

Lived Experiences of PWD Students in a State University in the Philippines during COVID-19 Pandemic towards Policy Enhancement

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ABSTRACT:

There was a change in the technique and form of instruction as a result of the pandemic, which produced difficulties, particularly for PWD students. They were already struggling prior to the pandemic, and things are getting significantly worse now because most of them were unprepared for this catastrophe. The purpose of the study was to assess the impact of the pandemic on the lived experiences of PWD students as a basis in enhancing policy using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Action Research (AR). The researcher used the purposive sampling technique. The respondents of the study were the PWD students of a certain college where they are enrolled and were selected based on the criteria set by the researcher. The researcher made interview guide questions that were validated by experts and pilot tested to non-respondents. The respondents were interviewed in person following IATF protocols to gather answers to the questions of this study. The thematic analysis was utilized in treating the data. Based on the findings, the PWD students experienced academic and psychological stress. The environmental, social, and technological challenges were encountered by PWD students in online learning, and to overcome these challenges, they used their self-determination, perseverance, self-directive and positive outlook rooted in the support given by parents and friends. Specialized programs and, a safe and PWD-friendly environment are among the suggested policies that came from the participants. Using the findings, the researcher formulated proposed policy interventions to address the negative experiences and challenges encountered by PWD students.

Keywords: Lived Experiences, PWD Students, Policy Enhancement, Inclusive Education.

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1. Introduction

Persons with Disabilities (PWD) were among the most neglected members of society as a result of

the COVID-19 pandemic. They were impacted by the abrupt changes in the educational landscape, which occurred at a time when most

schools were not prepared to accommodate PWD students. There may be existing policies that are not intended for online or flexible learning schemes, as well as more teachers who lack training in providing learning materials for students with special needs, some who lack family support and healthcare services, and some parents who have managed to support their children in order to survive during this pandemic.

These are the unexpected and unintended consequences that have impacted the lives of PWD students.

There have been studies on PWD students, but few have looked into their actual experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, interventions, and PWD involvement in revising policy to fully ensure PWD education accessibility.

According to United Nations Population Fund (2020), even under normal circumstances, persons with disabilities face discrimination, high rates of gender-based violence, and exclusion from services and decision-making. Today, as the COVID-19 pandemic spreads around the world, the vulnerabilities and barriers faced by people with disabilities are only growing. "In times of crisis, like COVID-19, persons with disabilities face more barriers to accessing information, education and services and are often overlooked in emergency response," said Leyla Sharafi, UNFPA's gender adviser.

Globally, 1 in 7 people are living with a disability – roughly 1 billion people. Yet their needs are too often overlooked. In a time of pandemic, policymakers must consider these needs, and they must make efforts to involve disabled persons' organizations and networks in decision-making.

UNESCO joined its partners in the Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network to raise awareness on the urgent need to put in place strategies and measures to mitigate the impact of school closures on learners with disabilities.

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a disproportionate impact on learners with disabilities who were already experiencing social and educational disadvantage. As many as half of the estimated 65 million primary and lower

secondary-school age children with disabilities in developing countries were already out of school before COVID-19 according to GLAD.

As recently noted by the UN Sustainable Development Group (2020), Learners with disabilities are also least likely to benefit from distance learning solutions, as recently noted in a policy brief on 'Persons with Disabilities and COVID-19'.

With COVID-related school closures, many countries have turned to online instruction to ensure continuity of learning. However, the focus on online learning means that many learners with disabilities are left behind. This is especially the case for girls with disabilities who are among the most marginalized due to social and gender norms and bias around both disability and gender.

Ensuring that all learners with disabilities continue to receive quality education requires urgent actions that consider their specific needs for accessible, adapted and individualized learning plans. Blended approaches combining lower tech or no tech solutions, captioning and sign-language options, and including integrating remedial classes can better support those who have been excluded from home-based learning and ensure that social and emotional needs are met.

The general statement issued by GLAD members, of which UNESCO is a member, recommends five key principles and calls for a greater mobilization to ensure that the right to education of learners with disabilities is ensured. Principles include considerations to include all learners' needs into COVID-19 responses and recognize the existing inequality in access for persons with disabilities. They also call for stronger support to families, educators and curriculum developers.

At its peak, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted, and in places interrupted, the education of 1.5 billion learners around the world. UNESCO, through its Global Education Coalition, calls on the international community to

ensure continuity of learning, inclusion and equity for all learners.

According to the World Health Organization's (WHO) World Report 2021, some key facts include: over 1 billion people live with some form of disability, and the number is rapidly increasing due to trends and increases in chronic health conditions, among other causes. During the COVID-19 pandemic, people with disabilities are disproportionately affected.

In the Philippines, based on Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) 2010 Census of Population and housing, of the 92.1 million household population there were approximately 1.44 million people, or 1.57 percent of the population, who have a disability.

The researcher was interested in learning more about the genuine status of individuals with disabilities in this pandemic, as they were previously struggling, and how they are faring now, as well as how the findings of this study can assist people with disabilities.

