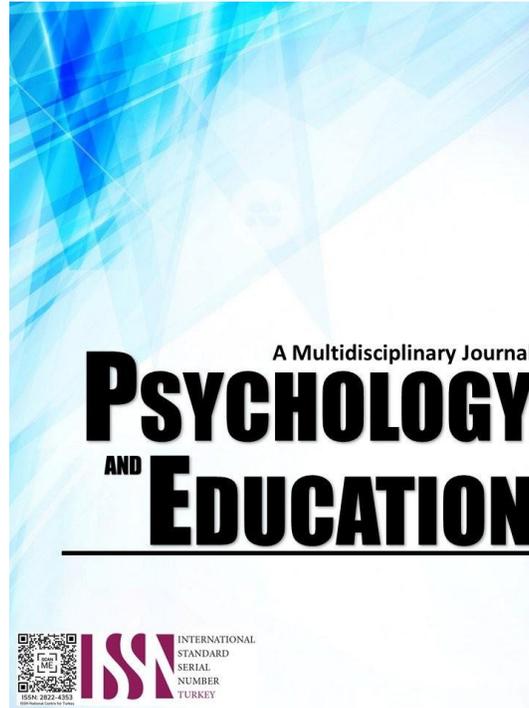


**SPECIFIC STRUGGLES AND COPING MECHANISMS OF EDUCATION
STUDENTS IN E-LEARNING DURING THE NEW NORMAL:
A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS**



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Specific Struggles and Coping Mechanisms of Education Students in E-Learning During the New Normal: A Quantitative Analysis

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Abstract

This study investigates the specific struggles and coping mechanisms of education students enrolled in e-learning at the University of Cebu-Main Campus during the school year 2021–2022. Guided by Attribution Theory and grounded in a descriptive quantitative design, the research surveyed 70 education students using a modified Likert-scale instrument adapted from Baticulon et al. (2020). Findings revealed high levels of technological, institutional, domestic, and individual struggles, with technological and institutional concerns being the most severe. Coping mechanisms varied in intensity across domains, with domestic and individual strategies most frequently applied. Despite strong coping practices, the statistical analysis showed no significant relationship between coping mechanisms and academic performance. Recommendations highlight the need for institutional support, teacher training, and equitable access to learning technologies.

Keywords: *e-learning, new normal education, online learning struggles, coping mechanisms, attribution theory, covid-19*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented disruptions to global education systems, pushing institutions to rapidly adopt online and blended learning modalities. Among those severely affected are college students, who are considered one of the most vulnerable populations in terms of mental health and academic stability (Ferrel & Ryan, 2020; Shroeder, 2020). Several studies have revealed a sharp increase in stress, anxiety, and uncertainty among students, not primarily due to the fear of infection, but because of concerns over academic performance, the potential loss of scholarships, delayed graduations, and reduced family income (Joaquin et al., 2020; Li & Lalani, 2020).

In the Philippines, the imposition of community lockdowns and mobility restrictions led to the sudden closure of physical campuses, forcing a shift from traditional face-to-face instruction to various forms of distance education, such as modular, blended, and online learning. This rapid transition exposed and widened the digital divide, as many students lacked access to reliable internet, digital devices, and conducive learning environments at home (Baticulon et al., 2020; Barteit et al., 2020). Consequently, what was intended as a temporary solution to sustain education during the pandemic became a new norm that presented numerous challenges—technological, institutional, domestic, and personal.

While online learning offers flexibility and autonomy, it also requires significant technological infrastructure, digital literacy, and emotional resilience (Adams et al., 2018; Kirkwood, 2009). Students must navigate learning management systems (LMS), cope with asynchronous content delivery, and often deal with unresponsive systems or untrained faculty—all while grappling with pandemic-related stressors. In the local context, many students reported being overwhelmed by increased workloads, lack of feedback, and limited social interaction (Wirth, 2020; Lear, 2020).

Motivated by these pressing concerns, this study seeks to examine the specific struggles and coping mechanisms of education students at the University of Cebu–Main Campus who are enrolled in online learning under the new normal. By understanding their lived experiences, this research aims to provide insights that can inform institutional policies and support systems for better academic and mental health outcomes.

