Emerging Adult Graduating Students Adapting to the Covid -19 Pandemic: A Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

Graduating college students are in the stage of life called emerging adulthood. It is a crucial time for identity exploration and making choices about the future, for which some emerging adults struggle while others thrive, depending on their ability to cope. The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted adjustments to the mode of delivery of classroom instruction around the world. Most tertiary education institutions opted for distance learning. As a developing country, almost half of the population of the Philippines has no Internet connection. The purpose of this study was to explore, describe, and interpret the lived experiences of emerging adult graduating students from a state college in Negros Occidental coping with distance learning in the new normal.

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ABSTRACT

Graduating college students are in the stage of life called emerging adulthood. It is a crucial time for identity exploration and making choices about the future, for which some emerging adults struggle while others thrive, depending on their ability to cope. The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted adjustments to the mode of delivery of classroom instruction around the world. Most tertiary education institutions opted for distance learning. As a developing country, almost half of the population of the Philippines has no Internet connection. The purpose of this study was to explore, describe, and interpret the lived experiences of emerging adult graduating students from a state college in Negros Occidental coping with distance learning in the new normal.

This study utilized the phenomenological research design. The participants were emerging adult graduating students of a state college in Negros Occidental, SY 2020- 2021. Eight graduating students coming from the College Arts and Sciences, College of Education, College of Industrial Technology, and College of Engineering participated in the study. Using the phenomenological in-depth interview, the participants shared their experiences as a graduating student this school year during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thematic analysis was done utilizing Hycner's data explication.

There are three main themes based on the six common themes that emerged from the lived experiences of the emerging adult graduating students. The main themes are: bracing the impact of COVID-19 pandemic; coping with the COVID-19 pandemic; and finding meaning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The common themes are: diverse consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic; psychological challenges during the COVID- 19 pandemic; difficulty of online classes; and inadequate on-the-job training (OJT). The essence of the coming of age of emerging adult graduating students is change - maturity of one's mind, body and emotion, welcoming adaptability amidst difficulties and achieving psychological resilience in adulthood.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has a profound effect on emerging adult graduating college students as they transition into young adulthood. Graduating students felt unprepared to graduate from college due to suspension of activities that equip them as they venture into the world or work. As these graduating students adapt to the new normal, it is imperative that educational institutions provide support services tailored to their needs. A collaborative approach, engaging the different service providers within an educational institution is needed to help empower these graduating college students. As the crisis of development is resolved, these graduating students develop resilience, grit, and adaptability resulting into more successful emerging adults.

This study contributes to the existing literature on distance learning in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in state universities and colleges. This study provides the basis for a social and emotional learning program for students using an online platform.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Graduating college students are in the stage of life called emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood is a developmental stage marked by identity discovery, uncertainty, conservative sexual beliefs, a self-focused feeling of in-between balanced by responsibilities to parents, and a time of relative freedom from social roles and normative expectation (Arnett, 2000). It is a crucial time for identity exploration and making choices about the future, for which some emerging adults struggle while others thrive, depending on their ability to cope (Peer & McAuslan, 2016).

Coping uses cognitive and behavioral strategies to manage the demands of a situation appraised as taxing or exceeding one's resources to combat the negative emotions and conflict caused by stress (APA, 2020). There are two types of coping based on the Lazarus-Folkman model: engagement and disengagement (Neilsen, & Knardahl, 2014). Engagement coping includes problem-focused coping and some forms of emotion- focused coping: support seeking, emotion regulation, acceptance, and cognitive restructuring. The disengagement or avoidance coping aims to escape the threat or related emotions brought by a problematic situation (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2020). Disengagement coping strategies are prone to depression, while engagement coping strategies are for better psychological outcomes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted adjustments to the mode of delivery of classroom instruction around the world. Most tertiary education institutions opted for distance learning. Distance learning is a learning style where teachers and students are physically separated using different technologies to communicate effectively (University of Kansas Education Online, 2020). Approximately 90% of the world's wealthiest nations have rapidly shifted from traditional to virtual schooling (Burns, 2020). In the Philippines, a massive training program for faculty members to prepare for flexible learning, a combination of online and offline programs, and technical assistance to improve connectivity in universities and colleges were implemented (CHED, 2020). Despite this assistance, college students doing flexible learning scramble to acquire digital devices and a stable Internet connection, causing many difficulties, especially in developing countries (Santos, 2020; Rotas & Cahapay, 2020). As a developing country, 45% of the population of the Philippines has no Internet connection (Joaquin, Biana, & Dacela, 2020).

Republic Act No. 10687, known as The Unified Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education Act (UniFAST) allows students from low-income households, those earning below 11,021 pesos a month, to have the chance to get into college. Most of these students have a very low emotional quotient (EQ) level, making them more susceptible to depression and higher suicidal tendencies (Alayon, 2020). In this view, the researcher is motivated to study the lived experiences of emerging adults graduating from college, especially their adapting to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The present study focused on emerging adult students graduating this academic year 2020-2021. This study was of interest to the researcher because she is currently a registered guidance counselor in a state college. She has experienced a suicide of a graduating college student last December 31, 2019, a few hours before the New Year celebrations, leaving family and friends devastated. The results will have implications in developing a social and emotional learning (SEL) program for college students.

1.2 Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to describe, explore, and interpret the lived experiences of emerging adult graduating students from a state college in Negros Occidental adapting to distance learning in the new normal.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The results of the study are valuable to school administrators, faculty, staff, guidance counselors, and future researchers. School

administrators, teachers, and staff understood their role in facilitating positive student adjustment, particularly during a crisis. Guidance counselors are aware of the importance of their role in assisting students, especially at the tertiary level, experiencing psychological distress due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The present study will serve as an impetus for future researchers to focus on the importance of grit, resilience, and adaptability for successful crisis management in preparation for life after the pandemic.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The study focused on the lived experiences of emerging adult graduating students of a state college in Negros Occidental, SY 2020-2021. These graduating students were from the different colleges, namely, College of Arts and Sciences, College of Education, College of Industrial Technology, and College of Engineering.

Using the phenomenological in-depth interview, the participants shared their experiences as graduating college students this school year during the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings of the study will have implications in developing a social and emotional learning (SEL) program for college students.

1.5 Review of Related Literature

1.5.1 Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Education

Recent evidence suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic affects the students' psychological, social, and academic functioning (Fura & Negash, 2020). The mental health of college students worsened, with some students suffering from depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic disorder (PTSD) (Cao et al., 2020).

Most of the students followed health protocols because they feared infection and were anxious about the well-being of their families (Lovric et al., 2020). They also reported difficulty in concentrating and learning. COVID-19 mainly had psychological effects on individuals, affecting every level of education at varying degrees (Karademir et al., 2020).

A study found that 71% of students noted higher stress and anxiety due to the COVID-19 outbreak (Son et al., 2020). Their stressors were related to the health of family and friends and their academic performance.

In the Philippines, college students experienced an emotional rollercoaster and growth under pressure due to COVID-19 (Cahapay, 2020).

1.5.2 Impact of COVID-19 on Graduating College Students

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted almost all sectors of today's society. Higher education is no exception (Aucejo et al., 2020). Due to COVID-19, less than a quarter of students have delayed graduation, almost half of the graduating students have lost a job, internship, or job offer, and one-third expect to earn less at age 35. In some cases, nearly two-fifths of graduating students had stress, anxiety, and depression (Mekonin et al., 2021).

Recent phenomenological studies on graduating nurses' response to the Covid-19 pandemic revealed their reluctance to take care of patients if they were not fully protected. Students considered low risk in the likelihood of an infection volunteered more to care for infected patients (Lancaster et al., 2021). Students noticed negative experiences when using public vehicles and were afraid of the clinical settings (Lovric et al., 2020). A number of students reported difficulty concentrating and learning, while the majority of students praised teacher support and faculty work in this crisis.

The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is evident in the Philippines (Cleofas, 2020). College students became more uncertain of their future. They were anxious about their future careers because of the lockdowns imposed by the government.

1.5.3 Shifting to Online Learning

The shift to online learning by schools, colleges, and universities has received considerable

attention, although online learning is not a new concept (Henaku, 2020).

Previous qualitative studies outline the impact of online learning on college students. Graduating medical students did not find tele-education and e-learning to be as effective as traditional face-to-face hospital clerkships (Franklin et al., 2021). Both professors and students found online learning not interesting compared to ordinary learning, and professors needed to provide more time in teaching (Elfirdoussi, 2020).

Several qualitative studies that support online learning. Online modality was well- received by nursing students (Mansour et al., 2020). Online learning was time-saving, which resulted in better academic performance despite some challenges in the delivery of lessons. Younger students preferred online learning for the upcoming academic years.

