International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation.

Exploring Psychology Students' Perceptions of Pandemic Learning Loss

Rhona G Jazmin [1]*, Lyzza Nicole R Castillo [2], Mark Cedric P Dolar [3], Leiy Antonio C Piad [4], Charles Edward N Devoma [5], Cristine Lae C Erasga [5]
[1-5] College of Arts and Sciences City of Cabuyao, Laguna

* Corresponding Author: **Rhona G Jazmin**

Article Info

Abstract

This qualitative research investigates the perceptions of third-year BS Psychology students from the University of Cabuyao regarding pandemic-related learning loss. Using a phenomenological approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five Dean's Listers who experienced remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thematic analysis revealed nine superordinate themes and twenty subordinate themes that described the psychological, academic, and social effects of learning disruptions. These included challenges in institutional support, emotional and financial strain, technological limitations, and diminished retention. Students also discussed various coping mechanisms such as structured routines, peer support, and emotional resilience. The study proposed the Comprehensive Learning Resilience and Enhancement Program (CLREP), an intervention based on Experiential Learning Theory and the Zone of Proximal Development, aiming to rebuild competencies and preparedness for future disruptions. This study contributes to improving educational support systems in times of crisis.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented disruptions to educational systems worldwide, impacting over 1.6 billion learners due to school closures and lockdowns (UNESCO, 2020). As part of the emergency response, institutions transitioned rapidly from traditional face-to-face instruction to various forms of remote learning. While this shift was necessary, it revealed significant vulnerabilities in educational access, student readiness, instructional delivery, and emotional well-being.

In the Philippines, students encountered a unique set of challenges during the pandemic-induced shift to online learning. The lack of consistent internet access, scarcity of digital devices, and limited technological literacy— particularly in public and provincial settings—exacerbated the already wide digital divide. The Department of Education and Commission on Higher Education (CHED) implemented blended and modular learning strategies; however, the effectiveness of these methods was highly dependent on institutional capacity, student support, and individual resilience.

The phenomenon of learning loss—defined as a decline in academic knowledge or skills due to an educational disruption—has become an increasingly prominent concern. According to the World Bank, learning poverty in the Philippines increased dramatically from 69.5% to 91% in 2021 alone. College students, especially those in fields requiring high levels of critical thinking, such as psychology, have reported difficulty retaining knowledge, reduced motivation, and mental fatigue. These disruptions not only impeded students' academic performance but also influenced their psychological and emotional health.

Numerous studies highlight the cognitive and emotional toll of remote learning. The absence of physical classroom environments led to decreased student engagement, limited peer interaction, and diminished instructor feedback. These factors collectively contributed to stress, anxiety, and a reduced sense of academic purpose. For psychology students, who must process complex theories and practical applications, the absence of direct experience and interaction became a significant barrier to learning.
.

The present study explores how academically high-performing psychology students perceived and adapted to pandemic learning loss. Anchored in Cognitive Load Theory and Social Cognitive Theory, the study aims to capture their lived experiences through a qualitative phenomenological approach. By understanding the psychological, academic, and technological challenges faced during this period, this research hopes to contribute to the improvement of institutional support programs and the development of targeted interventions for post-crisis educational resilience. Ultimately, the goal is to provide educational institutions with concrete insights into how students interpret and navigate learning disruptions—and how they can be better supported in times of crisis. This research addresses the pressing question: What does it mean to truly learn during a pandemic, and how can that learning be protected and restored in its aftermath?

2. Methodology
A. Research Design
This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design, which is appropriate for exploring and understanding individuals' lived experiences in a specific context. Phenomenology, as described by Creswell (2013) [24], is centered on the meaning individuals ascribe to a particular phenomenon—in this case, pandemic-related learning loss.

This design was selected because it enables an in-depth investigation of how students personally perceived and emotionally processed the academic and psychological disruptions caused by the pandemic. Rather than quantifying data, the researchers sought to uncover patterns, themes, and meaning structures through the narratives of selected participants.

