

# Methods of Coping with the Class Engagement Crisis in the Philippines' COVID-19 New Normal

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## ABSTRACT

*In the 'new normal' of distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an urgent need to increase class engagement and help teachers scaffold students' needs. This article examines the class engagement crisis between teachers and students in the Philippines and seeks to determine coping methods of teachers and students. Research for the article employed two survey questionnaires: one on teaching-learning crises and one on coping methods. The data was then analyzed and tabulated by frequency and percentage distribution. The results revealed that in the class engagement crisis, 90.3 percent of teachers agreed that the majority of teachers must be accommodating rather than imposing because students experienced delays due to intermittent internet connectivity. In terms of the class engagement crisis for students, 68.9 percent of students are still adjusting to the new normal; some are experiencing stress and worry. In terms of class engagement coping methods, 87.1 percent of teachers chose consultation, while 64.4 percent of students chose to seek information. The study concluded that in this new normal environment, teachers need to adjust to the situations of their students, particularly regarding internet connectivity. Consultation with students is necessary to address their concerns, while students need to cope with the challenges encountered through seeking notions related to class engagement.*

**Keywords:** Class engagement crisis, Coping methods, New normal, Tuition-free, Teacher, Students

## INTRODUCTION

The new normal of distance learning and increased isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic raises significant questions about educational success in unexpected ways. The closing of schools, together with the public health emergency and consequential economic crisis, pose significant challenges for both teachers and

students, who must deal with novel issues they never faced before (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). Teachers, mentors and students were not prepared to address these complexities. Those in the education sector would benefit from exchanging ideas within groups driven by similar principles to better fulfill educational goals (Hew et al., 2020).

This present study relates to the results gathered in a previous study by Ramos (2021) at the same institution, the Region XII State University. In that study, 48.5 percent of the participants resided in Kidapawan City, and the majority of the students were utilizing mobile data for internet access at home and could not afford Wi-Fi internet access. Their internet speeds were evaluated and with the results: Good, 39 percent; Fair, 43 percent and Poor, 30 percent. The majority of the materials used for learning were cellphones (96.4 percent), followed by paper (68 percent) and pens with 69 percent. In terms of problems encountered, the 83 percent of participants experienced slow internet connectivity, followed by a lack of resources at 59 percent, and lack of devices at 57.8 percent. A majority (51 percent) of participants preferred modular instruction.

The Philippines ranked first for COVID-19 cases in Southeast Asia as of July 2020 (Prasetyo et al., 2020) but the Nikkei Asia COVID-19 recovery performance index showed that as of October 7, 2021, the Philippines now ranked last, since the full vaccination rate in the population was only 30 percent, implying a low recovery rate when compared to other ASEAN countries (Atienza, 2021). After the beginning of the pandemic, Philippines President Rodrigo Roa Duterte declared students should stay home from school. To ensure continuity of learning, the higher education institutions and the Commission on Higher Education shifted to flexible learning, pursuant to the Inter-Agency Task Force on the Management of Emerging and Infectious Diseases Omnibus Guidelines.

The United Nations (2020) stated that the new normal had a significant impact, and schools are scrambling to keep up with teaching and learning processes. Some institutions, particularly private colleges, rely on students to meet their own basic needs, and are not able to endure prolonged distance learning. Teachers are compelled to rethink, rewrite, and rethink their goals and objectives. The pandemic is a global problem with economic and societal consequences. From the year 2020 onwards, it is anticipated that the pandemic will push 49 million people into poverty. Many people are noticing a widening chasm between the connected and unconnected. Now is the time for student-related services to spell out viable solutions to problems, as well as offer comprehensive assistance and support. Access to the internet is not the only factor that divides society; other factors include resources and facilities, as well as institutional and student preparedness for such abrupt changes.

The objectives of this article are to identify just what the class engagement crisis in the new normal actually is—for both teachers and students—and to determine class engagement coping methods used by and between the target participants, which in this study consisted of ninety students and thirty teachers at a regional Philippines university.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed education. In the new normal, teachers, students and others worried they might not be able to cope with new online learning platforms and submissions of criteria (Li & Lalani, 2020). One recent study by multiple scholars spread across several countries discovered that teachers are aware of the issues they face today but are overall uncertain about online education and adopting digital platforms. The majority of teachers prefer to teach in-person in classrooms that promote diversity and inclusion. Those with traditional educational backgrounds are confronted with the fact that the majority of their tasks and duties require interaction. They are unable to escape the influence of others.