In the Philippines, challenges of college students ranged from learning at home to technological literacy and competency (Barot & Llenares, 2021; Bayagas, 2020). The mental health of college students has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. It created a digital divide where almost half of Filipino households and three- quarters of public schools do not have Internet access (Joaquin, et al., 2020). Even students in urban places have limited internet access. Students get bored with online learning after the first two weeks of learning from home (Irawan & Lestari, 2020). Students whose parents have low income had considerable anxiety, because they had to buy quotas to participate in online learning. Mood changes occur due to too many assignments. Overall, online learning was ineffective for students.

1.5.4 On-the-Job Training for Graduating Students

Internship and practicum during the COVID-19 pandemic were cut short and were incorporated into a remote modality. Graduating students manifest diverse experiences in their practicum process, with difficulties inherent to the remote work condition, such as communication difficulties with students and school teachers, didactic and evaluation methods, and adaptation

context (Fierro et al., 2021). The downside is the missed experiences of graduating students and the loss of possible earnings (Abel & Deitz, 2020). This created an "earnings wedge" that can negatively affect total lifetime earnings of the graduating students.

On the contrary, online practicums/practical courses for diploma and undergraduate students in 2020 generally worked well, even if several students encountered difficulties (Yunus, 2020). The proportion of students who completed the practicums/practical courses online was considerably high.

In the Philippines, CHED announced that students could no longer have their internships in the field and abroad due to the threat of the new coronavirus (Mendoza, 2021). This caused anxiety to graduating students who felt that online classes were not enough in building their competence. These students know the importance of OJT in gaining real-world learning experiences and training in their respective professions (Cleofas, 2020).

1.5.5 Coping during a Crisis

Based on the Lazarus-Folkman model, there are two types of coping strategies: engagement and disengagement. Although disengagement coping strategies were most strongly associated with distress, engagement coping strategies were consistently linked to more favorable psychological outcomes (Neilsen & Knardahl, 2014).

Recent studies showed that most students adapted positive coping or engagement coping during the COVID-19 pandemic. College students used the following strategies to cope with the pandemic: realize the importance of facing these times positively, carrying out pleasurable activities, keeping in touch with family and friends, and establishing routines (Branquinho et al. (2020).

International college students diverted their anxiety by listening to music, eating or cooking, video or mobile gaming, seeking support from family and friends, browsing the web, positive

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thinking, exercise, spiritual support, and meditation (Lai et al., 2020).

Some of the coping strategies adapted by college students were performing cognitive behavioral activities, increasing their sociability with their support groups through email, social media, or SMS text (Fura & Negash, 2020). The pandemic has also taught college students to be self-regulated and creative by designing their coping strategies to deal with stress and anxiety such as enrolling in technical courses to keep their thoughts busy (Chandra, 2020).

In the Philippines, most college students comply with wearing heath protective gear and adhere to the stay at home policy of the government to relieve them from anxiety (Baloran, 2020). Students cope with the stress of remote learning by finding ways to adapt to the present crisis like relaxation to relieve them from muscle tension, reading books to keep their minds busy, and taking time to talk to friends and family.

Students stress that blended learning implications are primarily negative (Perante et al., 2020). They have learned to adjust as a result of the changes in the learning platform, but not having the necessary resources for blended learning requirements still emerges. Lacking resources is the most challenging. At the same time, most of them need to seek social support to cope with blended learning.

1.5.6 Meaning-Making in the Face of Adversity

Searching for meaning seems to be a natural human response when faced with adversity such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Emerging adults became self-motivated and committed to their studies (Rahiem, 2020). Through lifestyle changes and cognitive students learned to understand the severity of their problems, increasing their resilience as they adapted to the changes in their situations (Tariq et al., 2020).

In the Philippines, college students reported positive outcomes in spite of the challenging experiences (Cleofas, 2020). They were able to self-reflect and reevaluate their lives. They had a better appreciation of things such as in-person

classes, freely going outdoors, and personal relationships with family and friends. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has taught them to be conscious of how they use their time when their school tasks are complete, they ask questions from their teachers if they have to, and perform the assigned tasks ahead (Rotas & Cahapay, 2020). Altogether, they found ways to divert their mind from the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic through self-regulation and self- management.

1.5.7 Emerging Adulthood: Coming of Age

Coming of age is the transformation from childhood to adulthood. The coming of age shows the process of adolescents from immaturity to maturity (Fajarrani, 2013). In some cultures, coming of age is determined when a child reaches a particular birthday and is no longer a minor. Thirteen-, 15-, 16-, 18-, and 21-years of age are significant periods for young adults. The coming of age milestone can be a difficult transition, as some children are hesitant to leave their childhood behind (O'Donnell, 2021). A person's coming of age means a person achieved psychological resilience and maturity, where the person can be adaptable in the face of change (Trible, 2015).

Graduating college students range from 18 to 25 years old, this is a period called emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood is a transition to adulthood, that is, the age of maturity. According to Arnett (2000), there are three criteria for adulthood these are the following: acceptance of responsibility for oneself, ability to make independent decisions, and financial indepen-dence from significant family members or primary caregivers. With that said, emerging adult college students must hurdle the challenges of identity exploration, the age of instability, the age of self-focused, the age of feeling in-between, and the age of possibilities. The experiences they gain during this stage will lay down the foundation of their identity as an adult.

Identity formation is a defining feature of the transition to adulthood. Adolescents go through a period of exploration, possibly lasting into the early 20s (Erikson, 1968). They learn who they

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are and what their role is in society. Both Erikson and Havighurst espoused that achieving these tasks leads to happiness and increases competence. In contrast, failure leads to unhappiness in the individual, difficulty in later tasks and confusing self-identity (Nelson, 2005). Regardless of age, a person feels that they have reached adulthood as soon as they have fulfilled the expectations that are essential for adulthood.

Penaflor et al. (2018) studied features of emerging adulthood and self-efficacy of senior college students in the Philippines and found that the students identified their current developmental stage with the age of possibilities and age of identity exploration the most, while their current state to the age of instability the least. The self-efficacy level of the majority of the students fell within the high-level category. This implies that college years are suitable for emerging adults' self-exploration and self-reflection, and they may benefit from appropriate and adequate adult guidance. Through education and intervention programs aimed at increasing their knowledge about emerging adulthood, career choices, dealing with relationships, defining strengths, and protective factors that may facilitate transition into adulthood, including enhancing one's self-efficacy levels (Penaflor et al., 2018).

II. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study utilized the qualitative research design using the phenomenological approach. In qualitative research, data collection and analysis allow for a limited sample size. Participants are selected based on their interest in the subject, knowledge of the phenomena under investigation, and personal experience with the phenomenon (Sailor, 2013). Phenomenology examines how people make sense of their experiences and the world, how they shape worldviews, and how they interpret and translate their experiences into consciousness. Individuals' "lived experiences" must be the source of phenomenological study. The data collection and analysis allow for a limited sample size. Participants are selected

based on their interest in the subject, knowledge of the phenomena under investigation, and personal experience with the phenomenon.

Philosophical Assumptions. Husserl believed that an individual's perceptions were reliable and the only source of data from where to begin (Groenewald, 2004). Positivism was one of the most influential schools of thought (Ataro, 2019). The positivist used a quantitative approach as well as objective reasoning and interpretation.

Ontological Assumptions. The recorded conversations like interviews made the participants free from expressing themselves. A verbatim transcript was made. Analysis of data was shown through presenting quotes and themes while keeping in mind the anonymity of the participants. The process of member checking was to secure that the researcher truly captured the world view of each participant. These rigorous procedures ensured the positivist researcher's main role, to report and describe the phenomenon as it is.

Epistemological Assumptions. By applying in-depth interviews and constantly communicating with the participants before the virtual interview, the researcher minimized the distance between herself and the participants. It brought the researcher to the natural setting of the interviewees. The interview was done in a conversation-like manner allowing the participants to express their thoughts and feelings freely.

Axiological Assumptions. The researcher was aware of the value-laden nature of this study. Being a regular teacher with experience from tertiary education and a guidance counselor in school in Negros Occidental has implications on the study. Given the significant impact of distance learning at the Pandemic, surviving a semester of an online class was a big challenge to many college students. Therefore, the researcher's task was to be aware of her background and personal biases. The researcher knew the importance of commitment, determination, honesty, and self-respect in pursuing one's goal; holding these together and not influencing the participants' own

experiences and beliefs as they go through this pandemic crisis was just as important. The information gathered from the field is also value-laden.

Methodological Assumptions. The researcher used the phenomenological research design. Purposive sampling was utilized. This research intended to gather data regarding participants' perspectives about the phenomenon. Analysis of data was based on Hycner's phenomenological analysis of data. At the root of this study was to understand the phenomenon of adapting to distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic as experienced by the emerging adult graduating college students (Groenewald, 2004).

2.2 Participants

The participants of this study were eight emerging adult graduating students of a state college in Negros Occidental SY 2020-2021. The selection of the participants is through the purposive sampling method.

Eligibility criteria for inclusion in the study were the following: a graduating student from the four colleges during the second semester school year 2020-2021 through distance learning; age between 18 to 25 years old; and a male or female.

