online learning. Consequently, there is a significant impact of levels of being academically challenged on levels of experiencing distress. The findings of Hasan & Bao (2020) indicated that e-Learning stressors are linked to academic delays which affects students' mental well-being with associated anxiety further causing psychological distress. Challenges that have resulted in our study are Online Learning Distractions, Challenges to Technology Literacy, and Challenges to Internet Connectivity. These were the e-Learning stressors that corresponded to higher tendency of Psychological Distress in line with the researchers' findings. Students' dissatisfaction towards adjustment to online learning contributed to their anxiety and stress levels. A Bangladesh study (Hossain et al., 2021) highlighted that the challenges in adapting to e-Learning such as internet connectivity, technology literacy, and possible academic burnout might be attributed to such academic distress. Sundarasen et al. (2020) stated that an important contributor to academic stress and level

of anxiety was the sudden transition to online classes. This meant that some challenges to e-Learning such as tasks in terms of technological infrastructure and poor internet connection contributed to possible stressors of Psychological Distress. This study showed that the more distracted students are, the higher they perceive technology difficulty, and intermittency of internet connection corresponds to a higher tendency to experience distress.

Discussion

Upon analyzing the findings of Academic Challenges, the researchers have concluded the following: Academic Challenges can be seen through the perspective of learners and the perspective of online learning. From the standpoint of learners, the respondents stated that they have agreed in line with adjusting to e-Learning. With a marginal value, the researchers deduced that literacy towards using technological mediums that caters to online education eases the transition to e-Learning. However, despite being adjusted, learners do not prefer online learning. It is also important to note that aside from preferability, their home environment was unsuitable and made it harder for them to learn in an online class setting. Factors that affect learners in facilitating online learning are distractions and internet connectivity. Learners have agreed that they are indeed distracted, as they are entirely dependent on electronics and have tendencies to browse their social media. They have specified numerous distractions, such as juggling household chores and watching YouTube and other streaming platforms, but playing online games was not one of them. But the most important factor that highly affects facilitating online learning is challenges to internet connectivity. Learners have agreed that they do have reliable internet sources. Still, geographically speaking, the country has one of the slowest and most unstable internet connectivity, making it harder for them to comply. It is also important to note that learners agreed to use mobile data to attend online classes, which is most likely to have a higher tendency for unpredictable intermittency.

To generalize, from the perspective of learners, they disagree as being academically challenged, as they have adjusted to online learning given that they are technologically literate. But from the perspective of factors that facilitate online learning, respondents were indeed challenged. The dynamics of their home environment had tendencies for distractions to occur, making it less preferable for online learning. Additionally, unstable internet access and low connection inconvenienced the learners during e-Learning. Learners disagreed, academically speaking, of being challenged. But navigating their academics by factors facilitating online learning was indeed a challenge for them.

Upon analyzing the findings of Psychological Distress, the researchers have concluded the following: Lack of motivation was the least contributing factor to psychological distress. Respondents stated that they feel drained both in activities and attending synchronous sessions, making them feel obligated to pass and not to learn. With the help of their family and support system, their motivation and optimism are still present, but consequently, students are struggling to form a sense of compliance. Therefore, respondents feel anxious about having multiple deadlines and potentially have fear when they do not pass their activities on time. Fear of Academic Delay now becomes the second contributing factor to students' distress. But despite being anxious and afraid, respondents still claimed that they could attend their synchronous classes without a hint of fear and physical manifestation of anxiety.

Potentially, the factors mentioned earlier could generate a lower grade in the academics of the respondents. Upon disappointment, if such a happening occurs, this translates to stress. As they feel tired in their academics due to the accumulating stress and an existing pressure to maintain a good grade, academic stress and burnout now becomes the primary cause of distress among students. Possible instant gratification could satisfy students by acting irrationally through working and studying for long hours, and taking charge of a situation that requires a lot of thinking. But this only develops into a false sense of achieving academic success. The problem could worsen as students struggle to feel at ease and merely pass an acceptable output regardless of how they achieved it. The possibility of such a vicious cycle brought by the accumulation of the domains, if not intervened, could cause psychological distress towards online learning.