PWD students impacted their lives negatively as mentioned in the study of Tus, Jhoselle, et.al (2021), participants experienced the occurrence of online learning, most of the participants often experienced difficulties communicating and addressing their specific needs to instructions and classmates. PWDs still experienced social exclusion, and adjustment problems during the onset of the online class. In congruence, it was also mentioned by McKinney, V. & Amosun, S.L., (2020) in understanding of the impact of the narrated experiences of participants: motivated by the human desire to belong, inaccessible environments generated a range of negative emotions and in some cases, a severe decline in well-being. Participants also experience frustrations with having to deal with inaccessible environments and other people's assumptions about disability. They also felt that their disability rights were being violated and become deeply discouraged by inadequate and inappropriate facilities. In contrary, Murders (2017) stated that all participants described their online learning experience as a good learning option, although

several issues were highlighted, the results showed that most participants were overall satisfied with their online educational experiences.

Previous research has found a positive and negative impact on the experiences of PWD students; however, this may vary depending on the type of disability and the circumstances prior to and during the pandemic. It also revealed that the majority of the participants were subjected to social exclusions, which had an emotional impact on them. In relation to the current study, similar student level respondents were used, but they came from a skill-based course and in the context of a state university.

As regard to previous studies about the challenges encountered by PWD students, Tus, et.al, (2021) made mentioned that the respondents challenge commonly are limitations of assistive technologies and internet connection, and the sudden changes in the environment also caused most of the participants to struggle socially and financially. Majority of the participants had feelings of isolation and loneliness as impacted by their mental well-being, while few also had struggles caused by people's views and treatment. Also, similar observations by McKinney and Amosun (2020), stated that the participants found it cumbersome and exhausting when dealing with people who were not trained or used to dealing with disability and getting the assistance they needed was a challenge in itself. Participants felt they had been thrust into a humiliating position by the inaccessible environment, and all focus and unwanted attention was put on their disability. The findings of Murders (2017) is also congruent to the first two cited studies that no doubt, students with learning disabilities may find themselves socially isolated and/or less assured, and this may be even more pronounced for them when participating in online learning. Students with learning disabilities in online degree courses face a variety of challenges ranging from time management, accessing accommodations, communicating effectively with peers and instructors, to feeling unsure of the material on examinations.

Most of the participants in the cited studies faced technological, social, and financial challenges, such as assistive technologies, internet connections, isolation, treatment, humiliation, and unwanted attention, as well as feelings of insecurity, which are all themes explored in the current study, as well as environmental and individual challenges.

On the part of PWD students coping mechanisms/support system, Tus, et.al, (2021) mentioned that some of the students with disabilities place an emphasis that one's support system also serves as an inspiration to strive and continue life. Most of the participants persevere and have a sense of responsibility to family or to the community, positive mindset, positive thinking or being optimistic is only a solution that makes them survive. McKinney and Amosun, (2020), stated in their study that their participants are driven with desire to take part and be independent, and through this process develop their sense of belonging and dignity within society. They also mentioned that all participants expressed a sense of commitment to help improve accessibility. Similarly, Murders (2017), that participants necessitate self-discipline, motivation, initiative, and technical skills—derivatives of independence and self-confidence—to succeed in online learning, he also added that students with learning disabilities feel more independent and confident with the structure and organization of online courses.

Success in online classes is determined by one's personal motivation and desire to act, as well as the support of family and friends, as well as instructor and school assistance, according to the findings of past studies. Likewise, this study assessed the PWD students coping strategies and the support system they have at home and in an online class.

Experiences, challenges and coping mechanisms/support system are the commonality assessed by the previous studies, in parallel to the current study, the construct was similar with an additional construct on the perception of PWD students on what policy or guidelines would they suggest to help PWD

students. The construct was added primarily in accordance with the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2018), on the involvement of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in decision-making processes, the delegation was asked to explain the current mechanisms in place and to inform on a plan to meaningfully involve them in the process of making and amending laws; defining and adopting accessibility standards; and in the design of the disability assessment process and mechanism.

