



Academic Stress and Coping Strategies of College Freshmen in Online Education Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

Michaela Jennarine DL. Cruz ^a, Gener S. Subia ^{b*}, Regidor G. Gaboy ^c,
Efraim S. Vidal Jr. ^d

^{a,d}Faculty, College of Arts and Sciences, Wesleyan University Philippines, Cabanatuan City, Philippines

^{b*} Faculty, College of Education, Wesleyan University Philippines, Cabanatuan City Philippines-subtagener@yahoo.com

^cFaculty, College of Education, Central Luzon State University, Nueva Ecija, Philippines

Abstract

Determining the academic stress and coping mechanisms of the students allows for a broad understanding of how the online learning environment affects the students' present education. As a result, the researchers adjudged that it was important to find out how the students cope with stress in online learning when the COVID-19 pandemic is present. The researchers considered tertiary freshmen as respondents of the study since they were the ones who made a big shift from basic education to higher education. The results indicate that deadlines were a major source of stress for most of the respondents while attending online classes was a moderately stressful experience for most of the respondents. "Acceptance" earned the highest mean score among the facets of coping strategies, which corresponds to "I've been doing this a medium amount". Students can accept the fact that a specific circumstance has occurred, and they've had to acquire ways of coping with it. But despite their acceptance of the COVID-19 scenario, students still have inhibitions because they want to return to the face-to-face education environment in the future. Lastly, as the students experience stress often, the more that they are using many coping strategies at once. In order to cope with the pandemic, one may want to use several of the coping strategies or to alternate in using them.

Keywords: Academic stress; coping strategies; COVID-19; online education; college freshmen

© 2016 IJCI & the Authors. Published by *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction (IJCI)*. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (CC BY-NC-ND) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19), also known as SARS-CoV-2, has been a global concern since its widespread in 2020. The outbreak has constituted severe problems and difficulties to almost all sectors of humanity. As cited in Tria (2020), it resulted to restrictions on travel (Chinazzi et al., 2020), shutdown of schools (Viner et al., 2020), recession of global economy (Fernandes, 2020), conflicts on politics (Barrios & Hochberg, 2020), racist issues (Habibi et al., 2020), and misleading information and controversies (Enitan et al., 2020), to name a few.

Education is one of the most affected sectors when COVID-19 hit the world. More than 1.2 billion learners worldwide, with more than 28 million learners in the Philippines, are affected due to the closure of academic institutions (UNESCO, 2020). The fight against

the pandemic has brought adverse effects to all schools. Since the nationwide lockdown in March 2020, students are forced to study at home and teachers are mandated to work from home or work on a skeleton workforce. The Philippines is not ready to the abrupt shift of mode of learning from the traditional face-to-face to online and distance education. Many students, especially those living in far flung areas, cannot access the internet and network signals to reach out to their teachers when they encounter confusing topics. There are a lot of students as well who are living just enough to buy for food and other necessities; they cannot afford to buy gadgets that will be needed for the new normal education. Those who are lucky enough to have gadgets and internet connection still encounter several problems in the new education set-up.

In line with the government efforts to flatten the curve of the coronavirus 2019, colleges and universities worldwide have closed their campuses. In the Philippines, physical facilities of institutions have closed during the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) in mid-2020 which forced students to leave their regular routines in their school life. For most freshmen tertiary students, the past year has been anything but normal. The pandemic has eliminated many opportunities for college freshmen students that affected their college plans causing stress academically.

During these past several months, many first-year students embarked on their first semester of college while also navigating the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In a semester consisting of hybrid classes and socially-distance events, it is easy to see how these unusual circumstances may add additional stress and anxiety for first-year students (Munson, 2020, para. 1).

Majority of classes, if not all, have been conducted fully or primarily through online and video conferencing. As cited by Toquero (2020), teachers recorded and uploaded their lessons online for students' access (Fox, 2007). It has been the thought of many that there are only some who cannot attend video conferencing sessions. However, "some" is an understatement.

As college instructors in higher education institutions (HEIs), it has come to the researchers' attention that many students are experiencing academic stress caused by the different situations they are in. Nevertheless, students continue to strive with the help of coping strategies.

Identifying the academic stress and coping strategies of the students enables a wide range of understanding on the effect of online learning environment to the current education of students. Thus, the researchers deemed it necessary to determine the students' encounter of stress academically and how they strive through coping strategies in online education amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

The researchers particularly considered freshmen in the tertiary level as the respondents of the study since they were the ones who underwent a significant transition from basic education to tertiary education. The students may be able to discover their strengths and weaknesses in times of abrupt shift of modes of learning through this research study. Lastly, this study can be relevant to the strategic plans and future programs in the academe taking into consideration possible shifts in education.

1.2. Objectives and Hypotheses of the Study

This study was conducted to determine the academic stress and coping strategies of college freshmen students in online education amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, this study sought to:

1. describe the academic stress of the respondents;
2. describe the coping strategies of the respondents; and,
3. determine the relationship between their academic stress and coping strategies.

This null hypothesis was tested:

There is no relationship between academic stress and coping strategies of respondents.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study employed descriptive-correlational research design. According to Mertler (2014), descriptive studies are designed to describe and understand the current state of persons, places, circumstances, or occurrences.

In order to conduct the descriptive research design, the researchers utilized survey research. Survey research is generally a quantitative research approach in which a researcher conducts a survey or questionnaire to a sample of people to characterize their views, opinions, behaviors, experiences, or other demographic characteristics (Creswell, 2005). Furthermore, this study utilized correlational research design as well. According to Sage Publications, Inc. (2016), the goal of correlational research is to find and potentially quantify connections between two or more variables. Correlational study in education searches out qualities, talents, or conditions that covary, or co-relate. Hence, the researchers deemed it necessary to use descriptive-correlational research design to characterize correlations between variables without finding a causal link.