By focusing on Dean's Listers from the 3rd-year Psychology cohort, the study aimed to understand how even high-performing students—often seen as resilient—navigated the difficulties of online learning, technological access, motivation, and academic retention during the pandemic. Their narratives offered a unique lens into both the vulnerabilities and coping strategies utilized in the face of academic adversity.

B. Research Locale
The study was conducted at Pamantasan ng Cabuyao, a local university situated in Brgy. Banay-Banay, Cabuyao City, Laguna. This locale was chosen because it is a representative setting of urban provincial higher education institutions in the Philippines, which were notably affected by the educational shift brought by the pandemic. The university serves a diverse student population, many of whom faced socio-economic and technological challenges during the lockdown. Conducting the study within this institution allowed the researchers to generate data that is contextually relevant to institutional realities, available support systems, and the lived academic environment of the student population.

C. Population and Sampling
The population consisted of 3rd-year BS Psychology students enrolled during Academic Year 2023–2024. A purposive sampling method was utilized to identify and recruit Dean's Listers who had direct experience with online learning during the pandemic.

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique wherein participants are selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the research goals. In this study, the chosen participants were:
- Currently enrolled in the 3rd year of the Psychology program
- Recipients of the Dean's List honor
- Experienced remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Willing to participate and elaborate their experiences through an interview

D. Research Participants
The selected participants were between 19 to 22 years old, comprising both male and female students who had maintained an outstanding academic record despite the disruptions caused by the pandemic. Their inclusion provided insight into how students who are typically perceived as academically competent and resilient experienced, interpreted, and managed learning disruptions.

Participant consent was obtained prior to data collection, and confidentiality was guaranteed. Pseudonyms were used in transcripts and analysis to protect participant identities.

E. Research Instrumentation
The main data collection tool was a semi-structured interview guide developed by the researchers. It included both demographic questions and open-ended questions intended to probe students' perceptions, experiences, and emotional reactions to online learning. These questions were carefully designed to explore:
- Participants' experiences with remote learning.
- Perceived learning loss and academic challenges.
- Emotional and psychological impacts of the pandemic.
- Coping mechanisms used during online learning.
- Perceptions of institutional support and suggestions for improvement.

The interview guide was validated by experts in psychology and research methodology. To ensure reliability and appropriateness, the guide underwent expert validation using a panel of three validators, including a qualitative research consultant, a psychology professor, and a program adviser.

Examples of questions included
"What were your experiences with online learning during the pandemic, and how did it affect your academic progress?"
"How did your mental and emotional state change while studying remotely?"
"What kind of support from the institution did you find helpful or lacking?"

F. Data Gathering Procedure
The data collection process followed a systematic, ethically grounded approach:
- **Participant Recruitment:** An invitation to participate was extended to qualified students via email and class announcements.
- **Informed Consent:** Each participant signed a consent form that outlined the purpose of the study, data usage, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time.
- **Interview Sessions:** One-on-one interviews were conducted in a quiet and private environment, either

face- to-face or via secured video conferencing platforms (e.g., Zoom or Google Meet).

- **Recording and Transcription:** With participant consent, interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and preserve the integrity of responses.
- **Thematic Coding:** Transcripts were reviewed, coded, and analyzed for emerging patterns and recurring themes.

G. Data Analysis Procedure
The researchers employed thematic analysis, a method suitable for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach was used:

- Familiarization with data
- Initial coding
- Searching for themes
- Reviewing themes
- Defining and naming themes
- Producing the final report

A data analyst reviewed the data to ensure inter-rater reliability and minimize bias. The researchers also used member checking, wherein participants were asked to review the transcriptions and interpretations to validate the findings. Themes were then linked to the Cognitive Load Theory and Social Cognitive Theory, providing a theoretical lens for interpreting the results.

H. Ethical Consideration
The study followed the ethical guidelines outlined in the Data Privacy Act of 2012 and the institutional policies of Pamantasan ng Cabuyao. The following ethical safeguards were observed:

- **Informed Consent:** Participants were fully informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and risks.
- Confidentiality: All participant identities were anonymized, and data was stored securely.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Participants could decline or withdraw from the study at any stage.
- **Minimizing Harm:** Emotional discomfort was anticipated, so referrals to guidance counselors were made available if needed.
- **Transparency:** Participants were given the option to review the study results and summaries.
- Ethical approval was sought and granted by the college's research ethics committee before the start of data collection.

