RESEARCH ARTICLE

A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCES AND QUALITY OF LEARNING RECEIVED BY DISTANT LEARNERS IN TIME OF COVID - 19 PANDEMIC

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Manuscript Info	*Abstract*
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	The COVID-19 pandemic has a tremendous effect on many aspects of human lives and turns the normal and usual way of living into a new normal. The new normal in education brought new and strange experiences in the academe due to the sudden closure of school which led to the mandatory implementation of distance learning. In this regard, this study was conducted to explore the learning experiences and the quality of learning as perceived by the distant learners. The purposive sampling technique was utilized by the researchers and identified 25 junior high school students where data had been collected. Considering the safety protocols and the participants of the study which are minors, the data were collected from recorded interviews using messenger and audio recording applications. Experiences encountered by distant learners, learning strategies to cope with distant learning, and Quality of learning acquired based on the perception of distant learners were the themes that emerged in the study. This study showed that distance learning provides learners with new and unique learning experiences that the students must adapt to. Adaptation of learners in the demand of distance learning has been achieved by the learners through individual learning strategies and relied on the support given by friends and members of the family. Furthermore, the study also revealed that the quality of learning that students acquired in distance learning are not comparable with the quality of learning acquired by the students in physical or face-to-face classes. Results of this study convey that educational institutions may consider recalibrating the strategies in giving quality education in distance learning that could equate if not surpass the quality of learning that students acquired in the face-to-face learning setup.

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Introduction:-

COVID-19 Pandemic ruled the year 2020 and the rippling effect by such has brought sudden changes in many aspects of life. Such changes affect mental, psychological health, personal, social, economic, and even the education system of many countries. The Pandemic undeniably afflicted tremendous effects on many lives of the human race all over the Earth. One of the countries severely affected by the pandemic is the Philippines. In relation to the increasing number of COVID-19 cases, the President announced a community quarantine that put most provinces and cities, particularly in Luzon to a community lockdown. According to Limos A. (2020),Community quarantine is

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the isolation of a population within a community (e.g., a city, a region, or an entire country) to prevent the spread of disease. During community quarantine, people were restricted from going out of their homes except buying essential and basic commodities. In addition, the Government decided to create an Inter-Agency task Force that laid various interventions and protocols in order to control and lessen the increasing number of COVID-19 Cases.

Despite the strict implementation and aggressive interventions of the government to control the further transmission of the disease, the COVID-19 cases in the country continue to increase (Moralista&Oducado, 2020). As a matter of fact, the Philippines surpassed the number of COVID-19 cases in Indonesia making the country recorded as the country in Southeast Asia that has the largest number of COVID-19 cases (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2020; Ranada, 2020). In connection to this, the government decided to adjust the school year worse close all schools at primary to tertiary level. Such a scenario gives uncommon challenges in education (Moralista&Oducado, 2020). Leading everyone to an unusual Education system called the "New Normal" brought by the global lockdown in Education.

The study conducted by Rabacal et al. (2020), serves as proof that the new normal system in education caused by the pandemic really affects the entire education community. Aside from the fact that the teaching force took a greater step to move and adjust to the new system, it is also empirical to know and determine the challenges that the students are dealing with this new normal in education. In accordance with the challenges, it is also a must to determine how students are dealing with these challenges which are very vital in the learning process. In addition, very little conversation and news pertaining to or dealing with the challenges encountered or faced by students in the COVID-19 pandemic and on achieving learning outcomes were heard as specified in the research conducted by (Brown et al., 2020). In connection to this, the researchers come up with this qualitative study whose primary aim is to determine the experiences and the quality of learning that the students receive during the time of the pandemic. Specifically, the study aims to 1) Explore the experiences faced by distant learners while studying during the COVID-19 pandemic. 2) Identify the coping strategies in learning used by distant learners in response to the new normal in the education system. 3) Describe the quality of Learning received by the students during the time of the pandemic.