This study was conducted in Wesleyan University-Philippines, Cabanatuan City, Nueva Ecija during 2nd Semester of Academic Year 2020-2021. Professors were requested to disseminate the survey questionnaires through a link during their online classes with the students. The researchers chose the locale as it has a wide range of programs/colleges making the feedbacks of the respondents binding given their diversity.

In order to conduct the descriptive research design, the researchers utilized survey research. Survey research is generally a quantitative research approach in which a researcher conducts a survey or questionnaire to a sample of people to characterize their views, opinions, behaviors, experiences, or other demographic characteristics (Creswell, 2005). Furthermore, this study utilized correlational research design as well. According to Sage Publications, Inc. (2016), the goal of correlational research is to find and potentially quantify connections between two or more variables. Correlational study in education searches out qualities, talents, or conditions that covary, or co-relate. Hence, the researchers deemed it necessary to use descriptive-correlational research design to characterize correlations between variables without finding a causal link.

2.2. Sampling

This study used stratified random sampling in the selection of the respondents in which the researchers considered the proportion number of respondents in the tertiary

level based on their college they belong to and year level. Stratified random sampling is a sampling method in which a population is divided into smaller sub-groups called strata. Strata are generated in stratified random sampling, or stratification, depending on common traits or characteristics among individuals, such as income or educational level (Hayes, 2020). In this study, the common characteristics of the respondents were year level and college they belonged to. The researchers considered it essential to use stratified random sampling to get a sample population that best represents the overall population being researched. This study had a sample population of 252 (36 students per College).

2.3. Research Instrument

The researchers adopted "The Modified for Online Teaching Academic Stress Scale" which was adapted by Mosanya (2020) from University Student Stress Scale (Burge, 2009). This scale determined how stress the respondents were on the aspects of online academic works. The scale validity was presented in the study of Azila-Gbettor et al. (2015). The questions on this second questionnaire were modified by Mosanya (2020) to match online learning with an instruction: Please indicate how stressful you are for the following aspects of online academic work during the COVID-19 related social isolation and online learning - sample item: Studying for online tests and exams. For the study of Mosanya (2020), this scale had Cronbach's alpha of 0.81. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (not at all stressful) to 5 (extremely stressful).

Furthermore, the researchers deemed it necessary to utilize "Brief-Cope" by Carver (1997), a standardized test to determine the coping strategies of respondents in encountering a stressful life event. This third questionnaire is the Brief Cope questionnaire, which has 28 items about how the students dealt with stress. This questionnaire is a short form of the previously published COPE inventory established by Carver, Scheier and Weintraub in 1989 by Charles S. Carver in 1997. Brief Cope comprises of 14 subscales, with two items per subscale, active coping, planning, positive reframing, acceptance, humor, religion, using emotional support, using instrumental support, self-distraction, denial, venting, substance use, behavioral disengagement and self-blame.

2.4. Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers contacted Ms. Magdalena Mosanya through email to request permission to view and utilize the adapted academic stress scale. After Ms. Mosanya responded affirmatively and gave the questionnaire, the researchers sought for permission to conduct the study through a letter. The letter was received by the secretary of the Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA). The researchers waited for the approved letter from the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs (OVPA) before conducting the study.

Because of the difficulties and hazards posed by the COVID-19 epidemic, the researchers took into account the respondents' availability and capacity to complete the questionnaire without jeopardizing their health. Finally, as the internet has grown in popularity, so has the usage of electronic surveys. The electronic surveys were filled out

by the participants using Google Forms. The links of the document were shared through the group chat of the students on Facebook Messenger.

2.5. Data Analysis

The researchers collated, categorized, and arranged the different data sets collected. The data collected were statistically treated in order to solve the study's unique challenges. All the data were downloaded from Google Forms, encoded using the Microsoft Excel Program and computed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science or SPSS for purposes of analysis and interpretation. This section describes the following statistical computations that were employed in the study:

1. To describe the academic stress and the coping strategies of the respondents, mean interpretation was used.

2. To find out the relationship between academic stress and coping strategies of respondents, Pearson r correlation (also known as Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient) r is a measure of the degree to which two quantitative variables (interval/ratio) coincide with one another—that is, the extent to which two variables are linearly related: changes in one variable correspond to changes in the other (Allen, 2017).

3. Results

3.1. Academic Stress of the Respondents

Table 1. Academic stress of the respondents

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation Mean
1. Handling the online academic workload	3.234	.9472	Very Stressful
2. Studying for online tests and exams	3.214	.9664	Very Stressful
3. Sitting online test and exams	3.016	1.0098	Very Stressful
4. Doing an online oral presentation	3.238	1.1215	Very Stressful
5. Meeting deadlines	3.302	1.1415	Very Stressful
6. Attending online classes	2.409	1.0541	Moderately Stressful
7. Getting good enough grades	3.060	1.2077	Very Stressful
Pooled Mean			

Legend:

0.00 – 1.00 – Not stressful

2.01 – 3.00 – Moderately stressful

4.01 – 5.00 – Extremely Stressful

1.01 – 2.00 – A little bit stressful

3.01 – 4.00 – Very stressful

Table 1 presents the academic stress of the respondents. The table shows that “meeting deadlines” got the highest mean of 3.302 and interpreted as very stressful and “attending online classes” got the lowest mean of 2.409 and interpreted as moderately stressful. The over-all mean is 21.473 which is interpreted as very stressful, which is evident in the table since majority of the items had an interpretation of very stressful.

