Students' Online Class Experiences Using Google Classroom Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic

| Cristie Ann L. Jaca |
College of Education, Cebu Technological University, Philippines
cristieann.ph@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
The unprecedented occurrence of the Covid-19 pandemic has challenged both teachers and students to adapt to the new mode of teaching and learning using varied online platforms. This study explored the students' online class experiences using Google classroom as the primary medium for asynchronous and synchronous online classes. The study used the mixed-method research approach that employed both the quantitative and qualitative design to examine the students' online class experience using Google classroom amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The data were collected from the two Bachelor of Secondary Education major groups in English classes during the second semester of Academic Year 2020-2021. The results were analyzed using descriptive statistics employing frequency count and percentage. Student-respondents find the Google classroom Very Helpful and Extremely Helpful in their online classes as it is convenient and provides them the leeway to do their schoolwork on their own time and at their pacing. Learning during the Covid-19 pandemic has been very challenging as state university students, especially in third world countries like the Philippines, experience limited internet connectivity and accessibility issues in online learning.

KEYWORDS
Covid-19 pandemic; Google classroom; learning experiences; online class

INTRODUCTION
The Covid-19 pandemic gave rise to the influx of online learning using varied learning platforms. The use of educational technologies like Google classroom, Zoom, YouTube is just a few of the most commonly used platforms. However, most students prefer to have the Google classroom since it is easy, convenient, and easily accessed. Students' learning experiences during online classes during the Covid-19 pandemic have been very challenging, especially for state university students in developing countries like the Philippines. The limited internet connectivity low accessibility paired with minimal technological resources affect the delivery of online classes. Accessibility issues range from poor signal to lack of internet connection that even expands to economic deficiency due to limited financial resources for teachers and students to procure internet data/load. Differences in accessibility to online learning are partly attributed to the kind of resources and learning gadgets that students use at home compared to when they are in school or near their campus (Raes et al., 2019). The outbreak of the Covid-19 has birthed an array of highly creative innovations that have cut across several industries. Still, it has exposed the lack of technology in these sectors, including African countries' already fragmented education sector, which needs restructuring and transformation (Paschal & Mkulu, 2020).
During the covid-19 pandemic, the National Research Council of the Philippines found that internet connectivity and speed were among the top obstacles faced by teachers in their online teaching and learning. Students face bandwidth challenges in various elements of their learning experience, such as sharing files or taking synchronous classes, according to Naffi et al. (2020). There may be a disparity in access to digital learning resources for students who live at home rather than on or near campus (Raes et al., 2019).

Globally, online learning has become a vital and useful tool for curriculum delivery (Elshami et al., 2021). As a precaution against the spread of coronavirus sickness, most educational systems around the world have switched to remote learning methods (Roats & Cahapay, 2020). Unstable internet connectivity, insufficient learning resources, power outages, ambiguous learning content, overloaded lesson activities, limited teacher scaffolds, poor peer communication, conflict with home responsibilities, poor learning environment, related financial problems, physical health compromises, and mental health struggles were all identified as problems in remote learning by their content analysis. Learning continues through remote and digital alternatives, according to UNESCO, despite the closure of educational facilities in 191 countries. However, online instruction is not an option. (https://en.unesco.org/news/universities-tackle-impact-covid-19-disadvantaged-students)

In light of the current educational environment’s expectations, higher education students struggle with their online coursework and varying learning environments as the current educational landscape changes in the face of this epidemic. The context and use of educational technology in studies on online learning vary. Google Classroom as an educational medium has not been thoroughly explored in the new normal. Due to a lack of research on this phenomenon, this teacher-researcher decided to investigate state university students' personal online class experiences using Google Classroom during the Covid-19 outbreak.

**Objectives of the Study**

The study examined the university students’ challenges in attending online classes in their respective localities amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, it answered the following questions:

1. What is the student's profile in terms of age and gender?
2. What device do students use during online classes?
3. How is the students’ internet connectivity?
4. How do they find their online class using Google classroom?