Students in particular now have a better understanding of their vital role as agents of change in order to achieve social justice, develop leadership skills, and exercise critical thinking with a comprehensive understanding of embracement, distinctiveness, and cross-culturalism. Students' major concerns after the pandemic relate to how they will deal with their online classes, research projects, and other tasks that must be done and submitted online. Students' learning activities frequently necessitate formats that make use of digital platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet or Classroom, Hangout, and others. Under the direction of the Commission on Higher Education, various schools in the Philippines have built or implemented online platforms for students' thesis defenses, written and oral exams, and online meetings and conferences (Rapanta et al., 2020). To satisfy these new academic needs, all students in higher education are dedicated to addressing creative challenges, which may include remotely working on and engaging with advisers via a specific media or platform.

Some students used negative coping mechanisms to deal with the new normal, including sleeping more, doing multiple activities, smoking or drinking, and avoiding the news. Approximately one-third of participants in another study used positive coping mechanisms, which included spiritual practices and daily routines. The majority of these participants used self-management techniques such as relaxing hobbies, streaming services, social media, listening to music, reading books, playing with pets, and even physical exercise, while others used self-distraction techniques such as planning activities for academic work and personal matters (Son et al., 2020). In another study, approximately one-third of participants interacted with their relatives and friends as their main strategy for dealing with stress and worry during the pandemic. Some said they used virtual conference tools like Zoom to connect with friends and family on a regular basis (Sasangohar, 2020). Swami et al. (2021) claim that house confinement, social isolation, and quarantine for infection control all contributed to young people's lack of socializing and loneliness during the pandemic. In another study, spiritual pursuits and the seeking of support, consultation and information were the most regularly employed coping techniques (Labrague et al., 2020). These are thought to be problem-solving practices that try to relieve stress by focusing on its sources. Students here assessed their personal resilience as poor and identified a need to provide protection against stressful circumstances in the new normal.

## METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a quantitative descriptive research design to determine the parameters of the class engagement crisis and the coping mechanisms employed by teachers and students in the new normal. The study was conducted at the state university in Region XII. The respondents of this study were thirty randomly selected teachers and ninety randomly selected students from the College of Technology under the Bachelor of Technology major in Automotive Studies. The students were mostly male (72 percent), aged 20-21 (65 percent), while the majority of teachers were male (81 percent), aged 30-40 (74 percent).

The researcher utilized two sets of survey questionnaires: one for the teacher respondents and one for the students. The questionnaires were composed of two parts; Part I on the class engagement crisis faced by teachers and students and Part II on coping methods. The survey questionnaires were administered online. This study used a random sampling procedure through draw lots to select respondents. Random sampling results in an equal probability of choosing any participant. The data gathered were analyzed and tabulated using frequency and percentage distribution.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 shows the teaching class engagement crisis in the new normal. The result of the online survey revealed five common crises experienced by teachers in the Philippines' new normal. Out of thirty teacher respondents, twenty-eight or 90.3 percent of total respondents identified, "Teachers must be accommodating rather than imposing because students have experienced delays due to intermittent internet connectivity". Twenty-one, or 67.7 percent of respondents stated, "It will be necessary to determine how much students are learning, what teachers need to prevent that causes learners difficulties learning, and teachers need to be keen enough to know what they have missed during class". Nineteen or 61.3 percent selected, "There must be direct supervision during self-directed learning and assessment in the new normal". Nineteen or 61 percent of respondents stated "the schools' capacity to educate online and support teachers' instructional ideas is limited". This shows that teachers faced a crisis during this pandemic.

Moreover, the results of the study show other challenges identified by the teacher respondents. A total of 54.8 percent selected, "There is an issue with finding new ways to innovate and explore new paths in order to meet the demands of students and improve their learning and development". Twelve or 38.7 percent stated, "Collaboration and innovation are difficult to attain in the new normal". Seven or 22.6 percent of the sample population identified, "When the goal of instruction goal is limited merely to mastering materials, the broader goals of higher education are lost" and "Teachers cannot guarantee that students will become social justice agents, giving them a sense of belonging to mold them to become better individuals". Last, only four or 12.9 percent of the total teacher respondents stated that "Teachers are not given enough information about which kinds of learning

worked or did not work effectively, which could help us figure out how to improve learning as the pandemic continues to affect education”.