The data reveal that most of the respondents were very stressful in meeting deadlines. In contrast, most of the respondents were moderately stressful in attending online classes. Kraag et al. (2006), as cited by Yasmin et al. (2020), stated that time stress, which is one of the varieties of stress as outlined by Dr. Karl Albrecht, occurs when one is anxious about running out of time, or when one does not have enough time to complete

all his or her responsibilities, then time stress is being experienced. When people are afraid about missing a deadline or being late for a meeting or appointment, they frequently experience time stress. Kostić et al. (2021) further noted that the student population is under pressure to fulfill specified deadlines and combine academics with other commitments as they continually chase grades, fight hectic schedules, and face lack of spare time.

3.2. Coping strategies of the respondents

Table 2. *Coping strategies of the respondents*

	Mean	SD	Description	Mean Interpretation
Active Coping	2.9425	0.0756	I've been doing this a medium amount	Students are using this coping strategy often.
Planning	2.9305	0.0304	I've been doing this a medium amount	Students are using this coping strategy often.
Positive reframing	2.8115	0.0813	I've been doing this a medium amount	Students are using this coping strategy often.
Acceptance	2.9485	0.1407	I've been doing this a medium amount	Students are using this coping strategy often.
Humor	2.139	0.2078	I've been doing this a medium amount	Students are using this coping strategy often.
Religion	2.877	0.2800	I've been doing this a medium amount	Students are using this coping strategy often.
Using emotional support	2.4005	0.1124	I've been doing this a medium amount	Students are using this coping strategy often.
Using instrumental support	2.4265	0.0190	I've been doing this a medium amount	Students are using this coping strategy often.
Self-distraction	2.732	0.2163	I've been doing this a medium amount	Students are using this coping strategy often.
Denial	2.006	0.0480	I've been doing this a medium amount	Students are using this coping strategy often.
Venting	2.482	0.0084	I've been doing this a medium amount	Students are using this coping strategy often.
Substance use	1.409	0.0169	I've been doing this a little bit	Students are using this coping strategy sometimes.
Behavioral disengagement	2.1425	0.0954	I've been doing this a medium amount	Students are using this coping strategy often.
Self-blame	2.534	0.1767	I've been doing this a medium amount	Students are using this coping strategy often.

Table 2 shows the total scores by scale and with mean interpretation per number. The table reveals that most students used all the strategies in a medium amount or using these coping strategies often, except for one scale, which is substance use, as students used this in a little bit amount only or using this sometimes.

Despite the close results of each scale, it can be noticed that “acceptance” received the highest mean score of 2.9485 that has a description of “I’ve been doing this a medium amount”. This means that students tend to use this coping strategy to accept the reality of the fact that certain situation has happened and that they’ve been learning to live with it. According to the result of the study of Rizun and Strzelecki (2020), students have a medium feeling that distance learning has been increasing their efficacy and productivity

and that despite their favorable views on distance education, the students would like to go back to traditional schooling. This implies that even though students are somehow accepting the fact of the COVID-19 situation, they still have inhibitions as most are hopeful to go back to the face-to-face education setting.

Furthermore, “substance use” received the lowest mean score with a description of “I’ve been doing this a little bit” which means that to make themselves feel better or to get through some hard times, students use alcohol or other drugs occasionally only. Alcohol use in university students decreased during the COVID-19 epidemic (Graupensperger et al., 2021; Jackson et al., 2021; White et al., 2020).

3.3. Relationship between Academic Stress and Coping Strategies of the Respondents

Table 3. Relationship between academic stress and coping strategies of respondents

	Handling the online academic workload	Studying for online tests and exams	Sitting online test and exams	Doing an online oral presentation	Meeting deadlines	Attending online classes	Getting good enough grades
turning to work or other activities to take one's mind off things	$\rho = .164^{**}$ $\alpha = .009$	$\rho = .190^{**}$ $\alpha = .003$	$\rho = .139^*$ $\alpha = .028$		$\rho = .164^{**}$ $\alpha = .009$	$\rho = .212^{**}$ $\alpha = .001$	$\rho = .265^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$
concentrating efforts on doing something about the situation one's in	$\rho = .144^*$ $\alpha = .023$	$\rho = .172^{**}$ $\alpha = .006$	$\rho = .135^*$ $\alpha = .032$		$\rho = .206^{**}$ $\alpha = .001$		$\rho = .195^{**}$ $\alpha = .002$
saying to self "this isn't real"	$\rho = .171^*$ $\alpha = .007$	$\rho = .259^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$	$\rho = .165^*$ $\alpha = .009$		$\rho = .23^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$	$\rho = .209^{**}$ $\alpha = .001$	$\rho = .25^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$
getting emotional support from others	$\rho = .24^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$	$\rho = .146^*$ $\alpha = .021$				$\rho = .124^*$ $\alpha = .05$	$\rho = .132^*$ $\alpha = .036$
giving up trying to deal with it	$\rho = .317^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$	$\rho = .247^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$	$\rho = .156^*$ $\alpha = .013$	$\rho = .217^{**}$ $\alpha = .001$	$\rho = .229^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$	$\rho = .253^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$	$\rho = .278^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$
taking action to try to make the situation better	$\rho = .127^*$ $\alpha = .044$				$\rho = .153^*$ $\alpha = .015$		
refusing to believe that it has happened	$\rho = .153^*$ $\alpha = .015$	$\rho = .170^{**}$ $\alpha = .007$		$\rho = .152^*$ $\alpha = .016$		$\rho = .139^*$ $\alpha = .002$	$\rho = .152^*$ $\alpha = .016$