The New Normal in education greatly impacted the teaching and learning process. According to Burgess and Sievertsen (2020), the Global lockdown of education institutions causes a major interruption in students' learning; disruptions in internal assessments; and the cancellation of public assessments for qualifications or their replacement by anhumble alternative. The sudden changes in the education system disturb the Education institution to prepare for the transition of the educational system from Normal that is face to face to the New Normal which is pure distant learning or home-schooling. Such a scenario brought domino effects from the Department of Education to School Teachers, Parents, guardians, and most especially to the students. In response to the call of duty and to the demand that the current situation has given to educational institutions, teachers have left no choice but to carry out their sworn responsibility amidst the treat and anxiety brought by the Pandemic. In response, students have left no choice as well but to accept, embrace, and cope with the new learning process that distance learning will offer.

Methodology:-
This qualitative study was conducted to explore the learning experiences and quality of learning among Junior high school students regarding distance learning during the time of the pandemic. This study allows the researchers to explore the personal experiences of distant learners in different situations and experiences and determine the quality of learning acquired as perceived by the learners

Participants
The participants in the study were 25 Junior High School students enrolled in the school year 2020-2021 where the COVID-19 pandemic strikes. There were 10 male and 15 female students who participated in the study. A stratified purposeful sampling technique based on the intended research outcome was performed in order to ensure sufficient and diverse opinions among groups. The number of participants in this study is in line with the other relevant studies conducted, data should be based on 1 to 30 participants (Hsieh, H.F and Shannon, S.E, 2005; Panlikas, L.A. et al., 2015). According to Mason, M (2010), the smallest acceptable number of participants in all qualitative research is determined at least 15 participants but not exceeding fifty participants. Purposive sampling is the most suitable technique used in selecting the participant in this study, especially in the time of pandemics. Once possible participants had been identified, researchers sent messages to the identified participants through Facebook messenger. The message contains the information about the study and the consent form which was signed by the

participants and their respective parents or guardians. Students with accomplished and signed consent forms became the participants of the study.

Data Collection
Data were collected during the third and fourth quarters of the school year 2020 – 2021 through face-to-face or virtual interviews with the participants. The purposeful sampling was carried on until the researchers reached the saturation of data. According to Faulkner, S.L, and Troffer, S.P. (2020), data saturation pertain to the point in the qualitative research process where no new information is discovered in the analysis of data thus signaling the researchers to cease the data collection.

The interview is the primary and main source of data collection in this study and the researchers utilized an interview guide with open-ended questions to allow participants to express their freedom to secure a flow of thoughts and thorough descriptions of their experiences and perceptions (Bengtsson, 2016). The interview guide also allows the researchers to dissect the needed information from the participants. The researchers planned and prepared a set of questions written in advance that were asked to the participants in the same way.

The interview guide contains four major categories that elicited the experiences and quality of learning that the students acquired in distant learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic. These categories in the interview guide include 1) Experiences encountered by distant learners while studying during the COVID-19 pandemic, this category contains 8 questions. 2) Learning strategies used by learners to cope with distant learning that has 4 questions included and, 3) Quality of learning received by the students during the time of the pandemic which contains 4 questions.

The researchers created a schedule of interviews based on the availability of identified participants and the participants were notified about the interview 3 days prior to the schedule. In addition, participants were also informed about the purpose of the interview and that the interview will be recorded. In connection to the fact that the interviews are recorded, the researchers develop a good rapport with participants and assure that all their identities will be kept with utmost confidentiality and anonymity.

The interviews were recorded using various platforms and applications depending on the situation brought by the community quarantine where the participants are located. Most of the participants were interviewed using video call in the messenger, some were interviewed through face-to-face and voice recorded. Probing questions were also utilized in between some questions to clarify and enhance the open-ended questions, to allow the ability of researchers to hone important and specific details needed in the interview after allowing the participants to talk (Reynolds, J., 2020). The interview with each participant lasted an average time of 20 minutes.

Data Analysis
Questions were prepared and documented to explore the frequency of words for each of the questions. The acquired data were subjected to opening coding in the initial stage. The researchers listened and reviewed the recorded interviews several times to obtain the necessary information needed and to allow precise and reliable transcriptions. Thematic analysis of data was performed manually and themes were formed. The researchers make use of edited transcription summarizing the intelligent verbatim transcription omitting words like "uh', "you know", and other unnecessary or irrelevant words without changing the meaning of participants' answers (Streefkerk, 2019). The recorded interviews were transcribed individually following the intelligent verbatim transcription on which the researchers write down every word but remove irrelevant fillers in the interview process. According to Streefkerk (2019), intelligent verbatim transcription is the most common transcription method and is more readable than verbatim transcription.