2.3 Research Instrument

The unstructured in-depth interview was utilized to gather the required data. Unstructured in-depth interviews generate qualitative data through the use of open questions. Validity is increased because it gives the researcher the opportunity to probe for a deeper understanding, ask for clarification, and allow the participant to steer the direction of the interview.

Unstructured in-depth interviews were conducted with the graduating college students. This statement was directed to them to get their experiences, feelings, beliefs, and convictions, "Kindly tell me of your experiences of being a graduating student this school year during this COVID-19 pandemic." This entailed the graduating students to share their experiences of coping with distance learning during the pandemic.

III. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

After securing approval from the proper school authorities for the conduct of this study, the researcher identified the possible graduating students from the four colleges as participants of the study. The researcher presented the purpose and benefit of the study to the four deans to level expectations from graduating students and. To become familiar with the culture of each college. After establishing rapport with the identified participants, the researcher sent the research informed consent and a letter to the participants via Facebook Messenger. As soon as the participants agreed, the researcher set the date and time for the virtual interview. The conduct of the study began on May 3, 2020, starting with the initial identification of the participants. Communication and discussions continued until May 22, 2021, to accommodate the availability of the participants.

The unstructured in-depth interview, which was audiotaped, was carried out in a conversational style, which lasted for one hour. The researcher tried to make a good and safe atmosphere by being relaxed and focused, giving participants enough time to process their answers and clarify things that might be unclear. The participants spoke their native language, which is Hiligaynon and from time to time infused the English language during the conversation.

Debriefing was done after the interview to process the participants' personal experiences. Debriefing was conducted by the researcher, who was a Registered Guidance Counselor. Participants were told if they had questions about the interview or the whole procedure of the interview. Participants were asked if they had resentments or negative feelings while participating or whether they found it disturbing or odd in any aspect of the interview. The researcher processed the feelings and thoughts of the participants. The researcher ensured participants felt okay, relieved from bothersome thoughts, and answered all questions. The researcher once again thanked the participants for their contribution to the study.

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Data-collection interviews continued until the topic was exhausted or saturated; that was when participants introduced no new perspectives on the topic.

The researcher reviewed the transcripts and notes. Participants were asked to serve as member checkers for their interviews. The researcher transcribed all the interviews and listened to the tapes many times to secure the correctly written statements.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

Thematic analysis was done using the framework of Hycner (1985). According to Hycner, analysis means "breaking into parts" and often means a loss of the whole phenomenon, while explication implies an investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole (Groenewald, 2004). This explication process of Hycner involves bracketing and phenomenological reduction; delineating units of meaning; clustering of units of meaning to form themes; summarizing each written narrative stories, validating it and where necessary modifying it; and extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary (Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985).

4.1 Bracketing and Phenomenological Reduction

The phenomenological reduction is the researcher's deliberate and purposeful opening to the phenomenon. It refers to bracketing out or not allowing the researcher's definitions and perceptions to penetrate the participant's environment, such that no stance is taken for or against the researcher's presumptions (Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985). The researcher repeatedly listened to the audio recording of each interview to become familiar with the words of the interviewee in order to develop a holistic sense.

4.2 Delineating Units of Meaning

The researcher is ready to go over the transcript to evoke the participants' meanings to get to the heart of the matter (Hycner, 1985). The researcher examines the literal material, the number of times meaning is expressed, and how it was stated (Groenewald, 2004). After the interview, the researcher created the verbatim transcripts from the audiotaped interviews; these comprised the basis of her data for analysis. The length of the interview was one hour.

4.3 Clustering of Units of Meanings to Form Themes

To stay true to the phenomenon, the researcher must bracket her presumptions once more with the list of appropriate units of meaning (Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985). Through a thorough examination of the meaning units' list, the researcher extracts the essence of the units' meaning. Grouping units of meaning together usually form clusters of themes, and the researcher selects important subjects, often known as units of importance. Core themes are identified by exploring the different clusters' context, "which reflects the nature of these clusters" (Groenewald, 2004). The researcher used line-by-line coding of the transcribed interviews to highlighted phrases, key ideas, categories, and statements made during each interview process to organize the data of the study.

4.4 Summarizing each Written Narrative Stories, Validating, and Modifying

A review that integrates all of the themes elicited from the published narrative accounts of graduating college students during the pandemic creates a holistic framework. The researcher aims to recreate the participants' inner world of experience (Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985). The researcher utilized a comparative analysis by comparing the codes that emerged from the line-by-line analysis of each participant. After the analysis, the major themes from the data emerged; allowing the researcher to determine commonalities and similarities within the transcribed codes extracted from the interview transcripts.

At this point, the researcher performed a validity check by returning the summary and themes to

the participants and engaged in a dialogue with each participant about what was found so far (Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985). It was necessary for the researcher to dialogue with the participants what she found to determine if the participants agreed. Modifications were made as a result of the validity check.

4.5 Extracting General and Unique Themes for all the Written Narrative Stories and Composite Summary

The researcher looks for the themes common to most in- depth interviews and the individual variations (Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985). The researcher makes sure not to cluster common themes when significant differences exist. The meaning units and themes of all the participants are examined to represent the participants' experiences as a whole. The researcher ended the

explication by writing a composite summary, which would accurately capture the essence of the phenomenon being investigated (Hycner, 1985). The themes that emerged guided the formulation of the essence of the graduating college students coping with distance learning during the pandemic.

4.5.1 Essence of the Phenomenon

Language is used to express meaning when describing an experience. A metaphor is written to convey the meaning of a phenomenological study since language is used as data in qualitative analysis (Sailor, 2013). The researcher chose an acronym to encapsulate all the experiences of the emerging adult graduating students coping with distance learning during the pandemic.
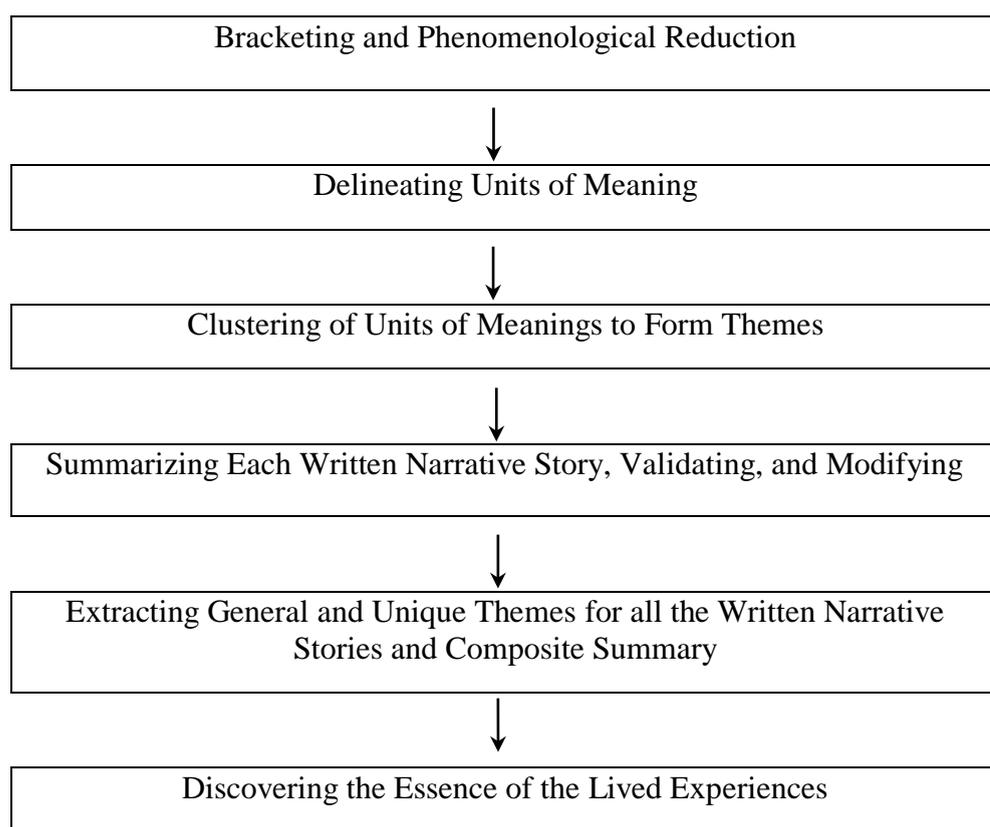
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Figure 1: Schematic Diagram for Data Explication

4.6 Ethical Considerations

The researcher addressed the general ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice to ensure the study's ethical soundness.

Social Value

This study served as a catharsis to students who experienced psychological distress amidst the distance learning education. The interview

provided an avenue to vent out repressed emotions, thereby providing relief and promoting good mental health.

Informed Consent

The researcher secured the informed consent of the participants. Informing the participants that their participation in this study is voluntary, and they have the right to withdraw if they feel uncomfortable in gathering information from them.

Vulnerability of the Participants

Considering the well-being of the participants, the researcher established rapport with the participants before the actual virtual interviews by exchanging messages online. It resulted in the sense of trust and mutual respect between the researcher and the participants.