saying things to let unpleasant feelings escape	$\rho = .263^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$	$\rho = .203^{**}$ $\alpha = .001$	$\rho = .125^*$ $\alpha = .047$		$\rho = .155^*$ $\alpha = .014$	$\rho = .196^{**}$ $\alpha = .002$	$\rho = .237^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$
getting help and advice from other people	$\rho = .146^*$ $\alpha = .020$	$\rho = .150^*$ $\alpha = .017$					
criticizing oneself	$\rho = .303^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$	$\rho = .275^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$	$\rho = .151^*$ $\alpha = .016$	$\rho = .162^*$ $\alpha = .01$	$\rho = .246^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$	$\rho = .323^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$	$\rho = .316^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$
trying to come up with a strategy about what to do	$\rho = .151^*$ $\alpha = .016$				$\rho = .189^{**}$ $\alpha = .003$		
giving up the attempt to cope	$\rho = .386^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$	$\rho = .297^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$	$\rho = .248^*$ $\alpha = .000$	$\rho = .225^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$	$\rho = .317^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$	$\rho = .356^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$	$\rho = .266^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$
doing something to think about it less	$\rho = .179^{**}$ $\alpha = .004$				$\rho = .129^*$ $\alpha = .041$		$\rho = .211^{**}$ $\alpha = .001$
accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened	$\rho = .186^{**}$ $\alpha = .003$	$\rho = .148^*$ $\alpha = .019$			$\rho = .185^{**}$ $\alpha = .003$		$\rho = .204^{**}$ $\alpha = .001$
expressing my negative feelings	$\rho = .269^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$				$\rho = .134^*$ $\alpha = .034$		
trying to find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs	$\rho = .191^{**}$ $\alpha = .002$			$\rho = .134^*$ $\alpha = .033$			
thinking hard about what steps to take	$\rho = .232^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$	$\rho = .174^{**}$ $\alpha = .006$	$\rho = .131^*$ $\alpha = .037$		$\rho = .286^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$		$\rho = .248^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$
blaming myself for things that happened	$\rho = .211^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$	$\rho = .183^{**}$ $\alpha = .004$	$\rho = .143^*$ $\alpha = .024$	$\rho = .17^{**}$ $\alpha = .007$	$\rho = .175^{**}$ $\alpha = .005$	$\rho = .263^*$ $\alpha = .000$	$\rho = .341^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$
making jokes about it		$\rho = .25^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$	$\rho = .127^*$ $\alpha = .043$			$\rho = .237^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$	$\rho = .159^*$ $\alpha = .011$
trying to get advice or help from other people about what to do		$\rho = .140^*$ $\alpha = .027$					

learning to live with it		$\rho = .140^*$ $\alpha = .027$			$\rho = .229^{**}$ $\alpha = .000$		$\rho = .193^{**}$ $\alpha = .002$
making fun of the situation		$\rho = .156^*$ $\alpha = .013$				$\rho = .136^*$ $\alpha = .031$	
trying to see it in a different light, make it seem more positive			$\rho = .126^*$ $\alpha = .046$				
using alcohol or other drugs to help me get through it						$\rho = .181^{**}$ $\alpha = .004$	

The table shows that handling the online academic workload has a weak positive correlation to turning to work or other activities to take one’s mind off things (self-distraction) ($r = .164, p>.01$), concentrating efforts on doing something about the situation one’s in (active coping) ($r = .144, p>.05$), saying to self "this isn't real" (denial) ($r = .171, p>.01$), getting emotional support from others (emotional support) ($r = .24, p >.01$), giving up trying to deal with it (behavioral disengagement) ($r = .317, p >.01$), taking action to try to make the situation better (active coping) ($r = .127, p>.05$), refusing to believe that it has happened (denial) ($r = .153, p>.05$), saying things to let unpleasant feelings escape (venting) ($r = .263, p>.01$), getting help and advice from other people (use of informational support) ($r = .146, p>.05$), criticizing oneself (self-blame) ($r = .303, p>.01$), trying to come up with a strategy about what to do (planning) ($r = .151, p>.05$), giving up the attempt to cope (behavioral disengagement) ($r = .386, p>.01$), doing something to think about it less (self-distraction) ($r = .179, p>.001$), accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened (acceptance) ($r = .186, p>.01$), expressing negative feelings (venting) ($r = .269, p>.01$), trying to find comfort in religion or spiritual beliefs (religion) ($r = .191, p>.01$), thinking hard about what steps to take (planning) ($r = .232, p>.01$), and blaming oneself for things that happened (self-blame) ($r = .211, p>.01$).

Eighteen (out of 28) indicators of coping strategies have correlation to academic stress. The finding reveals that academic stress in terms of handling the online academic workload has significant relationship to most of the coping strategies. The data inferred that when handling the online academic workload, respondents tend to use self-distraction, active coping, denial, emotional support, behavioral disengagement, venting, use informational support, self-blame, planning, acceptance, and religion as coping strategies.

In a nutshell, students prefer to adopt more practical coping strategies when faced with increased workload. This claim is supported by Kausar (2010) stating that a student with a heavy workload may find it helpful to engage in discussions with other students, gather notes and study material in order to cope with the pressure. Savitsky et al. (2020) discovered as well that the most prevalent coping strategies among nursing students during the pandemic were resilience, seeking information, mental detachment, humor, and the use of spiritual support.