Ethical Consideration
The researchers make sure that ethical considerations were considered throughout the study. Before the actual interview, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study participants were also informed that the interview will be recorded. Since the participants in this study are all students from junior high school, the consent of parents or guardians was also secured and assured by the researchers. A consent form in word document was sent and distributed to the parents of identified participants through social media platforms. This was done to assure that the health and safety of participants, parents or guardians, and researchers will not be compromised. The researchers also guaranteed to the participants that their identities will be kept confidential.

Results:-

The experiences and quality of learning of distant learners during the COVID-19 Pandemic were extracted and analyzed. Based on the result of analysis 15 subcategories were extracted from 3 main categories: Experiences encountered by distant learners while studying during the COVID-19 pandemic, Learning strategies used by learners to cope with distant learning, and Quality of learning received by the students during the time of the pandemic.

Theme 1:Experiences encountered by distant learners while studying during the covid-19 pandemic.

Participants describe in their reports their experiences about distant learning in terms of their preparation. Nine participants had stated that as a part of their preparation for distance learning they bought gadgets needed in distant learning. They express their preparation as follows:

"My parents put in Wi-Fi connection, bought me a phonethen Ibrowse various platforms that I can use in distance learning"(P3).

"My parents and I already expectedthat I need necessary gadgets for distance learning, so my parents bought a phone for me" (P4).

"When my parents attended the orientation held in our school they bought me a laptop, theyupgraded my cellphone, and they secure stable internet connection" (P23).

Students' reactions upon receiving their first learning materials are highlighted as well. Tenparticipants felt excited and happy as they received their first learning materials, Participants expressed:

"As I received my first modules I felt happy because it is an indication that I can continue my study despite the situation"(P10).

"I am excited as to how this distant learning would work" (P18).

"I feel happy and excited because everything is new. I'm happy to face distance learning"(P25).

On the other hand, five participants mentioned that they feel strange in receiving their modules. 5 had stated that they felt nervous upon receiving their learning materials e.g.

"When I received my first learning modules, I found it hard and difficult to grasp becauseit's very different to face-to-face classes" (P1).

"I feel strange once I get my first learning materials, everything is unusual and uncommon from the setup I used to havein every first day of the class during the face-to-face schooling" (P14).

One of the essential tasks of teachers in distance learning is to assure that learning materials or modules will be delivered and will be able to be received by the learners. In addition, learners' queries, concerns, and assistance in learning their modules must also be addressed in time. Participants expressed their following experiences in the distribution and retrieval of learning materials and reaching out to their teachers:

"I don't encounter difficulties in the distribution and retrieval of modules. My teachers are also accommodating. They respond to my questions though there are some that respond late but that is understandable due to so much work of teachers" (P2).

"Consistently, I receive my modules in time because the barangay hall is located near our house. In terms of submission, there are times that my brother personally submits my modules in school because I was not able to finish it in time" (P18).

However, 2 of the participants got ignored by their teachers when they ask queriesand clarifications about their learning task;

"There are subject teachers that do not answer my queries I usually got like sign or seen zone in messenger, they don't reply at all" (P15).

Meanwhile, one of the participants had a unique experience regarding the distribution of learning materials participant 6 shared;

"I experienced that my module bag containing all the modules that I was supposed to receive was got lost and found in another school but my adviser made a remedy about it. She gave me a digital copy of learning material and passed my output online"(P6).

Reports revealed that 7 participants stated that they got stressed because they don't understand the lessons or topic in their modules e.g.

"I cannot understand the topics in our module, especially during under time pressurewhich makes me feel stressed. I seek advice from my friends and siblings sometimes I play online games then I'll go back with my learning task and activities" (P5).

"I get stressed when I'm having a tough time understanding the lesson because no teacher is explaining and discussing the subject.So I seek help from my sister and my mother to guide me. Sometimes I review my previous lessons" (P10).

10 participants emphasized that too many learning tasks to accomplish caused them stress but they differ on managing the same source of stress, e.g.