Lastly, the researchers have concluded the following regarding the correlation between Academic Challenges and Psychological Distress. If students were more distracted due to several factors, such as balancing both home and academic demands, this potentially translates into distress. As online learning relies heavily on technology, if respondents are not technologically literate, such a factor could aggravate further stress. Additionally, if intermittent internet

connection adds up to the accumulation of the factors mentioned above, this corresponds to a higher tendency to experience distress. Our results indicate a positive correlation between online learning distractions, technology literacy challenges, internet connectivity challenges and psychological distress. However, regarding adjustment to e-Learning, a negative correlation has been found. Again, the researchers have looked at students' adjustment to online education from the perspective of learners and learning. If learners implied that they prefer online learning, this could lower the possibility of distress, same goes if their home environment is both suitable and convenient upon transition. If online learning itself is supported without any distractions, has stable internet connectivity, and is techno-friendly, this could decrease psychological distress as well. Therefore, the factors that facilitate online learning are indeed crucial in determining the possibility of potential psychological distress.

Following the end of the research, the researcher's recommendation is present:

1. The researchers suggest conducting qualitative research on this topic. As it gives detailed and in-depth data on a wider perspective of challenges and distress that have not been tackled in this research study. Conducting a qualitative approach is also supported by the study of Tremblay et al., (2021) as a response to the pandemic. This can enable future researchers to examine the different academic challenges and psychological distress and possibly add more variables to the study.
2. It is also suggested that future researchers widen the sample size to further differentiate programs, courses, and departments under the tertiary level. Future researchers could also include postgraduate/graduate programs and students under the K-12 program if desired.
3. If full disclosure of data is possible, it is recommended to adhere to the usage of random sampling to remove all hints of bias (Horton, 2022) – or at least it should – providing each individual in the large population the same probability of being selected.
4. With regard the self-made instrument used, to further increase the validity of the questionnaire, it is advisable to conduct a future pilot study using said questionnaire while also determining further the reliability per item. External validity shows whether results produced are transferable to other groups of interest (Kumar, 2017; Last, 2001).
5. The results of this study indicate that university students do need special attention due to their increasing level of mental stress associated with online education. Universities and colleges should address awareness and interventions to alleviate potential distress brought by online learning. A possible solution could be the involvement of parents. Also, learners' respective departments could give them their online class schedules and copies of their grades if possible. If supervision of parents or caretakers could bridge students to see it as additional help or support (Unesco.org, 2021), this could also alleviate the possibility of distress.
6. Future researchers can organize an activity, event, or meeting with the help of counselors, wherein each department should address the stigma about reaching out or seeking help. Removing such stigma can help students professionally facilitate and acknowledge the challenges they have endured during online learning. We also recommend that institutions and respective guidance counselors implement a comprehensive program that caters to determined challenges regarding online education. The program should discuss the following with the students and their parents: home dynamics and academic demands.
7. The researchers also recommend that institutions conduct a formative assessment to both receive and implement students' feedback (University of Queensland, 2017) about their online learning. If students were to experience such challenges, parents and the institution can now acknowledge and provide proper guidance to their children's behavior during online learning. If professional help is needed, again, students should be reminded that it is an important step and should not be something to be ashamed of.
8. The researchers recommend that institutions implement allotted days wherein teachers, professors, and facilitators can rest after preliminary periods within the academic calendar, such as prelims, midterms, and finals (Manila Bulletin, 2022). Professionals could see this as a positive reinforcement for facilitating and to help them also cope with online learning or serving as a mental health break for them.
9. Lastly, the researchers suggest that the government provide support and assistance to online teachers and online learners through their Local Government Units (LGU), by providing modalities and equipment to sustain the online learning setup of schools nowadays.

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