Moreover, the table presents that studying for online tests and exams has a weak positive correlation to turning to work or other activities to take one's mind off things (self-distraction) ($r = .190, p > .01$), concentrating efforts on doing something about the situation one's in (active coping) ($r = .172, p > .01$), saying to self "this isn't real." (denial) ($r = .259, p > .01$), getting emotional support from others (emotional support) ($r = .146, p > .05$), giving up trying to deal with it (behavioral disengagement) ($r = .247, p > .01$), refusing to believe that it has happened (denial) ($r = .17, p > .01$), saying things to let unpleasant feelings escape (venting) ($r = .203, p > .01$), getting help and advice from other people (use of informational support) ($r = .15, p > .05$), criticizing oneself (self-blame) ($r = .275, p > .01$), giving up the attempt to cope (behavioral disengagement) ($r = .297, p > .01$), making jokes about it (humor) ($r = .25, p > .01$), accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened (acceptance) ($r = .148, p > .05$), trying to get advice or help from other people about what to do (use of informational support) ($r = .14, p > .05$), learning to live with it (acceptance) ($r = .14, p > .05$), thinking hard about what steps to take (planning) ($r = .174, p > .01$), blaming oneself for things that happened (self-blame) ($r = .183, p > .01$), and making fun of the situation (humor) ($r = .156, p > .05$).

Seventeen (out of 28) indicators of coping strategies have correlation to academic stress. The finding reveals that academic stress in terms of studying for online tests and exams has significant relationship to most of the coping strategies. The data infer that when studying for online tests and exams, respondents tend to use self-distraction, active coping, denial, emotional support, behavioral disengagement, venting, use of informational support, self-blame, humor, acceptance, and planning. Paduraru (2019) mentioned that stress associated with (before, during and after) examinations can be decreased by employing coping techniques that can be created and practiced over time.

The table shows that sitting online tests and exams has a weak positive correlation to turning to work or other activities to take one's mind off things (self-distraction) ($r = .139, p > .05$), concentrating efforts on doing something about the situation one's in (active coping) ($r = .135, p > .05$), saying to self "this isn't real" (denial) ($r = .165, p > .01$), giving up trying to deal with it (behavioral disengagement) ($r = .156, p > .05$), saying things to let unpleasant feelings escape (venting) ($r = .125, p > .05$), trying to see it in a different light to make it seem more positive (positive reframing) ($r = .126, p > .05$), criticizing oneself (self-blame) ($r = .151, p > .05$), giving up the attempt to cope (behavioral disengagement) ($r = .248, p > .01$), making jokes about it (humor) ($r = .127, p > .05$), thinking hard about what steps to take (planning) ($r = .131, p > .05$), and blaming oneself for things that happened (self-blame) ($r = .143, p > .05$).

Only 11 (out of 28) indicators of coping strategies have correlation to academic stress. Hence, the finding reveals that academic stress in terms of sitting online tests and exams has no significant relationship to coping strategies. The data infer that when students are taking online tests or examinations, they are not utilizing any coping strategies indicated in this study. However, other coping strategies may be utilized by learners. In the study of Kolski and Weible (2018), gaze shifting behaviors during online tests and exams, in which students are monitored through webcam, were indicative of cognitive processing and coping techniques.

Furthermore, the table presents that doing an online oral presentation has a weak positive correlation to giving up trying to deal with it ($r = .217, p > .01$), refusing to believe that it has happened ($r = .152, p > .05$), criticizing oneself ($r = .162, p > .05$), giving up the

attempt to cope ($r = .225, p > .01$), trying to find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs ($r = .134, p > .05$), and blaming oneself for things that happened ($r = .17, p > .01$).

Only six (out of 28) indicators of coping strategies have correlation to academic stress. Thus, the finding reveals that academic stress in terms of doing an oral presentation has no significant relationship to coping strategies. The data disclose that when students are doing an oral presentation, majority are not using any coping strategies indicated in this study. According to The University of Melbourne (n.d.), there are ways in order to manage stress for oral presentations such as trying pre-presentation techniques (know the material, know the audience, confidence, perspective on nerves, develop positive thinking and visualization skills, etc.), practicing physical techniques (slow breathing, diaphragmatic breathing, muscle rolling, etc.), doing in-presentation strategies (focus on positive audience members, keep going, and biofeedback), and doing post-presentation (act on feedback, reflect, and practice mindfulness).

In terms of meeting deadlines, the table shows that it has a weak positive correlation to turning to work or other activities to take one's mind off things (self-distraction) ($r = .164, p > .01$), concentrating efforts on doing something about the situation one's in (active coping) ($r = .206, p > .01$), saying to self "this isn't real" (denial) ($r = .23, p > .01$), giving up trying to deal with it (behavioral disengagement) ($r = .229, p > .01$), taking action to try to make the situation better (active coping) ($r = .153, p > .05$), saying things to let unpleasant feelings escape (venting) ($r = .155, p > .05$), criticizing oneself (self-blame) ($r = .246, p > .01$), trying to come up with a strategy about what to do (planning) ($r = .189, p > .01$), giving up the attempt to cope (behavioral disengagement) ($r = .317, p > .01$), doing something to think about it less (self-distraction) ($r = .129, p > .05$), accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened (acceptance) ($r = .185, p > .01$), expressing negative feelings (venting) ($r = .134, p > .05$), learning to live with it (acceptance) ($r = .229, p > .01$), thinking hard about what steps to take (planning) ($r = .286, p > .01$), and blaming oneself for things that happened (self-blame) ($r = .175, p > .01$).

