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Profile and problems encountered in distance learning among Bachelor of Elementary Education students: A basis for a proposed action plan

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Abstract: This work sought the profile and extent of problems Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd) students encountered in distance learning as the basis for a proposed action plan. This study made use of descriptive-correlational research methods. Respondents were the Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd) students at Mindoro State University, Bongabong Campus (MBC). The study used a researcher-made instrument. Results showed that most BEEd students enrolled at MBC are 21 years old, female, in a state of lower income, single, and in their 4th year. BEEd students foster problems in distance learning concerning geographical location, internet connection, time management, and study habits. There is a significant correlation between demographic characteristics and issues faced, particularly regarding civil status and geographic location. These characteristics include adaptability, distractions, computer problems, and a lack of motivation and support. Socioeconomic status is only significantly related to internet connection, as not all students can participate in distance learning due to financial constraints.

Keywords: problems encountered; distance learning; Bachelor of Elementary Education; action plan

1. Introduction

As the world moves forward in response to the new standard setting, distance learning has replaced traditional modes of instruction. With this shift, distance education is a viable option. It is so because it can be a helpful learning method and improve students' skills. Furthermore, The Association for Humanistic Education (AHEAD) Chief Executive Officer Rosanna Llenado [1] states that distance learning paves the way for future educational advancement; it is a comprehensive learning platform that can provide students with valuable knowledge on various subjects.

Likewise, today's world necessitates continuous learning. Distance learning is an option for such people because it allows them to quickly overcome technology selection and adoption adjustments, design issues, strategies to increase interactivity and active learning, learner characteristics, and learner support.

Distance learning can help societal, social, and economic development. It is an essential component of general education worldwide. The mission of distance learning is to educate students during the pandemic. They said that distance learning gives students who cannot attend classes in person a chance to succeed and allows them to continue their education despite time, money, effort, and location constraints. They coined it a "self-paced learning process" used in distance learning that allows students of all types to learn [2].

Implementing distance learning in elementary schools during the pandemic showcased teachers' adaptability and resilience in acquiring technological skills for educational continuity. However, it simultaneously exacerbated existing inequalities, with the digital divide disadvantaging students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Concerns arose about declining learning outcomes, particularly in reading, writing, and math skills, and challenges in online student engagement, especially for younger learners. Technical difficulties underscored the need for robust digital infrastructure and support. Teachers faced increased workload and emotional stress, emphasizing the importance of psychological support and professional development [3].

Moreover, there are significant technological barriers, such as unreliable internet, limited device access, and digital literacy challenges, disproportionately impacting students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. It highlights the need to address the digital divide and ensure equitable access to technology. The research emphasizes the ineffectiveness of traditional lecture-based methods in online education, stressing the importance of engaging and interactive pedagogies tailored to elementary students. Emotional and psychological impacts, including isolation and stress, further emphasize the necessity of holistic support systems. Insights from this study can guide efforts to enhance online learning practices, bridge technological disparities, and prioritize students' emotional well-being in similar educational contexts.

Meanwhile, homeschooling is an alternative delivery model that seeks to provide students with primary education in a home-based environment, supported by trained parents, guardians, or tutors, according to Llego [4].

Most higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines have implemented flexible learning systems. During and after the pandemic, such systems consider significant changes in the learning environment. Students had chosen from three different learning modes: 1) online, which uses publicly available online classrooms to deliver instruction; 2) offline, which uses printed modules or digital media stored on storage devices; or 3) blended, which uses both online and offline modes [5].

Because of the advancements and the demand for an adjustment in response to distance education, Laguador [6] found some problems and challenges in distance learning that the students experienced: lack of technological materials, poor internet connection, and poor study habits.

Meanwhile, in Region IV MIMAROPA, the need for a signal or internet connection was a significant challenge due to the geographical location. As a result, many MIMAROPA schools use modular distance learning and are still coping with and developing the skills to deal with blended learning [7].

Schools, private colleges, and universities in Oriental Mindoro are all doing their part to help college students learn more. Every college student receives various learning modalities tailored to their needs while considering their current situation. Despite efforts to make education more accessible, students still face numerous challenges regarding distance learning, particularly in this province.

Furthermore, students and educators at Mindoro State University Bongabong Campus (MBC) must familiarize themselves with the university's modalities, causing a major crisis. Distance education has grown in popularity due to the limited

opportunities for face-to-face interactions between instructors and students. Still, it has also introduced many new challenges to teaching and learning.

Distance education has its challenges and problems, which leads us, as researchers, to collect and gather data on the problems encountered by Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd) in distance learning. The researchers also decided to conduct the study to address the needs of the respondents enrolled in a distance learning program and the teachers and the institution to have an intervention for the class organization using a proposed action plan.

