

## Unleashing the inners strengths of University entrants

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### ABSTRACT

This paper aimed to unleash the modular experiences of university freshmen during the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Using a transcendental phenomenological approach, the data were collected through individual phone interviews with fifteen university freshmen key informants analyzed through Colizzi's seven steps in data analysis. Moreover, triangulation was also used, where transcripts were presented to the KIs in the form of a Focus Group Discussion. Student's narratives revealed that university freshmen's experience of learning in challenging times is not always ineffective learning. Waray-waray college students were able to experience struggles to finish a semester while juggling multiple roles at home and facing the reality of being less privileged, having inadequate learning resources, and being in a geographically challenged and disadvantaged areas were never considered to be a deterrent to finishing what they have started in a set-up new to them. Resilient learning led them to find meaning in their experiences in these trying times resulted to their strengthened desire to pursue schooling and to unleash their inner strength.

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### 1. Introduction

Learning to be meaningful would mean students having a collaborative, interactive, and purposeful experience that would enable them to apply new knowledge or simply change in their behavior. But the case during the onset of the pandemic has been totally different. Martins, Tinga, Manjate, Siteo, and Matusse (2021) stated that during the suspension of classes, students used a variety of platforms and faced constraints regarding access to the internet, as well as difficulties in adapting to the process. In the higher education sector, schools and universities have enabled digital and other technical set-ups which support whatever form of learning that they will most likely adopt. It seemed like the new normal was about learning with different approaches and modalities like digital platforms and tools to support and enable effective learning.

In addition, due to the shift to online and modular learning, students are now taking more of an initiative in their own education and learning process. These initiatives were not only true in the Philippines but a worldwide shift in instruction. In a particular university, blended learning has been pushed through to address the challenges of learning continuity amidst the pandemic. However, not all are capable of the new normal in learning, especially if the learners are in the challenged areas in the province. GIDA, according to the Department of Health (n.d.), refers to barangays that are specifically disadvantaged due to the presence of both physical and socio-economic factors. These students were one of those who belong to marginalized families and underserved communities and lack the signals to be able to participate in online learning sessions.

The situation that these students have hurdled for the sake of education is not just a walk in the park. In fact, Cortes et al. (2022) revealed that students' experiences in modular learning include the lack or limited access to information, concerns about the accessibility of learning opportunities, lack of economic resources, time management concerns, communication with professors and classmates, and self-motivation and coping mechanisms. Moreover, Nguyen et al. (2021) exposed that students missed the social aspects of learning on campus. Learning with a sense of isolation from classmates and teachers has disrupted the normalcy of schooling. The possibility that limited, if not nothing, will enter and stick into their minds if they are worried about the sustenance of their body.

Kahu, Picton, and Nelson (2020) found that the lack of agency that students felt is evident and depicted themselves as passive acquirers of knowledge. Moreover, Cheung et al. (2020) found that freshmen students have difficulties in instruction for understanding & encouraging learning, peer support, and self-efficacy beliefs. The same is true with Caslib and Decano (2021), who claimed that the most difficult experiences met by students are the lack of comprehension and insufficient learning resources, leading to student's low academic performance.

The surface approach to learning, deep and organized studying, alignment & constructive feedback, and generic skills are all predictors of academic stress, a concern that the curriculum implementers in the higher education sector should look into- as there is no one-size-fits-all approach to different student populations when it comes to their meaningful learning experiences. As Joseph et al. (2021) pointed out university students, for the life transition they have to experience, have to deal with many other stresses including building of self-identity and issues concerning adolescent development and those in relation to academics. This is true since as students in university face a transition from a different learning approach to the different learning environment, it could result in their experience of study workload stress.

A variety of teaching and learning methodologies had to be suddenly introduced in schools and higher education institutions as a result of the global pandemic situation. In the context of distance education, Cicha, Rizun, Rutecka, and Strzelecki (2021) investigated first-year students' expectations about the education shift to distance learning and found the most important factors that influence the feelings of students and can convince them to change from teaching in the classroom to teaching in the distance learning model are the feeling of pleasure in this form of education and a sense of self-efficacy. Trolan and Jach (2020) discovered that applied learning approaches may help to improve students' motivation. Institutions of higher education should consider methods and strategies for developing and implementing applied learning experiences both in the classroom and in students' out-of-class experiences.

