



LEVEL OF STRESS AND COPING MECHANISMS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS IN THE ONLINE DISTANCE LEARNING

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Abstract:

This research aimed to investigate the level of stress and coping mechanisms of the College of Education (CED) students at Notre Dame of Midsayap College (NDMC) in online distance learning. This study also aimed to determine if there is a significant difference in the level of stress of the respondents when grouped according to sex and age. A descriptive research design was undertaken to assess the respondents' level of stress and coping mechanisms. The data were subjected to appropriate statistical tools utilized in the study such as frequency count, percentage distribution, weighted mean, and one-way ANOVA. Based on the major findings of the study, it can be concluded that students experience stress during their online distance learning brought upon by the COVID-19 pandemic. Bad internet connection, financial problems, disturbances in academic life, improper learning environment, tiredness, and irritation in performing their schoolwork are the significant causes of the stress of the students in dealing with their online distance learning. It was also found that they have different coping mechanisms in dealing with stress in their online distance learning. Such coping mechanisms were praying or meditating, creating a conducive learning environment, thinking positively, and playing online games. It was determined that male respondents experienced more stress in online distance learning than female respondents. It was also noted that younger respondents experience more stress than older respondents.

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1. Introduction

COVID-19 entered our lives at the end of 2019, threatening the health of millions of individuals worldwide and reaching pandemic status. This new pandemic is frightening and distressing for everyone because of COVID-19's high mortality rate and related economic instability, unemployment, stress, anxiety, and insecurity. It is natural for individuals to have a wide range of ideas, sentiments, and responses as the COVID-19 epidemic and its far-reaching ramifications develop internationally and in our community.

Stress has become an intrinsic element of life and the body's reaction in today's world since it is no longer restricted to adults. Still, it is increasingly impacting children of all ages. Covid-19's current situation catalyzes increasing student stress. Stress has undoubtedly become the most commonly recognized hindrance to academic success. Stress is an unavoidable element of student life since it harms most students' physical health, emotional well-being, and academic achievement. Factors such as an abrupt shift in lifestyle increased academic load, and new responsibilities, among others, have contributed to the emergence of this epidemic among students. Extreme stress can compromise the effectiveness of studies, resulting in poor academic achievement and attrition. In addition, depression, anxiety, behavioral problems, irritability, etc. are a few of the many problems reported in students with high academic stress (Deb, Strodl & Sun, 2015; Verma, Sharma & Larson, 2002).

Millennials (ages 18-33) had the highest stress levels of any generation, with 39% reporting an increase in stress in the previous year (American Psychological Association, 2013). During this transitional phase, college students lay the foundation for their future life goals (Salmela-Aro, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2007). Stress throughout this life shift may be significant for academic accomplishment. Loneliness, anxiety, depression, and disorientation are everyday experiences among college students. Previous research has also shown that poor coping mechanisms and personality differences might contribute to increased stress, leading to a negative pattern of behavior, psychosomatic symptoms, and poor academic achievement (Busari, 2014).

Academic stress has a negative physiological and social impact on students and may affect their learning and overall performance. Understanding prevalence, contributing factors, and coping strategies will facilitate organizing effective counseling strategies to facilitate students' development and academic and professional success. However, many studies addressed academic stress during the COVID-19 pandemic in economically developed countries. However, there is a lack of studies exploring academic stress and coping strategies in low-income countries with limited digital infrastructure and inadequate mental health support. Before the COVID-19 period, many studies were carried out to evaluate the level of perceived stress among students, whether

school or university students around the world. However, some studies were carried out on the same problem during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In line with the preceding situations, the researchers are eager to determine the stress level experienced by students enrolled in Notre Dame of Midsayap College's online distance learning modality. Furthermore, this research also aimed at identifying the students' coping strategies to cope with the numerous problems they face in their academic pursuits.

2. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows the illustration of the variables of the study. It displays both the dependent variable and the independent variable. These variables are connected and linked to form a test in this study. The independent variable focuses on online distance learning.

Meanwhile, the dependent variables are the stress level of the college of education students. The arrow that points from the independent variable to the dependent variable indicates that online distance learning causes stress on students. The intervening variable, the demographic characteristics of the respondents in terms of age and sex, somehow affects the significant difference in the stress level.