The researcher ensured that all feelings and thoughts during the interview were addressed and processed individually.

Risks and Benefits

The study presented no risk to participants because data was collected and communicated through the anonymity of color-coding. The emotional baggage that surfaced during the interview was immediately addressed since the researcher is a registered guidance counselor before proceeding to the next question.

Privacy and Confidentiality

The researcher will keep the participants' records for this study confidential in adherence to the Data Privacy Act of 2012. No information that discloses their identity will be released or published without their specific consent to the disclosure, except if necessary to protect their rights or welfare. Likewise, the researcher will not release the information about their participation to people not connected in the study. The researcher will dispose of all materials that have the basic information of the participants at a given time. Participants remained anonymous through the process of coding.

Transparency

Only the researcher involved in the study will be able to access data. Participants will be informed of the result of the study. No information that discloses the participants' identity will be released or published without their specific consent to reveal.

Finally, the researcher declared no conflict of interest since she will not gain any monetary or administrative benefits from conducting the study.

Qualifications of the Researcher

The researcher is a Ph.D. major in Psychology candidate of the Recoletos de Bacolod Graduate School (RBGS). As a Registered Guidance Counselor, she practiced ethical standards in all her dealing with clients. Based on her education and profession, the researcher is knowledgeable of the rigors of qualitative research.

Adequacy of Facilities

Participants who did not have internet load were provided an internet load good enough for a one-hour interview.

Justice

Participants were selected through the purposive sampling method. The researcher personally asked for the list of graduating students from the Registrar's Office and from the Deans' Office.

The participants did not get any payment or service as compensation for their involvement with the research.

Community Involvement

Initial talk about the results of the study transpired between the researcher, the Guidance Director, and the Information Service specialist. The researcher and the Information Service Specialist wrote a proposal to the school's officials. The Guidance Director convened all CHMSC guidance counselors regarding the webinar.

A webinar for the C: Cope Positively of the C.H.A.N.G.E.: Social and Emotional Learning for College Students was conducted to all first-year college students across four campuses last October 28, 2021, via FB Live.

V. RESULTS

5.1 Participants

Participants of the study were four males and four females, aged 22 to 25. The interviews were conducted from May 3 to May 22, 2021.

Participant 1. Pedro is a Bachelor of Science major in Psychology student who used to work part-time in a call center to help his parents. His father works on a farm, while his mother is a housewife. The COVID-19 Pandemic forced him to stop working. (*I'm 25 years old, 4th-year Psychology student, my father ga obra sa kampo, my mom work lang ya sa house. That's why I appreciate my mom for sending me to school. Wala ko ga part-time subong, focus sa studies).*

Participant 2. Juan is an engineering student who plans to work abroad if given a chance. He thinks that by working abroad he can make their lives comfortable. He is in a dilemma whether to take the board exam after graduating because he feels unprepared. (*I'm an engineering student sang CHMSC kag naga istar ko sa Bacolod City. Akon magulang miss, sye na suporta sa akon pag skwela. Online tutor sa English, sa mga Japanese. Homebased sya sang pag pandemic. Kung papalarin gusto ko magwa miss.)*

Participant 3. Tomas is a Bachelor of Secondary Education student, majoring in English The COVID-19 pandemic forces him to buy a new cell phone. His brother buys the things he needs for online classes including, a portable Internet router (*Mga 18 lng kami ka bilog ang ma graduate sa English. Ga review kami miss subong. Sa augusust exam, next year guro kng indi makaya subong.*)

Participant 4. Juaning is a BSIT major in Electrical Technology student, who misses going to school. He volunteers as Brgy. Tanod during the lockdown. His neighbors provide them food during the lockdown. (*Kag sa pag lock down, nag voluntary ko, dire sa alagyan samun pasulod, para makabulig man d miss eh kami ang gabantay, para wala iban na makasulod. tungod sa tupad balay. Kumbaga buligay bla miss ang iban bi gaagi tapus my tanum kami na langka na ginluto. Kung ano sud-an nila,e share nila sa amun.*)

Participant 5. Maria is a Psychology graduating student who tries to maintain her dean's list status no matter how difficult it may seem. She thinks that online classes serve no purpose, it unmotivates her to be at her best. She experiences emotional struggle during the lock-down. (*Ang emotion miss, kis.a daw ka okay lang, kis.a daw ka subo subo gid. Kabudlay budlay gid ya miss mainly mag communicate sa classmates namun. Daw nag paka hapus lang gid, guro indi lang man ako ang ga copy paste sa google miss.*)

Participant 6. Petra is a BSIT major in Food Trades student, she thinks unprepared to apply for a job after graduation. She suffers depression during the height of the lockdown because two of her relatives died. She is stressed and thinks of ways to help her sister with the expenses at home. (*Gaka stress ko miss kay, gapamangkot ko sa kaugalingon ko kung ano bala mabulig ko miss. Akon nga tiyo kay may asthma amo to natabo sa iya kag ang paka isa ko may ano, naaksidente sa ya miss. indi, tetanus miss, naigo iya ulo sang lansang.*)

Participant 7. Inday is a BS Engineering student living with her father and grandparents. She is unable to finish her on-the-job training because of the lock-down. She struggles managing online classes and responsibilities at home. (*Kag ang OJT namon sa sine miss hu, na tymingan gid na may pandemic, ti sa school lang kami ti daw wala kami bala mayu na expose sa iban pa gid bala. Daw wala ka bala lugar nga ma pwede ka ka focus gid nga wala mayu destraction, syempre may mga neighbors ka man. Lain gid bi miss ang classroom setting nga ang focus mo ara lang gid tanan sa lesson.*)

Participant 8. Nene is a Bachelor of Elementary Education, major in General Education. She finds it hard to adapt to the new normal. She experiences emotional meltdown during the lockdown. (*Kabudlay mag adapt sa new normal. Subong na graduating student naka agi kami stress ya miss eh hibi na ko kay mama indi na ko ka intindi miss kung sigehon ko pa ni ayhan ang pag skwela ko kay ka kapoy kapoy na ko nang nabudlayan na kami mangita sang kwarta nga enugpaload. Damo-damo na ko may gin panumdom nga nag sulod sa ulo ko nga kaya ko pa ni ayhan tapus wala na ko miss gakaon.*)

5.2 Common and Main Themes

Common themes are those found in six or more in-depth interviews (Groenewald, 2004; Hall, 2003; Hycner, 1985). These common themes were grouped into main themes. There are three main themes based on the six common themes that emerged from the lived experiences of the emerging adult graduating students. The main themes are: bracing the impact of COVID-19 pandemic; coping with the COVID-19 pandemic; and finding meaning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The common themes are: diverse consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic; psychological challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic; difficulty of online classes; and inadequate on-the-job training (OJT).

5.2.1 Bracing the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

Diverse Consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Graduating college students know that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all facets of their lives. Their transition to adulthood is impacted by the many limitations brought by the pandemic. The participants accepted, hurdled, and embraced the challenges they encountered.

Ang COVID-19 ga affect gid sya ya sa tanan: sa economeya, sa tawo, sa relationship, kag sa pamilya. (COVID-19 affects everyone: the economy, the person, the relationship, and the family.)

Ang COVID-19 sa subong isa kadako gid nga perwisyo sa economy... sa atun pag obra, sa

education, sa government kag sa tagsa-tagsa... ga produce sang negative nga emotion. (COVID-19 is currently a huge problem of the economy ... of our work, of education, of government and of each other ... it produces negative emotions.)

Ang COVID-19 damo gid gin bag-o sa sistema. Mas damo na gid ang nag pigado. (The COVID-19 has made big changes in the current system; more people become poor.)

Ang COVID - 19 pandemic nagtuga sang lockdown kag damo positive cases. (COVID - 19 pandemic created lockdown and many positive cases.)

Kag aware ko nga ang aton nga health care system daw indi maayo kasarang sa pag handle sang amo ni nga kind sang virus kag sa pandemic. (And I am aware that our health care system does not seem to be well equipped to handle this kind of virus and the pandemic.)

Kabudlay man kay naapektuhan gid ang financial life namun tapos amun daily activities/routine nagliwat. Kabudlay mag adapt sa new normal. (It was also difficult because our financial life was really affected and our daily activities/routine changed. It was difficult adapting to the new normal.)

Psychological Challenges during the COVID-19 Pandemic

According to Arnett, emerging adulthood is a stage of identity exploration, instability, self-focus, ambivalence to the idea of personal independence, and a sense of broad possibilities. As graduating students, the school is one avenue where they could explore endless possibilities about their choices and potentials. It is a time to discover and make their identity and be comfortable with their achievement. However, the COVID-19 pandemic deprived them of these opportunities. The participants experienced a roller coaster ride of emotions as they continued their journey.

Gaka affect sa akon as a student in general kay na anxious ko. (It affects me as a student in general because I'm anxious.)

