Nurturing Resilience During A Pandemic: Challenges And Strategies Of Filipino Students In Korean Language Online Learning

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic led to both disruptions and innovations in the educational sector, notably the shift to online learning. caused notable repercussions in the educational sector. Achieving a nuanced understanding of the online learning experiences of students is vital to developing comprehensive courses of action for the future. This paper was an attempt to dissect the challenges encountered by Filipino students learning Korean as a foreign language and shed light on the strategies they employed to ease their learning process during the pandemic. This study employed an explanatory-sequential research design. It involved a two-phase process: an online survey via Google Forms and semi-structured one-on-one interviews. The survey respondents were 112 college students from Bataan Peninsula State University who completed six-unit Korean subjects and participated in online learning for two semesters. The sample was calculated using G-Power Analysis Software. Six of these respondents were selected through quota sampling to participate in the interview. The survey questionnaire was adopted, and it was validated and piloted along with interview questions. Results showed that the greatest challenge encountered by students was their learning environment, specifically distractions they encountered at home. Difficulties concerning technological sufficiency also arose, especially with regard to gadgets and internet limitations. Challenges concerning the novelty of the Korean language were also mentioned. The unfamiliarity of the Korean sound inventory and writing system were major difficulties. To overcome these, students employed strategies like watching educational videos and K-dramas, reading books, memorizing and/or jotting down unfamiliar words and relearning them, and conversing with others using the language.

Keywords**:** online learning; foreign language learning, learning strategies, Korean language, Filipino students.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted and disrupted the routine functioning of several organizations, including the educational sector. In the majority of nations, this global crisis has brought problems and severe changes to the educational environment. Officials enforced lockdowns and quarantine measures to prevent the sickness from spreading. This resulted in the shutdown of academic institutions, including schools in the Philippines. To continue the delivery of learning throughout the pandemic, schools were compelled to explore alternatives and switch to an online learning environment.

Students' experiences with the abrupt transition from face-to-face to online classrooms revealed both advantages and disadvantages. Alshamrani (2019); Yanyun & Suyansah (2022) found that online learning enabled students to participate in other activities, such as working, and to quickly access online resources. Online learning is also considered cost-effective and time-saving, particularly when asynchronous communication is used. On the other hand, most of the students were found to have encountered challenges related to the use of technology and network concerns and became less motivated because of this. Due to a lack of physical activity and lengthy hours of gadget use, several individuals also faced health problems. Some students expressed a desire for a learning experience comparable to a face-to-face setting where there is more contact with instructors or other students (Alshamrani, 2019; Coman et al, 2020).

It is evident from previous studies that online learning during the pandemic brought more disadvantages than benefits. It has been investigated in different fields like health care education, engineering programs, and similar to this study, language learning (Idris, 2021; Delicano, 2020; Jansem, 2021). Hence, this raises concerns about the challenges and coping strategies of students who are learning foreign languages in an online set-up. Alawawdeh and Alshtaiwi (2020) argued that the difficulties that the foreign language educators' and students' experiences are brought by the lack of training, planning, and efficient policies as the online learning requires more preparation than traditional learning.

Since the beginning of this new online learning set-up, students attempted to cope by utilizing various learning strategies to facilitate their foreign language studies. According to Jee-yeon et al. (2021) & Atef Abdallah Bahrawi (2022), it was evident that collaborative and peer support are crucial to engage students despite the online learning set-up. This helps the students to learn the Korean language more easily as expressed by the students from Malaysia. Even though online learning separates students from learning in a face-to-face set

up classroom, it is still imperative for the students to learn foreign languages by engaging with their peers.

As the global health crisis continues and uncertainties remain, seeking a deeper understanding of students' online learning experiences in various contexts during the COVID-19 pandemic is important. While there have been a number of studies done on online learning, there is still a need to explore topics concerning the challenges of students learning foreign languages and the specific strategies they employ to cope with remote learning specifically in the context of the Philippines.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to gather and analyze how foreign language students in the Philippines respond to the problems that emerged from a sudden shift to online platforms amidst the pandemic. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. Identify the challenges students encountered during online learning, and
2. Identify the strategies students use to overcome the various online learning challenges.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

In this study, an explanatory-sequential research design was used. Through this, the researcher was able to gather data which included descriptions of the students' experiences and challenges in learning Korean language through online means.

PARTICIPANTS AND INCLUSION CRITERIA

The participants of the study were College students from Bataan Peninsula State University (BPSU). For the selection of participants, the researcher used the following inclusion criteria: (1) completed six-unit Korean subjects; (2) participated in synchronous and asynchronous online learning for at least two semesters; and (3) has computer skills and use materials such as laptops, mobile phones, and headphones, for online learning.