On the other hand, Waraynons, as Filipinos, are said to be resilient. It was pointed out by Bollettino, Alcayna, Enriquez, and Vinck (2018) that Filipinos are confident that they will be able to adjust to changes brought by disasters, that there are individuals who, despite their adversities, tend to develop healthier resilience, cope positively together with either family or community. These urged the researchers to explore the learning experiences of freshmen college students in the new normal, exploring the learning experiences of freshmen college students within the context of phenomenology. Specifically, the study sought to answer to the following questions: What are the modular learning experiences of the freshmen college students in the new normal?

## **2. Theoretical basis**

Filipino's resiliency construct pertains to one's ability to adapt cope and bounce back.

These are fundamental elements in human, community, and national survival. In the Philippines, considering the “*bayanihan*” construct is what helps individuals, families, communities and even the whole nation to continue moving forward. Lahad (2016) proposed the BASIC Ph Model. This model is built on an understanding of the community impacted and the ability of the inhabitants to withstand disasters and crises and leads to the development of one’s coping style which includes belief, affect, social, imagination, cognitive and physical activities which an individual can make use of whenever a major crisis is experienced.

This model is an integrative understanding of Filipino’s coping and resiliency. The BASIC Ph model proposes that people respond to life in six different coping styles or “languages”. Haba-Ashkenazi, Dahan, and Pendzik (2023) conducted a qualitative study of written data following the BASIC Ph method, including an analysis of the tellers’ coping styles using three sources: the Six Part Story Making technique, the story told at the performance, and a semi-structured interview with the tellers and suggested that applying the BASIC Ph model may help the performers to refine the resonance experienced by the tellers and that incorporating the BASIC Ph model is a therapeutic one. Narrating experiences may result in sharing stories of strength building and resilience, the case of Filipino GIDA learners.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research design**

The study employed a qualitative transcendental phenomenological approach through one-on-one in-depth interview sessions in discovering meaning of lived experiences from a group of university freshmen students who opted for modular approach in learning. TPH is grounded in the concept and conditioned upon setting aside all preconceived ideas (*epoche*) to see phenomena through unclouded glasses, thereby allowing the true meaning of phenomena to naturally emerge within and within their own identity (Castro & Lombrio, 2021).

The purpose is to describe the commonalities of the experience and avoid personal biases from the researchers. The transcendental phenomenology approach by Moustakas, adapted from Husserl, focuses on the participants’ given descriptions to generate an essence of the lived experiences. Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) added that phenomenology belonging to the interpretivism paradigm considers differences such as cultures, circumstances, as well as times leading to the development of different social realities. This approach views the methodology as a series of logical steps, accounts for multiple perspectives from participants, and utilizes rigorous data collection and analysis methodology.

#### **3.2. Research setting**

This research was conducted at Samar State University, Catbalogan City, Samar, a province in the Eastern Visayas Region, Philippines.

#### **3.3. Key informants and sampling**

The participants of this study were freshmen college students who opted for a full modular approach during the academic year of 2020 - 2021. Most of these students belong to Geographically Isolated and Demographically Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs), a term coined by the Department of Health (DOH) to refer to “communities with marginalized populations physically and socio-economically separated from the mainstream society” (DOH, n.d.). The age range of a freshman college student is between 18 - 19 considered by the World Health

Organization (WHO) as adolescents belonging to the most challenging stage of development. Orben, Tomova, and Blakemore (2020) affirmed that this period of life is characterized by heightened sensitivity to social stimuli and the increased need for peer interaction may it be in actual or online.

In fact, Knight et. al (2021) eported that students found it difficult to adapt to new expectations for university life and reported missing out on professional and social experiences. Unlike the sophomores, juniors and seniors, this is their first time to enroll in college. Meaning, there is no face-to face contact with classmates, instructors and the rest of the university population because of pandemic. Their experiences were totally different from the rest of the students in the university.

Participants were recruited purposively by the researchers and enumerators through email, text messaging, and snowball sampling. The inclusion criteria for their participation are that participants should have been enrolled as freshman college students in the university at the time of the interviews, have chosen a modular approach to learning, have not participated in any online meetings or discussions, and have between 18 - 19 years of age in the conduct of the study. Those who qualified as sample KIs sufficiently provided substantive information to answer the stated study objectives and research question. The addition of the sample was terminated when data saturation was reached on the 15th KI, so that 15 KIs were involved in the study.