COVID-19 affects me sa personal ko na life, first and foremost sa akon na emotion. How to adjust sang new world which is nga my ara na sang COVID-19. (COVID-19 affects me in my personal life, first and foremost in my emotions. How to adjust to the new world which has already COVID-19.)

Unstable ko emotionally kay daw wala na bala socialization nga ginatawag haw. Ang emotion ko kung kaisa daw ka okay lang pero kung kaisa daw ka subo subo gid. (I am emotionally unstable because there seems to be no socialization. My emotion is that sometimes I feel okay but sometimes I feel really sad.)

Financially, emotionally kag mentally challenging. Gaka stress ko kay gapamangkot ko sa kaugalingon ko kung ano bala mabulig ko. Wala ko may mabulig. (Financially, emotionally and mentally challenging. I get stressed because I ask myself what I can do to help. I am helpless.)

Naka experience ko lockdown kay kaagi ko upod sa isa ka LSI halin sa Manila. (I experienced a lockdown because I was with an LSI from Manila.)

Akon nga father naka stop work kay tungod nag lockdown. Kag sa studies medyo budlay sya kay syempre like me nga mahuloy-on bala kung mamangkot mangkot sa teacher. (My father stopped working because of a lockdown. And in studies, it is a bit difficult because I am shy to ask questions to the teacher.)

Naga ka stress ko kag naghibi na ko kay mama. Indi na ko ka intindi kung masigi pa ko eskwela kay ka kapoy kapoy kag nabudlayan na kami mangita sang kwarta nga e pa load para sa online classes. (It's stressing me out and I'm already crying to mom. I don't understand if I'm still going to school because I'm tired and we're having a hard time finding money for "load" for online classes.)

Budlayan ko mag adjust kapin pa gid magtuon. May ara gid ya teacher na daw ga adjust man sya sa sitwasyon te indi man kami mag intindihanay sa klase. (I struggle to adjust even more to study. There is a teacher who seems to adjust to the situation and we don't understand each other in class.)

Difficulty of Online Classes

The sudden shift to a flexible learning modality threatened the students' psychological, emotional, financial, resourcefulness, and determination. Change means adjusting and adjusting is often difficult because it requires one to get out of one's comfort zone. The participants embraced the new normal with a grain of salt but were relentless in finishing what they started.

Ka less sang learning sa online classes bangod kay indi ma explain sang teachers ang mga lessons. Unlike sa face to face classes, pwedi mo ma approach ang teachers anytime to ask questions. Ang internet connection ka bweset. (Less learning in online classes because teachers can't explain the lessons. Unlike face to face classes, you can approach teachers anytime to ask questions. The internet connection is bad.)

Budlay gid ang online class para sa akon... kis-a nabudlayan ko mag catch up kay lain gid b kung face to face... Kag kis-a hina ang signal. (The online class is very difficult for me ... sometimes I have a hard time catching up because it's very different when it comes to face to face ... And sometimes the signal is weak.)

For me lain gid ya ang learnings sa face to face kung e kumpara sa online class. Sa face to face learning pulido... While sa online classes daw kahapyaw lang sang learnings... mawad-an ka internet te disturbo kay kinanglan gid mag pa load. Dugang pa nga problema ang brown out kag kulang ang gadgets. (For me, face-to-face learning is very different compared to online classes. Face to face learning is polished... While in online classes it seems like the learnings are just a waste ... you will lose internet disturbance because you really have to load more. Another problem is brown out and lack of gadgets.)

Ang online classes sa tuod tuod lang indi ka man gid siling nga maka focus. Dasig ko matak-an sa online classes... indi man ko dayun ka

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pamangkot... damo ga cheat... Dugang pa nga kabudlayan ang gasto bakal load kag mahina nga signal. (Online classes, of course, you can never be able to focus. I'm easily discouraged to take online classes ... you can't ask easily ... there are a lot who cheats.)

Ka stressful sang online class kag indi ko mayo maka learn kay wala interaction sa teachers. Unlike sa face to face nga maka learn gid ko kay ga pay attention ko kay teacher. (The online class is stressful and I can't learn because there is no interaction with the teachers. Unlike face to face, I can really learn because I pay attention to the teacher.)

Indi gid daku nga bulig ang online classes kay daw wala man ko may na intindihan sa amon subjects. Nami man gid kung may face to face gid. Dugangan pa sang problema sa signal. (Online classes are not very helpful because I don't seem to understand our subjects anymore. It would be nice if there was a face to face. Adding to the problem is the signal.)

Kadamo distractions sa online classes. Kung face to face mas maka focus gid ko sa akon lessons... need mag perform experiment te indi man mahimo kay online classes. Kabudlay pa gid mag obra sang amon thesis. (Lots of distractions in online classes. If face to face I can really focus on my lessons ... I need to perform experiments but I can't do online classes. It is still difficult to work on our thesis.)

Ang challenge sa akon sa online classes amo ang signal... indi ko kakuha quiz te zero naman eh... Te daw wala gid ko mayo may nahawiran sa amon classes. (The challenge for me in online classes is the signal ... I can't take the quiz and it's zero ... I don't think I've ever learned anything in our classes.)

Inadequate On-the-Job Training (OJT)

The purpose of the OJT is to expose the graduating students to the duties and responsibilities in their chosen field. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it impossible for the participants to undergo their OJT to prepare them to face the next step – finding a job.

Kulang kami sa on the job training, kulang kami sa exposure. (We lack on the job training, we lack exposure.)

Kulang sa time para may ma acquire pa gid ko na experiences nga ma usar ko pa gid sa field. Kay nakulbaan ko bala kung sa field na gid. (I don't have enough time to acquire more experiences that I can use in the field. Because I was nervous when I was in the field.)

Budlay ang internship... Kabudlay gid mag build relationship using the phone kag mga gadgets. Wala gid ya feedback. (Internship is hard ... It's really hard to build a relationship using the phone and gadgets. No feedback at all.)

Daku gid ya ang impact sg COVID-19 sa OJT namun. Ang time bla dapat na e OJT namun, nga e obra namun, na e dugang sa knowledge kag sa experience namun nadula tungod sa pandemic. (The impact of COVID-19 on OJT is huge. Time supposed for our OJT, to work, to add to our knowledge and experience are all gone due to the pandemic).

Excited ko nga mag OJT sa mental facility. Tapus nabal-an ko wala kami OJT... indi gid ya namun ma experience bala mag OJT sa mental facility. (I was excited to do OJT at the mental facility. Then I found out that we didn't have OJT ... we never had the experience of doing OJT in a mental facility.)

Nag online OJT kami. Indi gid sya daku nga bulig. Kay daw wa-ay man ko may na intindihan gid. (We did online OJT. It was never a big help. Because I don't seem to understand anything at all.)

Hasta lang kami sa check-check sa construction site sa sulod sang campus... Laban lang kami sa pungko-pungko, gasaka saka sa babaw, lantaw lantaw kung ano ila gina obra. Laban gid ya nga time namun tanga lang kag pungko... sa amun ya isa lang ka semana amon OJT. (We just went to check-in at the construction site inside the campus ... We sat-down, climbed to the top, looked at what they were doing. It's really just wasting time, sitting ... we've only had an OJT for a week).

... nag virtual OJT kami. Wala kami kabalo kung ano amun madangtan sa ulihi at least tani man lang na feel man namun kung pano magtudlo sa students... As in daku-daku nga pag nugon. (... we did a virtual OJT. We don't know what we will end up with in the end and at least we can feel how to teach the students ... As in great loss).

5.2.2 Coping with the COVID-19 Pandemic

According to Folkman, positive coping is engagement coping. Through engagement coping, participants used a variety of strategies to address the concerns at hand such as prayer, focus on schoolwork, self-motivation and self-determination, positive thinking, and teamwork. The COVID-19 pandemic made education more challenging, and participants learned to adapt.

Ang coping ko sa akon nga pag eskwela amo nga gatuon ko sa akon lang... ma search nalang ko da sa internet since nga indi man ko nalipay sa online class. (My coping with my schooling is that I study on my own... I can only search the internet since I'm not happy with the online class.)

Ga pray ako every night na tani matapus nani, nga tani mabalik na sa normal. Ga attend ko Mass sa Church. (I pray every night that it will end, that it will return to normal. I attend Mass in the Church.)

Determination. Will power... dapat gid maninguha kay amidst sang pandemic... (Determination. Will power ... must strive amidst the pandemic.)

Ang una gid guro miss pray gid. Ga pray gid sa tanan nga ibalik ang sang una kag buligan ang mga tawo nga gapangyu tungod sa COVID. (First, pray. I really pray for everyone to return to what it used to be and help the people who are needy because of COVID.)

Gina comply ang tanan na requirement on time. Bisan copy paste lang basta on time. (All requirements are complied with on time. Even just copy paste as long as it is on time.)

Gina prioritize ko ang mga requirements. Ga think lang ko positive. (I prioritize the requirements. I just think positive.)