Respondents comprised of 112 (56 male and 56 female) students from four campuses of BPSU: Main, Balanga, Orani, and Abucay. Their ages range from 19-23 years old.

The sample was determined through G-Power Analysis Software. The number of study samples was assessed to have 95 percent statistical power, an alpha (probability error) of 0.05, and a small

effect size of 0.25. In addition, six of the respondents expressed interest in the interview phase.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

Quota sampling was utilized to select respondents in Phase I. All of these respondents were invited to participate in Phase II; however, only the consenting volunteers took part in the interview.

INSTRUMENT DESIGN

PHASE I: ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

The online survey questionnaire consisted of learning challenges section which is comprised of 37 questions about the following: Self-Regulation Challenges (six questions), Technological Literacy and Competency Challenges (ten questions), Student Isolation Challenges (three questions), Technological Sufficiency Challenges (six questions), Technological Complexity Challenges (three questions), Learning Resource challenges (four questions), and Learning Environment Challenges (four questions). The researcher employed a standardized questionnaire designed by Rasheed et al. (2020).

PHASE II: SEMI-STRCUTURES INTERVIEW

The interview covered two main parts. The first part focused on the other challenges encountered by the respondents while second part tackled the strategies employed by the participants to overcome these difficulties.

INSTRUMENT VALIDATION AND PILOT TESTING

Prior to the distribution of the survey questionnaire, it was validated by a language professor, a research instructor, and a statistician. It was found in the pilot testing that the instrument was highly reliable (Cronbach's=0.94). Meanwhile, the interview questions were validated by a language professor and a psychometrician.

QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

DATA COLLECTION

The quantitative method of data collection started with an invitation to all students who met the inclusion requirements. The invitation was made through foreign language professors and program heads during the second semester of the academic year 2021–2022. The survey takes about 10 minutes to complete, and respondents were given four weeks to complete the Google form. A total of 112 students responded during the administration period, accounting for a 100% response rate.

DATA ANALYSIS

A quantitative analysis was conducted to answer specific research questions using SPSS. The study used the following scheme to interpret the mean score each descriptor about challenges and opportunities: 4-3.26 Strongly Agree/Very Difficult, 3.25-2.51 Agree/Difficult, 2.50-1.76 Disagree/Moderately Difficult, and 1.75-1.00 Strongly Disagree/Not Difficult.

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION AD DATA ANALYSIS

DATA COLLECTION

At the end of the online survey, students were asked whether they were willing to engage in interviews. Six students confirmed their attendance. Each participant was asked about their availability for the one-on-one interview and was sent a Google Meet invite a day prior to the scheduled interview. Each participant was briefed on the nature of the study, the objectives, the conduct process, and the nature of their participation at the start of each session. Students were requested to sign the consent form and were asked for their permission to record the interview. The researcher used guide questions for the interview. Based on the participants' responses to several questions, follow-up questions were posed. Each interview with a participant lasted around thirty minutes. A few days later, students were asked to review and verify the accuracy of their responses in the interview as part of the transcript validation procedure.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The interviews with participants were categorized as P1 through P6. To maintain privacy, all audiotapes and transcriptions were kept confidential. QDA Miner Lite is used to transcribe English-Filipino text accurately. Coding is performed manually. This study also examined themes in three distinct phases. The application of several codes followed the identification of crucial coding statements. Additionally, extra care was taken for the evaluations of participant-provided data that led to the discussions.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Participants' anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality were protected by not revealing their names and identities in data collection, analysis, and interpretation. This study was entirely voluntary. Participants were informed about the research and the purpose of their participation. After explaining the research procedure, the researcher secured student consent.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

CHALLENGES

Table 1 presents the mean scores (M), standard deviations (SD), descriptive equivalent (DE) of the means, and the level of difficulty of the challenges encountered by students during the course of their online Korean Language learning. Seven (7) challenges were determined in the study, namely: Self-Regulation Challenges (SRC), Technological Literacy and Competency Challenges (TLCC), Student Isolation Challenges (SIC), Technological Sufficiency Challenges (TSC), Technological Complexity Challenges (TCC), Learning Resource Challenges (LRC), and Learning Environment Challenges (LEC). Each challenge is defined by a unique set of indicators.

SELF-REGULATION CHALLENGES

Students experience moderate difficulty on Self-Regulation Challenges (M=2.49, SD=0.490). Specifically, they struggle the most in preparing for an online class (M=2.77, SD=0.585) and often experience difficulties concerning time management (M=2.52, SD=0.827). Meanwhile, they do not always delay tasks to rush them or pass incompletely by the deadline (M=2.36, SD=0.793).

