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RESEARCH ARTICLE

LIVED EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LIMITED FACE-TO-FACE CLASSES

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Abstract

The Education sector has taken a huge toll during the onslaught of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Herewith, this study aimed to determine the lived experiences and challenges encountered by Senior High School learners of Manaybanay National High School during the implementation of the limited face-to-face classes. Eighteen (18) learners were selected as participants of the study using a purposive sampling technique. The study employed descriptive phenomenological design in qualitative research. Participant's responses were extracted through an in-depth interview to explore their lived experiences and challenges encountered during the school's implementation of limited face-to-face classes. Thematic analysis of the data gathered revealed that learners during the limited face-to-face classes felt a sense of satisfaction; they felt happy that someone is explaining them the difficult lessons; they view the limited face-to-face classes as good for their social and mental health; on the other hand, learners were continually challenged as they find it hard to concentrate during class discussion with the existing health and safety protocols that need to be strictly observed inside the classroom and school campus such as wearing of facemask and social distancing; lastly, learners in the limited face-to-face classes are greatly challenged in expressing their ideas effectively due to excessive reliance on ready-made answers from the internet during modular learning. In general, findings of this paper revealed that learners perceive the limited face-to-face classes a progressively helpful step towards the recovery of the educational system after the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Introduction:-

The education sector across the world is on its way to recovery. Presently, students and youths across the world can finally participate in in-person learning since most schools across the world are physically back open to serve quality education after the historic disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The current trend of progress that the Philippine government is doing in its battle against COVID-19, is a hopeful indication that things are gradually getting back to normal after two years of being chained from the horrors of the pandemic. Although its threats are still in the vicinity of our society, the truth that its dangers are becoming manageable is still undebatable. The Department of Health (DOH) Secretary, Dr. Francisco Duque III reported that

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COVID-19 cases in the Philippines are decreasing to less than 1,000 cases daily and the government is 29% away from the target population of 91 million Filipinos to receive full vaccination (Casas, 2022). With that into account, the Department of Education is eyeing on a progressive implementation of the expanded phase of limited face-to-face classes to schools across the country following its successful pilot testing last year.

The pilot testing of limited face-to-face classes was participated by 287 schools across the country from November 15 to December 22 last year was deemed successful. In a virtual press briefing with Manila Bulletin, DepEd Planning Service Director Roger Masapolreported that the pilot run of limited face-to-face classes across the country showed promising results based from the survey conducted by the Department of Education after the said pilot implementation. The survey revealed that satisfaction rating of Senior High School students to the limited face-to-face classes was 86 percent. Ninety-one percent (91%) of the students believed that limited face-to-face classes were more effective in developing their skills and knowledge; eighty-two percent (82%) felt more motivated to learn compared to distance learning; seventy-eight percent (78%) felt safe while studying with their classmates inside the classroom; and seventy-four percent (74%) felt safe inside the school premises (Hernando-Malipot, 2022).

Limited face-to-face classes in schools at low-risk areas in the country was allowed by virtue of DepEd Order No. 85, s. 2021 "Preparations for the Implementation of the Expanded Phase of Limited Face-to-face Classes". In connection to this, the School's Division of Leyte issued Division Memorandum No. 005, s. 2022 to conduct a division validation of the shortlisted schools that signified their intent to offer the expanded phase of limited face-to-face classes in which Manaybanay National High School's Senior High School Department of Pastrana District was included (Leyte-SDO, 2022).

Manaybanay National High School has officially started its implementation of the expanded phase of limited face-to-face classes last February 22, 2022. The expanded phase of limited face-to-face classes was offered to the Senior High School learners of Manaybanay National High School during the second semester. There are 90 Grade 11 learners, and 83 Grade 12 learners, accounting to a total population of 173 learners in the locale of the study.

Upon the implementation of limited face-to-face classes in Manaybanay National High School, pressing issues were identified by the teachers in the locale of the study such as: little to no interaction during class discussions, and learners tend to become unusually quiet and remain passive during the entire class period which resulted to significantly low academic performance of the students. Such issues are in conformity to the statements of DepEd Assistant Secretary, Malcolm Garma, in a virtual press briefing with Manila Bulletin dated January 2, 2022: "student's behavioral issues" and "unreadiness of learners in face-to-face learning" were some of the issues encountered in the pilot implementation of limited face-to-face classes. These issues are of pedagogical importance because they hamper the flow of teaching and learning process and if left unaddressed, may negatively affect and jeopardize the quality of learning that the learners will get from this limited face-to-face instruction.

