
Lived Experiences of SHS Students on the Challenges and Adaptation Strategies in the New Normal Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on examining the adaptation strategies used by randomly selected senior high school students in public schools in Dasmariñas, Cavite, when they faced challenges in the new normal classroom. Using a qualitative research design and a phenomenological approach, the purpose of the study was to (1) describe the challenges senior high school students face in the new normal classroom; (2) to describe the impact of these challenges on students; and (3) describe adaptation strategies used by students. Criterion-based sampling was used, selecting ten participants with an initial questionnaire validated by psychometricians. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain a comprehensive overview. The findings revealed that students who experience anxiety and social isolation are negatively impacted by challenges such as technological difficulties, adapting to a new classroom, and communication problems. Adaptation strategies included focusing attention, interpersonal and intrapersonal support, and proactive problem solving. The study notes that the sudden transition to a new regular classroom created significant challenges and negatively affected senior high school students. The main aim of adaptation strategies was to manage the effects of challenges rather than directly solving them. This study sheds light on the nuanced experiences of high school students in an evolving educational landscape.

Keywords: Live experiences, challenges, adaptation strategies, senior high school, new normal classroom

INTRODUCTION

Academic challenges have long been part of the student experience, but the landscape has changed dramatically with the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, declared an international public health emergency in January 2020 and later recognized as a global pandemic by the World Health Organization in March 2020 (Mheidly *et al.*, 2020). This unprecedented event encouraged students to develop coping mechanisms that fundamentally changed their approach to education (Mheidly *et al.*, 2020). The consequences of the pandemic extended beyond health to the economy, environment, governance, technology, and education worldwide (Bangayan *et al.*, 2021). According to the Department of Education and Distance Learning, governments have introduced strict health policies and started mandatory border closures to contain the spread of the virus, forcing educational institutions to switch from traditional face-to-

face classes to online learning study programs (Rotas & Cahapay, 2021). This sudden change presented daily challenges to administrators, teachers, parents, and students (Bangayan *et al.*, 2021).

In the midst of this change, students encountered difficulties associated with online education such as isolation, mental health, lack of technological literacy, unavailability of equipment, lower quality of learning, communication problems with professors and teachers, inadequate learning environments, and unreliable Internet connections. (Barrot *et al.*, 2021; Gillet-Swan, 2017; Fabito *et al.*, 2021). Although many studies have examined challenges, coping mechanisms, and adaptation strategies in higher education (Barrot *et al.*, 2021; Wasil *et al.*, 2021; Rotas *et al.*, 2021), limited research focuses on challenges, influences, and adaptation strategies of students in K-12 curriculum. Existing studies such as Bangayan *et al.* (2021), although valuable, lack broad generalizability due to limited data.

This study addressed this gap by examining the challenges presented by this new normal classroom for senior high school (SHS) students, investigating the impact of these challenges, and analyzing adaptation strategies in the unique context of Cavite, especially the City of Dasmariñas. The research aimed to provide insights that can guide academic and health institutions to understand and respond to the challenges facing students. It provided a framework for designing effective coping and adaptation strategies and support systems. Finally, this research contributes to the wider debate about the sustainability of education in the face of unprecedented challenges.

METHODOLOGY

This section describes the methods used to collect and analyze data from senior high school (SHS) students, as well as their experiences with the challenges of the new normal classroom. We introduced a phenomenological research design to understand the nature of SHS students' experiences and their adaptation strategies. This approach is based on individual understanding. Contextual perspectives have facilitated the exploration of challenges, impacts, and strategies faced by SHS students (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study included ten SHS students from Dasmariñas, Cavite, in the academic year 2023-2024. Selection criteria were Dasmariñas High School enrollment, online distance learning experience, and challenges in the new regular classroom. We used criterion-referenced purposive sampling (Nikolopoulou, 2022; Cohen *et al.*, 2006) to ensure that participants met specific criteria and maximized depth of experience.