Moreover, based on the conducted interviews, students experience a number of factors affecting their supposed time for class: low motivation, part-time jobs, and lack of peer support.

According to P5, “I experience low motivation. I [am] having difficulty concentrating and [I] struggle [with] time management. This is likely the most challenging for me to overcome, as my success rests solely on my own motivation.

"P3 explains, “Para po sa akin na isang working student, ang hirap po pagsabayin ng work at pag aaral. Bilang isang student po, para sa akin ay mas maiintindihan namin kung sa school kami nag aaral (As a working student, it is hard to maintain a good balance between work and studies. For me, lessons will be much easier to learn when in school).” P1 adds, “sobrang hirap po ng communication dahil hindi po tulad ng f2f

[na] makakapagtanong po o pwedeng may makausap tungkol sa lesson. Mahirap po maintindihan pag sarili lang po. (Communication is so difficult. [Online learning] is unlike f2f where discussions and asking for help is easier. It is difficult to understand the lessons by ourselves).”

Based on the results, it can be gleaned that the online learning setup demands strong self-motivation, discipline, and will. With the pandemic, the interaction of students with teachers and peers

became limited, thereby adversely affecting their social circle, relationships, and support system (Barrot et al., 2021). Furthermore, the current health-care crisis has had a financial impact on the population, particularly on lower-income households. It has required them to seek alternative sources of living. Additionally, as face-to-face classes are replaced by remote delivery, students lack familiarity with the new regular learning environment, putting them at a significant disadvantage. It has required them to hold their own time and set their own pace in studying at a remote setup, which in retrospect could be an advantage but actually requires massive change in habits to be effective. Self-efficacy in time management skills and competencies takes an ample amount of time to practice (Heo et al., 2021). These challenges in preparation, time management, and task completion could likely be an effect of virtual learning as an entirely new experience for learners (Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2021; Faisal et al., 2022).

TABLE 1: The Level of Students' Challenges during Online Korean Language Learning

CHALLENGES	M	SD	DE	Level
Self-Regulation Challenges (SRC)	**2.49**	**0.490**	**Disagree**	**Moderately Difficult**
1. I delay tasks related to my studies so that they are either not fully completed by their deadline or had to be rushed to be completed.	2.36	0.793	Disagree	Moderately Difficult
2. I fail to get appropriate help during online classes.	2.41	0.705	Disagree	Moderately Difficult
3. I lack the ability to control my own thoughts, emotions, and actions during online classes.	2.38	0.784	Disagree	Moderately Difficult
4. I have limited preparation before an online class.	2.77	0.585	Agree	Difficult
5. I have poor time management skills during online classes.	2.52	0.827	Agree	Difficult
6. I fail to properly use online peer learning strategies (i.e., learning from one another to better facilitate learning such as peer tutoring, group discussion, and peer feedback).	2.49	0.671	Agree	Difficult
Technological Literacy and Competency Challenges (TLCC)	**2.25**	**0.521**	**Disagree**	**Moderately Difficult**
7. I lack competence and proficiency in using various interfaces or systems that allow me to control a computer or another embedded system for studying.	2.31	0.748	Disagree	Moderately Difficult
8. I resist learning technology.	2.19	0.729	Disagree	Moderately Difficult

9. I am distracted by an overly complex technology.	2.35	0.681	Disagree	Moderately Difficult
10. I have difficulties in learning a new technology.	2.19	0.742	Disagree	Moderately Difficult
11. I lack the ability to effectively use technology to facilitate learning.	2.15	0.674	Disagree	Moderately Difficult
12. I lack knowledge and training in the use of technology.	2.12	0.694	Disagree	Moderately Difficult
13. I am intimidated by the technologies used for learning.	2.21	0.650	Disagree	Moderately Difficult
14. I resist and/or am confused when getting appropriate help during online classes.	2.43	0.654	Disagree	Moderately Difficult
15. I have poor understanding of directions and expectations during online learning.	2.29	0.728	Disagree	Moderately Difficult
16. I perceive technology as a barrier to getting help from others during online classes.	2.29	0.740	Disagree	Moderately Difficult
Student Isolation challenges (SIC)	**2.54**	**0.623**	**Agree**	**Difficult**
17. I feel emotionally disconnected or isolated during online classes.	2.46	0.793	Disagree	Moderately Difficult
18. I feel disinterested during online classes.	2.34	0.812	Disagree	Moderately Difficult

Table 1 (continued)