In light of these issues, this study was conducted to investigate the lived experiences and challenges of Senior High School learners of Manaybanay National High School in the implementation of limited face-to-face classes. Specifically, this phenomenological study aimed to sought answers to the following questions: (1) What are the lived experiences of Senior High School learners of Manaybanay National High School in the limited face-to-face classes? and, (2) What are the challenges that the learners encountered during the implementation of the limited face-to-face classes?

Seeking answers to such questions and issues is significantly important in the implementation of this teaching and learning framework to have a profound understanding of the underlying reasons as to why these issues occurred and how to properly address them. Findings of this study will be essential inputs in devising responsive and effective teaching strategies to help the teachers who encounter the same issues while dealing with learners who still suffer from the mental aftermath of the pandemic.

Methodology:-

Research Design

The study utilized descriptive phenomenological design in qualitative research. Descriptive phenomenology draws meanings of individuals' lived experiences in a certain phenomenon by understanding their feelings, thoughts, and responses (Rodriguez & Smith, 2018).

Participants and Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was employed in selecting the participants for the study. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method that uses the researchers' knowledge of the participants in obtaining a representative sample using sound judgement (Black, 2010). Participants were selected based on the following criteria: They are senior high school learners enrolled in the locale of the study, they are currently participating in the school's limited face-to-face classes, and they are willing to share their experiences to the researchers through an in-depth interview.

Eighteen (18) learners (Male: 9 and Female: 9) taking General Academic Strand (GAS) were selected as participants of the study. The participants were taken from the population of Senior high School learners participating in the school's limited face-to-face classes during the second semester at Manaybanay National High School of Pastrana District for school year 2021-2022.

Data Collection and Analysis

The study utilized an in-depth interview to explore the lived experiences and challenges of participants in the limited face-to-face classes. In-depth interview adopts the free-flowing process of a natural conversation and gives ample opportunities to collect a large amount of information about the behavior, attitude, and perception of the interviewees regarding a particular phenomenon (Adi, 2020). Probing questions were used by the researchers to extract participants' experiences in great and well-elaborated detail.

The interview proper was conducted in Filipino language so the participants will clearly understand the questions and express their ideas more effectively. At the end of this study, major clusters of ideas with similar meaningful associations or themes were identified through a rigorous coding and analyzation of the collated narrations of participants' responses.

Research Instrument

The interview guide was composed of nine (9) questions which highlighted two (2) key points: (1) the lived experiences, and (2) challenges encountered by learners during the implementation of the limited face-to-face classes. The interview was conducted through face-to-face encounter which lasted from 20 to 40 minutes. Health protocols such as wearing of facemask, using alcohol, and maintaining 1-meter physical distance were strictly observed during the conduct of the interview. Research instrument was evaluated by the school's two highly proficient teachers and the school principal who was an international research presenter to attain validity.

At the beginning of the interview, the researchers discussed with the participants about common experiences during the pandemic to establish rapport. The researchers also discussed important parameters of the interview such as: overview, confidentiality, and recording method.

A letter of permission to conduct the study which contained a clear description of its goals was sought from the school research office of the school principal.

Ethical Issues

The ethical standards were observed in this study. The researchers considered the participants' self-determination hence, no participant was forced to adapt and conform to a particular response. Republic Act No. 10173 – Data Privacy Act of 2012 was the guiding compass of the researchers in treating the data to ensure the confidentiality of the participants' responses. Furthermore, the data gathered were used for academic purposes only and do not intend to discredit or malign any individual or organization. The researchers ensured strict adherence to the ethical standards as well as health and safety protocols during the conduct of the study.

Results and Discussion:-

This chapter presents the critical analysis of the participants responses on the note of investigating their lived experiences and challenges encountered during the school's implementation of limited face-to-face classes.

Quality Learning Experience

Limited face-to-face learning inside the classroom allows both the teacher and learners to actively interact in the development of the lesson hence, paves way for a better quality of learning experience.