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Online learning is 'learning experiences in synchronous or asynchronous environments using different devices (e.g., mobile phones, laptops, etc.) with internet access (Sing & Thurman, 2019). The use of google classroom has exhibited different responses from different stakeholders. On the other hand, studies have begun to show that Google Classroom can work in a unidirectional manner, serving both teachers' and students' perceptions, understandings, and successful engagement in various classroom abilities (Al-Maroon & Al-Emran, 2018). At Al Buraimi University College (BUC) in Oman, they looked at the elements that influence students' acceptance of Google Classroom. It was discovered that both the perceived ease of use (PEOU) and the perceived usefulness (PU) of Google classrooms had a beneficial impact on the behavioral intention, which influences the actual use of the platform. Moreover, Iftakhar (2016) reported the overall view of Google classroom, its features, and some adoption factors such as organizational, social,
personal, and technological dimensions. The study affirmed that the use of google classroom could effectively understand and evaluate teachers' and learners' perceptions in ensuring quality teaching and learning.

According to Azhar, Kaukab, and Iqbal, Nayab (2018), teacher perceptions of the Google Classroom are that it is just a facilitation tool that can be used for document management and fundamental classroom administration without having a significant impact on teaching approaches. There is a need for a swift transition to online learning; consequently, Google's products (a) Gmail, (b) Google Forms, (c) Calendars, (d) G-Drive, (e) Google Hangouts, (f) Google Jam Board and Drawings, (g) Google Classroom, and (h) Open Board Software can all aid in such scenarios (not a Google product, helps in recording meetings in the form of files). Face-to-face classes can be successfully substituted with these tools (Basilaia et al., 2020).

Several tertiary institutions have adopted digital learning through online learning platforms and social networks. However, because of the fast-changing technology, research into the efficacy of such platforms, as well as the area itself, is muddled (Heggart & Yoo, 2018). One digital tool that can provide a one-stop-shop for easing digital output, workflow, and communication between professors and students is Google Classroom (Catapano, teachhub.com). In 2014, Google Apps for Education released a new application called Google Classroom. Teachers can rapidly design and manage assignments, provide effective feedback, and effectively communicate with their students in this classroom (Shahanee et al., 2016). Their research looked into the role of Google Classroom in English Language Teaching (ELT) to assist higher education decision-makers. Google Classroom also has several features that make it easier for teachers to conduct learning activities. Students can learn not just in class but also outside of it because they can utilize Google Classroom to learn anytime and wherever they want (Sukmawati & Nensia, 2019).

Despite the students' interest in using technology to accomplish their course requirements and augment their digital literacy skills, their access to online data is limited or deprived (Gebremichael & Jackson, 2006). They looked into the necessity for information professionals from developed countries to play a more active role in assisting developing countries in combating information poverty. Different stakeholders have reacted differently to the adoption of Google Classroom. On the other hand, studies have begun to show that Google Classroom can work in a unidirectional manner, serving both teachers' and students' perceptions, understandings, and successful engagement in various classroom abilities (Al-Marooof & Al-Emran, 2018). At Al Buraimi University College (BUC) in Oman, they looked at the elements that influence students' acceptance of Google Classroom. The findings of the study show that both the perceived ease of use (PEOU) and the perceived usefulness (PU) of Google classes have a positive impact on the behavioral intention to use them.

Because of the quarantine, educators and students were forced to teach and learn in a socially isolated atmosphere (Saienko & Chugai, 2020). The results of distance learning achieved by merging Google Classroom, Classtime, and Quizlet are reported in their article. Thirty-five students, representing 44% of all Classroom Google users, participated in the survey. Students rated the teacher's feedback and the completion of homework via Google Classroom positively (72 percent) after reflecting on their classroom experience (77 percent). For students, the most crucial aspects of effective remote learning are exciting material (66 percent) and course structure (51 percent). For English teachers who work from home, there are some suggestions. Educators in Ukraine and worldwide can benefit from the research's findings (Saienko & Chugai, 2020).
It is impossible to overestimate the role of technology in all phases of schooling. On the other hand, educators have been unable to determine which of the many technology tools are most suited to their teaching methods. Google Classroom is one such application that is available for free and has gathered a lot of traction in a short time (Azhar & Iqbal, 2018). According to their research, teachers see it as only a facilitation tool that can be used for basic classroom management and document management without affecting teaching methods in any way. According to the teachers' comments, the lack of a user-friendly interface is the fundamental cause of its inefficiency.