### ***3.4. Ethical considerations***

This study started upon receipt of the university ethical clearance numbered. The participants were informed of the purpose of this research and were oriented with the data privacy law. Participation was voluntary, and participants were given a load allowance for the purpose of the interviews and were not compensated. Upon verbal and written consent through Google Forms, participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire about their demographic information, such as age, gender, geographical location, and program of study, before completing the interview. Data gathered in this study were solely for the purpose of this study, names of the participants were made anonymous, but the researchers have assigned codes (KI for Key Informant number 1) for data analysis and discussion and were properly deleted after submission of the terminal report.

### ***3.5. Research instrument***

An interview guide was used as interview questions which were reviewed and validated by experts in the discipline to ensure content validity and reliability. The interview questions focused on deriving information pertinent to the modular learning experiences of the KIs. The conduct of the study was approved by the University Research and Innovation Center observing all the required ethical protocols in the conduct of data collection. The researchers utilized a 6-item guide of questions intended for the research participants to include:

1. What is the learning set-up that you have in the new normal?
2. How are the learning experiences during this pandemic different from normal schooling?
3. Describe the adjustments that you made while studying this pandemic.
4. Why did you continue to pursue schooling in this new normal?
5. How do you manage to perform your learning tasks while at home?
6. How would you describe the nature of learning away from the university?

### **3.6. Data collection**

Answers from the phone interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interview transcripts served as the main source of qualitative primary data. Observations of pauses, tone of voice, and intonations of KIs were noted. In cases where vital information may seem overlooked (*vis-à-vis* lived experiences), the interviewer made follow-up questions in the open-ended form as a form of response validation. The KIs were purposively chosen based on the study's need to generate optimum information from their lived experiences. This study focused on the modular learning experiences of the university freshmen. The student KIs were asked about their lived experiences in finishing the academic year having the remote learning modality. The addition of KIs was terminated when data saturation was reached on the 15th key informant.

### **3.7. Data analysis**

The researcher worked on Moustakas's method of inductive data analysis. After each individual transcript was read more than once, all transcripts were reread again and again and memos were recorded to immerse the researcher and highlight key concepts. The following steps were followed (1) horizontalization was performed by giving equal value and significance to each statement and coding it with a descriptive label, (2) reduction and elimination of statements was performed to determine the invariant constituents of the experience, (3) clustering was utilized to group related constituents together, and each category was given a thematic label. The final identification of themes was done by rereading the complete transcripts to verify the theme. These themes were used to construct individual and overall textural, structural, and textural-structural descriptions, culminating into an overall essence of the experience.

Psychology research nowadays has changed from pathological to positive human constructs, where practitioners have now increasingly been engaged in documenting, quantifying, as well as trying to understand the positive as well as the negative side of human reactions to stress, challenges, and difficult situations and more importantly, people can indeed be indomitable and overcome even the most daunting challenges, this is the case of resilient university entrants in a countryside university who belong to the marginalized and disadvantaged communities. As Lahad (2016) suggested in the BASIC Ph model: Belief and values, Affect (emotional), Social, Imagination, Cognitive, and Physiological represent an integrative multifaceted approach that suggests that each person has a personal combination of these elements which form his/her unique coping style and that these students have reacted in more than one of these modes, and that they also are potentially capable of coping in all six modes.

## **4. Result and discussion**

The study findings contained the narratives of the university freshmen modular learning experience in the midst of pandemic. The transition from senior high school to college journey were faced with difficulty as they move on with the new normal learning which features individualized instruction, in the case of these university students, printed and electronic modules were chosen due to unstable to poor internet connection to no signal at all.

### **4.1. Result**

Among the themes that have emerged after a thorough analysis of the responses, the dominant experience of these students revealed their inner strengths. Positive psychology highlights positive emotions, such as hope and happiness; positive personality traits, such as courage and resilience; and positive social institutions, which reinforce the first two components. Moreover, Inner Strength (IS) has been described as a human resource that promotes well-being

and is connected to health (Lundman, Hammarström, Ahlgren, & Norberg, 2019). Montano (2021) supported that thriving would lead to self-efficacy and the impact of thriving was strongest when academic stress was high. Likely, Ang, Shorey, Lopez, Chew, and Lau (2022) pointed out that resilience as an inner strength has been documented as an essential component in managing stress. These findings reinforced the revelations of the participants who were able to adapt to the difficult learning set-up, find light in times of darkness, and continue their academic journey in these trying times.