The results of the online survey conducted among teachers clearly reveal several teaching challenges closely related to issues in educational technology, including connectivity issues, difficulty achieving authentic learning assessments, and intervening in learning-related problems in such a way that could lead to incapacitating engagement in the contemporary instructional design of online teaching. Thus, creativity and resourcefulness mitigate challenges in the new normal. According to one study by Coman et al. (2020), online teaching is more challenging compared to classroom teaching and not all teachers are technologically skilled and competent in using technology; many educators state that they face major challenges regarding the continuity of lesson discussions, activities or tasks, and assessments utilizing online platforms; and in order to alleviate the effects of this dilemma, stakeholders engaged in educational planning should design, resource and collaborate with teachers more effectively; access to the internet is not the only aspect that divides our world, but many other aspects pertaining to resources and facilities, including institutional preparedness for sudden changes also play a part.

**Table 1**

*Class Engagement Crisis for Teachers*

<b>Class Engagement Crisis</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Teachers must be accommodating rather than imposing because students have been experiencing delays due to intermittent internet connectivity.	28	90.3%
The schools' capacity to educate online and support teachers' instructional ideas is limited.	19	61%
Collaboration and innovation are difficult to attain in the new normal.	12	38.7%
There must be direct supervision during self-directed learning and assessment in the new normal.	19	61.3%
There is an issue with finding new ways to innovate and explore new paths in order to meet the demands of students and improve their learning and development.	17	54.8%
When the goal of instruction goal is limited merely to mastering materials, the broader goals of higher education are lost.	7	22.6%
Teachers cannot guarantee that students will become social justice agents, giving them a sense of belonging to mold them to become better individuals.	5	16.1%
There are other important tasks in the learning process, such as assessment or autonomous learning that can still be challenging without the direct supervision of teachers.	19	61.3%
It will be necessary to determine how much students are learning, what challenges causes difficulties for learners teachers need to	21	67.7%

<b>Class Engagement Crisis</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
prevent, and teachers need to be keen enough to know what they have missed during class.		
Teachers are not properly guided on which various modes of learning worked or did not work well which could help guide how to improve learning as education in the new normal.	4	12.9%

Table 2 shows the learning challenges of students in the new normal. There are ten learning challenges faced by a majority of students. The statement "Most students are adjusting to recent events; some are experiencing stress and worry as a result of the uncertainty due to family crises caused by the pandemic" received 68.9 percent responses. Respondents also identified "Classes held in a classroom are still preferable to those done at home, where responsibilities and assignments pile up at the same time, and online sessions have a higher workload than traditional face-to-face classes" with 65.6 percent. Another learning challenge identified was "Students are struggling at utilizing internet and learning devices in the new normal". A total of 56.7 percent of student respondents identified "There are limited opportunities for students to experience more learning due to the online engagement wherein students are having a hard time coping". Other identified learning challenges are "New normal classes were challenging, but having companions makes it so much easier and less stressful, especially when stuck alone with assignments, activities, and tasks to accomplish" with 50 percent; "Students are having difficulties because they have not adapted to the use of technology in learning, or considered any online learning applications", with 47.8 percent; "Students were able to enhance qualities and competencies in using online or modular learnings" with 38.9 percent; "Students fear participating in online learning platforms and addressing their concerns" with 36.7 percent; and "Students are finding home learning programs challenging as they are used to learning in school" being identified by 35.6 percent of the total respondents.

The results revealed that psychological effects prevalent among the student respondents such as worry and stress from family problems, intermittent internet connectivity and inadequate learning devices are the reason why they opted to seldomly interact during class engagement. Ribeiro et al. (2021) stated that students were greatly affected by COVID-19 not just in educational matters but also from seeing their family at home affected from the pandemic, and in the context of distance learning, many are still adjusting to utilizing technologies.