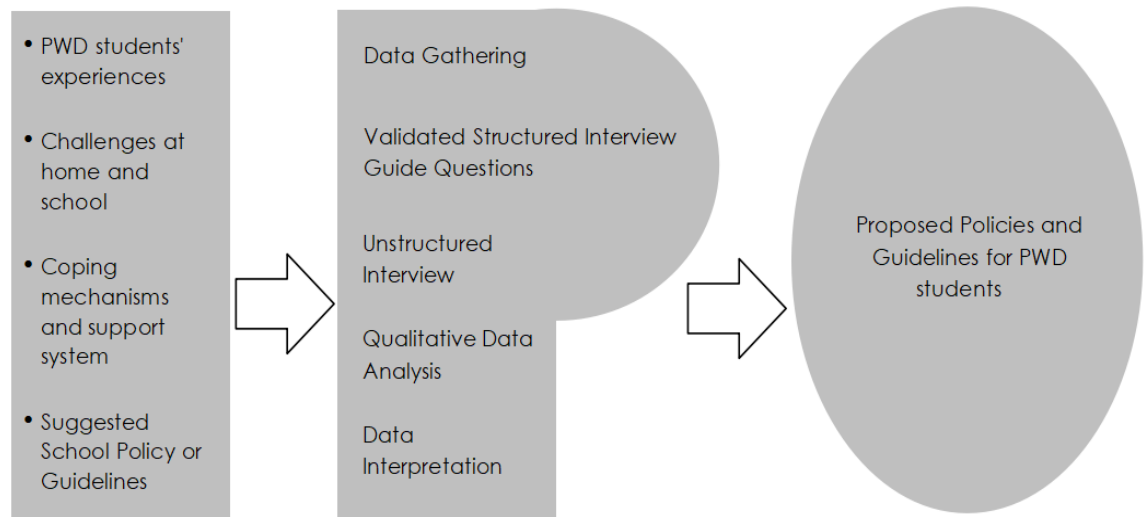
In general, previous studies revealed a variety of experiences by PWD respondents, including challenges they faced and how they overcame to survive in an online learning environment, but few of them looked into policy enhancement that involves PWD students in school decision-making to better serve them in exercising inclusive education.

Inclusive education is defined in many professional and popular contexts as the simple placement of students with specialized needs in mainstream programs alongside individuals who are not disabled. It focuses on students with disabilities and every student; it also focuses on educational policies and organization (Artiles, Dorn, and Christensen, 2006, Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021). What inclusive education entails is different and diverse students learning side by side in the same classroom, but how do PWD students cope now in this time of pandemic? Their actual experiences are critical building blocks in determining the true scenario of what is happening and how COVID-19 affected them in various aspects of their lives. This theory will serve as a guide in developing an intervention to formulate policies and programs for students with special needs.

The Input-Process-Output Framework was used for this study (see Figure1). The Input included the PWD students' experiences, challenges encountered at home and school, their coping mechanisms and support system they received, and their suggested school policy or guidelines to help them in an online learning environment; The Process presented the data gathering procedure

through validated structured interview guide with open-ended questions and unstructured interviews which elicited the participants own perspectives about their experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms/support system and suggested policies, and qualitative data analysis

followed through interpretation. The last was the Output which leads to a framework that will help school administrators to craft or create policies and guidelines/programs intended for PWD students. Figure 1 shows the schematic diagram of the study.



The study assessed the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the lived experiences of PWD students of Pampanga State University, Philippines. The findings of this study will be utilized to propose intervention on policy enhancement intended to students with special needs.

The following questions were addressed by this study: (1) how are the experiences of PWD students in this time of Pandemic; (2) what are the challenges being encountered by PWD students at home and school during the pandemic; (3) What are the coping mechanisms/support system done by the PWD students, family and friends to overcome the difficulties; (4) what possible policies and guidelines may be proposed/revised to support the PWD students during online classes or flexible learning?

The researcher believed that the proposed policies and guidelines would be beneficial to a larger community in the Philippines. For PWD students, it provides assistance through policy enhancement interventions and understand the implications of online learning for students with

special needs before enrolling. For teachers, gives them a better knowledge of the real-life situation that PWD students and prepares to interact with them online through adequate training and serves as an instrument in improving the curriculum. For parents, helps them understand their role in their children's performance in online classes, based on the identified support system at home and coping mechanisms of PWD students. For PWDs' peers/classmates, it opens the eyes of PWD students' classmates/peers to the effects of their conversations or interactions in an online learning environment and helps to craft a student development program centered on the role of students in inclusive education. For PWD unit coordinator, it provides guideline for creating a separate students' manual for PWD students. For school administrators, the study's findings could be used to reduce the difficulties faced by PWD students by adapting the research proposal, and it could be used to design an institutional intervention or policy enhancement for an equitable, accessible and inclusive education. For future researchers, the findings of this study could be used to delve deeper into the specific lived experiences and resiliency of students with

each type of disability. As a result, the outcome will truly address each specific need based on disability through interventions and full program implementation.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research method. Specifically, it is a combination of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Action Research (AR). IPA is a qualitative approach that aims to provide detailed examinations of personal lived experience and explicate an underlying structure in these accounts (Smith et al. 2009, Smith and Dunworth, 2003). Action research aims to help instructional designers to improve their practice. It is used when conditions require versatility, the participation of people in the study, or change must occur rapidly or holistically, rather than in contrived, experimental samples since its primary emphasis is on solving real problems. (O'Brien, R.,2001). This process is the co-generation of insight described in this paper from setting the research agenda, undertaking the research through to implementation of policy action (Greenwood and Levin, 2007). Interpretive phenomenology and community-based participatory research (CBPR) are often viewed as originating from different paradigms and not suited to be connected in an analytic approach. However, merging interpretive phenomenology and CBPR can provide an in-depth view of a community's experiences (Bush et al. 2019). The approaches assessed the lived experiences of PWD students, challenges, and coping mechanisms during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, this initial phase revealed that the impact using a structured

interview. Through AR, the result of this assessment will be utilized as input in formulating policy to help students with special needs minimize their challenges in an online or flexible learning scheme.

