

Exploring the Role of Mental Preparedness and Emotional Competence in Nurturing Academic Success among Students in the Post-Pandemic Instructional Landscape

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47175/rielsj.v5i2.976>

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between students' mental preparedness, emotional competence, and their academic success in the context of the reintroduction of full in-person instructional setup after a hiatus of almost three years. Using a descriptive correlational research design, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of these variables. The Grade 11 students from Langgal National High School were selected as the respondents. The findings highlight the significant influence of mental preparedness on students' performance in academic activities, underscoring the importance of being mentally prepared to address learning challenges, especially in the context of the pandemic. Additionally, the study reveals a moderate association between the level of emotional competence and academic success, emphasizing its role as a personal resource in adapting to the learning environment. Overall, the results suggest that students' mental preparedness and emotional competence during full in-person classes significantly contribute to their likelihood of achieving academic success.

KEYWORDS

Mental preparedness; emotional competence; academic success and post-pandemic instructional setup.

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is now on its way to full recovery from the pandemic that caused the 2020 recession. One of those adversely affected by the pandemic was the learning opportunities of students. There were so many learning losses that caused some problems in the full implementation of the face-to-face classes. Department of Education (DepEd) Order No. 34, s. 2022 urged all public and private schools in the country to transition from limited face-to-face to five-day face-to-face classes on November 2, 2022. Lately, the DepEd launched the 'Matatag Agenda' to establish a comprehensive roadmap that will anchor the national government's priority interventions in resolving basic education sector issues (Pineda, 2023). The pandemic has significantly impacted various aspects of students' life such as mental preparedness and emotional competence.

Hodgson (2016) stated that mental preparedness is the ability of an individual to perform their tasks at an optimal level from creating a balanced psychological state. He added that focus, confidence and planning comprise the mental preparedness students. In different manner, Igoe (2017) stressed that emotional competence is a skill that encompasses foundational, fundamental and responsive techniques that will help an

individual to flourish in any circumstances. It is also regarded as resilience or enduring any hardships in order to obtain an expected positive outcome.

On the other hand, academic success is the representation of students' outcomes that indicate the extent to which they have accomplished specific goals that are considered the major focus of activities in all instructional environments, specifically in school, college, and university. It is a set of actions taken by students in order to achieve accomplishments and satisfaction in various academic subjects.

Moreover, transition from full distance learning to limited face-to-face classes and later full face-to-face classes is no joke for the students. Their mental preparedness and emotional competence have been challenged. The pandemic caused delay in knowing what they need to think and getting good at thinking it (Barker, 2021). In addition, Bas (2020) noted that mental preparedness is an essential weapon for students in all school-related activities and it has a potential influence on their academic success.

Eisenberg et al. (2019) emphasized that mental preparedness and emotional competence of students after the pandemic drastically affect their academic performance. In any educational endeavor, mental preparedness and emotional competence are there to guide students attain their educational aspirations.

This study attempts to determine the impact of mental preparedness and emotional competence of students on their academic success during the post-pandemic instructional setup. Findings of the study will serve as a basis in developing an intervention program to improve the mental preparedness and emotional competence of students.

Statement of the Problem

This action research aimed to determine the impact of mental preparedness and emotional competence of Grade 11 students of Langgal National High School.

Specifically, this study was carried out to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent is the mental preparedness of students during the post-pandemic instructional setup in terms of:
 - 1.1 Self-confidence;
 - 1.2 Self-motivation;
 - 1.3 Focus;
 - 1.4 Goal-Setting?
2. To what extent is the emotional competence of students during the post-pandemic instructional setup in terms of:
 - 2.1 Self-awareness;
 - 2.2 Empathy;
 - 2.3 Self-control;
 - 2.4 Emotional Support?
3. To what extent is the academic success of students during the post-pandemic instructional setup in terms of:
 - 3.1 Learning Competency;
 - 3.2 Academic Performance;
 - 3.3 Personal Growth;
 - 3.4 Self-Learning Pace?
4. Is there a significant relationship between mental preparedness and academic success of students during the post-pandemic instructional setup?
5. Is there a significant relationship between emotional competence and academic success of students during the post-pandemic instructional setup?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between mental preparedness and academic success of students during the post-pandemic instructional setup.
2. There is no significant relationship between emotional competence and academic success of students during the post-pandemic instructional setup.

RESEARCH METHODS

Participants of the Study

The study's respondents were Grade 11 students at Langgal National High School during the School Year 2023-2024.