**Table 2**

*Class Engagement Crisis for Students*

<b>Class engagement Crisis</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Most students are adjusting to recent events; some are experiencing stress and worry as a result of the uncertainty due to family crises caused by the pandemic.	62	68.9%

Class engagement Crisis	Frequency	Percentage
Classes held in a classroom are still preferable to those done at home, where responsibilities and assignments pile up at the same time, and online sessions have a higher workload than traditional face-to-face classes.	59	65.6%
Internet signals are inconsistent, and the lockdown has put me in a financial bind. Parents could find it difficult to keep up with the cost of internet connectivity.	57	63.3%
Some students who do not have access to devices or an internet connectivity will struggle to keep up with their studies.	52	57.8%
There are limited opportunities for students to experience more learning due to the online engagement wherein students are having a challenging time coping.	51	56.7%
New normal classes were challenging, but having companions makes it so much easier and less stressful, especially when stuck alone with assignments, activities, and tasks to accomplish.	45	50%
Students are having difficulties because they have not learned well concerning the use of technology in learning, considering any online learning applications.	43	47.8%
Students were able to enhance these qualities and competences in using online or modular learnings.	35	38.9%
Students are being afraid in participating online learning platforms particularly in addressing their concerns.	33	36.7%
Students are finding home learning programs challenging as they are used to learning in school.	32	35.6%

Table 3 shows three coping methods for teachers in the new normal: consultation, seeking information, and spiritual and seeking support. For teachers' coping methods, "Consultation" has the highest percentage rating with 87.1 percent, followed by "Seeking Information" with 74.2 percent, and lastly, "Spirituality and seeking support" with 45.2 percent.

This result reveals that most teachers are still engaging and even preferred consultations for them to be able to cope with the demands of teaching and learning in the new normal. Teachers also tend to seek information in coping with teaching trends for the full implementation of the new normal modes of teaching. According to Arcilla (2020) consultation is necessary, specifically in alleviating apprehensions and fears of learners and teachers in the new normal. Moreover, some claim that online teaching is more challenging compared to classroom teaching, and not all teachers are skilled and competent in using technology (Cebu Normal University, 2020). Another coping style of teachers is spirituality and seeking support. They are still seeking spiritual support as part of their styles in coping with the present teaching situations during this pandemic. Savitskawy (2020) identifies some coping methods to help relieve the negative effects brought by the pandemic in the new normal.

**Table 3***Coping Mechanisms of Teachers in the New Normal*

<b>Coping Mechanisms</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Consultation	27	87.1%
Seeking information	23	74.2%
Spirituality and seeking support	14	45.2%

Table 4 shows the coping mechanisms of students in the new normal. There are again three coping methods presented: consultation, seeking information, and spirituality and seeking support. For students' coping methods, "Seeking Information" has the highest percentage rating with 64.4 percent, followed by "Consultation" with 87.1 percent, and "Spirituality and seeking support" with 46.7 percent. This result revealed that most students are eagerly seeking information despite the learning challenging situation that they experienced. Since most of the time they are engaged in self-learning activities, they still thrive to seek information to learn independently and be guided towards the accomplishment of their academic requirements. They also do consultations, hold spirituality and seek support in coping with their learning challenges. Son et al. (2020) stated that connecting with and seeking information from families, friends, teachers or any close individual is a primary way of dealing and coping with stress and anxiety during this pandemic.

**Table 4***Coping Mechanisms of Students in the New Normal*

<b>Coping Mechanisms</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Consultation	58	64.4%
Seeking information	42	46.7%
Spirituality and seeking support	42	46.7%

Foremost, the results of the study significantly revealed that both teachers and students were facing and experiencing tremendous challenges in the teaching-learning process.

## CONCLUSION

In the new normal, teachers and students, from the College of Technology under the Bachelor of Technology - Automotive, have encountered problems learning such as the use of technology and interrupted internet access. Solving these are important for determining how much students are learning. Students, on the other hand, are transparently having stress and worries due to the negative effects brought on by the transition to the new normal of education, particularly due to the

negative effects of their families, and the utilization of online learning. Both teachers and students have the same coping mechanisms, wherein teachers responded mostly with consultations while students responded mostly with seeking information. This implies that both students and teachers need constant communication to help one another in the new normal of education in the Philippines.

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