2.2 Respondents and Sampling Technique

The research population used were the PWD college students of Pampanga State University currently enrolled in the Program Bachelor of Science in Industrial Technology of the College of Industrial Technology during the 1st semester, S.Y. 2021 - 2022. The purposive sampling technique was used to identify the participants. According to Andrade (2020), a purposive sample is one whose characteristics are defined for a purpose that is relevant to the study.

According to the United Nations definition of PWD, the term "persons with disabilities" refers to all people with disabilities, including those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that, when combined with various behavioral and environmental barriers, prevent them from participating fully and effectively in society on an equal basis with others.

Selection survey form was made and administered through the collaborative Google classrooms of the college to gather pool of respondents, it was discovered that out of forty four (44) PWD students who answered the online survey form, only five (5) who qualified from the criteria set by the researcher: 1.) must have official PWD ID issued by the DSWD, and 2.) must be willing to participate in the research as an interviewee, and 3.) must have parent consent. The final respondents interviewed were four (4) and the following table shows their profile.

Student	Disability Category	Male	Female	Age	Program	Year Level
R1	Orthopedic Disability		✓	23	BSIT	4 th Yr.
R2	Communication Disability	✓		20	BSIT	3 rd Yr.
R3	Orthopedic Disability		✓	20	BSIT	2 nd Yr.
R4	Orthopedic Disability	✓		21	BSIT	3 rd Yr.

The researcher chose PWD students since the beginning of the pandemic they are one of the vulnerable and unheard members of society. Jesus, T. S., et al., (2020) mentioned that children and youths with special education needs may have important restrictions in the in-person participation in school and other (eg, therapeutic) activities, restricted by lockdown measures. Virtual schooling or therapy may be demanding, unpractical, or less effective for many (eg, requiring care giving assistance, skills in communication and information technologies from the caregivers or the children, digital devices and internet access, performed without tactile or bodily sensation such as that provided by a hands-on therapeutic input at the backdrop of children with sensory processing issues). Turk, M. A., & McDermott, S., (2020) stated that to better grasp the magnitude of the challenge for people with disability, information about global antigen and antibody testing within different residential settings and among a few disability subgroups is needed. We call upon our authors and readership to consider research approaches to evaluate the ongoing pandemic and to contribute to the understanding of the effect of Covid-19 on people with disability.

The college PWD students were chosen because they can decide and comprehend with written, verbal and/or nonverbal communication. Conley (2007) proposed that successful academic achievement in college includes knowledge of course content, writing skills, study skills, critical thinking, and contextual skills such as knowledge of college policies and expectations.

Gender equality was applied also in determining the 4 respondents, a 50:50 ratio was used in determining the respondents. Barca, et al., (2021) mentioned that gender and disability exacerbate potential risks of exclusion from social protection programs. However, information systems that pay explicit attention to reducing and removing these barriers can offer significant opportunities to promote inclusion as well as enabling a more tailored response to the needs of women and girls, and persons with disabilities.

The target sample size was small but the researcher achieved data adequacy with the four respondents. According to Vasileiou, K. (2018), the IPA articles found in the BJHP were the only instances where 'small' sample size was advocated and 'large' sample size was problematic and defended. These IPA studies illustrate that the characterization of sample size sufficiency can be a function of researchers' theoretical and epistemological commitments rather than the result of an 'objective' sample size assessment.

Pampanga State University was the selected locale of the study because of its diversity. The university is situated at Cabambangan, Bacolor, Pampanga, Philippines, a Chartered State University and a non-sectarian institution of higher learning. One of the mandates of an institution of higher learning is to provide relevant quality education to its clientele not only in the provinces of Pampanga but also to its neighboring provinces in Region III. Pampanga State University accepts PWD students and it has an office serving solo parents and persons with disabilities.

2.3 Instrument

Data was collected using combined validated researcher-made structured interview questions (open-ended questionnaires) in 3 languages: English, Filipino, and Capampangan with supplementation of unstructured interview questions. This type of interview is open and flexible, with the content, order, and formulation of the questions depending on the researchers who use an interview guide. The interview questions were subjected to face and content validation by 4 experts, comprised by one (1) psychometrician, (1) English grammarian, two (2) Filipino linguistics and one (1) Capampangan linguistic. The researcher modified the interview questions based on the suggestions made by the expert validators and was pilot tested to non-respondents PWD students. The revised questionnaires were crafted before the utilization.

Using the criteria developed for evaluating survey questionnaire by Carter V. Good and Douglas B.