3. Results and Discussions
This chapter presents and interprets the results obtained from the interviews with five 3rd-year BS Psychology Dean's Listers at Pamantasan ng Cabuyao. The primary goal was to explore their lived experiences with pandemic-related learning loss, analyze the psychological and academic effects of the shift to online learning, and determine the support mechanisms they used or lacked. Through thematic analysis, nine superordinate themes and twenty subordinate themes emerged. These were grouped under the three central research questions.

Table 1: Emergent Themes on Students' Perceptions of Learning Loss

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF LEARNING LOSS	
SUPERORDINATE	**SUBORDINATE**
Academic Support	• *Institutional Support for Online Learning* • *Learning Resources*
Impact of Support on Online Learning	• *Neutral Impact of Institutional Support* • *Neutral Impact of Institutional Support* • *Emotional and Financial Support*
Challenges in Online Learning	• *Technical and Connectivity Issues* • *Communication and Interaction Challenges*
Mental and Emotional State	• *Stress and Anxiety* • *Isolation and Fatigue*
Psychological Impact on Academic Performance	• *Negative Impact* • *Neutral Impact*
Coping Mechanisms for Online Learning Challenges	• *Taking Breaks and Social Boundaries* • *Social Connections*
Effectiveness of Coping Strategies	• *Improved Focus and Engagement* • *Emotional Support from Friends*
Needed Support for Online Learning	• *Structured Guidelines* • *Counseling and Peer Support* • *Consideration from Professors*
Impact of Online Learning During Pandemic	• *Negative Academic Impact* • *Learning Loss and Retention Issues*

Table 1 presents the emergent themes from the qualitative analysis of students' perceptions of pandemic- related learning loss. It categorizes students' experiences into nine superordinate themes, such as academic support, emotional state, and coping strategies, each broken down into more specific subordinate themes. These reflect the multifaceted challenges students faced during remote learning, including inadequate institutional support, mental health struggles, technological barriers, and difficulties in academic retention. The table also highlights students' adaptive responses—like taking breaks and seeking social support—and outlines the kind of institutional improvements they believe would have

mitigated learning loss, such as clearer guidelines and more empathetic instruction.

Table 2: Themes Related to the Impact of Online Learning During the Pandemic

SUPERORDINATE THEME	SUBORDINATE THEME
Impact of Support on Online Learning	*Neutral Impact of Institutional Support*
	Positive Impact of Institutional Support
	Emotional and Financial Support
Impact of Online Learning During the Pandemic	*Negative Academic Impact*
	Learning Loss and Retention Issues

The impact of support on online learning proved to be a significant factor in students' academic experiences during the pandemic. While some students acknowledged the positive effects of institutional support—such as access to learning materials, internet subsidies, and structured resources—others perceived its impact as neutral, relying more on personal motivation than external help. Emotional and financial support also emerged as crucial components, with students emphasizing that financial aid alone was not enough without accompanying emotional guidance. These findings highlight the importance of a holistic support system that addresses both academic and psychological needs to promote meaningful learning outcomes.

Meanwhile, the shift to online learning during the pandemic brought considerable negative academic consequences. Students reported struggling with engagement, retention, and comprehension, especially in hands-on or skill-based subjects. Many shared that they focused more on completing requirements rather than truly understanding the lessons, which led to a perceived learning loss. The lack of interaction and the passive nature of online formats contributed to diminished focus and long-term retention, underscoring the limitations of remote education in replicating the depth and effectiveness of traditional face-to-face learning.