Fifteen (out of 28) indicators of coping strategies have correlation to academic stress. Hence, the finding reveals that academic stress in terms of meeting deadlines has significant relationship to coping strategies. The data infer that when students are meeting deadlines, they are using self-distraction, active coping, denial, behavioral disengagement, venting, self-blame, planning, and acceptance as coping strategies. Expert Panel of Forbes Business Council (2019) stated recommendations for handling deadline stress which are getting a workout in, relaxing and staying calm, making a plan as soon as possible, and controlling what a person can and letting go. Getting a workout in, such as yoga, is a form of self-distraction that makes a person optimistic believing that deadlines will not feel so daunting. Relaxing and staying calm is active coping; once a person has calmed himself/herself, visualizing the roadmap of how to tackle deadline will be clearer. Making plan as soon as possible creates a visual on how the situation will be controlled and how deliverables will be completed successfully. One who knows what to control and let go recognizes fundamentally that the process is always more essential than the outcome, which is a form of acceptance. Moreover, Reille (2018) mentioned that task avoidance and "no stick, no carrot" are reasons why one struggles to meet deadlines and what to do about it. Task avoidance, which is a form of self-denial, is one of the reasons why people frequently procrastinate projects or reports as they anticipate the tasks to be unpleasant. In the short-term, self-denial, as a defense mechanism, may allow

one to have the time to adapt to an abrupt shift in his/her reality, and by that, one might be able to eventually endure, adjust, and move forward (Cherry, 2020). However, denial may cause problems in one's life as well as (Keille, 2018) said that whether a person realizes it or not, he/she justifies why it is good to work on a task later to absolve himself/herself of the guilt, but his/her justifications for deferring the task are nothing more than excuses, which may lead to being more stressful and remorseful in the long run. "No stick, no carrot" is a behavioral disengagement in which Reille (2018) elaborated that this happens when one focuses on what is familiar and easy while there are other important things that are overdue. Furthermore, Ritchie (2020) said that venting is a natural reaction to a variety of situations, from unattainable deadlines to dealing with toxic people. Lastly, Reille (2018) also mentioned that when people tell her about their struggles with time management, they typically blame themselves for not being organized or disciplined.

In terms of attending online classes, the table presents that it has a weak positive correlation to turning to work or other activities to take one's mind off things (self-distraction) ($r = .212, p > .01$), saying to self "this isn't real" (denial) ($r = .209, p > .01$), getting emotional support from others (using emotional support) ($r = .124, p > .05$), giving up trying to deal with it (behavioral disengagement) ($r = .253, p > .01$), refusing to believe that it has happened (denial) ($r = .139, p > .05$), saying things to let unpleasant feelings escape (venting) ($r = .196, p > .01$), using alcohol or other drugs to help get through it (substance use) ($r = .181, p > .01$), criticizing oneself (self-blame) ($r = .323, p > .01$), giving up the attempt to cope (behavioral disengagement) ($r = .356, p > .01$), making jokes about it (humor) ($r = .237, p > .01$), blaming oneself for things that happened (self-blame) ($r = .263, p > .01$), and making fun of the situation (humor) ($r = .136, p > .05$).

Only 12 (out of 28) indicators of coping strategies have correlation to academic stress. Thus, the finding reveals that academic stress in terms of attending online classes has no significant relationship to the coping strategies. The data disclose that when students are attending online classes, majority of them are not using any coping strategies indicated in this study. According to Mheidly et al. (2020), increasing the number of breaks between online sessions can help to relieve tension and keep learners interested and focused.

Lastly, the table presents that getting enough good grades has a weak positive correlation to turning to work or other activities to take one's mind off things ($r = .265, p > .01$), concentrating efforts on doing something about the situation one's in ($r = .195, p > .01$), saying to self "this isn't real." ($r = .25, p > .01$), getting emotional support from others ($r = .132, p > .05$), giving up trying to deal with it ($r = .278, p > .01$), refusing to believe that it has happened ($r = .152, p > .05$), saying things to let unpleasant feelings escape ($r = .237, p > .01$), criticizing oneself ($r = .316, p > .01$), giving up the attempt to cope ($r = .266, p > .01$), making jokes about it ($r = .159, p > .05$), doing something to think about it less ($r = .211, p > .01$), accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened ($r = .204, p > .01$), learning to live with it ($r = .193, p > .01$), thinking hard about what steps to take ($r = .248, p > .01$), and blaming oneself for things that happened ($r = .341, p > .01$).

Fifteen (out of 28) indicators of coping strategies have correlation to academic stress. Hence, the finding reveals that academic stress in terms of getting enough good grades has significant relationship to coping strategies. The data infer that when students are trying to get enough good grades, they are using self-distraction, active coping, denial,

using emotional support, behavioral disengagement, venting, humor, acceptance, planning, and self-blame as coping strategies. Unavoidable stressors may cause people to divert themselves from the issue (Allen & Leary, 2010). When getting good grades, students have habits of highly successful students, which include motivating oneself, listening and participating in class, taking thorough notes during a class, not hesitating to ask for help, among others. (UMass Dartmouth, n.d.) Furthermore, the University of Hampshire (n.d.) stated some tips to help cope when worrying about results of exams and tests. The university enumerated such tips like using campus resources, staying present, using positive self-talk, focusing on what one can control, practicing good self-care, among others, which are related to self-distraction, active coping, using emotional support, venting, humor, acceptance, and planning. However, when getting good grades, students are likely to deny, blame self and disengage behavior as well. In the article “The Case Against Grades” by Thomsen (2013), a poll of students at the University of Cape Town revealed that stress and anxiety of failing tests lead to “typical symptoms of procrastination and avoidance,” disorientation, and poor self-esteem. It's one of those situations where one is like, 'Oh my gosh, I can't flunk a test.' One patient described it as “like a very serious strain.” Thomsen also stated that another exhibited the classic pattern of grade-weighted failure leading to disengagement: After failing at something, I moved on to something else.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to determine the academic stress and coping strategies of college freshmen in online education amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. To give light to the endeavors of this study, descriptive-correlational research design was employed. The data also disclose that in terms of academic stress, “meeting deadlines” got the highest mean of 3.302 and interpreted as very stressful whereas the over-all mean is 21.473 which is interpreted as very stressful. While in terms of coping strategies, the data divulge that most students used all of the strategies in a medium amount or using these coping strategies often, except for one scale, which is substance use, as students used this in a little bit amount only or using this sometimes. Nevertheless, “acceptance” received the highest mean score of 2.9485 that has a description of “I’ve been doing this a medium amount”.