Scates, a jury of experts evaluated the self-made questionnaire instruments specifically for this study. In the following Table 2 shows the

summary of ratings from the jury and Table 3 is the 5-point Likert Rating Scale:

Table 2. Summary of Ratings from Jury

AREA	CRITERIA	Jury 1	Jury 2	Jury 3	Jury 4	Jury 5	Mean	Descriptive Rating
1	The questionnaire is short enough that the respondents respect it and it would not drain much precious time.	5	5	5	5	5	5	Excellent
2	The questionnaire is interesting and has fair appeal such the respondents will be induced to respond to it and accomplish it fully.	5	5	5	5	5	5	Excellent
3	The questionnaire can obtain some depth to the responses and avoid superficial answer.	5	5	5	5	4	4.8	Excellent
4	The items/questions and their alternative responses and neither too suggestive nor unstimulating.	5	5	5	5	5	5	Excellent
5	The questionnaire can elicit responses, which are definite but not mechanically forced.	5	5	5	5	5	5	Excellent
6	Questions/items are stated in such a way that the responses will not be embarrassing to the person/persons concerned.	5	5	5	5	5	5	Excellent
7	Questions/items are formed in a manner to avoid suspicion on the part of the respondents concerning hidden responses in the questionnaire.	5	5	5	5	5	5	Excellent
8	The questionnaire is not too narrow nor restricted or limited in philosophy.	5	5	5	5	4	4.8	Excellent
9	The responses to the questionnaire when taken as a whole could answer the basic purpose for which the questionnaire is designed and therefore considered valid.	5	5	5	5	5	5	Excellent
	TOTAL RATING	45	45	45	45	43	4.95	Excellent

Source: Good, Carter V and Scates, Douglas B. *Methods of Research*, Philippines Copyright, Appleton-Century-Grofts, In. 1972. Pp 615-616

Scale	Range-Value	Verbal Interpretation
5	4.50-5.00	Excellent
4	3.50-4.49	Very Good
3	2.50-3.49	Good
2	1.50-2.49	Fair
1	1.00-1.49	Poor

Table 3. Five-point Likert Scale

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

Permission to conduct the study and collect data from PWD students was approved. The validated interview guide questions were first sent via Facebook messenger prior to the schedule of interview, this tool was used due to its convenience and familiarity, and a personal interview was conducted following the IATF protocols. To get preliminary data, the researcher informed the respondents that they were selected to participate in the study, then the researcher provided a google form for the respondents to answer and secure consent for data privacy purposes. After the consent form, the researcher informed the students about the study and its

purpose. The interview was scheduled based on the availability of the respondents and approval of the parents. Respondents were visited at home, nearby Barangay Hall and Municipal Grounds depending on the convenience and preference of the interviewee. The interview was carried out for 30 to 45 minutes to collect sufficient data from the participants. The students were given enough time to respond to the questions and to detail their experiences. The researcher debriefed the participants to answer the research questions and instructed them to feel comfortable in sharing their opinions. The responses of the PWD students was video recorded and transcribed. Figure 2 presents the data gathering procedure utilized in this study.

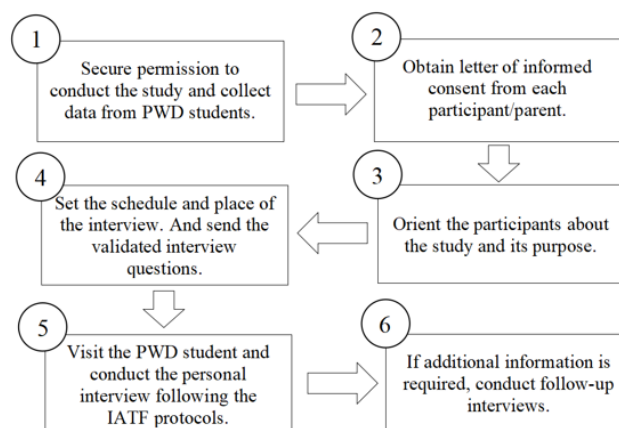


Figure 2. Data Gathering Procedure

2.5 Data analysis

This study utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Interpretive phenomenology examines the human experience,

and thus, interpretation is critical (Langdrige, 2007; Laverty, 2003; Tuohy et al., 2013).

Over-all perceptions were established, responses were tabulated and analyzed using thematic analysis through the process of open coding to

identify the common themes. The thematic analysis also involves (usually inductive) coding of qualitative data into clusters of similar entities, or conceptual categories and the identification of consistent patterns and relationships between themes, so as to come up with a theoretical explanation of the phenomenon under study. (Figgou, L., & Pavlopoulos, V., 2015), it entails searching across a data set to identify, analyze, and report repeated patterns (Braun and Clarke 2006). It is a method for describing data, but it also involves interpretation in the processes of selecting codes and constructing themes. (Kiger, M. E., & Varpio, L., 2020)

Open coding was used to identify the participants' lived experiences, challenges, and

coping mechanisms to produce prominent themes. The themes were clustered into larger categories. The highlighted words or phrases in the statements of the participants were analyzed to formulate themes. All data were organized, coded, and accounted for consistency and accuracy. The consistency of the interpretation was made by the researcher and was verified through correspondence with the participants to ensure that the emerging themes and patterns are valid, truthful, and trustworthy.

Generally, the Nicdao's Qualitative Data Analysis was utilized to analyze the transcribed data and the following figure shows the process.