CHALLENGES	**M**	**SD**	**DE**	**Level**
19. I feel unease and uncomfortable in using video projection, microphones, and speakers.	2.55	0.745	Agree	Difficult
20. I feel uncomfortable being the center of attention during online classes.	2.82	0.785	Agree	Difficult
Technological Sufficiency Challenges (TSC)	**2.51**	**0.719**	**Agree**	**Difficult**
21. I have insufficient access to learning technology.	2.36	0.721	Disagree	Moderately Difficult
22. I experience inequalities with regard to access to and use of technologies during online classes because of my socioeconomic, physical, and psychological condition.	2.40	0.716	Disagree	Moderately Difficult
23. I have outdated technology.	2.42	0.706	Disagree	Moderately Difficult
24. I do not have Internet access during online classes.	2.16	0.692	Disagree	Moderately Difficult
25. I have low bandwidth and slow processing speeds.	2.63	0.749	Agree	Difficult
26. I experience technical difficulties in completing my assignments.	3.11	2.954	Agree	Difficult
Technological Complexity Challenges (TCC)	**2.55**	**0.598**	**Agree**	**Difficult**

27. I am distracted by the complexity of the technology during online classes.	2.46	.696	Disagree	Moderately Difficult
28. I experience difficulties in using complex technology.	2.46	0.670	Disagree	Moderately Difficult
29. I experience difficulties when using longer videos for learning.	2.74	0.756	Agree	Difficult
Learning Resource Challenges (LRC)	**2.74**	**0.552**	**Agree**	**Difficult**
30. I have insufficient access to library resources.	2.68	0.687	Agree	Difficult
31. I have an insufficient access to laboratory equipment and materials.	2.85	0.713	Agree	Difficult
32. I have limited access to textbooks, worksheets, and other instructional materials.	2.56	0.682	Agree	Difficult
33. I experience financial challenges when accessing learning resources and technology.	2.87	0.811	Agree	Difficult
Learning Environment Challenges (LEC)	**3.00**	**0.522**	**Agree**	**Difficult**
34. I experience online distractions such as social media during online classes.	2.88	.732	Agree	Difficult
35. I experience distractions at home as a learning environment.	3.12	0.798	Agree	Difficult
36. I have difficulties in selecting the best time and area for learning at home.	3.00	0.723	Agree	Difficult
37. Home set-up limits the completion of certain requirements for my subject (e.g., laboratory and physical activities).	3.01	0.704	Agree	Difficult
Average	**2.58**	**0.426**	**Agree**	**Difficult**

Scale of Means: 4.00–3.26 Strongly Agree/Very Difficult; 3.25–2.51 Agree/Difficult; 2.50–1.76 Disagree/Moderately Difficult; 1.75–1.00 Strongly Disagree/Not Difficult; M-Mean; SD-Standard Deviation; DE-Descriptive Equivalent

TECHNOLOGICAL LITERACY AND COMPETENCY CHALLENGES

Similarly, students find Technological Literacy and Competency Challenges moderately difficult (M=2.25, SD=0.521). Interestingly, although they acknowledge resisting or being confused when getting appropriate help during online classes (M=2.43, SD=0.654), they believe that they do not lack knowledge and training in technology use (M=2.12, SD=0.694).

With the increasing technological advancements in the modern world, TLC is becoming of greater importance in education. Even prior to the pandemic, a significant portion of the population was already familiar with technology and the internet. According to the global internet usage and access demographics chart released by the Pew Research Center in 2020 (Gonzales, 2020), 94% of 18 to 29-year-olds in the Philippines are tech-savvy, compared to 74% of the 30-49 age

group and only 36% of the 50+ year-olds. Furthermore, those with access to the internet are appreciative of integrating technology into learning (Gurajena et al., 2021; Obaid & Mohammad 2022). This could explain why the respondents, all of whom are between the ages of 18 and 29, believe they have adequate knowledge of technology. Consequently, a study by Peper et al. (2021) reveals that teachers experience similar technological issues as students in online learning, only that they are a little less acquainted with technology, as shown in the statistics. Some members of the faculty belong to older age groups; therefore, it is likely inevitable to encounter challenges such as confusion when seeking technology-related help in classes.

STUDENT ISOLATION CHALLENGES

Students experience difficulty in Student Isolation Challenges (M=2.54, SD=0.623). In fact, they feel discomfort being the center of attention during online classes (M=2.82, SD=0.785) and experience uneasiness when using video projection, microphones, and speakers (M=2.55, SD=0.745). On a lighter note, students disagree that they feel disinterested during online classes (M=2.34, SD=0.812). In addition, based on the conducted interviews, this result corresponds to the experience of P1, wherein the student stated “Opo, sobrang hirap po. Dahil hindi po tulad ng face to face makakapag tanong po or pedeng may makausap tungkol sa lesson mahirap po maintindihan pag sarili lang po. (Yes, it is very difficult. Because unlike face-to-face, we can ask for clarification or talk about the lesson… it is hard to understand it on our own).”