Teamwork na lang sa mga classmates. (Just teamwork with classmates.)

Gina motivate ko ang akon kaugalingon nga kinanglan ko gid tapuson kay may ginikanan ko nga dapat buligan. (I motivate myself that I really need to finish because I have a parent to help).

5.2.3 Finding Meaning during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The easiest way to recover from any adversities is to find meaning from them. Self-determination, self-reliance, appreciating the present, and being positive helped the participants manage. The participants' journey may be difficult, but finding meaning to the realities of life is making them stronger.

You have to face what is given to you and engage yourself in order to learn something. Indi dapat mahuya para maka survive. (You have to face what is given to you and engage yourself in order to learn something. You must not be ashamed to survive.)

Ang gintudlo sa akon sang pandemic amo nga wala gid ta ya kabalo kung ano matabo sa aton sa future kag kung ano ang mga possibilities. (What the pandemic has taught me is that we never know what will happen to us in the future and what the possibilities are.)

Ang gintudlo sang pandemic sa akon amo nga mangin self-reliant bisan wala sang dako nga bulig from the teachers and classmates. (What the pandemic taught me was to be self-reliant even without much help from teachers and classmates).

Ako na lng mangita way kung paano madugangan ang akon knowledge related sa akon course. Dapat gid ko maninguha, magtuon kag e train ang akon self nga e face ang reality... (I'm have to find a way to increase my knowledge related to my course. I really have to try, study and train myself to face reality ...)

Bisan bala nga ara ka na sa situation na daw kabudlay na, ma look ka lang gid into positive

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sight. (Even if you are already in a situation that seems difficult, you can still be positive).

At the end of the day, self ko lang ang makabulig sa akon nga ma overcome ang tanan. Ara sa akon ang lyabe sa pwertahan para makaguwa sa mga negativities nga nagakatabo bangod sang pandemic. Positive lang dapat. Go go go. (At the end of the day, only myself can help me overcome everything. I have the key to the door to get out of the negativities that are happening because of the pandemic. Just be positive. Go go go.)

5.3 The Essence of the Lived Experiences of these Emerging Adults Adapting in the New Normal

The educational system in the Philippines continues to be challenged due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This experience may be one of the most challenging experiences for emerging adult graduating college students. Their transition into adulthood is a roller coaster ride because the situation forced them to adjust drastically to the changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. The adjustment is never easy since it will test the emerging adults psychologically, financially, and spiritually. Overcoming the challenges can result in more mature young adults. A mature young adult copes positively; hopes for the best; adapts to change; never gives up; grows, excels, and succeeds. Thus, a strong foundation for adulthood is essential. According to Charles Darwin, "he who can adapt to whatever life gives you survives." Arising from this process of adjustment is the coming of age of the emerging adult graduating student. Metaphorically, this coming of age of emerging adult graduating students is change - maturity of one's mind, body and emotion, welcoming adaptability amidst difficulties and achieving psychological resilience in adulthood.
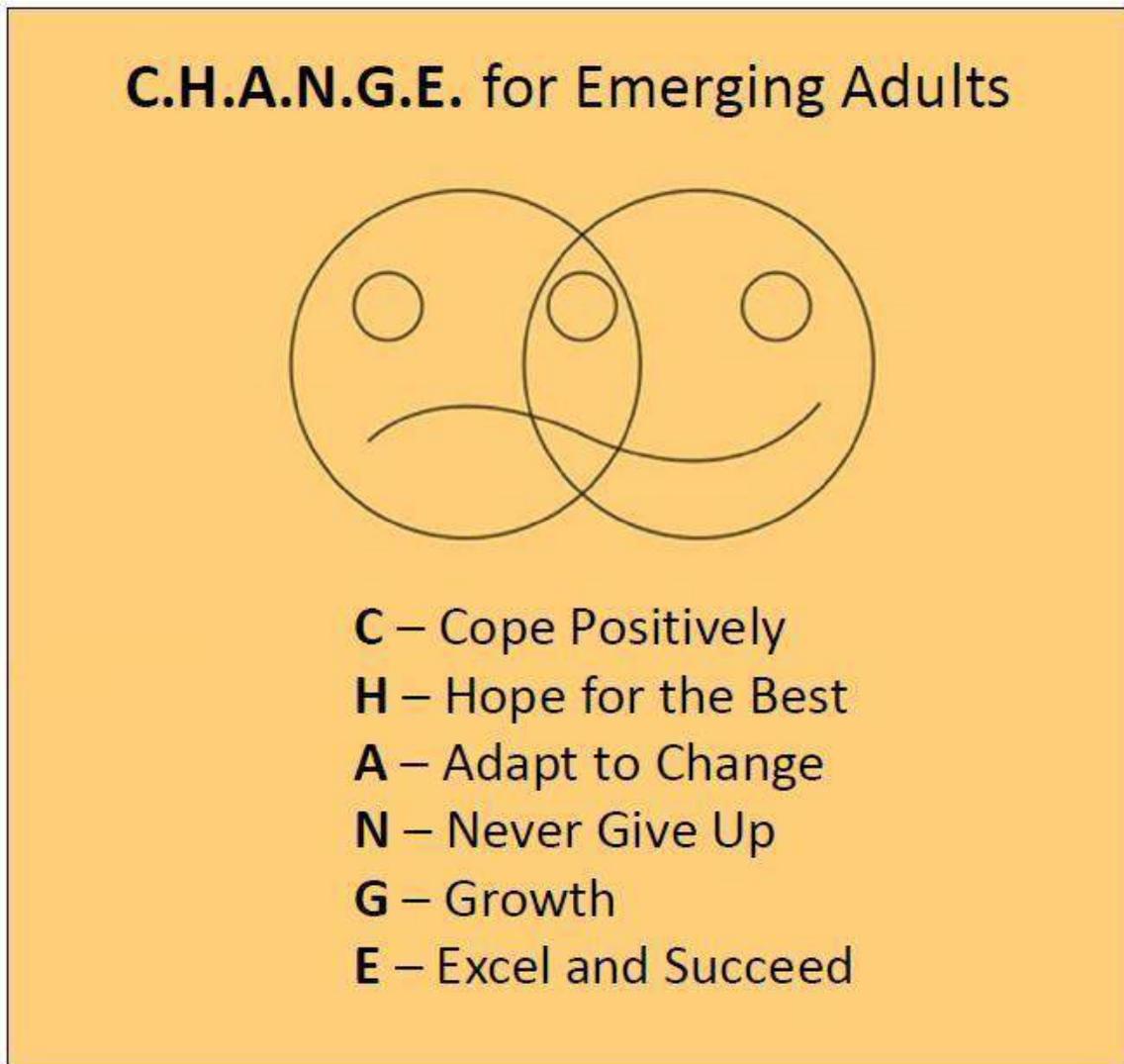
Figure 2: Visual Representation of the Essence of the Lived Experiences of the Emerging Adult Graduating Students

VI. DISCUSSION

Bracing the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic: Nobody is Spared

Exiting from adolescence and entering adulthood is crucial for emerging adults because it will become the foundation of their adult life. Adding more to this crucial period are the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants braced the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic in the following areas: financial, emotional, online classes, and OJT. The challenges are a strong foundation for mature adults.

The coronavirus pandemic has taken an even deeper financial toll on colleges and universities than expected (Murakami, 2020). Similarly, college students in the United States experienced anxiety/depression and financial instability (Jones et al., 2021). The pandemic created job loss for students and their families (Aucejo et al., 2021). Their families undoubtedly heightened students' financial hardship, making it even more challenging to meet their basic needs, let alone pay their college tuition. The pandemic has also challenged the finances of college students due to a lack of resources to meet the demands of the new learning modality and in buying a quota for internet load (Perante, 2021; Rotas, and Cahapay, 2020).

The emotional and psychological setbacks brought about by the current crisis are evident in stories of these emerging adult graduating college students. Forced adjustment to the new normal while in hindsight fearing one's health made the transition to adulthood seem all of sudden and instantly, not allowing oneself to digest and process their experiences, allowing growth to come naturally. Most college students in SUC have low EQ (Emotional Quotient), making them more susceptible to depression (Alayon, 2020), which was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. They became emotionally unstable, depressed, stressed out, and hopeless when they didn't have control of the situation and were forced to adjust and adapt to the new normal.

The COVID-19 pandemic affects the students' psychological, social, and academic functioning (Fura & Negash, 2020). Due to the social distancing, isolation, and distance learning, the mental health of these graduating students have been negatively affected, which has decreased their academic performance (Cao et al., 2020; Son et al., 2020). They also worry about their future career prospects and lament that the restrictions imposed by the lockdowns have disrupted their career plan (Cleofas, 2020).

Online classes seemed to serve less purpose for most of these emerging adult graduating college students. Most of them agreed that there was less learning, unlimited distractions, limited social interactions, problems with the internet connection, no space at home for this kind of learning and geographical locations. They felt that online education could not compensate for the absence of face-to-face classes. Most of them acknowledged the effort of the teachers to give their best during online courses. While these emerging adult graduating students have eventually adapted to online classes, they will not recommend online classes for the next school year.