Research Questions

This study aimed to determine the struggles of education students in E-Learning in the New Normal Set-Up school year 2021-2022 in University of Cebu- Main Campus. Specifically, this sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the struggles of the respondents in E-Learning in the new normal set-up as to:
 - 1.1. technological;
 - 1.2. individual;
 - 1.3. domestic; and
 - 1.4. institutional?
2. What will be the coping mechanism of the respondents in terms of:
 - 2.1. technological;
 - 2.2. individual;
 - 2.3. domestic; and
 - 2.4. institutional?

3. What is the academic performance of the respondents?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the coping mechanisms and the academic performance of the respondents?
5. What recommendations can be made based on the findings of the study?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to systematically capture and analyze the struggles and coping mechanisms of education students engaged in e-learning during the new normal. A modified 20-item Likert-scale instrument was used to collect quantifiable data related to four key dimensions: technological, individual, domestic, and institutional.

Respondents

A sample of 350 education students (from both BEED and BSED programs) was selected from a population of 3,556 using purposive sampling. The selection was limited to students currently enrolled under the College of Teacher Education.

Instrument

The study utilized a modified questionnaire adapted from Baticulon et al. (2020), originally designed to assess online learning barriers among medical students in the Philippines. The instrument consists of 20 statements across four domains: technological, individual, domestic, and institutional. The instrument was pilot-tested and validated, showing a Cronbach Alpha > 0.7 , confirming its internal reliability.

Procedure

Permission was first sought from the Dean of the College of Teacher Education and the General Education Coordinator. A formal request was then submitted to the registrar to obtain the necessary student enrollment data. Informed consent was secured from all participants prior to data collection. The data were gathered through Google Forms, which were distributed online. Once collected, all responses were encoded, processed, and subjected to statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using weighted mean to determine the extent of struggles and coping mechanisms. To assess the relationship between coping mechanisms and academic performance, Pearson's r correlation coefficient was computed, and results were interpreted based on the critical value of t at 0.05 significance level.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. *Struggles of the Respondents in E-Learning in the New Normal Set-Up*

<i>Technological</i>	<i>Weighted Mean</i>	<i>Description</i>
I only have one gadget/computer at home, which is also used by other family members.	3.14	Agree
I live outside the city where my school is located. The internet connection is poor.	3.33	Strongly Agree
I only use mobile data because internet plan is expensive.	3.43	Strongly Agree
Our school uses LMS as the main platform for online learning and crashes often.	3.41	Strongly Agree
My mobile phone has only limited storage to store school notes and download video calling apps.	3.43	Strongly Agree
Aggregated Mean	3.35	Strongly Agree
Individual		
I have a hard time understanding uploaded materials on my own.	3.04	Agree
I experienced eye strain and headache from prolonged use of gadgets.	3.25	Agree
I get nothing but uncertainty, stress, and anxiety in this pandemic.	3.16	Agree
I lack of drive to study since it is different from the school set-up.	3.16	Agree
I don't have books, reference materials, and printer in my house.	3.29	Strongly Agree
Aggregated Mean	3.18	Agree
Domestic		
My home is not conducive for studying because of small space and noisy environment.	3.20	Agree
I need to allocate a day just to buy essential supplies because of long lines.	3.22	Agree
My relationship with family members is strained, so being in the house for so long is emotionally tiring.	2.88	Agree
I have to work extra income because my family's main income is affected by the pandemic.	3.26	Strongly Agree
We have no choice but to subscribe to an internet service provider, despite	3.26	Strongly Agree

my family being on a tight budget.	Aggregated Mean	3.17	Agree
Institutional			
Workload is far too much compared to when there were face to face classes.		3.42	Strongly Agree
Some professors just give their files or presentation slides with no audio or presenter notes.		3.23	Agree
Our school promised leniency but our voices weren't heard.		3.19	Agree
Insufficient exposure for practical learning.		3.28	Strongly Agree
Lack of preparedness of educators to shift to online learning.		3.20	Agree
	Aggregated Mean	3.26	Strongly Agree
	Overall Aggregated Mean	3.24	Agree

The results reveal a complex and multi-dimensional landscape of challenges that education students face in adapting to e-learning under the new normal. Among the four domains of struggle identified—technological, individual, domestic, and institutional—the technological domain emerged as the most pressing concern. The highest weighted mean (3.43) underscores the critical issue of internet affordability and infrastructure. Many students are burdened by the cost of internet plans and the limitations of mobile data, exacerbated by the use of low-capacity mobile devices. LMS crashes and unreliable internet connectivity, especially in rural areas, further compound the digital divide.