Each of the student's learning experiences led to their awareness and eventually, acceptance of the realities of remote learning during the pandemic. Each of the formulated meanings (see Table 1) is derived from the lived experiences and corresponding theme clusters describing their modular learning realities caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. So, their awareness of the learning modality in difficult times led them to accept that the situation is impermanent. Their experience developed mindfulness as their journey developed realizations of what they are capable of overcoming is also presented below (see Table 2).

**Table 1**

Mindfulness of the modular learning modality

Key informant's significant statements	Formulated meanings	Theme cluster
"Felt sad that I experience this kind of learning modality" "I felt sad cause I cannot attend online classes because I am not capable of it" "I experienced stress and depression thinking of all that is to be passed and accomplished" "Cannot enjoy the company of my classmates because I don't see them" "The transition is hard on my part"	The acknowledgment of the difficult reality of modular learning setup during Covid-19 pandemic	Awareness of the modular learning realities
"I know I will grow as an individual, after this experience" "I need to endure everything to finish my studies" "Accepting whatever available ways to continue studying" "It's different from what I am used to, but fun especially when new LPs arrive" "I kept on reminding myself, that these things are temporary"	The recognition of a temporary condition or reality while journeying the new normal learning	Acceptance of the difficult experience during a temporary situation

Difficult times challenge your inner strengths. The KI's realization of their own capabilities in this kind of journey revealed what they could become more of than what they knew. As Frankenhuis and Nettle (2020) pointed out, people living in poverty may have made reasonable psychological responses to their circumstances or may have developed strengths that enhance their ability to cope with challenges in their lives. As the participants discovered more about themselves, they also recognized what made them finish the remote learning modality presented in Table 3.

**Table 2**

Recognizing capabilities in journeying the remote learning

Key informant's significant statements	Formulated meanings	Theme cluster
"I learned a lot about me, about school and the course I am taking" "I didn't regret taking the course because I learned a lot from it" "I learned new things faster and easily using the modular learning method" "All I can say is that I understand my module and learn from it"	The understanding of own capacity and pacing in learning remotely	Gaining self-knowledge and owning personal capabilities
"If I find my teacher to be strict, I find other ways to solve my concerns and eventually accomplish my tasks" "I am putting more effort and patience & take things seriously because it is my responsibility" "I answered the LPs early in the morning where I have focus and fresh mindset" "I am prioritizing the earliest deadlines"	The student's way of managing the deliverables during the modular learning setup	Student's way of coping and management of remote learning modality

The modular learning experiences of the students in GIDAs revealed something about them: coping, time-management, self-efficacy, and resiliency to be used as they continue their life's journey. Every story of a triumphant journey in life's adversities and challenges encompassed a discovery of strength. Their remote learning experiences, when considered positively, make them understand better about themselves better and discover more capabilities when future challenges come. On the other hand, their stories of success discovered not only what in within but what enabled them to push through. Teamwork highlighted their unique learning modality as well; collaborative learning also transpired from the KI narratives. Help-seeking, as Broadbent and Lodge (2021) reported, is an essential self-regulatory and metacognitive skill. Hayden, Carrico, Ginn, Felber, and Smith (2021) mentioned that peer teaching and learning encourage student engagement in online synchronous or asynchronous learning (see Table 4 below).

**Table 3**

Realizing inner strengths in surviving the new normal learning

Key informant's significant statements	Formulated meanings	Theme cluster
"In this new normal, I have become more productive in a sense that I can accomplish an academic task at the same time doing household chores because I am at home" "I can do a sideline in order to help my family, work in the morning and study at night"	Student's recognition of their ability to accomplish multiple responsibilities at the same time	Realization of the possibility of self-paced learning

Key informant's significant statements	Formulated meanings	Theme cluster
"I tried to make things possible as much as I could, learning while helping at home"		
"I learned to be more confident and stronger, because of my experience" "I may have a hard time adjusting for the whole school year, but I am proud I was able to continue and finish it strong" "I was able to work independently to get things done, and I am proud of myself whenever I get things done ahead of time"	Students realized what they are more of, more than being able to pass the subjects	Finding meaning from their own difficulties

Remote learning may have resulted in isolated learning to other students; the KIs shared that working on difficult lessons required teamwork and cooperation. This led them to seek help from other students when needed and to extend help as well when necessary. Indeed, cooperative learning, De Leon and Bucayu (2022) mentioned helps students to learn as a student-centered approach that groups students together to work as a team and cooperatively work toward the success of the activity added to the students' meaningful journey. Out of the clustered themes presented in the tables above, a broader thematic analysis was done, reducing them and revealing four emergent themes (see Table 5).