These findings are in line with the conclusions drawn by Giray et al (2022). Students experience anxiety when participating in class due to the fear that their language skills are insufficient, and they may commit grammatical and pronunciation errors when speaking a foreign language. This fear stems from the fact that students believe they are more likely to make mistakes when speaking a foreign language than when speaking their native language. Also, they are concerned with the opinions of others and have a tendency to overthink their performance in class. The students' personal fears and the ambiance of the online class both play a role in determining how confident they feel about participating in online classes, despite the fact that the students are motivated to learn about the subject matter.

TECHNOLOGICAL SUFFICIENCY CHALLENGES

The students encounter difficulties related to Technological Sufficiency Challenges (M=2.51, SD=0.719), most especially during the completion of assignments, where various technical issues arise (M=3.11, SD=2.954). While the majority have internet access, they

often face problems such as low bandwidth and slow processing speeds (M=2.63, SD=0.749). Additionally, there are still a significant few who do not have complete internet access during online classes in some cases (M=2.16, SD=0.692).

Qualitative results support the findings obtained from the survey. From the interviews, all six participants experienced limited access to quality internet connection. A response from P1 says, “Pag po mabagal ang internet connection ko apektado po ang pag-access at pagsagot ko sa mga assessment, especially po yung may mga time limit na klase ng exam kasi po nadedelay ako sa pag sagot kaya nalelate din magpasa. In the end po minsan di na nakakapagpasa dahil inabutan po ng time. Sigurado po na mababa ang scores ko (Slow internet connection affects my access and performance in assessments, especially when exams are time-bounded. Forms load slowly, giving me less time to complete my answers, that is why I submit late. Or worse, I sometimes fail to submit for not beating the deadline. In turn, I get low scores).” P6 comments, “Hindi po competitive and internet provider namin...Hindi ko po lahat nadodownload ‘yung mga course packets at nababasa tapos po panibagong lesson na naman. Nahuhuli po ako sa lesson (The internet service we receive is not competitive…I fail to download and read all course packets in time. In the end, I get late for the lesson).”

Some students encounter gadget limitations. P4 says, “I am using Huawei smartphone, the one with no Google at all.” When asked about difficulties in downloading files, P3 explains, “Mahirap po lalo na ‘pag via phone lang ino-open minsan po dahil full storage na… (It gets especially difficult via phone because sometimes the phone’s storage is full…).” P2 says, “I borrow a phone to my cousin para makapasok at makagawa ng mga activities and para makapasok sa online [class] (I borrow my cousin’s phone just to attend online classes and accomplish my activities).”

In an online environment, the most typical hurdles that both students and instructors face are ones that are technological in nature, including issues with software, unanticipated malfunctions of electronic devices, limited storage capacity, and unstable internet connection (Farooq et al., 2020 and Xheleli et al., 2021 as seen in Jaradat & Ajlouni, 2021). The infrastructure for distance learning, electronic gadgets, and the upkeep of these technologies are all massive expenditures that the government is responsible for bearing. However, because of the weak economies of emerging nations, these requirements are not being completely satisfied (Tadesse & Muluye, 2020; Sri Wilda et al., 2022). Therefore, the responsibility of meeting the requirements of online courses is placed on the shoulders of the students, who, regrettably, do not all possess the skills necessary to get access to an adequate number of tools and technology. More

interestingly, even though the participants in this study were students who chose online delivery rather than modular delivery, the findings that showed that these students did not have full access to the internet shed light on a gap that prevents students from receiving an equal, inclusive, and appropriate learning opportunity.

TECHNOLOGICAL COMPLEXITY CHALLENGES

Consequently, students encountered difficulty in Technological Complexity Challenges (M=2.55, SD=0.598). Among the three indicators, they found it the most difficult to use longer videos for learning (M=2.74, SD=0.756).

Learning new information through the use of video instructional materials is not a mindless pursuit, in contrast to the practice of viewing entertaining videos on other social media sites like YouTube and TikTok. Because they require engagement-that is, a shift from merely observing to actively taking part in the learning process-online video lectures and recorded synchronous classes may take a considerable amount of time to process. This is because engagement is a prerequisite for both of these types of learning environments (Peper et al., 2021). Due to the unprecedented movement toward online learning, students are not being prepared to become active learners while viewing video materials, which creates a challenge for the retention of students and poses a dilemma for the education system. They are forced to halt what they are doing or shift their focus to something else as a result of the overwhelming amount of information. It was urged that more interactive video materials be produced so that students might increase the amount of time they spent paying attention during video lectures (Geri et al., 2017).