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews validated by psychometricians and discussing challenges, influences, and strategies. With the participant's consent, we used audio recordings and notes to facilitate transcription for analysis. Thematic analysis was used where the data were examined, initial codes were created, themes were searched for, themes were explored, themes were defined and named, and a final report was prepared (Attride-Stirling, 20019; Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

Ethical considerations prioritized the well-being of participants, emphasizing convenience, informed consent, and voluntary participation. Proactive measures were taken to minimize stress, and participants were given the option to pause or interrupt the interview if signs of stress appeared. Confidentiality, anonymity, and lack of coercion were ensured through extensive informed consent

procedures (Wilkinson, 2019; Draucker, Martsof, & Poole, 2019; Artal & Rubenfeld, 2017). This careful approach aims to capture nuanced experiences while protecting the ethical integrity of the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This presents the result of the study based on the analysis along the:

A. Challenges Faced by the SHS Students in the New Normal Classroom

This section addressed the initial problem statement, specifically focusing on the challenges encountered by SHS students in the new normal classroom. The participants' responses revealed that SHS students faced numerous challenges in the new normal classroom. There are three superordinate themes that emerged from the participants' responses: technological difficulties, adjusting to the new normal classroom, and ineffective communication. This part answered the first statement of the problem, specifically what are the challenges faced by the SHS students in the new normal classroom. The responses of the participants showed that SHS students encountered numerous challenges in the new normal classroom. There are three superordinate themes that emerged from the participants' responses: technological difficulties, adjusting to the new normal classroom, and ineffective communication.

Table 1. Challenges experienced by the SHS students in the new normal classroom

SUPERORDINATE THEMES	SUBTHEME	DESCRIPTION
Technological Difficulties	Internet Connection Problem	Participants faced internet issues, leading to fluctuations and inconsistent connectivity.
	Lack of Gadget	Challenges arose from unreliable or unavailable gadgets, impacting academic tasks in the new normal classroom.
	Difficulty in Utilizing Scholarly Software	Participants struggled with navigating unfamiliar academic software.
Adjusting to New Normal Classroom	Dealing with Sudden Changes	Participants faced challenges adapting to new schedules and dynamics in the new normal classroom.
Conflict with Other Responsibilities	Struggles in Balancing Tasks	Participants faced challenges balancing academic tasks with non-academic responsibilities like household chores.
Schedule of Deadlines	Meeting Academic Deadlines	Participants encountered difficulties meeting deadlines for academic tasks and submitting work on time.
External Distractions	Learning Environment Disturbances	Disturbances in the participants' learning environment caused frustrations and distractions.
Ineffective Communication	Online Communication Constraints	Participants experienced hindrances in expressing themselves online, leading to misunderstandings and relationship difficulties.

Technology Difficulties

The overall theme of technology challenges highlights the challenges senior high school students faced in the new normal classroom. Within this theme, three prominent sub-themes emerge: problem of internet connectivity, lack of devices, and difficulty using scholarly software.

Internet connection problems

SHS students battled inconsistent Internet connectivity, causing disruption during online classes. Participants expressed concern about delays and disruptions affecting both students and teachers. These challenges have significantly hampered the quality of education, as noted by participants, Torres and Ortega-Dela Cruz (2022), and Fabito et al. (2021).

Lack of Gadgets

The lack of necessary gadgets was a significant barrier for SHS students, limiting their ability to complete academic tasks. Limited access to relevant devices, such as laptops, hampered learning, as students expressed difficulties and relied on borrowed devices. This is consistent with the findings of Torres and Ortega-Dela Cruz (2022), which highlight the disuse of devices in the new normal classroom.

Difficulties in using scholarly software

SHS students faced challenges in navigating various academic applications and software. A lack of familiarity with these tools hampered the smooth functioning of the new normal classroom, making it more difficult for students to attend their courses. This echoes the findings of Torres and Ortega-Dela Cruz (2022), which highlight widespread difficulties in adapting to online learning platforms.

Thus, technical difficulties, including internet connectivity issues, equipment shortages, and struggles with scholarly software, significantly hindered the learning experience of SHS students in the new normal classroom.

Adapting to the New Normal Classroom

Another general theme explores the challenges that SHS students have faced in adapting to the new normal classroom. Four interrelated subthemes emerged: dealing with sudden changes, conflict with other responsibilities, scheduling for deadlines, and external distractions.

Coping with sudden changes

SHS students had difficulty adjusting to the sudden transition from traditional face-to-face classes to synchronous and asynchronous learning modalities. Participants expressed challenges with effective time management, resulting in feeling overwhelmed and struggling to understand lessons. This is consistent with Bangayan *et al.*'s (2021) findings and highlights the negative effects of sudden educational changes.

Conflict with Other Responsibilities

Balancing academic and non-academic responsibilities has proven to be a challenge for SHS students. Homework, personal assignments, and synchronized classes made it difficult to

manage time. Hidalgo *et al.* (2021) also found that students had problems with time management and balancing academic workloads with personal commitments.