Since most of the indicators of academic stress affect coping strategies, it is therefore concluded that the null hypothesis, stating that there is no significant relationship between academic stress and coping strategies, is rejected.

The results indicate that deadlines were a major source of stress for most of the respondents while attending online classes was a moderately stressful experience for most of the respondents. On the other hand, all the coping strategies were used in a medium amount or frequently by most students, except for one, which was substance use, where students used it in a small amount or occasionally.

“Acceptance” earned the highest mean score among the facets of coping strategies, which corresponds to “I've been doing this a medium amount”. Students are able to accept the fact that a specific circumstance has occurred, and they've had to acquire ways of coping with it. But in spite of their acceptance of the COVID-19 scenario, students still have inhibitions because they want to return to the face-to-face education environment in the future.

Lastly, as the students experience stress often, the more that they are using many coping strategies at once. Adapting to changes may be difficult since they demand us to adjust. Too many changes in a short period of time, such is the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic, might give the impression that we are not in control of the situation, thus resulting to stress. Adapting to unexpected demands, or stresses, is part of the process of coping. As a result, one needs to exert more effort and use more energy than one normally would. Coping is more of a process than an event. In order to cope with the pandemic, one may want to use several of the coping strategies or to alternate in using them.

5. Recommendations

Uncertainty and ambiguity are the hallmarks of the corona outbreak. Generally, and especially among students, the sensation of losing control over one's life may be extremely stressful. To provide a sense of control and to offer a stable educational framework for students, the faculty serves a key responsibility. Correspondingly, students' satisfaction survey may be performed per semester and all students' opinions and comments may be taken into consideration. This study may also be extended through considering a bigger sample of students pursuing undergraduate and graduate studies within the university and neighboring institutions. It is also recommended to conduct a survey on the academic experiences of the faculty members to determine how they are dealing with the abrupt shift in education. Moreover, there are presently few activities within the institution targeted at familiarizing students with effective coping strategies that may help them cope. The university may also provide stress management workshops and promote a balanced lifestyle for students that balances academic obligations with a healthy way of living.

References

- Azila-Gbetteor, E.M., Atatsi, E.A., Danku, L., & Soglo, N.Y. (2015). Stress and Academic Achievement : Empirical Evidence of Business Students in a Ghanaian Polytechnic.
- Allen, A. B., & Leary, M. R. (2010). Self-Compassion, Stress, and Coping. *Social and personality psychology compass*, 4(2), 107–118. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2009.00246.x>
- Allen, M. (2017). *The sage encyclopedia of communication research methods* (Vols. 1-4). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc doi: 10.4135/9781483381411
- Barrios, J. M., & Hochberg, Y. (2020). Risk Perception Through the Lens of Politics in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic. *National Bureau of Economic Research*. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w27008>
- Carver, C. S. (1997). You want to measure coping but your protocol's too long: Consider the Brief COPE. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 4, 92-100.
- Burge, J. (2009). Coping frequency, coping effectiveness, and personality factors in university students (Unpublished Honors Doctoral Thesis). University of Canberra, Australia.
- Cherry, K. (2018). Denial as a Defense Mechanism. Retrieved July 20, 2021 from <https://www.verywellmind.com/denial-as-a-defense-mechanism-5114461>

- Chinazzi, M., Davis, J. T., Ajelli, M., Gioannini, C., Litvinova, M., Merler, S., ... Vespignani, A. (2020). The effect of travel restrictions on the spread of the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. *Science*, 368(6489), 395. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aba9757>
- Creswell, J. W. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
- Enitan, S., Adeolu, O., Olayanju, A., & Eleojo, I. (2020). The 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak: Current Crises, Controversies and Global Strategies to Prevent a Pandemic. *International Journal of Pathogen Research*, 4(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.9734/IJPR/2020/v4i130099>
- Expert Panel of Forbes Business Council. (2019). 15 Recommendations for Handling Deadline Stress. Retrieved July 20, 2021 from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2019/12/17/15-recommendations-for-handling-deadline-stress/?sh=361637037f89>
- Fernandes, N. (2020). Economic Effects of Coronavirus Outbreak (COVID19) on the World Economy. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3557504>
- Fox, R. (2007). SARS epidemic: Teachers' experiences using ICTs. Retrieved from https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&url=https://www.ascilite.org/conferences/perth04/procs/pdf/fox.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwi83IjD2N3oAhWm-GEKHRgcCCUQFjABegQIAhAB&usg=AOvVaw1pZFXsa8vwVtg_19X7YwtN
- Graupensperger, S., Jaffe, A. E., Fleming, C. N. B., Kilmer, J. R., Lee, C. M., & Larimer, M. E. (2021). Changes in College Student Alcohol Use During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Are Perceived Drinking Norms Still Relevant? *Emerging Adulthood*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696820986742>
- Habibi, R., Burci, G. L., de Campos, T. C., Chirwa, D., Cina, M., Dagon, S., ... Hoffman, S. (2020). Do not violate the International Health Regulations during the COVID-19 outbreak. *The Lancet*, 395(10225). [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30373-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30373-1)
- Hayes, A. (2020). Stratified Random Sampling. Investopedia. Retrieved July 20, 2021 from https://www.investopedia.com/terms/stratified_random_sampling.asp
- Jackson, K.M., Merrill, J.E., Stevens, A.K., Hayes, K.L., & White, H.R. (2021). Changes in Alcohol Use and Drinking Context due to the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Multimethod Study of College Student Drinkers. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, 45 (4), p. 752-764. <https://doi.org/10.1111/acer.14574>
- Kausar, R. (2010). Perceived Stress, Academic Workloads and Use of Coping Strategies by University Students. *Journal of Behavioural Sciences*, Vol. 20, pp.31-43.
- Kolski, T. & Weible, J. (2018). Examining the Relationship Between Student Test Anxiety and Webcam Based Exam Proctoring. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 21 (3). https://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdl/fall213/kolski_weible213.html
- Kostić, J., Žikić, O., Đorđević, V., & Krivokapić, Ž. (2021). Perceived stress among university students in south-east Serbia during the COVID-19 outbreak. *Ann Gen Psychiatry* 20, 25. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12991-021-00346-2>
- Kraag, G., Zeegers, M. P., Kok, G., Hosman, C., & Abu-Saad, H. H. (2006). School programs targeting stress management in children and adolescents: A meta-analysis. *Journal of School Psychology*, 44(6), 449–472.
- Mertler, C. (2014). *Action research: Improving schools and empowering educators* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