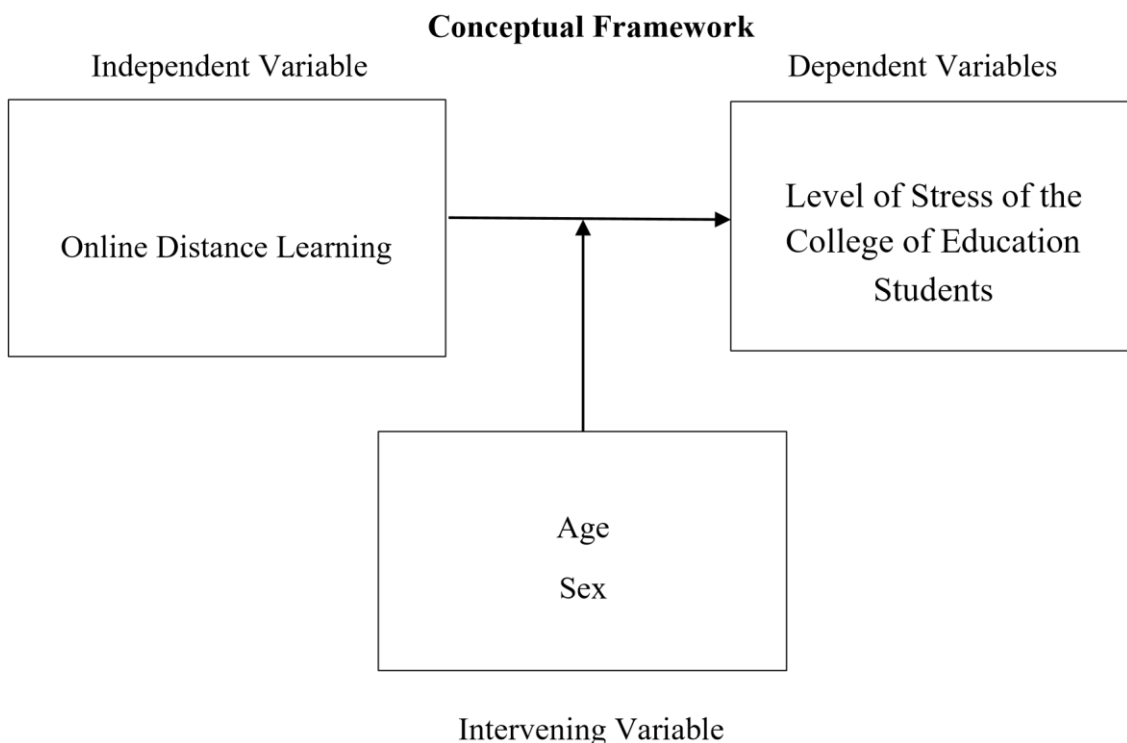


Figure 1: A conceptual frame work showing the relationship between dependent and independent variable

3. Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the level of stress of the respondents when grouped according to sex and age.

4. Methodology

The researchers utilized the descriptive method using a quantitative approach in gathering information about the present condition. Calderon (2006) defined descriptive research as a purposive process of gathering, analyzing, classifying, and tabulating data about usual conditions, practices, processes, trends, and cause-effect relationships and then creating an adequate and accurate interpretation of such data with or without or sometimes slight aid of statistical methods. The researchers employed a descriptive research design to describe the respondents' demographic features, stress levels, and coping mechanisms in online distance learning. It assisted the researchers in establishing the significance of the relationship between sex and age and the respondents' stress levels. The researchers used the descriptive method methodically to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.

4.1 Research Instrument

The researchers used a researcher-made survey. Questions were taken from the review of related literature. The survey questionnaire is divided into three parts using close-ended questions. Part I is the respondents' demographic profile, including sex and age. Part II is about the level of stress of the respondents in online distance learning. Part III consists of questions about the coping mechanisms used by the respondents. There were ten (10) questions each for the level of stress and coping mechanisms. In Part II and III, the respondents were asked to rate each question using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5: 5 – Very Often; 4 – Fairly Often; 3 – Sometimes; 2 – Almost Never; and 1 – Never; 5 – Strongly Agree; 4 – Agree; 3 – Moderately Agree; 2 – Disagree; 1 – Strong Disagree.

5. Analyses and Results

5.1 Profile of the Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Profile of the Respondents	<i>f</i>	%
Age		
18	9	18.0
19	10	20.0
20	11	22.0
21	11	22.0
22 and above	9	18.0
Total	50	100.0

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Sex		
Male	25	50.0
Female	25	50.0
Total	50	100.0

Reflected in Table 1 below are the demographic characteristics of respondents in terms of age and sex. Of the 50 respondents, 11 or 22 percent are 20 and 21 years old. It was followed by the 19 years old with a frequency of 10 or equivalent to 20 percent. The least is 18 and 22 years old with the same frequency of 9 or equivalent to 18 percent. The mean age of the respondents is 20.02 years old. For the sex of the respondents, they have an equal number of respondents of 25, which is equivalent to 50 percent.