The pandemic's ramifications and impacts on schooling are still unknown. In more brittle and unpredictable environments, however, they will undoubtedly be more difficult for instructors and students. The world's most populous countries were subjected to an unprecedented entire or partial lockdown, resulting in the immediate closure of institutions and schools. Students and teachers had to learn how to adapt to teaching from afar (Flores & Swennen, 2020). In developing countries like the Philippines, particularly in some public schools and state universities, students have limited access to the internet due to straitened circumstances. This reality deprived some students of attending online classes consistently. Thus, the presence of google classroom allows them to catch up with their missed synchronous class sessions.

RESEARCH METHODS
The study was conducted using a mixed-methods research methodology that included quantitative and qualitative components. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the study focused on the students' online class experience using Google Classroom. During the second semester of the academic year 2020-2021, data was collected from sixty second-year Bachelor of Secondary Education majoring in English (BSEd-English) students enrolled in the second semester. For sixty student-respondents, there were two parts, each with thirty pupils in each class. The data were evaluated using descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency counts. Thematic analysis was used to categorize the replies from the students' online class experiences in the qualitative component.

Research Respondents
The study involved all Second Year Bachelor in Secondary Education major in English (BSEd-English) students enrolled during the Second Semester of Academic Year 2020-2021. There were two sections with thirty students in each class for sixty student-respondents.

Research Instrument
Because the study was conducted during the Covid-19 epidemic, the researcher used a Google form-based survey questionnaire. The first section of the questionnaire asked for information about the pupils' age and gender demographics. The instrument's second section focused on the device they used to take online classes and the speed of their internet connection. When it came to using Google Classroom for online courses, they were asked how effective it had been for them so far. Expert English teachers in the study provided content validation for the research instrument.

Research Procedure
The researcher asked the Vice-President for Academic Affairs to conduct the study. Informed consent was given to the student-respondents to solicit their voluntary
participation in the study. Upon approval, permission from the Ethics Review Board was sought. Then, through Google forms, the researcher-made questionnaire was sent to the appropriate online platforms. Once data was retrieved, it was analyzed and interpreted utilizing the right quantitative and qualitative statistical tools.

**Data Analysis**

The study employed descriptive statistics using modes, frequencies, and percentages presented in frequency distributions to determine the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age and gender, together with the device they used during online classes and the speed of their internet connection. Their personal experiences using the Google classroom were validated through an online interview where students narrate their personal experiences while attending online classes in their respective home residences. Most of them participate in online courses in their home municipalities.

**Ethical Consideration**

Before the data collection, the researcher sought approval from the student-respondents through a consent form that solicited their voluntary participation in this study. The respondents' identities were assigned a code to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. Likewise, the data collected from the Google form were bound to privacy to ensure that it is solely used for academic purposes only.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The student-respondents from Cebu Technological University, Philippines, have two classes of Bachelor of Secondary Education students majoring in English. Table 1 below shows the demographics of these college students in terms of age and gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age/Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.667</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.667</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.333</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>56.667</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>65.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>above 21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16.666</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>15.00</strong></td>
<td><strong>51</strong></td>
<td><strong>85.00</strong></td>
<td><strong>60</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. presents the distribution of the sixty student-respondents in terms of their age bracket and gender. The Second Year Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English (BSEd-English) students enrolled during the Second Semester of Academic Year 2020-2021 are within the age bracket of nineteen to twenty-one years old. The majority of the English majors are between twenty to twenty-year-old students, which comprised 65.00% of the total number of respondents. This is followed by eighteen to nineteen-year-old students and nineteen-year-old which has 21.67%, and those above twenty-one years old comprise 13.00%. In terms of gender, there are more female BSEd-English students, which is 85.00%, compared to the male students, which is only 15.00% of the total student-respondents. These sixty student-respondents are graduates from private and public Senior High Schools in Cebu and Cebu City, Philippines. They all want to improve their English skills as they become high school English teachers in the future, which is the reason why they enroll in Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English course.