PARTICIPANT'S RESPONSE (Filipino)	TRANSLATED RESPONSE(English)
Masaya akona may face-to-face classes na...(P2)	I feel happy now that we are having face-to-face

	classes...(P2)
Mas natututukanangakingpag-aaral...(P13)	I can easily keep track of my learning progress...(P13)
Mabilismabigyan ng kalinawanangmgabagaynahindikomaintindihan...(P8)	Vague topics are quickly and easily clarified and explained...(P8)
May guroanagpapaliwanag ng mahihirapnatakangaralin...(P4)	There is a teacher explaining the difficult lessons...(P4)
Mas malinawangmgabagaydahilnaipapaliwanag ng maayos ng guro...(P11)	Things are clearer because the teacher explains them well...(P11)
Kapagako ay may mgatanong at gustonglinawin, mabilismasagot ng guro...(P7)	If I have clarifications and questions, the teacher can easily explain and answer...(P7)

Teachers, as the “more knowledgeable other” inside the classroom can easily explain concepts that the learners find difficult with and provide immediate and essential feedbacks to reinforce learners’ performance. Learners can easily ask questions to concepts which they vaguely understand. Hence, learning is more meaningful and profound through face-to-face interaction. This is incongruity to Lev Vygotsky’s Social Development Theory which stresses that social interaction is the fundamental key in the development of cognition. Furthermore, the same theory also gives emphasis on the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which primarily claims that a learner is able to accomplish a task that he/she cannot do alone, with the help of a more skilled person (McLeod, 2007).

Mental and Social Satisfaction

Learners find the limited face-to-face classes good for their mental and social health.

PARTICIPANT’S RESPONSE (Filipino)	TRANSLATED RESPONSE(English)
Mas magaanapiramdam mag-aral ng may kasama...(P5)	It feels easier to study with someone...(P5)
Masaya angpag-aaralsa limited face-to-face classes, nakakasamakoangmgakaibiganko at hindinamasyadongnakaka-stress dahilhindinaako ng-iisa...(P3)	It’s fun to study in the limited face-to-face classes, I get to be with my friends and I don’t get too stressed because I’m not alone anymore...(P3)
Kapag may bakantengoras, nakikipagkwentuhanakosamgakaklaseko kaya mas napapagaananghirap ng pag-aaral...(P1)	If there are vacant times, I would exchange conversations with my classmates to lessen the difficulty of learning...(P1)
Malaki angnaitutulog ng mgasimplengkwentuhan at tawanankasamaangmgakaklase para mapagaananghirap at stress ng pag-aaral...(P12)	Simple conversation and laughter greatly help in lessening the difficulties and stress of studying...(P12)

Although interactions inside the classroom are limited, students find the limited face-to-face classes more mentally and socially satisfying compared to modular learning. Interaction with their classmates also influences their motivation towards learning. This is in accordance to the study of Chaturvedi, Vishwakarma, & Singh (2021), which claims that student’s motivation and academic satisfaction is influenced by the extent of socialization that they have with their classmates and friends.

Limited face-to-face classes allowed the learners to be with their friends after two years of not being with each other. Learners felt more connected with their classmates which helped reduce the level stress that they felt due to feeling of being alone during distance learning. The study of Cao & Zheng (2020) revealed that students in distance learning are more likely to be prone to stress and depression due to feeling of isolation.

Conversations and dialogues between learners, although minimal inside the classroom during the limited face-to-face classes played an important role in the teaching and learning process. Learners viewed the limited face-to-face classes good for their mental health. Social interaction is an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Humans are social beings; hence, it is our nature to socialize and interact with others to attain and maintain social and mental stability (Marmarosh, R, Strauss, & Burlingame, 2020).

The Issue on Facemasks and Social Distancing

Learners are having trouble in concentrating during class discussion because of facemasks and social distancing inside the classroom.

PARTICIPANT'S RESPONSE (Filipino)	TRANSLATED RESPONSE(English)
Nahihirapanako mag concentrate saklasedahilnaitanakosa facemask...(P17)	I find it hard to concentrate in class because I feel hot because of the facemask...(P17)
Pinagpapawisanakosa facemask...(P1)	I am sweating because of facemask...(P1)
Hindi akomakahinga ng maayosdahilsa facemask...(P15)	I can't breath properly because of facemask...(P15)
Hindi komarinig ng maayosangsinasabi ng teacher kodahilsa facemask at social distancing...(P9)	I can't hear well what my teacher is saying because of facemask and social distancing...(P9)

Wearing of facemasks and social distancing hampers student's concentration during class discussion. The said issues were mentioned by Education Assistant Secretary Malcolm Garma during his report on the implementation of limited face to face learning. Secretary Garma reported that challenges during the implementation of in-person learning includes: learner's difficulty in concentration and hearing due to face masks and social distancing (Cabrera, 2022).