"Usually I get stressed in doing lots of modules including the modules of my siblings because of this; I was not able to join some of our family bonding. Experiencing this, I learned to manage my time correctly and spent time finishing at least two subjects a day" (P16).

"Too many modules to accomplish and I was not able to manage my time effectively. Every time I feel stressed I just play online games and afterward go back with my modules again" (P20).

"I feel stress when there are a bunch of modules that I need to finish for a certain week and to lessen the stress I make a plan on what subject I need to accomplish for a day" (P21).

Four of the participants indicated that the environments there into are not conducive to their learning acquisition and sometimes some of their family members are the cause of their stress; their experiences are expressed as:

"Personal problems in our family give me stress and I was not able to focus and understand the topic in our learning materials" (P2).

"I also have various tasks and household chores to finish before I start working on my module" (P5)

"Too much noise, untidy surroundings, the environment is not conducive for learning" (P8).

"I got stressed answering too many modules but what made me more stressed during this pandemic and distance learning is the fact that I witnessed my parents fighting and quarreling. During the face-to-face I never saw them quarreling" (P18).

In the reports, participants citedthe negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As many as 11 participants had stated that the COVID-19 pandemic affects their social life, e.g.

"The pandemic created separationfrom others and brought problems because of fear of the rough times" (P1).

"This pandemic really affects my relationship with others, I become more introverted again due to limited exposure and contacts with my friends and my relationship with my friends before has changed" (P2).

"I cannot go out and play what we used to play before with my friends. This pandemic created barriers between me and my friends" (P12).

"I already overcome my shyness but now that I don't get out and exposed again to so many people it all came back and I'm so afraid if there are lots of people that I see maybe because of our situation right now" (P4).

Additionally, 2 participants expressed that their motivation to learn was lost and decreased due to the new learning set-up brought by the pandemic. Their experiences were expressed as;

"I am not motivated enough to learn because of this pandemic" (P14).

"I slightly lost my interest to learn and study in this pandemic" (P22).

Meanwhile, reports from some of the participants projected a positive impact of COVID-19. Three of the participants stated that the pandemic brought a positive impact on them. The participant shared;

"This pandemic allows us to spend more time with our father. Since childhood, our father was not able to spend more time with us because of his work. In this pandemic, we were able to spend more time with my father. I think this was the longest time he stayed with us, around seven months I think" (P16).

"I learned to reach out to other people, it made a positive impact on me because I was able to communicate and get along with all the people in our family" (P6).

"In this pandemic I got more time to sleep and rest and I was able to spend longer time with my mom. I also learn to fight my boredom" (P20).

Theme 2:Learning strategies used by learners to cope with distant learning

Participants of this study arrived and revealed a common driving force or motivation to continue their study and learning despite the changes in the education system.

Twenty-three participants expressed that their dreams to help their family motivated them to pursue learning amidst pandemic.

"The support I received from my family and my eagerness to reach my dreams motivated me to continue learning no matter what circumstances I might encounter along the way" (P14).

"Everytime I am answering my most hated subjectI thought of stopping this type of learning but yet I still do it and finished the subject because I want to prepare myself for the future and for my family" (P22).

Participants 23 and 24 stated that their fear of being left behind by their batch matesmotivated them to continue their studies.

One of the strategies that make students learning organized and sequential is through following specified class schedules. According to all participants in this study, their teachers provided them a class schedule for their weekly task but reports of the respondents revealed that none of the 25 participants in this study followed the schedule given to them by their respective teachers. Some of the participants said:

"I receive class schedules but I don't follow the schedule given to me by my adviser, I usually work depending on the difficulty of tasks or subjects. Most of the time I work and study my module at night" (P21).

"I follow my own schedule, I start working on my modules 2 to 3 days after I receive the modules and sometimes it depends on the number of modules given for a specific week" (P24).

"I don't follow the class schedule. I do first the easy topics or subjects and then next will be the subjects that need some materials for a certain task" (P8).

"No, I don't follow the class schedule. I study my lesson and answer my modules depending on my mood" (P23).

Despite the situation that participants have, reports revealed that participants of this study still manage to build their own study habits and practices as a way of maximizing their learning acquisition. Twelve participants had already included browsing various online platforms as part of their study habits, Interviewees said;

"It's just a matter of self-discipline. Browsing the net and various platforms to understand the lessons in our learning materials has been my practice before and until this distance learning" (P4).