Table 3: Themes on Challenges and Psychological Impact in Online Learning

SUPERORDINATE THEME	SUBORDINATE THEME
Challenges in Online Learning	*Negative Impact*
Psychological Impact on Academic Performance	*Neutral Impact*

Challenges in online learning during the pandemic were diverse and deeply affected students' ability to stay engaged and focused. Technical issues like unstable internet connections, communication barriers, and constant distractions at home created an environment that made learning difficult. Many students reported increased stress from balancing academic responsibilities with household duties, which negatively impacted their motivation and grades. These challenges reflect broader findings in existing literature, showing that the lack of a conducive learning environment in remote setups contributed to both academic decline and emotional strain.

In addition to logistical challenges, the psychological impact of the pandemic further hindered academic performance. Feelings of anxiety, isolation, and emotional instability made it difficult for students to concentrate and stay motivated. However, not all students were equally affected—some demonstrated resilience and maintained stable academic performance despite mental health struggles. This suggests that personal coping mechanisms and support systems played a vital role in mitigating the effects of psychological stress, leading to varying outcomes in students' academic experiences during online learning.

Table 4: Themes on Academic Support in Online Learning

SUPERORDINATE THEME	SUBORDINATE THEME
Academic Support	*Institutional Support for Online Learning*
	Learning Resources

Academic support played a pivotal role in helping students manage the shift to online learning during the pandemic. Access to digital resources such as online books, learning management systems (LMS), and structured course materials helped students stay organized, engaged, and academically focused. These institutional tools reduced the confusion and disconnection often associated with remote learning. As emphasized by Aguilar *et al*. (2021), such academic support systems not only improved student engagement but also lessened the learning barriers posed by the remote setup.

Specifically, institutional efforts like internet subsidies proved crucial in minimizing logistical and financial obstacles. Students reported that these supports enabled consistent participation in online classes without the added burden of connectivity issues. In addition, the availability of digital learning resources allowed them to better comprehend lessons and complete academic requirements effectively. Together, these forms of academic support provided students with both access and structure—two key elements for academic success in a remote learning environment.

Table 5: Themes on Mental and Emotional States During Online Learning

SUPERORDINATE THEME	SUBORDINATE THEME
Mental and Emotional State	*Stress and Anxiety*
	Isolation and Fatigue

During online learning, many students experienced heightened stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion, largely due to the overwhelming workload and lack of face-to-face interaction. The shift to remote education left students feeling isolated and disconnected, with constant screen time contributing to mental fatigue. Some struggled to stay emotionally stable, often feeling anxious about deadlines and uncertain about the future. These experiences reflect how the pandemic not only disrupted academic routines but also took a significant toll on students' mental well-being, ultimately affecting their motivation and ability to perform well in school.

Table 6: Themes on Coping Mechanisms for Online Learning Challenges

SUPERORDINATE THEME	SUBORDINATE THEME
Coping Mechanisms for Online Learning Challenges	*Taking Breaks and Setting Boundaries*
	Social Connections

To manage the emotional and academic pressures of online learning, students adopted various coping strategies, with many highlighting the importance of taking breaks and setting clear boundaries between school and personal life. These small habits helped them avoid burnout and stay mentally balanced. Staying connected with friends also played a big role—social support offered comfort, reduced feelings of isolation, and helped students stay motivated. These simple yet meaningful actions became essential tools for navigating the challenges of remote learning and maintaining both academic performance and emotional well-being.

Table 7: Themes on Effectiveness of Coping Strategies

SUPERORDINATE THEME	SUBORDINATE THEME
Effectiveness of Coping Strategies	Improved Focus and Engagement
	Emotional Support from Friends

Students found that their coping strategies—like taking breaks, managing time well, and staying connected with friends—not only helped them feel better emotionally but also improved their ability to stay focused and engaged in class. These simple practices made a big difference, especially when the challenges of online learning felt overwhelming. Having someone to talk to, even just friends going through the same struggles, made students feel less alone and more motivated. Overall, these strategies proved to be effective in supporting both their mental well-being and academic performance during remote learning.