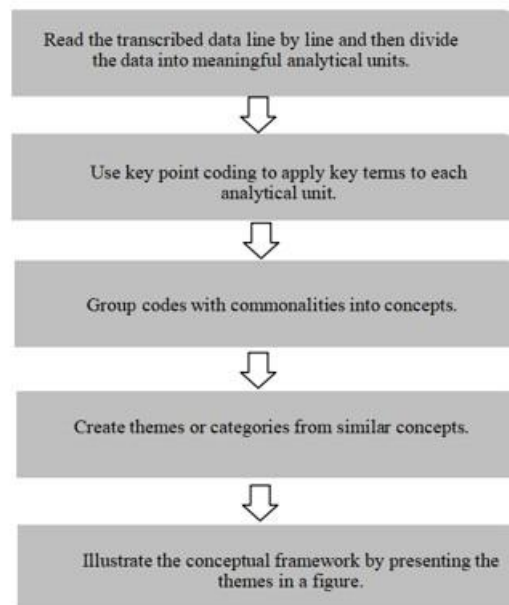


Figure 3. Nicdao's Qualitative Data Analysis Process

2.6 Ethics

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles stipulated in the National Ethical Guidelines for Health and Health-Related Research (2017) by the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board and the university's existing research protocols.

Beforehand, the researcher ensured that the instrument and the purpose of the study will not harm the PWD college students in any way or form. Permission to conduct the study was approved by the University President. Informed

consent was obtained from the respondents, and a confidentiality agreement was discussed to ensure the active participation of the participants as contributors to the conduct of the study. The researcher informed also that the data gathered will be stored securely on the researcher's personal computer for three years only and assured that the researcher will observe Data Privacy Act. Respondents were given codes to hide their identity in presenting the data.

The researcher asked also the consent of the parents that their son/daughter will be interviewed and answer questions about their

experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms and their suggestions to minimize their challenges experienced at home and school. The researcher applied measures to comply with the ethical aspects and will not violate PWD rights.

Ultimately the researcher adhered to and personally discerns ethical procedures in every situation during the whole conduct of the study and while writing this paper.

3. Results and discussion

The participants' shared inputs on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic led to the emergent of themes. These themes cover the experiences of PWD students, challenges encountered, coping mechanisms/support system, and their suggested policies.

1.Experiences of PWD students in this time of Pandemic.

The following are the themes emerged from the inputs of the participants relative to their experiences in this time of pandemic:

Negative Learning Experiences. The participants discussed their negative experiences with online classes, which included feelings of helplessness, confusion, and inability to comprehend. According to Griffin et.al. (2019), the sense of helplessness and witnessing waves of death is deeply and cumulatively disturbing and can lead to a sense of failure and moral injury. In accordance with the findings of Roni et al. (2021) that students' feelings of loneliness were influenced both directly and indirectly by their experiences with distance learning difficulties.

"It's a bit difficult, I'm still adjusting, I'm not used to it, I feel like I'm figuring out what else to do." (R3)

"I'm having a hard time especially when I feel like no one is helping." (R1)

"He has the most difficulty with lecture subjects with wordings." (R2)

Psychological Stress. Participants highlighted the stress they had experienced, specifically when they lost their courage, feeling frustrated

and worried when their parents lost their jobs due to pandemics, in their contributions. Similar findings in Yazcayir and Gurgur's (2021) study, problems such as boredom and depression of children and families during quarantine, three parents stated that their children experienced problems due to staying away from their school friends and not being able to socialize. According to Lambert and Dryer (2018), the e-environment had a negative impact on students' quality of life in higher education, with increased stress and anxiety, feelings of inadequacy, less time available for other activities, and less time available for personal connections.

"I feel like I'm giving up." (R3)

"I feel like I don't want to study anymore." (R1)

"He had a time when he rarely cried. He is frustrated." (R2)

"My parents lost their jobs because of the pandemic." (R4)

2. Challenges encountered by PWD students at home and school during pandemic.

The participants shared inputs on the challenges encountered at home and school during pandemic and these led to the development of the following themes:

Environmental Challenges. According to the participants it is difficult for them to attend classes when they are at home because they can't concentrate due to noise and the household chores they need to accomplish. Similar to Averett's (2021) findings, these included difficulties with disruption to routine, distractions related to siblings and home, difficulty navigating technology and various learning apps and platforms, and difficulty with different teaching modalities than what students are used to. Also, in the study of Onyema et. al. (2020) found out that apart from the cost of accessing online education, many other factors such as network issues, poor power supply, distractions, poor digital skills, inaccessibility

and availability issues can also hinder smooth study from home.

"It is difficult to combine online class and household chores. Sometimes while I'm in an online class, I wash the dishes." (R1)

"During the online class, the noise and household chores go hand in hand." (R4)

Technological Challenges. Internet connectivity is one of the difficulties that the participants face. The majority of participants expressed and communicated their dissatisfaction with the lack of a reliable internet connection, which is consistent with the findings of Tus, Jhoselle, et al (2021).

