

E-LEARNING CHALLENGES OF ONLINE GROUPS IN A STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT: *The COVID-19 pandemic has created significant economic, cultural, and ideological quandaries all across the world. This catastrophe has spread to other nations and incapacitated many people who have been confined to their homes. With the transition of E-learning from the traditional face-to-face classroom comes the emergence of digital online communities. Stress and worry have escalated since the shift to the academic landscape. Challenges with proper online student-to-student and student-to-instructor communication were also major concerns of online education. This paper seeks to identify Mindanao State University Iligan Institute of Technology online communities. It explores which online platforms have been utilized and how these groups have addressed the E-learning challenges they have encountered. The researchers utilized random sampling to identify participants and conducted online interviews via Messenger to collect data. The data was analyzed using the Qualitative Research Method, specifically Thematic Content Analysis. Based on participants' utterances, ten online groups were identified. With all the variables taken, the e-learning challenges are as follows: Mental Health Issues, Connectivity Problems, Limited Access to Technology, Heavy Workload, and Insufficient Sources of Information.*

Keywords: COVID-19, E-Learning Challenges, Online Groups, State University

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 has been marked by the emergence of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). This virus has reached many countries and has paralyzed the lives of many people who have been forced to stay at home in confinement [1]. The outbreak was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. Countries around the world cautioned the public to take responsive care. The public care strategies have included handwashing, wearing face masks, physical distancing, and avoiding mass gatherings and assemblies. Lockdown and staying-home strategies have been put in place as the needed action to flatten the curve and control the transmission of the [2].

The COVID-19 pandemic has established massive global economic, cultural, and ideological dilemmas. It has resulted in an educational crisis as well as a health crisis. 87 percent of the world's school population was impacted severely by national lockdowns and restrictions, and 1.52 billion students were absent from school and related academics [3]

E-learning refers to the instruction that is delivered electronically through various multimedia and Internet platforms and applications for learning [4]. With the mode of learning, E-learning tools have played a crucial role during this pandemic, helping schools and universities facilitate student learning during the closure of universities and schools [5]. While adapting to the new changes, staff and student readiness needs to be gauged and supported accordingly. Learners with a fixed mindset find it difficult to adapt and adjust, whereas learners with a growth mindset quickly adapt to a new learning environment.

Along with the shift of E-learning from the traditional face-to-face class comes the creation of online groups in the digital world. Online groups considered school organizations are created to unite members with the same interest and talents in specific fields such as journalism, singing, filming, etc. Meanwhile, bond-based groups are formed because of the interpersonal relationship with one another. Likewise, groups

that have the same aim are built primarily for the reason of achieving their common goal [6]. Group work online is challenging. However, it can work in certain circumstances. People may disagree, but the main challenge is differences in time zones that can impede live communication. When this is missing, much of critical interaction is a part of the learning experience [6].

However, the shift towards e-learning caused by the pandemic has brought several significant concerns relating to policy, pedagogy, logistics, socioeconomic factors, technology, and psychosocial [7]. Several studies have revealed that students faced numerous challenges and adversities with the new learning mode. [6, 7] noted that many countries have substantial issues with a reliable Internet connection and access to digital devices. While, in many developing countries, economically backward children are unable to afford online learning devices, online education poses a risk of exposure to increased screen time for the learner. Therefore, it has become essential for students to engage in offline activities and self-exploratory learning. Lack of parental guidance, especially for young learners, is another challenge, as both parents are working. There are practical issues around physical workspaces conducive to different ways of learning.

Similarly, [8] elicited that the sudden and jarring shift to e-learning has been challenging among students especially those who lack technological resources, have poor internet quality, lack information communication technology (ICT) knowledge, and have illiteracy to computer-mediated communication tools.

These e-learning challenges can have an adverse effect on the academic performance of students. According to [2] with the e-learning issues that the students face in an online class, the level of academic performance of the students is likely to drop for the classes held for both year-end examination and internal examination due to reduced contact hours for learners and other internal and external factors.