"I use various platforms like Google search and Youtube to analyze and understand the lesson. I spend 3-4 hours a day working on my module and usually I work at night" (P20).

Meanwhile, some participants formed distinct study habits during the distance learning, the participant said;

"I make a list of tasks given in our modules, and then check the task that I accomplish. In this way, I can see if there are tasks that I missed to accomplish" (P3).

"Every time I work on my learning materials I listen to music. Listening to music while studying lighten my mood and ease my stress" (P9).

Participants were asked as well whom they seek help in studying their lesson during the distance learning. The majority of the participants seek help from their siblings, e.g.,

"I used to seek help from my brother because he already took the lessons and subjects I have" (P15).

"My brother helpsme with my modules despite the fact he has modules that need to be accomplished as well" (P25).

Moreover, 6 participants reported that they usually seek the help of their parents in studying their lessons. One of them said;

"I ask my mom to assist in browsing the net and other platforms to make sure that I'm getting the right knowledge and information that I needed" (P22).

On the other hand participant 1, 4, and 9 expressed that they study on their own. One of them stated;

"I work and accomplish my learning modules on my own because my sibling has her own learning modules to work on and our parents are into business " (21).

Theme 3:Quality of learning acquired as perceived by distant learners

Learning is the most essential part of education that involves processes of acquiring knowledge or skill through studying or experiencing something. In this study the researchers attempt to determine if distant learners were able to understand or comprehend their lessons.

Responses vary as to how participants perceived comprehension and understanding of their lessons.

Despite the new set-up as many as 11 participants believe that they learn and understand their lessons. They said;

"Yes, I understand and learned my lessons because I read a lot and browse the internet if I can't understand the topic" (P8)

"I understand and comprehend our lessons because of the help of various platforms I use and I always reach my subject teachers whenever I hardly understand our lesson" (P16).

"I believe I understand and comprehend our lessons because our teachers assure that all the materials we need in this distant learning have been provided both printed and digitized materials" (P3).

Meanwhile, 6 participants were in between of whether they or they did notunderstand the lessons they have in distance learning, e.g.,

"Somehow I understand our lessons but the information isn't retained on my mind" (P3).

"I can say that I understand some lessons but there are more lessons that I didn't understand than those that I understand" (P11).

"I understand our lesson on those subjects I found easy to understand but as a whole I guess not" (P18).

"I'm not sure if I understand our lessons or Not" (P19).

On the other hand, 3 participants directly expressed that they don't understand theirlessons. One of the participants said;

"I didnot understand our lesson mostly during the first quarter; I justanswer my modules by looking the answer at the last page of our modules where the answers key is written" (P13).

Among the different subject matter that distance learners are taking in, 19 participants stated that they are having difficulty learning and understanding Mathematics subject, e.g.,

"I'm really having a hard time learning math subject in this pandemic" (P1).

"I tried everything I know and I can but still it doesn't work, Math is really a difficult subject for me" (P23).

"I love math but it doesn't really for me even in this pandemic. I don't know if I learned something on it" (P17)

One of the struggles of the education system in this new normal is the quality of learning that distant learners acquired in this pandemic. Thus, researchers of this studytargeted this aspect as perceived by the learners. Eleven participants expressed that the quality of learning they acquired in distant learning is not comparable to the quality of learning they acquire in face-to-face classes.Some of the participants said;

"I learned something but I think it is not the same as the learning that I gain in the face-to-face setup" (P2).

One of the participants said;
"I am not sure about the learning I gained because I feel like the knowledge retained in me is not enough" (P15).

Based on perceptions 5 participants believe that the quality of learning they acquired during the pandemic is poor. Some of them stated;

"The quality of learning is poor because there is little or almost no retention of learning" (P19).

The researchers took the opportunity of interviewing the participants to get their feedback and ask their preferences regarding the learning set-up for the next academic year. The majority of the participants preferred the face-to-face learning setup. Eighteen participants choose to have face-to-face classes and 12 participants still chose to continue distance learning. The statement of   some participants favor in the face to face learning included the following;

"Social interactions are very important to enhance our skills and abilities. I hope that it will go back to normal and that face-to-face learning will happen very soon" (P4).
"If I were to ask, I would still go to face-to-face classes for the next school year following the safety protocols. I will be very happy and excited if that will happen" (P11).