"I'm really having a hard time with the online class." (R4)

"Sometimes there is no internet." (R1)

Financial Challenges. The participants discussed their financial difficulties in attending classes during the pandemic. According to the WHO (2020)SEA disability report, the effects of lockdown on families and the economic consequences of loss of livelihood are problems shared by all groups. Up to 90% of patients in some groups had lost their jobs and were having difficulty accessing food. Some families with disabled members who received a disability pension found themselves relying solely on the pension. The PwD suffered from deprivation as a result of the loss of the spouse's job.

"Financial Challenges." (R1)

"I'm having financial difficulties." (R4)

Social Challenges. Embarrassment and bullying, according to participants, are the most difficult challenges they face in public. Similar findings were found in Scanlan's (2021) study, which discovered that people with disabilities are concerned about being tracked and bullied online, and that many have already experienced cyberbullying in the previous year. Furthermore, Cowie, H., and Myers, C. (2020) stated that, while victims of bullying may have been relieved not to have to go to school during the lockdown, as we

have seen, some bullying continued, either on social media or in person in the community.

"I don't want to study anymore because there are people who are insulting. We are not the ones who did the wrong but we are the ones who are suspected." (R1)

"Bullying... not from our classmates, from other course/ department." (R1)

"I get bullied by my classmates, I feel hurt emotionally." (R4)

Personal/Individual Challenges. Academics, peer pressure, lack of concern from classmates, and low self-esteem are among issues that PWD students face. They found it challenging to acclimatize to online learning since they were disregarded by teachers among their non-PWD peers, similar to Hasan and Khan's (2020) findings.

"There are times in my lessons that I don't understand." (R1)

"Many times, it's not just this pandemic that he wants to stop studying, he told us he's just going to clean up, where? In Jolibee it seems." (R2)

"That's also what makes me feel bad, every time I ask questions in our group chat it seems like they don't pay attention to me." (R3)

"It seems like I'm not in that group chat so I'm not really active in our group chats." (R3)

"Aside from his frustration with lectures, peer pressure, for example group projects." (R2)

Participants in this study reveal the various challenges faced by PWD students that had a significant impact on their lives during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similar findings were found in the study of Schur et al., (2020), who found that COVID-19 created new challenges for people with disabilities. It is worth noting that the pandemic has forced people to reconsider some of the ableist societal norms and assumptions about working and schooling. Individuals with disabilities, such as those with chronic health conditions, may have previously

requested to work remotely, but this may have been against the institution's policy. According to the findings of Krishnan et al. (2020), hearing impaired students faced four challenges: hearing devices, disruption in comprehension of the lesson, unfamiliarity with online devices, and being emotionally affected during online classes.

3. Coping mechanisms/support system done by the PWD students to overcome the difficulties.

During the interview, the participants discussed their coping mechanisms and the assistance they received to help them overcome the difficulties. The following themes emerged as a result of their shared experiences:

Personal Factors. Respondents' coping mechanisms for overcoming difficulties include self-determination, perseverance, self-direction, and a positive outlook. Tus, Jhoselle, et al. (2021) discovered that the majority of participants persisted in order to achieve a sufficient standard of living. Personal growth and resiliency in PWD students are aided by their sense of responsibility, healthy mindset, and positive mindset.

"I will only strengthen my heart sir, I will not pay attention to what other people say, don't listen to them, I will listen to what is good for us like that, what is encouraging, always praying. Just fight until you can, they say "It's okay to get tired but just don't give up."(R3)

"Once when we didn't have WiFi, we only connected here in the Barangay, for a year. Sometimes with relatives. Even if it rains here we persevere."(R1)

"Time management." (R4)

"It's fun to survive in the online class."(R4)

Family and Friends Factors. The participants mentioned that most of the support they received came from their family, specifically, parents support and friends.

"They always supported me, I can't tell them that they didn't let me down."(R3)

"I am allowed to study because they don't want me to be like them."(R4)

"When I have a project, I am given budget for it."(R1)

"Every time when I need to buy something so I can buy it, they don't lack support to me."(R3)

"Then the things that I value the most, I have no choice but to pass them on to him even if he has already damaged the others, then the things I gave him, the ones when he has a project, I help him."(R2)

"His older sister is the one who help when he has a lecture subject, she helps when one of his older sisters is busy, our youngest is the one who answers."(R2)

"My friends always help, for example I forgot something I will ask them."(R4)

School Factors. According to the participants, they also received support from school, including some from their classmates and a limited amount from their teachers and staff. Similar to Crescenza et al. (2021), a sense of solidarity and mutual support appears to have developed among students, albeit at a distance: almost all of them say they collaborate and help each other with schoolwork.

"He has a chat with his classmates... since the pandemic or before the pandemic he is the one I hear especially from my siblings who are focusing on him."(R2)

"Just asking my classmates." (R1)

"My teacher help me get into financial assistance."(R4)

"When I inquired, the guards guided me on how to do it at that time."(R3)

4.Policies and guidelines that may propose to support the PWD students during online classes or flexible learning.