Both professors and students found online learning unattractive during the pandemic compared to ordinary learning, and professors needed to provide more time in teaching (Elfirdoussi, 2020). Online classes were also insufficient in making graduating students proficient (Cleofas, 2020). Students know the importance of real-world learning experiences and training in their respective fields to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge.

These graduating college students were supposed to be having their on-the-job training. Most of them were looking forward to it. Their OJT is usually a time for excitement, friends, the outdoors, and career exploration. The lockdowns delayed their graduation and with it the planned celebration. Internships in the field and abroad due to the threat of the new coronavirus were suspended by CHED (Mendoza, 2021).

The cancellation of their OJT made them feel unprepared, unready, unmotivated, and not excited after graduating. They thought that the COVID-19 pandemic deprived them of the opportunities to hone and practice their skills and knowledge to equip them better when they work. Suspension of OJT created a share of worry about future career prospects to these graduating students (Cleofas, 2020). They felt that online classes were not sufficient to build their competence.

Coping with the COVID-19 Pandemic: Buffering against Distress

These graduating students eventually learned to cope and adapt to online learning. Among the four kinds of adaptation: the overwhelmed, the surrenderers, the maintainers, and the adapters, adapters appreciated the level of autonomy and were better able to self- regulate their learning, investing more time and effort in their self-study (Biwer et al., 2021). In a time of independent learning, self-regulation is a must.

College students cope through stress (Barot et al. 2021). Managing one's time and scheduling one's activities seemed fine for these graduating college students. Prioritizing tasks are necessary as part of coping in online classes. Internal factors such as time management and difficulty focusing while learning online for a more extended period are challenges of distance learning (Amir et al., 2020). Other Filipino college students faced the challenges of online learning through interaction

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and engagement, determination and commitment, prioritization and time management, communication and discernment, and relaxation and enjoyment (Cordero et al., 2021).

Compliance of requirements was still necessary to pass the course for online classes. These graduating students thought that teachers would consider their predicaments due to the pandemic. Through learning on their own, they experienced genuine independent and individual learning, and viewed this mode of education as a means to comply and to cope with the set standards given the available measures and resources (Delute & Ada, 2021).

Self-discipline was a significant factor in overcoming the challenges of distance education, plus the support of the faculty through a compassionate and flexible pedagogy (Gelles et al., 2021). Students' satisfaction with the e-learning experience is influenced by e-learning self-efficacy (Aldhahi et al., 2021). Self-efficacy and academic motivation of these graduating college students remained high, thus increasing their commitment to finishing their studies (Yapo, et al., 2021).

These students adapted strategies that helped maintain their hope to move forward and continue despite the challenges and limitations brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Their coping strategies involved: identifying study place and time, establishing time management plan, creating linkages with needed resources, seeking support from others, and adapting relaxation techniques such as calming activities and prayer (Arslan &Yıldırım, 2021; Salman et al., 2021; Rotas & Cahapay, 2020).

Finding Meaning during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Benefit Finding Helps

These emerging adult graduating students tried to find personal meaning to their experiences to move forward from these difficult situations. One of the easiest ways to move forward during a crisis is to find personal meaning from it. Benefit finding is an essential coping strategy during the pandemic among these graduating students

(August & Dapkewics, 2020). Meaning in life promotes complete mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic (Arslan et al., 2020). Meaning in life is also related to increasing cultivation of happiness and reduced loneliness for college students (Datu & Fincham, 2021).

Emerging adults became self-motivated and committed to their studies (Rahiem 2020; Rotas & Cahapay, 2020; Branquinho et al., 2020). Self-regulation and self- management proved to be effective for these emerging adults in facing the crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has taught them to be self-regulated and creative by designing coping strategies to deal with stress and anxiety (Chandra, 2020). These graduating students coped with the stress of remote learning by finding ways to adapt to the present crisis like relaxation to relieve them from muscle tension, reading books to keep their minds busy, and taking time to talk to friends and family (Baloran 2020).

These graduating students taught themselves to be optimistic even if uncertainties abound. To be optimistic amidst the crisis made them stronger, and they looked forward to graduating.

Cognitive restructuring helped these graduating students change their negative beliefs about their situations, which allowed them to adapt while finishing school (Tariq et al., 2020). This explains how COVID-19 stress is related to subjective well-being (Arslan & Genc, 2021). They reported positive outcomes from these challenging experiences (Cleofas, 2020).

C.H.A.N.G.E.: Coming of Age of Emerging Adults During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Coming of age is a challenging process toward psychological resilience and maturity essential in adulthood. The challenges experienced by these emerging adult graduating students at a time of the COVID-19 pandemic is an excellent foundation as they move forward into adulthood.

While adapting to a new educational platform brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, these emerging adult college students learn to overcome their struggles. They chose to continue schooling and not give up amidst the difficulties

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of distance learning. These graduating college students see a silver lining from the COVID-19 pandemic and find a new meaning in their lives as they transition to mature persons. Their experiences resulted in the synthesis of a model signifying the coming of age of emerging adults dealing with a crisis, the C.H.A.N.G.E. Model for Emerging Adults: "C" is for cope positively; "H" is for hope for the best; "A" is for adapt to change; "N" is for never give up; "G" is for growth; "E" is for excel and succeed.

Man is capable of changing the world for the better if possible, and of changing himself for the better if necessary.

Victor E. Frankl

VII. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

7.1 Summary of Findings

Though the experiences of emerging adult graduating students may differ from each other, there are similarities in their experiences of distance learning through online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. There are three main themes based on the six common themes that emerged from the lived experiences of the emerging adult graduating students. The main themes are: bracing the impact of COVID-19 pandemic; coping with the COVID-19 pandemic; and finding meaning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The common themes are: diverse consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic; psychological challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic; difficulty of online classes; and inadequate on-the-job training (OJT).

7.2 Conclusion

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has a profound effect on emerging adult graduating college students as they transition into young adulthood. Usual activities like going to school every day, experiencing on-the-job training, preparing for future careers were suspended and modified to mitigate the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic on their academics. Students felt unprepared to graduate from college

due to suspension of activities that equip them as they venture into the world or work.

One of the challenges in transitioning to online learning is maintaining student productivity and engagement. As these graduating students adapt to the new normal, it is imperative that educational institutions provide support services tailored to their needs. A collaborative approach, engaging the different service providers within an educational institution such as student affairs, guidance services, and other networks, is needed to help empower these graduating college students.

Despite their fears and frustration, the COVID-19 pandemic taught these graduating students to cope, reflect, and appreciate life. The journey toward adulthood may be challenging and dreadful due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the crisis of development is resolved, these graduating students develop resilience, grit, and adaptability resulting into more successful emerging adults.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are suggested.

COVID-19 is considered as the ultimate disruptor and the educational industry has not been spared. This resulted in a major shift from in-person learning to online learning. Ability to adapt to change is crucial in the success of graduating college students as they will enter into the world of work that has already become more digitally-based. College students should avail of services given by trained guidance counselors in social and emotional learning in order to successfully hurdle the developmental tasks they will face as they transition from emerging adulthood to young adulthood ready to enter the world of work.

The limitation of this study is using a small sample. It is recommended that future researchers recruit a more diverse sample. It is also recommended that social and emotional learning activities be integrated in course subjects and in guidance programs to strengthen the

adaptability of college students. Future research must be conducted to determine the effect of mental health and psychosocial support on those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic as the world prepares for a new normal after the pandemic.

Proposed Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Program for College Students

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process by which people develop the knowledge, self-awareness and personal well-being to strengthen the emotional competencies that help them succeed (Kampen, 2021). According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), SEL helps people understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, have empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Dymnick, et al., 2013).

When SEL is provided, students have good social emotional skills, improved academic performance, and better social outcomes. It provides the building blocks for life-long learning and important interpersonal skills; the ability for collaboration, the capacity to empathize, and communicate effectively with others (Kampen, 2021).

IX. RATIONALE

College students with strong social and emotional skills cope better with challenges they encounter and benefit academically, professionally, and socially. From effective problem-solving to self-discipline, from impulse control to emotion management and more, SEL provides a foundation for positive, long-term effects on college students. Students thrive. Schools win. Work-places benefit. Society strengthens. These are the results of social and emotional learning.

Social and emotional learning help set college students for success through fostering relationship building and school connectedness, improving students' mental health, involving community outreach, and creating foundation for skills necessary for the workforce (Page, 2019). Social and emotional learning create the foundation for skills such as critical thinking,

adaptability, and interpersonal communication skills that are essential in setting college students up for success.

Most college students have yet to develop the capacity and strategies to handle stressors and emotions. Integrating SEL practices that promote positive mental health strengthens resilience in college students, which improve academic outcomes.