LEARNING RESOURCES CHALLENGES

Students also perceive serious problems related to Learning Resources Challenges (M=2.74, SD=0.552). Particularly, they experience financial challenges when accessing learning resources and technology (M=2.87, SD=0.811), as well as insufficient access to laboratory equipment and materials (M=2.85, SD=0.713). Limited access to textbooks, worksheets, and other instructional materials (M=2.56, SD=0.682), although the least challenging among the LRC indicators, is still a significantly difficult challenge encountered by students.

Access to a computer and the internet are the most fundamental requirements for effective remote learning. Sadly, this is not the situation for many students, especially those who study in poor nations (Zhang, 2020 as seen in Tadesse & Muluye, 2020). The education industry was caught off guard when the abrupt move to online learning occurred, and as a result, it was ill-equipped to

provide access to fundamental digital services. In addition, financing for textbooks, other instructional materials, and suitable information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructures was restricted in emerging countries (Mathrani et al., 2021), which put the educational institutions in a significant disadvantage. Additionally, in the majority of nations, the instructional technologies and resources available at private schools are often of a higher quality than those offered at public institutions (Tadesse & Muluye, 2020). For a state university located in a developing nation like the Philippines, this explains the obvious lack of resources experienced by the students of BPSU to support online learning. This is in addition to the financial difficulties experienced by the students, which have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT CHALLENGES

The Learning Environment Challenges posed the greatest level of difficulty among the seven challenges (M=3.00, SD=0.552). Specifically, students agree that they experience distractions at home as a learning environment (M=3.12, SD=0.798) the most. And despite having the least mean among the four LEC indicators, students experiencing online distractions such as social media during online classes (M=2.88, SD=0.732) is still a significant difficulty.

Results aligned with the responses of the participants in the interviews. P4 revealed that, “there are so many issues like the sound of the cars on the street which makes me feel unfocused with what I am doing.” Similar concerns about noise in the neighborhood were raised by P2 and P5.

Previous study conducted by Barrot et al. (2021) came to the same conclusion, finding that the learning environment is the most difficult obstacle for students to overcome, particularly the lack of space and amenities that are favorable to learning. The findings also corroborated earlier reports that learners face a significant obstacle in the learning environment, such as noise, a lack of a private workspace, disruptions to regularly scheduled chores and activities, and the presence of other people in the household that cause disruptions to the working space (Khlaif & Salha, 2020; Amiruddin et al., 2022). Because they were receiving their education from home, students were expected to be present both digitally in the classroom and physically in the house. As a result, students had to combine their tasks and obligations as students with those of members of a family all at the same time. In addition, studies have shown that it is more difficult to concentrate online than it is during sessions taught face-to-face. This is a result of the rising technological convergence in our society (Jaradat & Ajlouni, 2021; Peper et al., 2021). Students in today's schools often multitask; for example, they may browse on

social media, search the web, or contact one another while they are working on their coursework or even as a normal part of their everyday life (Heo et al., 2021). On average, people check their mobile devices 344 times every day, which equates to once every four minutes (Wheelwright, 2022). Consequently, temptations such as social media during online sessions are much more attractive. This is particularly true when considering the fact that students are confined to unsupervised working conditions at home.

Students experience the seven identified challenges on a difficult level (M=2.58, SD=0.426) with the indicator means ranging from M=2.12 (moderately difficult) to M=3.12 (difficult). More indicatively, the greatest challenge students faced was concerning the learning environment challenges (M=3.00, SD=0.552), particularly on the distractions within their environment (M=3.12, SD=0.798). Other indicators students deemed highly challenging were the technical difficulties encountered when completing assignments under TSC and the home set-up as the limiting factor in the completion of certain requirements under LEC. On the contrary, the least challenging students experienced was related to the technological literacy and competency challenges (M=2.25, SD=0.521), particularly on the adequacy of knowledge and training in the use of technology (M=2.12, SD=0.694). Other areas that students experienced the least challenging were the ability to use technology effectively under TLCC and internet access under TSC.

OTHER CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

Aside from the seven (7) predetermined challenges in the survey, students named a number of concerns from the interviews, all falling under the theme: novelty of the language. This pertains to the challenges they experienced in learning Korean language itself, including the use of English in teaching Korean.

P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6 found language learning difficult given the fact that Korean is a foreign language. Furthermore, they are not well-versed in English, which is the language instrument used for teaching, thus aggravating the challenge in learning Korean. They experience difficulties in speaking, reading, and writing the language, and they feel lacking in terms of syntax, grammar, and vocabulary.