- Mheidly, N., Fares, M., & Fares, J. (2020). Coping With Stress and Burnout Associated With Telecommunication and Online Learning. *Frontiers in Public Health*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2020.574969>
- Mosanya, M. (2020). Buffering Academic Stress during the COVID-19 Pandemic Related Social Isolation: Grit and Growth Mindset as Protective Factors against the Impact of Loneliness. *International Journal of Applied Positive Psychology* (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41042-020-00043-7>
- Munson, N. (2020 November 9). How first-year students are adapting to the college experience amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Mary Mount University. <https://marymount.edu/blog/how-first-year-students-are-adapting-to-the-college-experience-amidst-the-covid-19-pandemic/>
- NewsWise. (19 March 2021). College Students' Alcohol Use Fell, Not Rose, During the Early COVID-19 Pandemic. Research Society on Alcoholism. Retrieved May 30, 2021, from <https://www.newswise.com/articles/college-students-alcohol-use-fell-not-rose-during-the-early-covid-19-pandemic>
- Paduraru, M. (2019). Coping strategies for exam stress. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333747776_Coping_strategies_for_exam_stress
- Reille, A. (2018). 10 Unconscious Obstacles to Effective Time Management and How to Overcome Them. Retrieved July 20, 2021 from <https://thrivinginadmin.com/blogs/unconscious-obstacles-time-management>
- Ritchie, D. (2020). 6 Ways to Make Venting at Work Productive. Calendar. Retrieved July 20, 2021 from <https://www.calendar.com/blog/6-ways-to-make-venting-at-work-productive/>
- Rizun, M. & Strzelecki, A. (2020). Students' Acceptance of the COVID-19 Impact on Shifting Higher Education to Distance Learning in Poland. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17, 64-68; doi:10.3390/ijerph17186468.
- Sage Publications, Inc. (2016). Quantitative Research Methods. Retrieved July 29, 2021 from https://us.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/70019_Mertler_Chapter_7.pdf
- Savitsky, B., Findling, Y., Ereli, A., & Hendel, T. (2020). Anxiety and coping strategies among nursing students during the covid-19 pandemic. *Nurse Education in Practice*, 46, 102809. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nepr.2020.102809>.
- The University of Melbourne (n.d.). Managing stress for oral presentations. Retrieved July 20, 2021 from <https://students.unimelb.edu.au/academic-skills/explore-our-resources/speaking-and-presenting/managing-stress-for-oral-presentations>
- Thomsen, M. (2013). The Case Against Grades. *Slate*. <https://slate.com/human-interest/2013/05/the-case-against-grades-they-lower-self-esteem-discourage-creativity-and-reinforce-the-class-divide.html>
- Toquero, C. M. (2020). Challenges and Opportunities for Higher Education amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Philippine Context. *Pedagogical Research*, 5(4), em0063. <https://doi.org/10.29333/pr/794>
- Tria, J. Z. (2020). The COVID-19 Pandemic through the Lens of Education in the Philippines: The New Normal. *International Journal of Pedagogical Development and Lifelong Learning*, 1(1), ep2001. <https://doi.org/10.30935/ijpdll/8311>
- UMass Dartmouth. (n.d.). How to Get Good Grades. Retrieved July 20, 2021 from <https://www.umassd.edu/dss/resources/students/classroom-strategies/how-to-get-good-grades/>
- UNESCO. (2020). UNESCO's support: Educational response to COVID-19. Retrieved as on May 03, 2020. www.en.unesco.org/covid19/education

- University of Hampshire. (n.d.). Academic Stress: Coping Strategies. Retrieved July 15, 2021 from <https://www.unh.edu/pacs/academic-stress-coping-strategies>
- Viner, R. M., Russell, S. J., Croker, H., Packer, J., Ward, J., Stansfield, C., ... Booy, R. (2020). School closure and management practices during coronavirus outbreaks including COVID-19: A rapid systematic review. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, 4(5), 397- 404. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642\(20\)30095-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(20)30095-X)
- White, H. R., Stevens, A. K., Hayes, K., & Jackson, K. M. (2020). Changes in Alcohol Consumption Among College Students Due to COVID-19: Effects of Campus Closure and Residential Change. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 81(6), 725–730. doi:10.15288/jsad.2020.81.725
- Yasmin, H., Khalil, S., & Mazhar, R. (2020). COVID 19: stress management among students and its impact on their effective learning. *International technology and education journal*, 4(2), 65-74.
-

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the Journal. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (**CC BY-NC-ND**) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)