Schedule of Deadlines

SHS students faced challenges in meeting strict deadlines for academic assignments. Inadequate time allocated to assignments increased the pressure on students, which affected the overall quality of their work. Torres and Ortega-Dela Cruz (2022) similarly highlighted the problem of inadequate task planning in the new normal classroom.

External Distractions

SHS students struggled with external distractions during class, including background noise and the lure of online media. These distractions interfered with concentration and took attention away from academic responsibilities. Barrot *et al.* (2021) and Torres and Ortega-Dela Cruz (2022) emphasize the impact of distractions on the learning environment.

In essence, adjusting to the new regular classroom presented SHS students with multiple challenges that included sudden changes, conflicting responsibilities, tight deadlines, and external distractions.

Ineffective Communication

Another recurring theme revolves around the challenges of ineffective communication that SHS students face in the new normal classroom. It is grouped into the online communication constraints.

Online Communication Constraints

SHS students encountered various barriers to online communication that led to misunderstandings, arguments, and difficulties in maintaining relationships. Factors such as differences in online presence, adequate expression, unstable internet connections, and limitations in expressing certain thoughts contributed to communication problems. These findings are consistent with Tang *et al.* (2020) and Adarkwah (2021) studies highlighting dissatisfaction and perceived ineffectiveness of online communication.

Thus, the general theme of ineffective communication highlights the barriers that SHS students face in self-expression and maintaining meaningful communication in the new normal classroom, reflecting broader challenges presented by the limitations of online communication.

B. Effect of the Challenges to the SHS Students

This section addresses the second statement of the problem, specifically focusing on the impact of the challenges faced by the SHS students during the implementation of the new normal classroom. The participants' responses indicate that the challenges had a negative impact on SHS students. There are a total of three superordinate themes that emerged from the participants' responses: distress, negative emotions, and feeling of social disconnectedness.

Table 2. Effects of the challenges to the SHS students

SUPERORDINATE THEMES	SUBTHEME	DESCRIPTION
Distress	Dealing with Anxiety and Uncertainty	Participants coped with anxiety and uncertainty from abrupt learning changes, negatively impacting mental health.
	Poor Sleeping Schedule	Irregular sleeping patterns and disrupted sleep durations affected participants due to new schedules.
Negative Emotions	Emotional Breakdown	Uncontrollable emotional bursts occurred in response to overwhelming changes and experiences.
	Self-directed Anger	SHS students directed anger towards themselves, influenced by the control they have over their schedules.
Feeling of Social Disconnectedness	Disrupted Relationship with Family	Students' relationships with families suffered as family members bore the brunt of negative emotions or lack of time.
	Less Interaction with Others	The new normal restricts social interaction opportunities for SHS students.
	Being Enclosed in One's Social Group	Difficulty approaching others led SHS students to stay within established friend groups, hindering new connections.

Distress

The overarching theme of anxiety illustrates the challenges high school students face when implementing a new normal classroom, resulting in increased levels of anxiety and uncertainty. Dealing with anxiety and uncertainty emerged as a subtheme, in which a sudden change in teaching and learning methods created a new and challenging environment that prevented effective adaptation. This increased anxiety among the participants, which affected their academic performance. Another subtheme, poor sleep schedule, was influenced by conflicting factors, such as an extended vacation period that encouraged inappropriate sleep patterns and an early schedule for online classes. As a result, SHS students slept poorly, which contributed to their general anxiety. The findings are consistent with studies in Brunei and China showing increased levels of anxiety when transitioning to an online learning method (Idris et al., 2021; Wang and Zhao, 2020).

Negative Emotions

The overarching theme of negative emotions reflects the detrimental effects of challenges on SHS students' emotional well-being, relationships, and self-esteem. Emotional disintegration, a subtheme, highlights cases where participants uncontrollably express negative emotions, affecting family relationships and self-esteem. Another subtheme, self-directed anger, reveals students' frustration with their decisions in the new normal classroom, leading to low self-esteem and frustration. Italian university students observed similar experiences, emphasizing self-blame and negative emotions related to academic performance (Cofini et al., 2022). The

study highlights a significant decline in SHS students' emotional health characterized by frequent emotional outbursts and generalized self-directed anger.