Table 8: Themes on Effectiveness of Coping Strategies

SUPERORDINATE THEME	SUBORDINATE THEME
Effectiveness of Coping Strategies	Structured Guidelines
	Counseling and Peer Support
	Consideration from Professors

Students emphasized that clear guidelines, emotional support, and understanding from professors played a big role in making online learning more manageable. Having structured instructions helped reduce confusion and anxiety, while access to counseling and supportive peers made it easier to cope with stress and feelings of isolation. Many also shared that when professors were flexible and considerate—especially during technical difficulties—it made them feel seen and supported. These factors, combined, greatly improved students' motivation, focus, and overall experience during remote learning.

4. Discussion
This study examined the experiences of BS Psychology students at the University of Cabuyao during the abrupt transition to online learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Students reported a significant sense of learning loss, primarily due to reduced engagement, limited retention of information, and the overwhelming focus on meeting deadlines rather than understanding course content. These academic challenges were compounded by emotional and psychological distress, including stress, anxiety, and feelings of isolation, which deeply impacted students' motivation and overall performance. While some students acknowledged the usefulness of institutional support like learning materials and internet subsidies, many found these efforts insufficient without structured guidance and emotional backing.

To manage these difficulties, students relied on personal coping strategies such as taking regular breaks, establishing routines, and maintaining social connections with peers. These actions helped improve their focus and lessen emotional exhaustion, reflecting their adaptability in the face of adversity. However, the findings also emphasized that student resilience alone is not enough. Educational institutions play a crucial role in creating supportive learning environments by providing clearer academic guidelines, accessible mental health services, and empathetic, flexible instruction. These forms of support were highlighted as essential in helping students stay engaged, motivated, and emotionally stable throughout remote learning.

In response to these findings, the researchers proposed the Comprehensive Learning Resilience and Enhancement Program (CLREP)—a tailored intervention designed to address both academic and psychological gaps caused by the pandemic. Rooted in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), the program aims to help students recover lost learning while developing practical skills and emotional resilience. CLREP is structured into four phases: assessment and planning, pilot testing, full-scale implementation, and ongoing evaluation. Key activities include a Digital Literacy Bootcamp to improve students' technical readiness, Psychological First Aid Training to build mental health awareness, and Interactive Counseling Workshops to foster real-world applications of psychological principles. All activities will be facilitated by internal faculty to ensure cost-effectiveness and institutional alignment. CLREP emphasizes flexibility, sustainability, and long-term impact, equipping students not just to recover from past disruptions, but to thrive in future academic and professional settings.

5. References
1. Adedoyin OB, Soykan E. Covid-19 pandemic and online learning: the challenges and opportunities. Interact Learn Environ. 2023;31(2):863-75. doi:10.1080/10494820.2020.1813180
2. Al-Oraibi A, Fothergill L, Yildirim M, *et al*. Exploring the psychological impacts of COVID-19 social restrictions on international university students: a Qualitative study. Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2022;19(13):7631. doi:10.3390/ijerph19137631
3. Alvarez AV. The phenomenon of learning at a distance through emergency remote teaching amidst the pandemic crisis. Asian J Distance Educ. 2020;15(1):127-43. doi:10.5281/zenodo.3881529
4. Baluyos GR, Rivera HL, Baluyos EL. Teachers' job satisfaction and work performance. Open J Soc Sci. 2019;7(8):206-21. doi:10.4236/jss.2019.78015
5. Baticulon RE, Sy JJ, Alberto NRI, *et al*. Barriers to online learning in the time of COVID-19: A national survey of medical students in the Philippines. Med Sci Educ. 2021;31(2):615-26. doi:10.1007/s40670-021-01231-z
6. Cao W, Fang Z, Hou G, *et al*. The psychological impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on college students in China. Psychiatry Res. 2020;287:112934. doi:10.1016/j.psychres.2020.112934
7. Chen CY. Are professors satisfied with their jobs? The factors that influence professors' job satisfaction. SAGE Open. 2023;13(3). doi:10.1177/21582440231181515
8. Curelaru M, Curelaru V, Cristea M. Students' Perceptions of Online Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Qualitative Approach. Sustainability. 2022;14(13):8138. doi:10.3390/su14138138
9. Demır F, Özdaş F, Çakmak M. Examining the learning losses of students in the COVID-19 process according to teachers' opinions. Int J Psychol Educ Stud. 2022;9:1012-26. doi:10.52380/ijpes.2022.9.4.978
10. Dhawan S. Online learning: a panacea in the time of COVID-19 crisis. J Educ Technol Syst. 2020;49(1):5-22. doi:10.1177/0047239520934018