The devices used among the student-respondents during their online classes are reflected in table 2 below.
Table 2. Device Used During Online Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The device used during online classes</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cellphone</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>93.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laptop</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 reflects the device the student-respondents use in attending their online classes. The majority of the students use cellular phones during online courses, 93.33%, while 6.67% use laptops. This implies that students' financial capacity is dependent on the available device at home as their only means of attending online classes. This shows that their cellphone is the only device they can use. This conveys the information that students have limited screen time depending on the type of cellphone the applications imbedded on their phone. They have a hard time complying with their course requirements as they make every effort to write using their cellphones. The screen is minimal in terms of space and usage. This means that their access is also limited to the resources available at home. Because most students take their online classes on mobile phones, it's difficult for them to keep up with some of the course requirements that demand a lot of typing, and they can't use some of the other technological capabilities. It is also shown that first-generation students encountered more hurdles in attending virtual classrooms when higher education transitioned to online learning due to a lack of adequate technology and space to perform coursework (Zalaznick, 2020). Some students do not have access to laptop computers or high-speed internet at home. In addition, for reasons of technophobia, elderly internet users benefit the least from online education (Nimrod, 2018).

The students' internet connectivity is presented in table 3 below.

Table 3. Students' Internet Connectivity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How is your internet connectivity?</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Strong</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Strong</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16.666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>50.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Poor</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the student respondents' internet connectivity speed, 50% of the respondents have poor internet connectivity while 25% have Very Poor internet connections. This affirms the students' difficulties in attending online classes and that they are struggling to get a good signal so they can consistently participate in their online courses. Only 16.66% of the students have Strong connections, while 6.66% are Very Strong and 1.66% have Extremely Strong internet connectivity, respectively. These are why some students cannot attend classes or the cause why they sometimes are being cut during online class sessions. This confirms the findings of Naffi et al. (2020), who found that students' learning experiences, such as file sharing and synchronous classrooms, were hampered by bandwidth constraints. In an online delivery setting, one such concern, according to Raes et al., 2019, is the possible disparity in access to digital learning resources for students who live at home rather than on or near campus.
The students' feedback on using Google classroom in their online classes is reflected in table 4 below.

**Table 4. Students' Feedback on the Use of Google Classroom**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do you find your online classes using Google classroom?</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Helpful</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Helpful</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>55.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Helpful</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Helpful</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Helpful</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>60</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows the students' feedback in the use of Google classroom during their online classes. Several respondents, 55.00% of the sixty students, find the Google classroom Very Helpful and 31.67% Extremely Helpful in their online class experience. The majority of the students find Google classroom very helpful during their online classes. This implies that students find their online class experience with Google classroom effective as they can adjust to the transition brought about by the pandemic. The accessibility and delivery of instruction, including the educational materials found in Google classroom, has helped make it easier for the students to achieve the expected learning outcomes with the teacher's guide as the facilitator of learning. The Google Classroom is a relatively new addition to the virtual classroom, as evidenced by this. 2016 allows participants to talk with one another, view presentations or videos, connect with other participants, and use resources in workgroups, according to Iftikhar's research. One of the most well-known solutions for improving teacher productivity is Google Classroom (Iftakhar, 2016).

Students' desirable feedback in using Google classroom during their online classes can be related to their internet connectivity issues. Since most students experience intermittent internet connectivity and speed of connectivity, the Google classroom has allowed them to work on their school tasks at their own time, even if they sometimes miss or are being cut in their synchronous class sessions. Thus, it provides a flexible delivery of instruction. As Shahanee et al., 2016 describe, the Google classroom facilitates the teachers to create and organize assignments quickly, provide feedback efficiently, and communicate with their classes with ease.