2. Methodology

The research utilized descriptive-correlational research to describe the demographic profile, the extent of problems encountered by respondents participating in distance learning, and their relationships. The respondents were selected among first-year to fourth-year Bachelor of Elementary Education program students under the distance learning modality—90 from 116 BEEd students enrolled from the first year to the fourth through simple random sampling.

The study used a self-made questionnaire, which aided in surveying the respondents regarding their profile and problems encountered in distance learning. The said instrument contained two (2) parts. The first part consisted of questions regarding their personal information, including their names, ages, genders, civil statuses, socioeconomic statuses, and year levels.

Meanwhile, the second part was the statements about what they encountered in distance learning concerning geographical location, internet connection, time management, and study habits. Each item in Part II was rated using the 4-point Likert scale, which allows researchers to include four extreme options without a neutral option [8]. Three (3) research experts validated the instrument. Upon validation, Pearson's Product Moment of Correlation Coefficient was used for reliability, which has been interpreted based on the r -value from the ten (10) non-respondents administered in a test-retest method from the Innovative College of Science and Technology (ICST). The reliability value was 0.835 for geographical location, 0.866 for internet connection, 0.870 for time management, and 0.855 for study habits.

In data gathering, the researchers forwarded a request letter to the Campus Executive Director for approval to conduct the study. Upon approval, the researchers surveyed 90 participants from BEEd in MBC. The statistical tools used were descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequency and Percentage, Weighted Mean, and Pearson's R . The data were measured using 88 degrees of freedom at a 5% significance level.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Age

The results showed that 37, or 41.11%, belong to the 21-year-old group. In comparison, 21, or 23.33%, aged 20; on the other hand, 16, or 17.78%, were 22 years old; five (5) out of 90, or 5.56% of the population, were 23 years old; four (4), or 4.44%, out of 90 were 19 years old; three (3) out of 90, or 33.3% of the population,

were in their 18th year; 3.34% of the population, or three (3) of the respondents, were 25 years old. The survey's most minor finding regarding the age of the respondents was the age of 24, where there is only one (1) or 1.11% of the population.

The results imply that most Bachelor of Elementary Education students at Mindoro State University are 21. Results conform to the study by the US Census Bureau [9], where the majority of the students in college were aged 21, which has a percentage of 69%. Since the largest population of the respondents came from the 3rd year and 4th year, respectively, they have the most significant number of students who are 21 years old because the traditional full-time students are more likely to graduate college at 4–6 years; therefore, 22 to 23 is the average college graduation age of the students.

3.2. Civil status

Results reflected that most BEEed students were single for the Academic Year 2021–2022. Single students only prioritized their studies over anyone else, while married students had more responsibilities in their homes and schools. That is why single students were most enrolled in the Bachelor of Elementary Education course. Results confirmed with the survey of College Pulse [10], where the majority (70%) of the 1000 undergraduates in a recent college study were single at some point during the COVID-19 pandemic; this is because single students were better at prioritizing and concentrating on their studies, but students who are married dropped out of school because of unneeded difficulties at home and school.

3.3. Gender

Results reflected that most of the students taking education courses were females due to the ability of women to be more responsible and know how to handle learners than men. Results confirmed by Kathan et al. [11] found that men and women study different subjects. As evidenced by data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) on the 2018 to 2019 cohort of UK students enrolling in higher education, women tend to adhere to the more traditionally “feminine” topics like education, wherein 78% of female students are taking education courses. Gender imbalances in education occurred from women's deliberate and strategic choices, labor market conditions, social norms, and cultural messages. It is widely accepted in the Philippines that women are more progressive in their education than men despite earning lower labor-market wages and the demand of their location.

3.4. Socio-economic status

Results show that 44%, or 49%, of the population belonged to lower-income families with less than ₱10,957 per month. Sixteen (16) or 18% of respondents reported having a low income that ranged from ₱9520 to ₱21,194 per month. There are 26%, or 29%, in the low middle with a monthly income ranging from ₱21,194 to ₱43,828. Four (4), or 4%, of the population belong to middle-income earners, ranging from ₱43,828 to ₱76,669.

Results imply that most respondents are lower-income (less than ₱10,957). Despite significant progress in poverty reduction, income inequality has only recently

declined. Because of the impact of a pandemic that led people to lose their jobs, others reduced their working hours to respect and follow the health protocols. Results aligned that even though public school is free, families still cannot afford to send their children to a complicated network of socioeconomic reasons. The following compose the majority of the socioeconomic profile.