Participants also discussed their proposed policies and guidelines for assisting PWD students in online classes or flexible learning modes. During the interview, their responses resulted in the development of a single theme for each of the areas:

Programs and Services. In terms of program implementation and services, participants expressed a desire for a specialized program as well

as employment services. According to Denisova et al. (2020), it is necessary to specifically prepare students with disabilities for the effective use of the digital educational environment's resources, as well as provide tutor support and technical assistance. Teachers must also acquire new skills in order to meet the special educational needs of students with disabilities during the digital educational process. Furthermore, Jesus et al. (2021) contend that all of these pandemic disparities stem from a lack of disability-inclusive responses and preparedness, and, more fundamentally, from socially-determined disparities that people with disabilities have long experienced.

"Lecture subjects will be reduced, so that he can explore his major more."(R2)

"Specialized program for PWD."(R2)

"One section intended for PWD."(R4)

Institutional Interventions. In terms of school plans, the participants suggested that there should be training for teachers, provide specific room for them, proper room scheduling, basic services, and safe and PWD friendly environment.

"Equal treatment from teachers."(R1)

"Have a room really allotted for PWD students in an area or campus that is really only for them and then they take classes there."(R2)

"I hope if it's face to face I hope we can only prioritize in the same room those who can't move around anymore, especially we PWDs, it's hard for me to walk, those who can't walk fast, have been standing for a long time like me."(R3)

"Provide the simple needs of the PWD." (R3)

"Scholarship, financial assistance and gadget assistance."(R4)

"I hope to have face to face classes that even if that happens, help each other."(R1)

"Give a seminar to transport jeepney drivers to give priority to PWDs in case there will be face to face classes."(R4)

"Fully vaccinated before entering school."(R1)

5. Proposed Policy/Plans

The data gathered from respondents' experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms/support systems, and suggested policies was used to develop proposed policies/plans for implementation to assist PWD students during online classes. The findings of this study will be presented as part of the action research phase, and the enhanced policies and plans will be proposed to the university administration for review, further improvement, approval, and implementation. Monitoring and evaluation will also be included in the plan to assess the success and execution of each policy/plan, as well as to track progress and identify areas for improvement. In the study of Gleason et al. (2020), it is also advised that we must integrate flexibility in the design of technology and policy to support PWD undergoing rapid development. Additional laws and policies are needed to protect the rights of people with disabilities, as they, too, may face numerous challenges in their education, mental health, and overall well-being as a result of the pandemic (Toquero 2020). Also, Krishnan et al. (2020) proposed that all institutions of higher learning form a special task force to assist students with disabilities. The task force could identify prospective student needs and develop detailed guidelines for faculty personnel to follow when delivering online learning, recorded lectures, mid-term tests, tasks, and undertakings.

4. Implications

Based on the findings, the PWD students experienced academic and psychological stress, most of them experienced confusions and lose of courage to study during this time of pandemic. They felt also helpless and can't comprehend in their academic subjects at the same time frustrated and sad because parents loss jobs due to pandemic. The challenges encountered by the PWD students came from the environment, social and technological that emerges from households, bullying, financial and internet connectivity. The coping mechanism of PWD students rooted from the support system they have at home, from their parents and from their friends that radiates self-determination, perseverance, self-directive

and positive outlook. The PWD students dream of having specialized program and, a safe and PWD friendly environment.

As a result, PWD students should be classified according to their disability upon admissions/enrollment; the department head should be given lists of PWD students; and the teachers must be informed prior to the opening of classes so that they can prepare the learning materials intended in each enrolled PWD students. It is also suggested that the teachers should undergo training on how to deal with PWD students online. It is also recommended that there should be quarterly PWD parents meeting/orientation should be implemented to lessen the environmental challenges at home. PTO must prioritize program in providing FREE internet connection of PWD students at home, and school should regularly include "Anti Bullying Act" and "Cyber Bullying Law" in every student's orientation to lessen the incidence of bullying among PWD and students with special needs in general. The results also suggested to conduct personality and self-care webinar to PWD students to strengthen their self-esteem and a webinar for parents to boost more their morale. Recognized students who are supporting their PWD students. The outcomes recommended to revisit the university code and craft a special program for PWD with relevant short courses that caters their abilities, and formulate policy and

guidelines that are beneficial to PWD students leading to the attainment of a "University that is safe and PWD friendly". It is also suggested that the future researchers may use the result of this study to further look deeper on the specific lived experiences and resiliency of students with learning disabilities. It is also advised to adapt and implement the proposed policy/plans based on the results of this study:

1. Faculty training on teaching/dealing PWD students in an online learning environment.
2. Specialized program intended to PWD students with communication and learning disabilities.
3. Hire teachers with specialization in special education.
4. Gadget and internet connection assistance to PWD students.
5. Classroom on wheels that can regularly visit PWD students with orthopedic disability.
6. Separate classroom intended for PWD students.
7. Creation of technical working group with the PWD unit coordinator as head to assess and evaluate the real situation of the PWD students.
8. Student Manual intended for PWD students

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