This social and emotional learning (SEL) program entitled C.H.A.N.G.E.: Social and Emotional Learning for College Students was patterned from Gallagher and Stocker SEL Manual (2018) and the Department of Education (DepEd) Most Essential Learning Competencies (2020). The C.H.A.N.G.E. program engages students and teachers in a collaborative learning and in a fun way at the same time injecting values for the promotion of social emotional skills of the students.

Figure 3: C.H.A.N.G.E.: Social and Emotional Learning for College Students

Area	Objective	Activity
C: Cope Positively Title of SEL Activity: *Coping Strategies Menu*	By the end of the session, students will be able to identity and reflect their coping strategies.	Learning Task 1: Let's Try This! 1. Using the coping strategies list, choose at least 3 strategies that best described what you practice. (You can write coping strategies that are not listed here). 2. Think of the situations that you used these strategies. 3. Identify the outcome of these strategies. Learning Task 2: Let's Process This! 1. How did you feel while doing the activity? 2. Which coping strategy worked well for you Why? 3. How these strategies helped achieve your goal? 4. What lesson have you learned from this activity? Learning Task 3: Let's Synthesize. Stress is a part of life. What matters is how we deal with it — or in other words, our coping mechanisms. Coping mechanisms are the strategies /techniques people use to deal with painful emotions and adjust to stressful life events. Learning Task 4: Let's Evaluate. Write a reflection about your coping strategy during the first cycle of virtual classes. Limit your answer to 100 to 150 words only.
Area	**Objective**	**Activity**
H: Hope for the Best Title of SEL Activity: *Finding Silver Lining*	By the end of the session, the students will choose to look on the bright side even when things go wrong.	Learning Task 1: Let's Try This! 1. List five things that make you feel like your life is enjoyable, enriching, and/or worthwhile at this moment. 2. Think about the most recent time when something didn't go your way, or when you felt frustrated, irritated, or upset (only one answer). 3. In a few sentences, briefly describe the situation in writing (refer to question number 2). 4. List three things that can help you see the bright side of this situation. For example, perhaps you missed your bus this morning. *Three ways to look on the bright side of this situation might be:* a. Even though you missed the bus, you got some good exercise when you were running to catch it. b. You're fortunate to live in a city where there was another bus just 10 minutes later, or where buses run reliably at all. c. Ten years from now, you likely won't remember what happened this morning. Learning Task 2: Let's Process This! 1. What were you thinking while doing the activity? 2. What difficulty did you encounter during the activity? Why? 3. How do you feel while answering number I and 2 questions? Explain. 4. What positive take away of this activity?

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Area	Objective	Activity
		Learning Task 3: Let's Synthesize.
		Most of us ruminate on things that have gone wrong in our lives – a mistake we made at home, a day that didn't go as planned. It can sometimes seem like our lives are filled with these mishaps and disappointments. Focusing on them too much, however, can cast a pall over our lives and even be associated with depressive thinking.
		Learning Task 4: Let's Evaluate.
		Assignment after the session: Complete Steps 1 through 4 on five consecutive days. Your five positive things from Step 1 do not have to change each day. However, you should use a different situation for Step 2 each day.

Area	Objective	Activity

A: Adapt to Change
 	
Title of SEL Activity: *Making Stress Your "Friend"*
	By the end of the session the students will be able to assess their framing of a stressor (and how they interpret their body's response to it) to be more productive for their well-being and flexibility.	Learning Task 1: Let's Try This!
		1. Watch the TED talk by Dr. Kelly McGonigal (about 15 minutes).
		2. Think about an event that may be occurring in the near future (next couple of weeks) that you are currently feeling 'stressed' by. In a few sentences, briefly describe this stressor.
		3. Think about yourself in this particular event. How might you be feeling?
		4. As you think about this stressor, do you think of it as a 'threat' or as a 'challenge' (as described in the material above).
		a. If you view it as a threat: Let's try to re-frame this. Describe, in a few sentences, times when you have successfully met the demands of a stressor in your life. Look – you've met big challenges before!
		   • Second, are there resources or internal abilities that you haven't currently taken advantage of that you could? Describe those. Make a plan to use them.
		b. If you view it as a challenge: Let's try to understand this. Describe in a few sentences, times when you have successfully met the demands of a stressor in your life. Look – you've met big challenges before!
		   • Second, what resources or internal abilities were you able to use to succeed in those stressful events? Describe those. How could you use them in this current situation?
		Learning Task 2: Let's Process This!
		1. How do you feel while doing the activity?
		2. What were your thoughts while thinking of your stressor?
		3. What did you learn from yourself in this activity?
		4. What positives can you take away from the activity?
		Learning Task 3: Let's Synthesize.
		If you believe that you have the resources or ability to

Area	Objective	Activity
		meet the demands of the stressor, then you are more likely to view it as a "challenge" and are more able to interpret it as an opportunity for growth and accomplishment. Learning Task 4: Let's Evaluate. After you complete this activity, you will submit the writings that you completed for Steps 2 through 4.

Area	Objective	Activity
N: Never Give Up Title of SEL Activity: *Use Your Strength*	By the end of the session the students will be able to identify one of their personal strengths – a positive trait that contributes to their character, such as kindness or perseverance – and consider how they could use it in a new and different way.	Learning Task 1: Let's Try This! 1. Take a moment to think about one of your personal strengths – for instance, creativity, perseverance, kindness, modesty, or curiosity. Consider how you could use this strength today in a new and different way. For example, if you choose the personal strength of perseverance, you might make a list of tasks that you have found challenging recently, then try to tackle each one of them. Or if you choose curiosity, you might attempt an activity that you've never tried before. 2. Describe in writing the personal strength that you recently use. 3. Write in detail about what you did, how you felt, and what you learned from the experience. Learning Task 2: Let's Process This! 1. How did you feel during the activity? 2. Do you have difficulty thinking about your personal strengths? Why? Why not? 3. What did you learn from this activity? 4. How can you apply what you learned from this activity in your life? Learning Task 3: Let's Synthesize. Reflecting on these strengths can help remind people that they do have important positive qualities, and this reminder can build confidence and self-esteem – and, in turn, increase happiness. Learning Task 4: Let's Evaluate. After you complete this activity, you will submit the reflection that you wrote as part of Step 4.
G: Growth Title of SEL Activity: *Meaningful Photos*	By the end of the session the student will be able to recognize and appreciate sources of meaning through photography	Learning Task 1: Let's Try This! 1. In your cell phone, name 3 photographs of things that make your life feel meaningful or full of purpose. These can be people, places, objects, or pets. (Option 2 if no available personal cell phone or gadget: Write 5 personal photographs that make your life more meaningful). 2. Take time to look at and reflect on each one. For each photo, write down a response to the following question: "What does this photo represent, and why is it
	which can help make them more tangible and serve as a reminder of what matters most to them, allowing the self to grow in the process.	meaningful? Learning Task 2: Let's Process This! 1. What were you thinking while doing the activity? 2. What did you find out from yourself in this activity? 3. What did you notice from your answers? 4. Lessons from this activity. Learning Task 3: Let's Synthesize. To grow is to reflect on the greater meaning of our everyday experiences. Learning Task 4: Let's Evaluate. After you complete this activity, you will submit a Word document that contains your five photographs and responses via g- classroom per GECSEL teacher.
Area	Objective	Activity

E: Excel and Succeed Title of SEL Activity: *Goal Visualization*	By the end of the session the students will be able to describe a goal and to visualize the steps they will take to achieve it.	Learning Task 1: Let's Try This! 1. Identify one goal that you would like to achieve this semester in your GECMATH class and briefly describe it in writing. Make sure that this goal is realistic (e.g., "complete and turn in all of the homework assignments on time" rather than "get 100% on all of the homework assignments") and will actually help you to succeed in the course (e.g., "participate meaningfully in class by asking at least one question" rather than "staying awake in class"). 2. To help you visualize how you will go about accomplishing this goal, describe in writing the steps that you will take to get there. For example, if your goal is to complete and turn in all of the homework assignments on time, these are the steps that you might take to achieve it: a. schedule one hour every Monday and Wednesday that you will devote to GECMATH homework; b. turn off your cell phone/other distractors; c. put on some comfortable clothes; d. turn on some upbeat music; e. break down the job into sub-tasks: skim the chapter for a refresher; look over notes from class; carefully read the homework assignment instructions; and so on; and f. remind yourself that it's ok if you don't do everything perfectly or don't understand everything completely. Learning Task 2: Let's Process This! 1. What were you thinking while doing the activity? 2. What did you find out from yourself in this activity? 3. What did you notice from your answers? 4. Lessons from this activity. Learning Task 3: Let's Synthesize. When you believe that you will be successful at something, it encourages you to work harder toward achieving that goal—and this greater effort increases the
		chance that you will actually succeed. Plus, the more you succeed, the more confident you will be about future goals. Learning Task 4: Let's Evaluate. After you complete this activity, you will submit your three goals (from step 1) and the steps you decided you need to take to complete each goal (from step 2).

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