**Table 4**

Collaborative learning in a remote learning setup

Key informant's significant statements	Formulated meanings	Theme cluster
"I and my neighbor classmate find time to meet when there is a new set of modules received, I share my insights with her as well" "We helped each other if the lessons were difficult, I make sure to impart my own understanding whenever possible"	Students experienced collaboration and extended the self whenever possible	Students experienced the possibility of learning with peers
"I opened up to friends for help, when needed" "I know I can sometimes learn from others, so I sometimes ask for help" "When times that I find the lessons difficult to absorb, I call a friend for help"	Students are also acknowledging the need to seek help in times of difficulties	Help-seeking is also sought when in need

**Table 5**

Thematic clusters and emergent themes

<b>Theme 1. Mindfulness of the modular learning modality</b>	<b>Theme 2. Recognizing capabilities in journeying the remote learning</b>
Awareness of the modular learning realities Acceptance of the difficult experience as a temporary situation	Gaining self-knowledge and owning personal capabilities Student's way of coping and management of remote learning modality
<b>Theme 3. Realizing inner strengths in surviving the new normal learning</b>	<b>Theme 4. Collaborative learning despite being in a remote learning set-up</b>
Realization of the possibility of self-paced learning Finding meaning from their own difficulties	Students experienced the possibility of learning with peers Help-seeking is also sought when in need

**4.2. Discussion**

## Theme 1. Mindfulness of the modular learning modality

Several research has demonstrated how mindfulness can improve cognitive abilities like memory, thinking, problem-solving, and emotional equilibrium. An enhanced attention to and awareness of experience, as it occurs in the present moment, resulted in a stronger desire for the students to finish their tasks (Bunjak, Hafenbrack, Černe, & Arendt, 2022). Additionally, Henriksen, Richardson, and Shack (2020) claimed that the more aware people are of this construct and of their own mind's activities, the more capable they become of noticing and attending to creative ideas in productive ways. These university students reported their hopeful belief that this difficult situation in learning is just temporary. Despite their inability to interact online with their teacher and classmates, this will never hinder their desire for the acquisition of knowledge through learning tasks. They believed that this new normal in education could help them find more ways to continue learning and to see the reality of life for their future. In fact, the students shared that:

*"I already have accepted the situation that I am in, I didn't regret taking the course because I am learning a lot about myself and what I am capable of doing". KI9*

*"I know I'm in a difficult situation. However, it will develop my strengths; experiencing stress and depressing moments, yes, but I am thinking that all of these will pass." KI4*

The KIs also stated how they were able to adapt to the learning set-up and how learning was able to take place in a remote set-up with limited resources as they narrated that:

*"I tried to read and reread to analyze well the lessons and comprehend". KI1*

*"I try to look for the meanings of the difficult words in the dictionary, and if possible, I ask other students to better understand". KI5*

## Theme 2. Recognizing capabilities in journeying the remote learning

Being able to adapt positively in the face of adversity can mean that students are aware of what they are capable of, what they lack, how to work for it, and make sense of the demands of their chosen modality to enable them to persist in their studies. The main reason is because Philippine higher education has been driven by the urgency of alternative learning modalities from

traditional to flexible teaching and learning (Talosa, Javier, & Dirain, 2021). This led to the student's realization of what they have in them to push through as they recalled:

*"My Learning experience last school year really challenged my capabilities and my flexibility. The learning set-up experienced by me was not easy, but I knew I would make it, so I did". KI7*

*"It was hard because there were hmmm, there were unfamiliar words but luckily, I was able to look for ways to understand it, because if you really wanted to learn something, you can always find ways". KI8*

Coping positively helped them to become more productive in everyday activities they have at home as well as their way of diverting their attention from their difficult lessons and going to the municipal kiosk for their new sets of module and retrieval of their accomplished tasks as they mentioned:

*"I learned to deal with stress, whenever I am being confronted with stress, I divert my focus on other activities like household tasks, and then go back to module after finishing my chores". KI8*

*"I sacrificed a lot in order to get the modules to the municipal hall kiosk, however it made me happy to see other students who are also doing their best to win in this challenging situation". KI5*

Participants revealed their inner resilience strength in learning despite the lack of resources. Resilience in learning in this sense, as in life, is about being able to persevere through setbacks, take on challenges and risk making mistakes and facing difficulties to reach a goal. Highlighting the inner strength of students through resilience in this way will help them realize that when they engage confidently with a challenge, anything is possible and failure is not something to fear.