Individual struggles also scored significantly high, with students reporting a lack of learning resources such as books and printers, which are essential for independent study. The data reflect the mental and physical toll of online learning, with students experiencing headaches, eye strain, stress, and lack of motivation. This highlights a need for better student support services focused on well-being and academic guidance.

In the domestic sphere, the pressure to contribute financially to the household, lack of study space, and strained family dynamics were found to hinder academic focus and emotional health. These conditions are indicative of how external socioeconomic stressors infiltrate the academic environment, emphasizing the importance of inclusive and supportive policies.

Institutionally, the results demonstrate systemic issues in instructional delivery. Excessive workload, limited interaction with instructors, and the lack of engaging learning materials suggest a need for professional development among educators. Moreover, the perceived broken promises regarding leniency highlight a disconnect between administrative policies and student experiences.

Taken together, these findings illustrate that while education students strive to persevere through personal and technological challenges, institutional structures and domestic environments play a pivotal role in shaping their learning outcomes. Addressing these interconnected issues requires a holistic approach that includes not only technological investment but also mental health support, instructional reform, and equitable access policies.

Technological Struggles Table 1 shows that respondents almost strongly agree with all technological struggles encountered during e-learning. The highest mean (3.43) reflects that most students rely on mobile data due to the high cost of internet plans, and their mobile phones have limited storage for school notes and video calling apps. The second concern (mean = 3.41) is frequent LMS crashes, followed by poor internet connectivity in remote areas (mean = 3.33). Lastly, a weighted mean of 3.14 indicates that many students own only one gadget, which is often shared among family members, complicating their ability to attend synchronous classes.

Individual Struggles Respondents identified several individual-level difficulties. The top concern (mean = 3.29) was the lack of access to physical learning resources like books, reference materials, and printers. This is followed by eye strain and headaches caused by prolonged gadget use (mean = 3.25). Tied at a mean of 3.16 are two factors: pandemic-induced stress and anxiety, and a lack of motivation due to the absence of traditional classroom settings. A mean of 3.04 also indicates students' difficulty in comprehending uploaded learning materials independently.

Domestic Struggles

The data also highlight significant domestic challenges. At the top (mean = 3.26), students reported the need to work part-time to help compensate for their family's pandemic-related financial losses and subscribe to internet services despite budget constraints. Following this, with a mean of 3.22, students often spent entire days acquiring basic necessities due to long queues. A mean of 3.20 shows that many students live in noisy, cramped households that are not conducive to studying. Additionally, a mean of 2.88 reveals that strained family relationships made prolonged time at home emotionally draining.

Institutional Struggles

Institutional difficulties are also prominent. The most reported concern (mean = 3.42) is the excessive academic workload compared to pre-pandemic levels. This is followed by insufficient exposure to practical learning (mean = 3.28). Students also struggled with instructors who merely distributed slides without explanations (mean = 3.23) and expressed frustration over the lack of preparedness among faculty to transition to online learning (mean = 3.20). Finally, a mean of 3.19 shows discontent with institutional promises of leniency that students felt were not fulfilled.

- Technological struggles had the highest average (3.35), with issues such as limited gadgets, poor internet, and LMS failures.
- Institutional struggles (3.26) reflected complaints on excessive workload and lack of pedagogical preparedness.
- Domestic and individual struggles also scored high (3.17 and 3.18), including noise, financial burden, and emotional fatigue.

Table 2. *Coping Mechanisms of the Respondents in E-Learning in the New Normal Set-Up*

<i>Technological</i>	<i>Weighted Mean</i>	<i>Description</i>
I always prioritize the battery of my cellphone before the online class starts.	3.61	Strongly Agree
I always put on alarm 5 minutes at the schedule of my classes.	3.58	Strongly Agree
I used my free time to read the lesson to avoid being bored.	3.38	Strongly Agree
I would be taking online class outdoors than indoors.	3.16	Agree
I play some mobile games to avoid being stress to my studies and have balance in my time.	3.23	Agree
Aggregated Mean	3.39	Strongly Agree
Individual		
Making sure that I don't have any issue with the accounting payments.	3.42	Strongly Agree
Enrolling as early as possible to avoid any troubles.	3.49	Strongly Agree
I regularly ask for pieces of advice in the guidance.	3.22	Agree
Paying for exam as early as possible.	3.35	Strongly Agree
Checking if all my subject is guaranteed to be enrolled.	3.42	Strongly Agree
Aggregated Mean	3.38	Strongly Agree
Domestic		
I always consult my parents if there is a problem at school.	3.55	Strongly Agree
I sometimes do online class while doing household chores.	3.49	Strongly Agree
I create ways to be free from chores if there is an ongoing online class.	3.39	Strongly Agree
I'll go to an area where the internet connection is stable.	3.61	Strongly Agree
I always check my balance load at home to avoid disturbance with my online class.	3.57	Strongly Agree
Aggregated Mean	3.52	Strongly Agree
Institutional		
I have a back-up phone/laptop in case of emergency.	3.03	Agree
I always consult the LMS support team for clarification on my subjects.	3.03	Agree
I have a proper understanding of the in and outs of the LMS app.	3.23	Agree
I constantly carry two or more sim card in case of internet failures.	3.01	Agree
I always update my LMS app for additional information.	3.28	Strongly Agree
Aggregated Mean	3.12	Agree
Overall Aggregated Mean	3.35	Strongly Agree