11. Dinu L, Baykoca J, Dommett EJ, *et al*. Student Perceptions of Online Education during COVID-19 Lockdowns: Direct and Indirect Effects on Learning. Educ Sci. 2022;12(11):813. doi:10.3390/educsci12110813

12. Donnelly R, Patrinos HA. Learning loss during Covid-19: An early systematic review. Prospects. 2021;51(4):601-9. doi:10.1007/s11125-021-09582-6

13. Hasan N, Bao Y. Impact of "e-Learning crack-up" perception on psychological distress among college students during COVID-19 pandemic. Child Youth Serv Rev. 2020;118:105355. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105355

14. Haser Ç, Doğan O, Erhan GK. Tracing students' mathematics learning loss during school closures. Int J Educ Dev. 2022;88:102536. doi:10.1016/j.ijedudev.2021.102536

15. King RB, Chai CS, Korpershoek H. Learning and teaching during Covid-19 and beyond. Educ Psychol. 2022;42(10):1199-203. doi:10.1080/01443410.2022.2159684

16. Maba W, Widiastuti IAMS, Mantra IBN, *et al*. Learning loss: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the students' psychosocial condition. J Educ E-learn Res. 2023;10(2):209-14. doi:10.20448/jeelr.v10i2.4543

17. Rahayu RP, Wirza Y. Teachers' Perception of Online Learning during Pandemic Covid-19. J Penelit Pendidik. 2020;20(3):392-406. doi:10.17509/jpp.v20i3.29226

18. Rotas E, Cahapay MB. Difficulties in remote learning: Voices of Philippine university students. Asian J Distance Educ. 2020;15(2):147-58. doi:10.5281/zenodo.4299835

19. Sahu P. Closure of Universities due to coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). Cureus. 2020. doi:10.7759/cureus.7541

20. Sarker MFH, Tamal MA, Khan NA, *et al*. Students' experiences of e-learning practices during COVID-19. Int J Emerg Technol Learn. 2022;17(14):157-71. doi:10.3991/ijet.v17i14.30393

21. Syakur A, Sudrajad W, Winurati S, Tilwani SA. The motivation of students and their exposure to learning loss after the pandemic. Stud Learn Teach. 2023;4(3):622-33. doi:10.46627/silet.v4i3.348

22. Zapata-Cuervo N, Montes-Guerra MI, Shin HH, *et al*. Students' Psychological Perceptions Toward Online Learning Engagement during COVID-19. J Hosp Tour Educ. 2021;35(2):108-22. doi:10.1080/10963758.2021.1907195

23. Zhdanov SP, Baranova KM, Udina N, *et al*. Analysis of learning losses of students during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Contemp Educ Technol. 2022;14(3):ep369. doi:10.30935/cedtech/11812

24. Creswell JW, Poth CN. Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design. 5th ed. SAGE Publications; 2024.

25. Polit DF, Beck CT. Nursing Research - Generating and assessing evidence for nursing practice. 2016.

26. Addressing effects of Covid-19 among Filipino learners. Philippine News Agency. https://www.pna.gov.ph/opinion/pieces/704-addressing-effects-of-covid-19-among-filipino-learners

27. Algorani EB, Gupta V. Coping mechanisms. StatPearls. 2023. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK559031/

28. Byrne L. What is learning loss? Xello. 2022. https://xello.world/en/blog/student-engagement/what-is-learning-loss

29. Ncsp JHPB. Importance of a support system. Highland Springs. 2022. https://highlandspringsclinic.org/the-benefits-and-importance-of-a-support-system/

30. Ray K. What is Remote Learning? TechLearningMagazine. 2021. https://www.techlearning.com/how-to/what-is-remote-learning

31. Rogers K. Pandemic. Encyclopedia Britannica. 2024. https://www.britannica.com/science/pandemic