According to P3, “Mahirap po para sa akin dahil hindi ako gano’n kagaling magsalita sa English kaya hirap din po ko sa Korean (Learning Korean is difficult for me because I am not that fluent in English).” Meanwhile, P5 encounters problems both in speaking and writing: “Nahirapan din po ako sa pagbigkas saka pagsulat, ‘yung ibang kasi mag kakapareho kaya nakakalito isulat (I had a hard time speaking and writing, especially since some [characters] look alike and it confuses me).” P1 also has agreeing statements, “Sa speaking and

reading po ako nahirapan, nakakalitong basahin po… (I had difficulties in speaking and reading. Tthe characters] are confusing to read…)."

Accompanying the speaking and writing difficulties are challenges in syntax, grammar, and vocabulary. P2 explains, "The biggest challenge to learning Korean is the entirely new vocabulary, with words that can be hard to distinguish from one another, especially in a fast-paced conversation." P5 also comments, "Pinaka nahirapan po akong topic is 'yung sa mga sentence kasi maraming mga papalitan at bubuuin na mga sentence (The most difficult topic for me is the one that involves sentence structure since there are a lot to replace and construct in a sentence)."

Because reading and writing are the primary focuses of online programs, students who do not have a strong command of the English language may have difficulties. (Byram & Feng, 2006 as shown in Esperat, 2018). This is particularly true when English is the tool used to teach another foreign language, since a lack of fluency in English heightens the barrier in communication between the two parties.

Non-verbal clues, such as expressions on the face and body language, are very important components of communicating ability in a second language (Lim, 2016). The fact that these signals are not always well monitored or trained makes it particularly challenging to talk and converse in a specific language when one is utilizing an online setting (Esperat, 2018). In addition, the Korean language has its own speaking patterns. Students may have difficulty understanding one another when they hear sounds in a foreign language (in this case, Korean) that are not included in the English or Filipino sound inventory, and vice versa (Ohata, 2004 as seen in Quintos, 2021). The normal patterns of stress and intonation in Filipino and English, which help define the overall rhythm of a sentence, are different from those in Korean, and as a result, Korean rhythm is foreign to most people.

The Hangeul is the name of the distinctive writing system used for the Korean language. They are asked to familiarize themselves with a large number of characters that do not correspond to phonetic spellings. As a result, presenting Hangeul to kids who have only been acclimated to the straightforward phonetic writing method might be quite daunting for them (Joo & Damron, 2015; So Hee Yoon 2022). Therefore, it is necessary to engage in less intimidating reading and writing tasks with children in order to give them a sense of accomplishment after the materials have been finished.

STRATEGIES

Students employed several strategies to deal with the challenges posed by online Korean language study. To acquaint themselves with the Korean language, students engage in activities such as watching

Korean videos, reading Korean books, conversing in Korean, and jotting down Korean vocabulary.

Students watch K-dramas and educational videos on YouTube, such as videos on how to pronounce a particular word (P1, P3, P5, P6). For example, P3 says, “I'm always watching in YouTube of basic pronunciations and word vocabulary.” P5 agrees, saying, “I think the best strategy that i used in enhancing my vocabulary is by being a K-pop fan for like a decade now. I always watch K-dramas. I think that helped a lot.”

Meanwhile, some jot down difficult words they encounter while reading books and try memorizing them (P1, P2, P4). P2 comments, “Ang strategy ko ay magbasa at isulat ‘yung mga korean language para mas maintindihan ko yung Korean language at the same time alam kong isulat (My strategy is reading and writing Korean terms so I could understand them better and write them properly at the same time).” P1 adds, “Kapag may di ako naiintindihan sa mga video, kinakabisa ko minsan [‘yung salita] at nagta-try ako gumawa ng sentence at aaralin ulit kinabukasan (Whenever I did not understand some words mentioned in videos, I memorize them, try using them in a sentence, then review them again the following day).”

On the other hand, P6 practices speaking skills by conversing with someone well-versed in the language. According to them, “I also collaborate with my friends in the dorm, and we share to each other what we know.”

The results showed that students actively engage in numerous methods when confronted with academic-related challenges in an online setup. They acknowledge the difficulties and find ways to deal with it, rather than simply giving up. For instance, P1 stated during the interview, “I adapt myself with online learning. Wala akong choice eh kun’di kung anong meron ako, yayakapin ko na lang. Mahirap pero hindi susuko. Laban lang (I have no choice but embrace what I have. It is difficult but I will not give up. Fighting).” Consequently, P6 says, “Lagi kong naaalala ang mga magulang ko kaya lagi akong nag-aaral mabuti. Kapag distracted ako kasi may problem sa gadget ko, iniisip ko sila para motivate ako ulit (I study hard because I always think about my parents. Whenever I get distracted by gadget limitations, I motivate myself by thinking of them).” These findings aligned with previous research (Khalil, 2020; Fawaz et al., 2021; Barrot et al., 2021) showing that their approach to learning adaptation is dependent on unique elements and situations surrounding each student, such as the presence of peers, availability of resources, and aptitude. It also varies with the learning style that fits them: some prefer memorizing, while some make use of traditional pen and paper. They keep themselves motivated by finding reasons and inspirations to keep going, such as family, and draw from their present circumstances.