3.5. Year level

Results revealed that 30%, or 33.3%, of the respondents were in 3rd and 4th year, respectively; 21%, or 23.3%, were second-year students, and nine (9) 10% were first-year students, which implies that most students enrolled in BEEd were in their third and fourth years, with first-year students accounting for the smallest number of students enrolled. Many third- and fourth-year students enrolled in the BEEd program because of the time; however, the students in the first and second years, during their time, were not encouraged to enroll in the education course because they were scared due to the pandemic.

Most third- and fourth-year enrollees came from traditional grade levels, where their ages corresponded to year levels. The findings were consistent with a survey conducted by the Polytechnic University of the Philippines [12], the country's first polytechnic and largest state university, which had 64,551 undergraduate students in the first semester and 61,416 in the second semester of the 2014–2015 academic year, as well as 10,860 first-year students in the course Bachelor of Elementary Education.

3.6. Geographical location

Results revealed that various challenges students face in distance learning are attributed to the difficulty and cost of submitting student requirements in school, including the financial burden of travel. It highlights a significant financial strain on most BEEd students, indicating that their low-income backgrounds make it challenging to afford transportation expenses, hindering their ability to complete school requirements.

The findings align with the observations made by Kirst [13], who noted the increasing financial burden on college students, particularly related to travel expenses. On the contrary, location hinders students from interacting with others, echoing the concerns raised by Sikali [14] about the social implications of social distance. This item suggests that BEEd students may be grappling with issues related to socialization, potentially impacting their overall learning experience and personal growth. The results emphasize the complex interplay between financial constraints and social aspects affecting the distance learning experience for BEEd students.

3.7. Internet connection

Results findings indicate that among the challenges faced by the respondents in distance learning, issues related to internet connectivity garnered significant attention, highlighting the financial strain of availing internet load for online classes, the necessity of seeking places with faster internet connections, difficulty finding stable connections, and concerns about poor connectivity affecting academic performance.

The implications suggest that many respondents faced obstacles securing reliable internet access, particularly those residing in mountainous areas. Financial constraints further complicated the situation, with some students unable to afford internet load due to their parents' unemployment, while others sacrificed their food allowance to avail online access. These challenges align with previous studies by Hastuti et al. [15] and Lynch [16], highlighting students' struggles in remote areas with limited internet signals and the detrimental impact of poor connectivity on academic performance. The findings underscore the critical role of accessible and stable internet connections in ensuring the effectiveness of distance learning, especially in areas with geographical or economic challenges.

3.8. Time management

Results indicate that among the challenges encountered by Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd) students in distance learning, emphasizing the stress associated with balancing responsibilities at home and academics and difficulty in estimating the time required for each task, juggling academic tasks and household responsibilities, balancing time effectively, neglecting household chores to prioritize academic responsibilities, and struggling to determine task priorities, all received high mean scores, indicating prevalent difficulties in time management for BEEd students.

The implications highlight that most BEEd students struggle to balance academic commitments and household responsibilities while confined to their homes. The need to allocate time for household errands often forces students to set aside their schoolwork, impacting their academic performance under the pressure of managing both responsibilities. It aligns with Emmanuel's [17] observations that the time spent on household chores can adversely affect students' academic performance. Additionally, the challenges in time management resonate with Harman's [18] insights, emphasizing that even highly successful individuals may encounter difficulties in effectively managing their time to meet various demands and deadlines. These findings underscore the importance of addressing time management issues to enhance the overall distance learning experience for BEEd students.

3.9. Study habits

Results reveal that students face significant difficulties related to insufficient resources and time constraints, such as the inability to engage with modules due to the lack of learning materials such as gadgets, challenges in completing all schoolwork within the given time, struggle to review notes amidst household distractions, and difficulty managing distractions and maintaining productivity.

The implications suggest that many BEEd students need more essential learning materials, including gadgets like laptops, personal computers, printers, and basic stationery, crucial for participating in online classes and completing modules. Financial constraints, exacerbated by parents losing jobs due to pandemic-related protocols, have hindered students' ability to afford these necessary devices. Moreover, additional expenses, such as printing study materials and commuting for assignments, further strain students' financial resources, making it challenging for them to save money to purchase gadgets. It resonates with Graham et al.'s [19] findings,

highlighting the disparities in online class participation due to financial constraints. Conversely, the item with the lowest mean score aligns with Shatz’s [20] observations, where students struggle with time management and productivity due to procrastination, leading to suboptimal academic performance.

Table 1 showed that a significant relationship exists between the demographic profile and the extent of problems encountered in distance learning, specifically among the following: age and time management—0.242 *r*-value; age and study habits—0.318 *r*-values; civil status and geographical location—0.315 *r*-value; civil status and study habits—0.214 *r*-values; socioeconomic status and internet connection—0.211 *r*-values; socioeconomic status and study habits—0.205 *r*-values; year level and study habits—0.368 *r*-values, which all exceeded the critical *r*-value of 0.171 using 88 degrees of freedom at 5% level of significance.