Legend: 3.26–4.00 – Strongly Agree; 2.51–3.25 – Agree; 1.76–2.50 – Disagree; 1.00–1.75 – Strongly Disagree.

The findings on coping mechanisms indicate that despite the myriad struggles associated with e-learning, students actively developed and applied strategies to navigate the demands of the new learning environment.

Technological coping mechanisms received a high aggregated mean of 3.39, indicating that students generally responded proactively to technological limitations. Prioritizing phone battery life and setting alarms before class helped students maintain attendance and engagement. Additionally, using free time for studying and choosing outdoor spaces for better connectivity reflect efforts to adapt learning environments, even if playing mobile games served as a method for stress relief.

In terms of individual coping mechanisms (aggregated mean = 3.38), students adopted responsible academic behaviors. Enrolling early, checking subjects, and resolving school-related payments early showed strong organizational skills. Although asking for guidance support received a slightly lower mean, it still shows willingness to seek help, suggesting a positive disposition toward institutional resources.

The domestic coping domain scored the highest (aggregated mean = 3.52), suggesting that students rely heavily on their immediate family environment to support their learning. Strategies like relocating to areas with better internet, managing chores during class time, and checking mobile load balance to avoid disruptions highlight the dual responsibility students manage at home. Consulting with parents shows emotional reliance, while creative time management helps maintain academic focus.

On the other hand, institutional coping mechanisms received the lowest aggregated mean (3.12), reflecting limited student empowerment or satisfaction in this area. While some respondents updated their LMS and carried extra SIM cards or backup devices, lower means indicate possible gaps in institutional support or training. The data imply a need for improved orientation and LMS-related technical support, as well as better communication from academic units.

Collectively, the coping mechanisms employed by students demonstrate resilience and adaptability. However, the lower ratings in the institutional domain point to a need for stronger structural support, particularly in technological infrastructure and faculty preparedness, to fully equip students for digital learning. Students strongly agreed with domestic (3.52) and individual (3.38) coping practices, like

finding stable connections, early enrollment, and parental support.

- Technological and institutional coping mechanisms were also applied but less consistently.

Table 3. *Academic Performance of the Respondents*

Levels	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent (1.0)	0	0%
Very Good (1.1-1.5)	23	32.86%
Good (1.6-2.5)	38	54.29%
Fair (2.6-2.9)	6	8.57%
Passing (3.0)	3	4.28%
Total	70	100%

The data from Table 3 illustrate that a significant portion of respondents maintained commendable academic performance amid the challenges posed by the new normal. More than half (54.29%) achieved a general weighted average in the "Good" range (1.6–2.5), while 32.86% performed at a "Very Good" level (1.1–1.5). Only a small percentage fell under "Fair" (8.57%) and "Passing" (4.28%) classifications. Notably, none of the respondents achieved the highest possible rating of "Excellent" (1.0).

These findings suggest a strong sense of academic resilience among the students, even as they navigated through technological, institutional, and personal barriers. The relatively high number of students in the "Good" and "Very Good" categories may reflect the effectiveness of coping mechanisms such as early enrollment, time management, and strong family support.

However, the complete absence of "Excellent" ratings implies that the maximum academic potential of students may have been hindered by the persistent challenges of remote learning, such as inconsistent internet access, mental fatigue, and lack of direct instructional support.