Feelings of Social Disconnection

This core topic explores the social implications of the challenges faced by SHS students in the new normal classroom. The first subtheme, Troubled Relationship with Family, encompasses negative emotions towards family members and a decrease in communication due to the academic workload. Less interaction with others, another subtheme, is due to constraints such as online communication and increased academic demands. The third subtheme, closed to the social group, reflects students' reluctance to interact with new peers online. SHS students experience disconnection from family, friends, and potential new connections, which negatively affects their social health. These findings are consistent with research that has found a reduction in social interaction and communication in online learning environments (Robinson, 2020; Quintanilla, 2021).

C. How the SHS Utilized Adaptation Strategies to these Challenges

This part addresses the third statement of the problem, specifically how the SHS students used adaptation strategies to deal with the challenges they encountered in the new normal classroom. The participants' interview excerpts showcase the different adaptation strategies they used. There are a total of three superordinate themes that emerged from the participants' responses: diverting attention, interpersonal and intrapersonal support, and problem-focused coping.

Table 3. How the SHS students utilized adaptation strategies with the challenges in the new normal classroom

SUPERORDINATE THEMES	SUBTHEME	DESCRIPTION
Diverting Attention	Doing Things They Enjoy	SHS students predominantly cope by redirecting attention to enjoyable activities like music, gaming, cooking, etc.
Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Support	Emotional Release Through Friends and Family	Seeking solace, learners found relief discussing challenges with close relationships.
	Focusing on Self	SHS students prioritized self-assessment and emotional management, aiding decision-making for overcoming challenges.
Problem-focused Coping	Finding Better Solution	Adaptation strategies involved altering challenges by using technology and effective time management in the new normal classroom.

Diverting Attention

The first general theme highlights how SHS students adapt to the challenges of the new normal classroom by diverting their attention. This coping strategy involves changing focus to mitigate the negative effects of challenges. The sub-theme, “Doing things they enjoy,” indicates that they believe engaging in pleasurable activities is a widely accepted coping mechanism. Participants recognized that watching series or movies, listening to music, playing games, cooking, playing musical instruments, finding new hobbies, drawing, and online shopping provided temporary relief from challenges. This is consistent with Rotas and Cahapay (2021), Escultor et al. (2022), and Billah et al. (2023), who highlight the importance of focusing on mental health challenges to face in distance learning. The results show that SHS students mostly rely on attentional orientation as a coping mechanism.

Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Support

The second main theme highlights interpersonal and intrapersonal support as a common coping mechanism among SHS students. This topic consists of two subtopics: “Emotional Release Through Friends and Family” and “Focusing on Self.” Participants typically seek comfort in confiding in close friends and family to release emotions and feel understood. This is consistent with Billah et al. (2023) and Barrot et al. (2021), which emphasize the importance of individual and social support systems during difficult times. In addition, the subtheme “Focusing oneself” reveals that SHS students prioritized intrapersonal communication and emphasized self-reflection to manage thoughts and feelings. This is consistent with Cleofas (2020) findings on self-reflection as a coping mechanism. In conclusion, SHS students use both interpersonal and intrapersonal supports to cope with challenges in the new regular classroom.

Problem-Focused Coping

The third main theme deals with problem-focused coping strategies, illustrating how SHS students try to change the causes of stressors. Subtopic, “Finding a Better Solution,” features students who deal directly with challenges by planning and using available resources. Participants introduced strategies such as doing tasks quickly and using search engines to understand unfamiliar terms. These findings are consistent with Rotas and Cahapay (2020), Mutya et al. (2022), and Olila (2021), who emphasize proactive approaches such as early completion of tasks and using technology for flexible learning. As a result, SHS students engage in problem-focused treatment, actively seeking better solutions to the challenges they face in the new normal classroom.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. The sudden shift to the new normal classroom left SHS students unprepared, lacking essential materials, knowledge, and facing suboptimal learning environments.
2. Challenges negatively affected SHS students, inducing distress, anxiety, disrupted sleeping schedules, self-directed anger, emotional breakdowns, strained family relationships, and limited social interactions.
3. SHS students mainly used adaptation strategies to manage the impact of challenges, with mindfulness being the most popular method.

RECOMMENDATIONS

▪ The study's findings led to the following recommendations:

1. Academic institutions may provide teaching sessions using scholarly software to help students who struggles with these applications.
2. Educational institutions may provide programs and counseling services to help students manage the psychological effects of new normal challenges.
3. Parents are to recognize and support their children by encouraging positive coping mechanisms and adaptation strategies.
4. Students with severe challenges should seek professional help.
5. Students may explore the coping mechanisms and adaptation strategies used by SHS learners to create effective strategies.
6. Future researchers can extend the research to different fields and use different research methods to achieve wider applicability.

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