Difficulty in Communicating Ideas Effectively

Learning in the limited face-to-face classes has been challenging to some learners. Learner's inability to express and communicate their ideas effectively hinders the flow of the teaching and learning process inside the classroom.

PARTICIPANT'S RESPONSE (Filipino)	TRANSLATED RESPONSE(English)
Nasanayakosa modular learning nakapag may hindiakonaiintindihan at may lessons nahindikomaipaliwanag, madalikongmai-google angsagot, ngayonhindikonamagawasaloob ng classroom...(P16)	I was used to modular learning that if there are topics and lessons which I do not understand and cannot explain, I can easily google them, now I can't do that inside the classroom...(P16)
Nahihirapanakongbuoing ideas kosatuwingtinatawagako ng teacher kongayong limited face-to-face classes hindikagaya ng modular learning napwedekongi-search sa internet angsagot at i-copy paste...(P13)	I find it difficult to organize my ideas every time I would be asked to recite in this limited face-to-face classes not like in modular learning where I can easily search answers from the internet and copy-paste them...(P13)
Nahihirapanakongsumagot ng diretsotuwingtinatawagako ng teacher ko...(P2)	I am having a hard time answering directly whenever my teacher calls me...(P2)
Nananahimiknalangakokapag nag tatanongnayungguro, minsankasihindikotalagaalamangagot, minsannamannahihirapanakongayusinang ideas ko...(P4)	I just keep quiet when the teacher asks, sometimes because I don't really know the answer, sometimes I have a hard time organizing my ideas...(P4)
Mahirap din ngayong limited face-to-face kasikapaghindikonaintindihanang lesson at nahihiyaakongmagtanongsaguro, walatalagaakongmaisasagohindikagayasa modular	It's also difficult now with limited face-to-face classes because when I don't understand the lesson and I feel shy to ask the teacher, I really can't answer, unlike modular learning when I don't understand anything in

nakapagwalaakongmaintindihansamodules, google angtabuhanko. Wiki-how, Wiki answers, at brainlylangmalakas! ...(P10)	the modules, I would just consult google immediately. Wiki-how, Wiki answers, and brainly always save the day!...(P10)
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Learners are challenged in communicating their ideas effectively during in-person learning, thus, they tend to remain silent and passive during class discussion. In the study of Batubara (2021), Indonesian students' comprehension and concentration during class discussion in the limited face-to-face classes were poorly observed. Such issues can be linked to the negative aspects of distance learning as the widely used modality during the surge of COVID-19 pandemic. Modular learning has made the learners too dependent on the internet for ready-made answers. The study of Lazaga & Madrigal (2021) revealed that learners in distance learning tend to develop laziness in accomplishing their tasks such as answering their activities that they resort to copy-pasting their answers from the internet. Moreover, the development of their reasoning and critical thinking skills has been negatively affected. Learning with the use of technology without proper guidance becomes detrimental because learners tend to rely on ready-made information from the internet hence, the development of their critical thinking skills is jeopardized.

Conclusions:-

Based on the results of the study, the following conclusions were drawn: learners perceive the limited face-to-face classes a progressively helpful step towards the recovery of the educational system after the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic; learners prefer limited face-to-face classes over modular distance learning because it bears better quality of learning; learners perceive the limited face-to-face classes as socially satisfying and good for their mental health; on the other hand, learners are challenged in concentrating during class discussion with the existing health and safety protocols that need to be strictly observed inside the classroom and school campus; lastly, learners in the limited face-to-face classes are greatly challenged in expressing their ideas effectively due to excessive reliance on ready-made answers from the internet during modular learning.

Recommendations:-

From the conclusions drawn the researchers would like to suggest the following recommendations: since some students find it hard hearing what the teacher is saying during class discussions because of facemasks and social distancing, it would be helpful if teachers will be provided with portable microphones so the students sitting at the back can clearly hear the discussions; teachers should be encouraged to be creative and provide more individualized and interactive learning activities to stimulate learner's attention and motivation during class discussions; lastly, teachers should be encouraged to practice the art of questioning and give emphasis to the utilization of probing questions during class discussions to effectively guide learner's cognition, develop their critical thinking and enhance their communication skills;

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