Table 1. Correlational analysis results between demographic profile and the extent of problems encountered by BEEd students in distance learning.

Extent of problems encountered in distance learning								
Profiles of BEEd students	Geographical location		Internet connection		Time management		Study habits	
	<i>r</i> -value	Result	<i>r</i> -value	Result	<i>r</i> -value	Result	<i>r</i> -value	Result
Age	0.116	NS	0.121	NS	0.242	S	0.318	S
Gender	0.042	NS	0.015	NS	0.169	NS	0.144	NS
Civil status	0.315	S	0.098	NS	0.126	NS	0.214	S
Socio-economic status	0.168	NS	0.211	S	0.044	NS	0.205	S
Year level	0.169	NS	0.128	NS	0.153	NS	0.368	S

Critical *r*-value: 0.171; NS—not significant; degrees of freedom: 88; S—significant; level of significance: 0.05.

Meanwhile, the relationship between age and study habits implies that they were significantly correlated. Younger students were more successful in having their successful study habits than adult students. With this, consistent study habits among students were challenging, especially for adult students with many responsibilities at home during distance learning.

The relationship between civil status and geographical location implies that civil status is also a factor in having problems in terms of geographical location. Geographical proximity and civil status hinder the students from passing their requirements at school if it is needed. Since most of the respondents are single and come from different municipalities of Oriental Mindoro, passing their requirements at school is not easy. Most students from the Bachelor of Elementary Education of Mindoro State University—Bongabong Campus are from the municipality of Mansalay, Bulalacao; some came from Bansud, Gloria, and Pinamalayan.

A significant relationship exists between civil status and study habits. Civil status is also a factor in facing the problem of having consistent study habits during distance learning. It all falls into priorities and responsibilities. Students may perform well but must have effective study habits because they get distracted easily. Single students are also adaptable but lack the drive to maintain regular study routines. However, married

students struggle because they have to balance their responsibilities as partners and students, which hinders their performance [21]. For example, single students are more mature and highly motivated to achieve good grades and have the maturity to manage the demands of college, which is why they are more focused on developing their study habits. Married students, on the other hand, may not have as much time and energy as single students because they must also consider and prioritize the welfare of their family members.

The relationship between socioeconomic status and Internet connection implies that socioeconomic status hinders students from accessing an internet load that provides a strong internet connection to attend classes and submit their requirements and activities online. Financial support is among the most in need of all people during the pandemic, especially for the students enrolled in distance learning.

Meanwhile, the relationship between socioeconomic status and study habits implies that distance learning requires technology at home while studying, such as mobile phones and/or laptops; students who cannot afford that find it hard to study, leading them to become unmotivated to study at home. It is easier for a student to study if provided with the materials or tools needed. Even though some students applied as beneficiaries of financial assistance from the government and other private agencies, more is needed.

Results show a significant relationship between year level and study habits, which implies that year level affects the study habits of the respondents. For instance, the study habits of first- and 2nd-year college students are more focused due to workload and activities. However, third- and fourth-year students focus more on enriching their capabilities to practice their profession, such as lesson planning, preparing lessons, and demonstrating. Since students from lower years are more focused on preparing themselves to be pre-service teachers, they have to practice reading, writing, and comprehending the lesson for them to be able to master the courses that they are taking.

There is no significant relationship between age and geographical location, which has an r -value of 0.116, or age and an internet connection, which has an r -value of 0.121, which implies that the profile of the students in terms of gender shows that there is no significant relationship to the extent of problems encountered during distance learning such as geographical location, Internet connection, time management, and study habits. There is also no significant relationship between civil status and an internet connection, which has an r -value of 0.098, and civil status and time management, which has an r -value of 0.126. Moreover, the result shows no significant relationship between socioeconomic status and geographical location, which has an r -value of 0.168, and socioeconomic status and time management, which has an r -value of 0.044. The result shows no significant relationship between year level and geographical location, which has an r -value of 0.169; year level and an internet connection, which has an r -value of 0.128; year level and time management, which has an r -value of 0.153.

4. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the majority of BEEd students enrolled at

MinSU Bongabong Campus are 21 years old; most of them were female, identified in states of lower income, single, and states who were in 3rd and 4th-year levels. BEEed students foster problems in distance learning concerning geographical location, internet connection, time management, and study habits. There is a significant correlation between demographic characteristics and issues faced, particularly regarding civil status and geographic location. These characteristics include adaptability, distractions, computer problems, and a lack of motivation and support. Socioeconomic status is only significantly related to internet connection, as not all students can participate in distance learning due to financial constraints.

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