5.2 Level of Stress in Online Distance Learning

The respondents' perceptions of the level of stress in online distance learning are found in Table 2.

Table 2: Level of Stress in Online Distance Learning

Item	Mean	Sd	Description
1. How often have you been frustrated by a bad internet connection during online distance learning?	4.460	0.788	Very Often
2. How often have you felt that you couldn't control problems in online distance learning?	4.000	0.782	Fairly Often
3. How often do you get nervous about online recitations?	3.840	1.017	Fairly Often
4. How often have you felt tired when performing schoolwork in online distance learning?	3.720	0.757	Fairly Often
5. How often have you experienced academic stress due to workloads and learning materials?	4.040	0.807	Fairly Often
6. How often have you been disappointed because you got a low grade for your academic performance?	3.900	1.074	Fairly Often
7. How often have you felt irritated in your academic life?	3.700	0.995	Fairly Often
8. How often that your academic life been disturbed by your financial problems?	4.240	1.001	Very Often
9. How often have you felt muscle tension and headaches while having online distance learning?	3.900	0.863	Fairly Often
10. How often have you suffered physical stress due to an improper online learning environment?	4.020	0.845	Fairly Often
Overall	3.982	0.893	Fairly Often

Legend		
Scale	Range	Description
1	1.00 to < 1.80	Never = Normal Level
2	1.80 to < 2.60	Almost Never = Mild Level
3	2.60 to < 3.40	Sometimes = Moderate Level
4	3.40 to < 4.20	Fairly Often = Severe Level
5	4.20 to 5.00	Very Often = Extreme Level

The average rating of the education students' level of stress in online distance learning is 3.982, which means they are fairly often (severe level) frustrated by a bad internet connection during their online distance learning. This result implies that a slow or unstable internet connection would hinder their online distance learning and cause to increase in their level of stress.

The present result finds congruence with Rotas (2021) that one of the most recurring difficulties experienced by the students in online distance learning resulting in stress is unstable internet connectivity. It is hard for them to keep in touch with the events like Google meetings and Messenger discussions.

Moreover, education students were very often (extreme level) disturbed in their academic lives by their financial problems. This means that education students feel stressed when they experience financial problems that somehow affect their academic lives. This implies that education students feel stressed once their family is financially constrained, especially on school fees and other expenses for their online distance learning. This result is also supported by Rotas (2021) that students have difficulty with online distance learning regarding its financial demands. It requires internet expenses for their learning needs.

In addition, education students fairly often (severe level) suffer physical stress due to an improper online learning environment. This means that education students are affected by their continuous online distance learning when the physical learning environment is improper or poor. This implies that education students might lack motivation for their studies due to a poor or improper physical online learning environment. Licayan et al. (2021) support this finding that students encountered difficulties in online distance learning, for they felt stressed when sacrificing their physical health. They reported eye strain and headaches due to exposure to the gadgets. Students also expressed that they are deprived of enough time to take physical rest. Another cause of their stress is the poor learning environment which is not conducive to online distance learning.

5.3 Coping Mechanisms of the Respondents

The coping mechanisms of the respondents are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Coping mechanisms in online distance learning

Item	Mean	Sd	Description
1. I have time with my family to lessen the stress that I experience from online distance learning.	4.100	0.789	Agree
2. I look for a good space and time to feel more comfortable.	4.240	0.716	Strongly Agree
3. I've been trying to find comfort in my friends and religion.	4.180	0.748	Agree
4. I've been doing something to think about it less, such as going to movies, watching TV, reading books, and sleeping.	4.180	0.873	Agree
5. I've been playing online games to release tension and pressure.	3.380	1.383	Moderately Agree

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6. I ask questions to the teachers if I am having difficulties with my lessons and class requirements.	3.960	0.807	Agree
7. I ask my classmates to discuss online to get more ideas and help each other so that no one will be left behind.	4.040	1.068	Agree
8. I open my social media accounts, read updates, and sometimes scroll over shopping applications to comfort myself.	3.920	0.944	Agree
9. I download all the PDF files that I need for my lessons ahead of time.	4.100	0.886	Agree
10. I've been trying to see it from a different perspective to be more positive.	4.240	0.716	Strongly Agree
11. I've been praying or meditating whenever I feel tired and stressed.	4.480	0.707	Strongly Agree
12. I do some physical activities or exercises to lessen the stress I feel.	4.020	0.892	Agree
13. I've been practicing time management.	4.200	0.808	Agree
14. I've been doing learning tasks ahead of time.	4.040	0.989	Agree
15. I've been extending the time for learning activities.	4.000	0.969	Agree
Overall	4.072	0.886	Agree