The distribution of academic performance also reinforces the need to assess not only how students cope, but how institutions can proactively support academic excellence by addressing deeper systemic issues affecting student achievement. **

The analysis of academic performance among the 70 respondents reveals that a majority (54.29%) fall under the 'Good' category, with general weighted averages between 1.6–2.5. Additionally, 32.86% of the students performed at a 'Very Good' level (1.1–1.5), indicating a strong academic standing for nearly one-third of the sample. A smaller portion of respondents, 8.57%, had 'Fair' performance (2.6–2.9), while only 4.28% were classified as just 'Passing' (3.0). No students reported an 'Excellent' academic rating (1.0).

These results suggest that despite various personal, technological, and institutional struggles, most students managed to maintain a reasonable academic standing. The relatively high percentage of students achieving 'Good' to 'Very Good' performance levels reflects a level of academic resilience and adaptability, potentially supported by their coping mechanisms. However, the complete absence of 'Excellent' ratings may indicate that the ongoing challenges still impose limitations on students' ability to reach the highest academic achievement under e-learning conditions.

- Majority (54.29%) achieved a GPA between 1.6–2.5 (Good), with 32.86% in the Very Good range (1.1–1.5).

Table 4. *Comparative Statistics Between the Coping Mechanisms and the Academic Performance of the Respondents*

Variables	(rxy)	df	t-computed	t-critical ($\alpha=0.05$, two tailed test)	Decision	Conclusion
Coping Mechanisms and the Academic Performance of the Respondents	-0.02	68	-0.16	1.995	Do not Reject H0	There is no significant relationship

The statistical analysis presented in Table 4 demonstrates that there is no significant relationship between coping mechanisms and academic performance among the respondents. The Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = -0.02$) indicates an extremely weak and negative relationship, and the t-computed value (-0.16) does not exceed the t-critical value (1.995) at the 0.05 significance level for a two-tailed test. As such, the null hypothesis is not rejected.

This result suggests that while students may employ effective coping strategies to manage their struggles with e-learning, these strategies do not directly translate to improved academic performance. The implication here is that academic outcomes during the new normal may be influenced more strongly by structural or systemic factors, such as curriculum design, instructor readiness, and access to educational resources, than by individual coping alone.

This underscores the importance of institutional interventions—particularly those addressing pedagogical preparedness, learning material quality, and student support systems—if improved academic outcomes are to be achieved under remote and blended learning environments.

- Pearson's $r = -0.02$; t-computed = -0.16; t-critical = 1.995. There was no significant relationship between coping mechanisms and academic performance.

Conclusions

The results of the study reflect important insights into the nature of stress faced by education students and the ways they deal with it. Technological, individual, institutional, and domestic stressors were common and occurred at high levels for more than half of the respondents. The findings reinforce the need for creating a more supportive and stress-reducing learning environment, especially by minimizing academic overload and aligning tasks with meaningful learning objectives. While respondents demonstrated generally good coping mechanisms, the results revealed that these coping strategies had no significant impact on academic performance. This implies that although students adapt well, systemic challenges in digital access, instructional quality, and learning support still limit their academic potential. Teachers play an essential role in guiding students to manage stress effectively, highlighting the importance of mentorship and psychosocial support in ensuring students maintain a healthy school-life balance

In order to improve students' learning experiences in remote and hybrid environments, educators should assign classwork judiciously and ensure alignment with learning objectives. Overloading students with assignments that lack clear purpose has been a common issue during remote instruction. Tasks should be thoughtfully designed to meet objectives without overwhelming learners. Peer-to-peer interaction is equally vital, as it combats feelings of isolation and boosts motivation. Structured group work and virtual discussions help cultivate a sense of community. Clear rubrics and transparent evaluation tools provide students with a better understanding of expectations, reducing anxiety and promoting academic accountability. Institutions must also acknowledge disparities in technological access by offering support or alternatives to students who lack sufficient resources. Additionally, timely and specific feedback is essential, as it recognizes students' efforts, supports learning, and fosters the application of lessons to real-world contexts.

Despite these evidence-based strategies, challenges persist, particularly in technological and institutional areas. While coping mechanisms such as peer collaboration and structured feedback are beneficial in managing stress, their impact on academic performance appears limited. Students may remain burdened by systemic issues that go beyond their control, such as inadequate access to devices or inconsistent internet connectivity. Therefore, institutional efforts must extend beyond individual-level interventions to include broader, equity-focused policies and technological support. Only through comprehensive and inclusive measures can schools ensure that academic outcomes are not compromised by external barriers.

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