**Students' Online Class Experiences Using Google Classroom Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic**

**Remote Learning Challenges**

An ongoing reality in a developing country like the Philippines in the context of continuous online learning has obstacles to overcome. Students experienced varied challenges in their attendance and participation in their online classes. The student-respondents perspectives were narrated as they expressed their personal experiences in their online learning journey amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. Their impressions on their online course specified the challenges they encountered in online learning that led to their absence, tardiness, and delayed submissions of assignments and classwork.
Qualitative Feedback on the Students’ Online Class Experiences Using Google Classroom

The student-respondents provided a sufficient portion of their personal experiences in attending online classes using google classroom. Their narrative accounts were collected during the conducted random interview that validated their responses to the researcher-made survey questionnaire. Thematic analysis by Braun and Clark (2006) was employed in identifying the themes among the students’ online class experiences using google classroom. The researcher considered the 6-phase approach for a trustworthy thematic analysis. Data familiarization, code generation, topic identification, theme review, theme naming, and report preparation were all examined by the researcher for a reliable thematic analysis. In a data set, it is a process for determining the most important themes, analyzing them, arranging them, explaining them, and reporting them (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The following are transcripts of the student-respondents during the random interview conducted. Three major themes were generated: Google classroom is manageable, flexible, and facilitates the teacher’s discussion. These are discussed in the following section.

Theme 1: Google classroom is manageable.
The majority of the students expressed that they are comfortable using google classroom because of its straightforward features that allow them to work independently and collaborate with other classmates on their classwork. This is exemplified in the following vignettes:

R1 : “Google classroom is ok to use and easy to manage some tasks.”
R12 : “The google classroom is easy to manage and is very friendly when I use it.”
R14 : “Google classroom is easy to use and access on my phone.”
R5 : “First, the google classroom is practical because all the activities, assignments, and lecture notes are easily available when I need them.”
R10 : “My experiences during online classes are my internet connection, blackout, and my mobile phone. I’m having a hard time attending the synchronous class. That is why the google classroom helped me in knowing the things I missed.”

Based on the students’ narration, they find the Google classroom user-friendly as it allowed them to become resourceful and independent learners despite the challenges they encountered during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Theme 2: Google classroom is flexible.
The student-respondents found the use of the google classroom flexible as it allowed them to quickly adapt and adjust to the work schedules as they accomplish their learning tasks both online and offline.

R3 : “Then use of google classroom is adaptable and adjustable during those times that I cannot attend my class because of low internet connection.”
R7 : “I have a low internet connection, so I just look at our google classroom if I have an internet connection so I would know what is being discussed if I am not able to join the class.”
R8 : “Even if my internet connectivity is one of my biggest challenges, I can always check our Google classroom once I already find a good signal so I can make up for what I have missed in some of our online class
interruptions."

R11: "My teacher shares her materials in our google classroom, so it is very flexible and convenient to me when I need information."

The flexibility of the Google classroom provided smooth facilitation on the way the lesson is delivered online, and it gave the flexibility to customize the students’ learning experiences.

**Theme 3: Google classroom facilitates the teacher’s discussion.**

The student-respondents conveyed their expression of gratitude to their teacher, who was generous to share her instructional materials in their Google classroom. This led to their claim that the google classroom that their teacher made and managed helped them to follow their teacher's lesson and discussions.

R9: “I can achieve my learning tasks through google classroom because it helps me understand the teacher’s discussion as I can always review the notes that my teacher uploads in our google classroom.”

R15: “The google classroom helps me in understanding the teacher’s lesson because my teacher shares her materials and resources in the google classroom.”

R16: “Google classroom saves my time and is useful in getting information from my teacher.”

The teacher’s way of using the Google classroom as a repository of her instructional materials and references assists the students in having a smooth transition of the face-to-face interaction to the blended learning method of teaching. It provided the students with more opportunities to develop their resourcefulness and be independent learners.

**CONCLUSION**

The tertiary students’ online class experiences using the google classroom as the leading learning platform during the Covid-19 pandemic have received positive feedback among the student-respondents. During the Covid-19 outbreak, tertiary students’ online class experiences using Google Classroom as the primary learning platform have garnered excellent reviews from students. Despite occasional connectivity challenges, the majority of students found Google Classroom Very and Extremely Helpful in conducting their online classes in the midst of the Covid-19 outbreak. They were able to migrate from face-to-face to online and blended learning courses as a result of their personal learning experiences with this platform. The use of Google Classroom as a learning platform makes it easier to teach and learn. It enabled the students to overcome their concerns about connectivity and accessibility, resulting in the desired learning outcomes.

**REFERENCES**