"I want to go back to normal. Face to face learning for me is needed to continue our education" (P6).

Participants who choose to continue the distance learning till the next school year state their case as;

"If there are still positive cases reported in my community I still want to continue distance learning" (P21).

"I miss being in school, wearing my uniform and I miss my classmates too. But as long as there are still threat in our health caused by COVID – 19 I still choose to continue distance learning" (P14)

"I still prioritize my health, myself, and my family so I still go for distance learning for the next school year (P20).

Discussion:-

This study explores the experiences and the quality of learning acquired by distant learners in times of pandemic. The findings revealed in this study comprise its three specific objectives. It is empirical to determine the situation, condition, and or experiences of learners dealing with the sudden shift of the learning process from a normal setting to the "New normal". This study explores how the learning process occurs and was carried out from home in a distance learning set-up where the home of the students serves as their classroom.

According to Berg, G., and Simonson, M. (2016) distance learning is a form of education that involves physical separation of teachers and students during instructions and makes use of various technologies to facilitate teacher-student and student-student interaction. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the implementation of the learning process was changed. Educational institutions, parents, and students left no choice but to embrace distance learning (Berg, G. and Simonson, M., 2016).

In this regard, it is empirical to determine how students dealt with this new normal system in education through exploring their experiences in distance learning. Participants describe their experiences in terms of the following aspects; Preparation for distance learning, readiness, distribution and retrieval of modules, Collaboration, and Managing stress. In terms of preparation, all participants in this study have their own cellular phones that they use in distance learning but 9 participants bought cellular phones and other related technology devices they need in distance learning.

According to Holland, B. and Kellog, N (2020),   there are three important reasons for having and using cellular phones in distance learning 1) it maintains a line of communication, particularly to students who probably need additional support and feel isolated brought by the pandemic. For some, phones could be a lifeline of students in distance learning. 2) It increases students' ability to discuss and share which they believe to be the critical component of distance learning. 3) It expands the communication among distant learners. Owens et al. (2009),stated that in the absence of technology remote learners will experience difficulty in completing distance learning thus students' preparation related to technology is a great move.

Learning materials are very vital and one of the most important aspects in the conduct of distance learning. These learning materials will serve as the major source of information among learners. In this regard, learners' perceptions of these learning materials are necessary. In connection to this, the researchers included in the interview guide the Participants' reactions upon receiving their first learning material were also considered as part of their experiences. Reports of participants reveal that 10 among the participants are happy and excited upon receiving their first learning materials.

In addition, the same students have stated positive descriptions of the learning and quality of learning they acquired in distance learning. Results of this study are congruent with the study conducted by Howland and Moore (2002), stating that students with positive perceptions towards distance learning were those students with characteristics similar to constructivist learners. Howland and Moore's (2002), added that learners that are more independent and responsible for their learning are those students with positive perceptions of distance learning. The result of the above study had been strengthened by the findings of Smart and Cappel's (2006), findings of their study support the belief that students interested in learning material indicate a higher level of motivation.

On the other hand, 5 students have negative perceptions on the very first day of their distance learning. Participants with negative perceptions build disinterest and distraction within the learners (Smart and Cappel, 2006), these are attributed to the distraction of "Wealth of information" offered by distance learning (Felix, 2001).

Based on most of the participants, teachers succeed in assuring that printed and digitized learning materials for distance learning were distributed and received by the learners. Their teachers assured them that they received their

modules. Reports from the participants revealed that messenger is the most useful online platform in the distribution of digitized materials as well as in updating students in the distribution and retrieval of learning materials. One of the participants said;

"Our advisers consistently update and remind us about the scheduled date of distribution and submission of modules thus, I was able to accomplish all my modules in time. They are also responsive in all my queries even at night" (P8).