Furthermore, students’ physical and mental health was affected due to the sudden physical isolation, health concerns, and the difficulties posed by the asynchronous nature of online learning [9] For instance, a recent study showed that 71% experienced increased stress and anxiety since the start of the online learning [10]). In addition, challenges concerning adequate online interaction between the students as well as between them and their instructors represent a significant issue for online learning during the pandemic. This paper aims to determine the types of online groups of MSU IIT. It seeks to identify those groups' categories and determine the members' social media platforms. Moreover, it looks into the role of online groups in online education.

Research Questions

1. What are the online communities at MSU-IIT?
- 2.What online platforms are widely used by the students, as seen in these groups?
- 3.How do these groups address challenges in online education?

Conceptual Framework

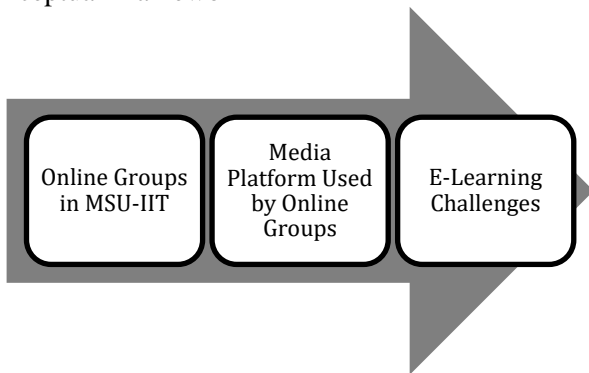


Figure 01. Schematic diagram of the study

The figure above shows the theories and variables in this study. This paper aims to determine the types of online groups in IIT, the social media platforms used, and E-learning challenges.

2.0 MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1 Design

This study utilized a qualitative research approach to investigate the various online communities at MSU IIT and their E-learning issues in the midst of the COVID-19 outbreak. Qualitative research is defined as an iterative procedure through which the research community gains a better knowledge of a phenomenon by making new, meaningful distinctions as a result of getting closer to it [12]

2.2 Participants

Participants in the study are male and female Mindanao State University Iligan Institute of Technology undergraduates. The researchers utilized purposive sampling to identify individuals. In this analysis, 35 volunteers were selected from seven (7) distinct departments, colleges, and year levels at MSU IIT.

2.3 Instruments

A structured researcher-made questionnaire was crafted to answer the problems. The interview questions were divided into three sections: the online communities established at MSU

IIT, the platforms utilized to engage with one another, and how these groups to aid in tackling online education difficulties.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

To ensure the safety of the participants on these trying times, the researchers used online interviews. The participants were interviewed using Facebook Messenger.

2.5 Data Analysis

The researchers used Thematic Content Analysis in examining the data. According to [13] thematic content analysis is a way of assessing qualitative data. It is frequently used to describe a group of texts, such as an interview or transcripts. The researcher carefully studies the data to uncover common themes - subjects, concepts, and meaning patterns that appear again.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Online Groups within MSU-IIT

Based on the responses, this study identified ten (10) distinct online communities at MSU-IIT. The roles they play, the reasons they were formed, the nature of the bonds between members, and the directions they work toward are all unique to each of these groups.

Online Groups Established within Mindanao State University- Iligan Institute Technology
(1) Online Classroom
(2) Class Group Chat
(3) Group Chat for Specific Activities in Class
(4) Octava Chorale Society
(5) Silahis
(6) Linguazette
(7) MSU IIT Mobile Legends Bang Bang Community (MLBBC)
(8) Dakilang Pamantasanposting
(9) Junior Philippine Institute of Account (JPIA)
(10) Kalilas

3.2 Social Media Platforms Used within Online Groups

Facebook Page

Facebook is the most common social media platform used in Online Groups, particularly Common Identity Groups and Ad Hoc groups. Through the Facebook page, members are informed of the ongoing and upcoming events of the groups because of the announcements posted on the page. of events that will commence within the month.

Messenger

Messenger is the widely used medium for interacting with members in online groups at MSU IIT. Members can easily send their thoughts and feelings to one another through group chats in class, school organizations, and designated school activities. Messenger’s text and call features allow group members to conveniently plan their activities and tasks in class, send resources or class materials (ppt, pdf, etc.) among classmates, notify everyone with class updates and announcements, and exchange ideas and insights about specific topics.

Google Meet

Google meet is the platform to meet and interact online. Gmeet is very essential in online classes. It is the avenue to conduct a class meeting, reporting, research consultations, and defense in the thesis.