Legend		
Scale	Range	Description
1	1.00 to < 1.80	Never = Normal Level
2	1.80 to < 2.60	Almost Never = Mild Level
3	2.60 to < 3.40	Sometimes = Moderate Level
4	3.40 to < 4.20	Fairly Often = Severe Level
5	4.20 to 5.00	Very Often = Extreme Level

On the coping mechanisms of the education students in online distance learning, the item that gained the highest mean was the statement: *I've been praying or meditating whenever I feel tired and stressed*. Their agreement with this item means that if they feel tired or stressed, they opt to and ask for spiritual intervention. This indicates that prayer or meditation will help them relax and re-process their thinking. This result finds congruence in the study of Ano and Vasconcelle (2005) that a culturally positive coping mechanism is the act of turning to God. They further investigated if there was a connection between religious coping and psychological stress adjustment. Similarly, Amponsah et al. (2020) revealed that students become more prayerful when stressed about online distance learning.

Results also revealed that for the respondents to cope with their stress, they would look for a comfortable place for their learning and consider looking at the positive side while having their online distance learning. Amponsah et al. (2020) supported the above finding that stress is seen as a psycho-physiological process that results from the interaction of the individual with the environment and results in disturbances caused to the physiological, psychological, and social systems, depending upon individual characteristics and psychological processes.

5.4 Difference between the Level of Stress According to Sex

The result of measuring the difference between the level of stress on sex is presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: The significant difference in the level of stress if grouped according to sex

Sex	N	Mean	SD	P-value	Decision
Male	25	4.292	0.461	0.001	S
Female	25	3.672	0.703		

Note: NS = Not significant at .05 level (2 – tailed); S = Significant at .05 level (2– tailed)

The findings on determining the difference between the level of stress and sex revealed a significant difference since the p-value is 0.001. The findings revealed that males are more stressed than females. This rejects the hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the respondents' level of stress and sex. This implies that every student encounters daily stress during their academic life, but each person experiences stress differently. The result of the investigation is aligned with the study of Yousif et al., 2022 that students experienced stress in their online distance learning. However, their level of stress significantly differs according to their sex. The results were parallel to the findings of Vijaya and Karunakaran (2013). They stated that the majority of boys expressed high levels of stress and moderate stress compared to girls. The results were in contrast with the findings of Dusselier et al. (2005) who found that females experienced more stress than males, however, they also pointed out that the females in their study performed better academically than the males.

5.5 Difference Between the Level of Stress According to Age

The result of measuring the difference between the levels of stress of the respondents when grouped according to age is presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: The significant difference in the level of stress if grouped according to age

Age	N	Mean	SD	P-value	Decision
18	9	4.400	0.636	0.037	S
19	10	4.140	0.576		
20	11	3.982	0.433		
21	11	3.927	0.689		
22 and above	9	3.456	0.757		

Note: NS = Not significant at .05 level (2 – tailed); S = Significant at .05 level (2– tailed)

Finally, the findings on determining the difference between the level of stress and age revealed a significant difference since the p-value is 0.037, which is less than the level of confidence of 0.05. This rejects the hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the level of stress and age. This implies that respondents significantly differed in their level of stress in terms of their age. The results also show that younger

respondents reveal a high level of stress than older respondents. With this result, research from Divecha (2020) reported that teens have reported higher levels of stress than adults.

6. Conclusion

Based on the major findings of the study, it can be concluded that students experienced stress during their online distance learning brought upon by the COVID-19 pandemic. Bad internet connection, financial problems, disturbances in academic life, unsuitable learning environment, tiredness, and irritation in performing their schoolwork were the significant causes of the stress of the students in dealing with their online distance learning. It was also found that they have different coping mechanisms in dealing with stress in their online distance learning. Such coping mechanisms were praying or meditating, creating a conducive learning environment, thinking positively, and playing online games. It was determined that male respondents experienced more stress in online distance learning than female respondents. It was also noted that younger respondents experience more stress than older respondents. These results, it may serve as a guide for parents to look after and check the mental health and condition of their children. The results also play an important role for school administrators and teachers. They can develop school programs and activities that will help their learners to have a break from academic experience and check their mental health as well as their well-being as a whole.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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