Participants of this study also revealed that teachers also succeed in accommodating and addressing students' queries and concerns regarding their learning materials and learning task. As many as 21 respondents prove that their queries and concerns are being addressed by their respective teachers. According to Wijayanti, A. et al. (2018), a Teacher's attention plays a very important role in providing and enhancing students' understanding about the significance of learning during and learning takes place. In addition, teachers can give understanding to students by providing explanations to students (Barlenti et al., 2017).

In addition, participants also expressed that collaborations between other distant learners are evident particularly in group tasks or performance. According to Kearney et al. (2012), a collaboration framework includes sharing of data or resources and conversations. Collaborations of distant learners were through online conversation and group learning tasks. Collaboration according to Yates, A. et al., (2021), was an important aspect of students' learning experience at home.

To deepen the data to be analyzed in terms of participants' experiences in distant learning the researchers ask the participants to describe things that stress them. The majority of the participants reported that bombardment of learning modules and learning tasks to accomplish are the major source of stress among distant learners. Research evidence suggests that stress is a part of being a student (Ramos, 2011; Rourke et al., 2010). Despite the commonality of stress, participants in this study showed different stress coping strategies. The result signifies that students' stress coping strategies depend mainly on their perceptions, personality, and previous experiences (Kwaah, C. and Essilfie, G., 2017) and also sought help from their near ones (Chaturvedi, K., et al., 2020).

Another important aspect of distance learning is the environment. In a distance learning setup, the home of participants serves as a ground for the learning environment. Four of the participants stated that their home as a learning environment is not conducive and that some of the family members contribute or become their stressors as well. The environment in which students are learning is very important Anene (2005), the home environment includes all the persons found inside one's home. She also added that home is the sole and most significant environmental factor that enables the learners to learn and on the contrary it could also be a factor that hinders learning among students.

Moreover, participants also reveal the negative impact of the COVID -19 pandemic on distant learners. The majority of the participants showed that distance learning caused by the pandemic greatly affects their social aspects. As minors, participants were not allowed to go outside their homes. For students, one of the highlights of being a student is social interaction and not just the academics; interactions with their teachers, friends, classmates, and other personnel that they mingle along with their ways (Child and Adolescent, 2021). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, their movements and socialization were bounded by the fear of being infected and safety protocols existing within their community.

On the other hand, there are some participants that reported a positive impact of this pandemic. Some participants show a positive impact particularly when it comes to spending time with the members of the family. This finding is in line with the findings of Clayton, C. and Potter, M. (2020), that many parents had the chance to spend more time with their children, work from home set up has led parents to focus on the family and personal relationship. Their study also highlighted that many children benefit from spending more time together as a family.

Motivation projects something different about each one of the students. It plays an important role in the acquisition of learning and in continuing education despite circumstances, hardships, and pandemics. The majority of the participants revealed that pursuing their dreams and helping their parents motivated them to continue learning despite the shift and uncommon learning setting brought by the pandemic. According to Wettergren, G(2012), motivated students are vital and important in all forms of the learning process, especially in distance learning where

students depend on their efforts. A study also conducted by Radovan (2011), showed the importance of motivational factors and effort regulating strategies. Reports of participants also revealed that distant learners created and followed their own schedule and formed their own study habits and learning style that they might also be used in the next school year of distance learning. Ying, et al. (2008) has shown that the motivation and learning strategies of students have a positive result on learning.

Conclusion and Recommendations:-

The highlight of this study is determining the quality of learning acquired and as perceived by distant learners. Despite the fact that the majority of the participants believed that they learn something in distance learning; Participants revealed and admitted based on their perception that the quality of learning they acquired in distance learning is quite low and unsure compared to the quality of learning they acquire in the face-to-face classes. Students believe that they learn more through face-to-face classes, Participants in this study favored face-to-face or physical classes over distance learning.

Distance learning has widely used in this time of pandemic as an immediate substitute for conventional learning method to provide essential learning competencies and skills to the learners at home that has limited learning resources. Results of this study suggest that educational institutions may consider recalibrating the strategies in giving quality education in distance learning. Educational institutions may also consider upgrading the learning resources which are adapted to learning competencies that can be implemented at home. Supplementary learning materials must also be available to distant learners to widen the opportunity among the learners in acquiring long term retention of knowledge.

Conflict Of Interest/s

Researchers reported that this study was conducted without any financial or other personal consideration that could compromised their professional judgments.

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