MOLE/ Google Classroom

MOLE or MSU IIT Online Learning Environment and Google Classroom are both online platforms MSU IIT students use to be notified of the tasks and activities in class. MOLE is usually the

platform used when answering quizzes and exams. It is also the avenue to submit written tasks and assignments given by the professors.

Google Drive

Google Drive is also one of the CMC tools used by the online groups at MSU IIT. It is an application wherein students access the files and class sources given by the professors (documents, educational videos, PowerPoint presentations, etc.

3.3 Online Groups and E-Learning Challenges

Mental Health Issues

Online groups are essential in addressing Mental Health Issues among MSU IIT students. Most respondents attested that these virtual communities allow them to express their emotions, and mental health problems during this pandemic. These groups give them the space to vent their hidden feelings and anxiety and have a heart-to-heart talk with their fellow group members. In such ways, these groups help them to overcome the stress and troubles they feel because of the healthy discussions and the words of advice. One of the respondents delineated that the sense of camaraderie present in the group chat can help lessen the mental health issues in students effectively. He stated,

“Group chats allow us to see the shared troubles in academic struggles. This gives us the feeling that we are not alone in this struggle, and we are facing the same battles”.

Connectivity Problems

Connectivity problems are one of the most challenging issues in online education. The unstable network, power interruptions, and poor internet connection among remote areas made students unable to join the meeting, take their exams, and delay their submission of class activities. Hence, the respondents stressed that online groups are vital in addressing this E-learning challenge. According to their narratives, one of the participants mentioned that as someone with no internet connection at home and relies only on data, he uses the group chat as an outlet to inform everyone about his situation.

“Through online groups, I can ask my friends to tell our professors why I am absent. Also, whenever I am absent from the class, they can relay to the group chat the class discussion and the activities to be done in that subject”.

Moreover, other respondents contended that the online platform, particularly Gdrive used in the virtual community, is significant in the case of online class problems. According to them, the pre-recorded video report and the recorded meeting uploaded in GDrive are beneficial when they can't attend class due to connectivity issues.

“The screenshots of the class lessons sent in the GC, copy of PowerPoint presentations given by the teacher, and the recorded lectures uploaded in Gdrive made me updated on what has been discussed despite not being able to attend the actual class”

Limited Access to Technology

We are living in the same socioeconomic status. Thus, not everyone has access to technological devices used in the online learning system. However, online groups have paved the way to solving this issue. In one of the interviews with the respondents, she revealed that MSU IIT online mainly Dakilang Pamantasanposting serves as an outlet for students with problems with access to technology to address their concerns. In her statement, she said, “Dakilang Pamantasanposting gives the group members the platform to raise their struggles in limited access to technology.” She added that the #PisoParaSaLaptop had become a trend within the group as it originally circulates in different media sites in the Philippines.

“Because of the narratives of the members having these problems and their plea to the public, they could receive financial help and collect enough money to purchase the technological device they needed in this online learning.”

Heavy Workload and Insufficient Sources of Information

As mentioned by one of the samples, he elucidated that groups formed online are beneficial in addressing issues such as numerous activities and lack of sources of information.

“With the use of online groups, we would be able to share our activities and get some idea on how these activities should be done. We can exchange research-based information about the topic given to us for our fellow members to have a broader knowledge of the subject and discuss what we have understood about it”.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Since the entire university transitioned to online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic, this study substantially contributed to MSU-IIT students and to the State Universities and Colleges as a whole, particularly in online education and e-learning. Online groups used various platforms as an avenue to communicate and enable online classes. Educational media like MOLE, Gdrive, Gmeet, and GClassroom hold meetings, webinars, forums, tests, and quizzes and provide students their assignments and access to class learning materials, pre-recorded lectures, and recorded class sessions. With the established communities in the institution, it was evident that online groups solve many E-learning issues. It allows mental health patients to discuss their challenges. It lets people vent and get advice from other members. In the case of connectivity troubles, members can directly use the group chat to warn their classmates and lecturers that they can't attend the meeting or may delay submitting activities due to their unreliable connection. Online communities are also helpful in reaching out to fellow members for financial assistance to buy the digital device needed for online classes. In a nutshell, virtual groups open an opportunity not just to collaborate with other students but also to share available resources

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