CONCLUSION

This research was an attempt to dissect the challenges that students faced when learning Korean language online in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and shed light on the strategies that students employed to ease their learning process. According to the findings of the online survey and the interviews, students face the seven predetermined challenges at a difficult level overall. The challenges pertaining to self-regulation and technological literacy and competency were experienced at a moderate level of difficulty, while the challenges pertaining to student isolation, technological sufficiency challenges, technological complexity challenges, learning resource challenges, and learning environment challenges were experienced at a difficult level. The greatest obstacle was presented by LEC, particularly in terms of the disruptions caused by others in the household, such as noise, a lack of private workspace, disruptions to regularly scheduled chores and activities, and the fact that other people in the household cause disruptions to the working space.

In addition, students consider an indication about TSC to be very tough, notably the technological challenges (such as an unusual breakdown of internet access) that are faced while completing tasks. These results demonstrate that students do not have full access to the resources that are necessary for successful remote learning. These resources include a pleasant workplace, sufficient technological resources, and enough infrastructure. Even if the students who took part in the research were the ones who favored online learning over the modular style of delivery, the technical and internet demands were still insufficient for the online experience to come even near to being a success. The provision of fundamental digital services was restricted to economies in development, including the Philippines. In the midst of a public health crisis in which families with a lower socio-economic status were negatively impacted by the financial repercussions of the pandemic, students instead bore the responsibility of providing for their own needs for learning, with little to no provision from institutions. This was the case despite the fact that the institutions were obligated to do so. Anxiety, a lack of motivation, and poor participation in courses are the direct results of the online learning system, which has made the students' financial, technical, and social obstacles even more difficult.

In addition, there are other issues that center around the uniqueness of the Korean language, such as the use of English in the instruction of Korean. Students who are not fluent in the language that is used in the classroom (that is, English) have a far more difficult time understanding Korean language concepts. The students were unfamiliar with the non-phonetic letters, which made learning the Hangeul writing system more difficult. This was particularly true given

that Hangeul is a unique writing system. Because of this, the pronunciation, intonation, and sounds employed in the language are not part of the sound inventory used in English or Filipino; the fact that this vocabulary does not exist in Korean contributes to the difficulty of speaking Korean. Students adopt a number of ways to overcome these problems, including viewing instructive films and K-dramas, reading books, memorization and/or writing down new terms and relearning them, and speaking with people while using the language. They do their best to keep themselves motivated by always looking for new sources of inspiration and being committed to their objectives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions drawn, the researcher offered several recommendations to enhance the capacities of the students to learn Korean Language despite the shift of learning modalities. First, free medicines and accessible mental health and medical care should be highly prioritized. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the deteriorating financial situation of students, schools must emphasize the holistic health of their constituents. In order to make medical and mental health services accessible, on-call and online consultations must be made available. Additionally, free medicine and medical help must be offered to ensure the resolution of current issues.

Furthermore, the researcher recommended enhanced online learning instructional materials and faculty training. Changes in the learning environment and student demands would need the modification and alignment of course competencies. This is a result of enhanced educational materials (IMs). IMs must be more participatory, particularly for learning Korean. It is advised that students practice conversations using the target language via group activities and partnerships in class. Teaching pronunciation and non-verbal signals using more interesting materials, such as K-pop songs and K-drama clips, might be effective. Also, as not only the students but also the faculty encounter a new learning environment, it would be required for the professors to complete extensive training in online learning instruction. Thus, instructors would be better capable of using technology and locating materials for education.

It is encouraged to develop technical infrastructures and provide funding for students' electronic gadgets. As noted in the findings, poor nations (such as the Philippines) accept for internet access with low speeds and bandwidths. As the educational system transitions to online instruction, internet access is becoming a need for students. Unfortunately, the existing infrastructures do not support or reach remote and rural regions; instead, they are only present in

communities close to cities. Thus, educational inequality is a developing concern.

Finally, the researcher suggested maximizing research efforts and using evidence-based techniques. Higher education institutions (HEIs) are supposed to meet the requirements of their constituents, including professors, staff, students, and parents. In the midst of a health crisis, HEIs are expected to exhibit evidence-based and research-based procedures that are effective and efficient. It is advised that institutions increase their research efforts in order to record both the issues and the best practices, and revise their policies appropriately, particularly during pandemics.

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