### Theme 3. Realizing inner strengths in surviving the new normal learning

Self-directed learning skills is critical for successful distance learning experiences (Kim et al., 2021). This was realized by students when they took the initiatives to look for ways where they will be able to realize their desire to learn, with or without someone to help them in cognizance to their learning identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes independently. KIs have identified the struggles they experienced such as carving out time to study alongside other commitments, as well as developing their academic strategies to accomplish all their learning tasks on time and attend to all their deliverables on their own. Students also identified factors that enabled them to adapt to these challenges and be successful in continuing to study and developed sense of responsibility as they shared that:

*"I know I will still be receiving other sets of modules so I work on my output early to avoid cramming". KI11*

*"I answered the LPs/modules early in the morning where I can think less of other things and I can focus on the materials". KI13*

*"It is my responsibility as a student, so I need to put more effort and patience and take things seriously in my studies". KI8*

*"I always make sure that I accomplish all the tasks first so that It will not be difficult for me when deadline comes". KI4*

#### Theme 4. Collaborative learning despite being in a remote learning set-up

This case of collaborative modular learning experience of the KIs, learners had the opportunity to converse with peers, present and defend ideas, exchange diverse beliefs, question other conceptual frameworks, and be actively engaged. A great opportunity for students in the higher education because it encourages the joint construction of knowledge, as well as the development of skills related to the interaction that results in more essential learning processes (Herrera-Pavo, 2021).

The KIs revealed that whenever they find a topic so difficult to comprehend and understand, they find their peers or classmates in the nearby villages to discuss some topics, share their insights and learn together. Others would throw a question while having their own discussion and ask other students to discuss their ideas with other students within their neighborhood.

*“Whenever I get to travel to downtown, I ask for a favor to have my Facebook account be opened to check on their conversations, have it printed and I share the screenshots with my classmates to have shared discussions”. KI6*

*“I look for a study partner so that we can help each other if the topics were difficult”. KI3*

*“Whenever I find the lessons to be difficult, I go to my classmates to ask for me to better understand and I can also ask her to ask our teacher”. KI6*

*“My classmates are helping me with our lessons because they know that I don’t have a phone”. KI7*

One common experience of the KIs is the lack of the means to be fully engaged in the new normal education. Acknowledging their frailties in these trying times motivated them to the finish line and overcome the struggles and challenges of the modular learning approach. To better understand that we are living in an unprecedented human historic transformation, we need to manage and mitigate its uncertainty mechanisms how the behavioral coping of vagueness could lead to a positive psychological outcome as inspiration, during the Covid-19 pandemic (Buheji, Ahmed, & Jahrami, 2020).

#### **5. Conclusions & recommendations**

Learning in challenging times is not always ineffective learning as narrated by the fifteen KIs. It is true us Filipinos will always find light in every dark moment and develop strategies to continue despite of difficulties. This case of Wara-waray college students specifically, were able to experience struggles to finish a semester. Moreover, juggling multiple roles at home while learning and facing the reality of being less privileged and with limited resources were never considered to be an obstacle to finish what they have started.

Finding meaning to their experiences during difficult situations resulted to their strengthened desire to pursue schooling. These aspirants in the field they have chosen to practice after leaving the premise of this university is not only an ordinary student. These are the proteges who were able to hurdle the challenges brought by Covid-19 pandemic. They are the sons and daughters at home willing to also assist their friends and siblings. They were able to build their characters and realized inner strengths.

Thus, the essence of the modular learning experiences of the freshmen college students in the new normal goes from traditional way of learning to strategic self-directed learning, from plain compliance to collaborative work, coupled having a positive disposition and finding inner strength

despite the situation. Therefore, learning during these challenging times unleash every potential of new university entrant.

Considering the findings and conclusion of this investigation, the authors suggest that the students continue to develop positive mindset in times of difficulties, cultivate teamwork when the need arises and never hesitate to seek for assistance whenever necessary. Significantly, the investigators have found out relevant psychological constructs for further studies, family and community dynamics which revolves around the “kapwa” construct for the sense of belongingness and collective mentality thus encourages teamwork and collaboration among students, self-efficacy that have been observed to be dominant in their narratives and fostered optimism that have resulted to their enabling behavior in surpassing every challenging phase of learning.

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