Data Gathering Methods

The main instrument used in this study was a survey questionnaire developed by the researcher based from several literatures and this was validated by reliable research experts. Following the validation, reliability testing was conducted with 25 Grade 12 senior high school students of Langgal National High. Students who participate in the pilot testing were not included among the study's final respondents.

To find out the extent of mental preparedness, emotional competence and academic success of students, the criteria that were employed as follows:

Mean Score	Verbal Description
4.20 – 5.00	Very High
3.40 – 4.19	High
2.60 – 3.39	Moderately
1.80 – 2.59	Low
1.00 – 1.79	Very Low

Data Gathering Procedures

The researcher began the construction of the research instrument when the Division Office had approved the action research titled "*Exploring the Role of Mental Preparedness and Emotional Competence in Nurturing Academic Success among Students in the Post-Pandemic Instructional Landscape*". Next, the research instrument's validity and reliability were tested.

A letter to the Schools Division Superintendent, as noted by the Division Research Coordinator, was secured. To begin implementing the action research, an approval letter was sought from the School Principal of Langgal National High School. The researcher explicitly explained the study's purpose and significance so that respondents/participants understood that the results will develop the intervention to improve students' mental preparedness and emotional competence.

Data Analysis Plan

Descriptive statistics, such as mean, was used to assess students' mental preparedness, emotional competence and academic success. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to investigate the relationship of mental preparedness and emotional competence of students on their academic success during the post-pandemic educational setup.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Level of Mental Preparedness of Students during the Post-Pandemic Instructional Setup

COVID-19 had caused a lot of changes in the society especially in the mode of learning of the students. That’s why, new normal modes of learning such as online and modular learning modalities were created. These novel types of knowledge dissemination and acquisition challenged the mental preparedness of the students. After more than 2 years of being confined into new modes of learning, limited face-to-face learning modality came into existence until such time that full implementation of face-to-face classes began on November 2, 2024. All students really adjusted to the full implementation of face-to-face classes. The table 1 below presents the mental preparedness of students during the post-pandemic classroom setup.

Table 1. Level of Mental Preparedness of Students

	Mental Preparedness	Mean	Description
1	Self-confidence	3.52	High
2	Self-motivation	3.81	High
3	Focus	3.21	Moderately High
4	Goal Setting	3.63	High
	Overall Mean	3.54	High

Legend: 4.20 – 5.00 – Very High; 3.40 – 4.19 – High; 2.60 – 3.39 – Moderately High; 1.80 – 2.59 – Low; 1.00 – 1.79 – Very Low

As shown in the Table 1, mental preparedness of students during the post-pandemic setup accumulated an overall mean of 3.54 and had the verbal description of “High” which implies that students were mentally prepared to take a journey on the new mode of learning caused by the global pandemic from blended learning to full face-to-face learning mode. They were able to take the challenges during the post-pandemic setup. In other words, they were mentally prepared in the transition they had to make due to the global pandemic, presumably COVID-19. Initially, they had to adopt to blended learning, which is a mix of online, modular and limited in-person instruction. This was a significant shift from traditional full-face-to-face learning, requiring them to adapt to new technologies and learning methods. However, as the pandemic situation improved, they were expected to transition back to full face-to-face learning. This again posed challenges as they had to readjust to the traditional classroom setup after having gotten used to the blended mode.

Further, the above finding just only emphasizes that they were mentally prepared for these challenges, meaning they were ready to adapt and overcome any difficulties they might face during the transition. It is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of students in the face of significant changes in their learning environment caused by external factors like a global pandemic.

Notably, the indicator garnering the highest mean of 3.81 labeled as “High” was self-motivation which encompassed that students motivated themselves to carry on with their studies despite the challenges brought by the changes in the learning environment. They drove themselves to pursue their goals no matter what the hindrance there might be. In other words, this finding reflects the students' ability to motivate themselves to continue their studies despite the difficulties posed by the changes in the learning environment particularly the transition from traditional full in-person classes to blended learning and

going back to full face-to-face classroom setup. It implies that these students were able to push themselves forward and remain determined in pursuing their goals, regardless of any obstacles they encountered.

On the other hand, the indicator that received the lowest mean of 3.21 and was considered “Moderately High” was the indicator “Focus” which indicated that students had minor difficulties in putting their focus on their school activities. They lacked the ability to hold their attention on their lessons or any school-related activities. This indicator suggests that students faced some challenges when it came to maintaining their focus on school activities. It indicates that they had difficulties in paying attention to their lessons or any other school-related tasks. In other words, the score of 3.21 suggests that while the issue of focus was present, it was not a major hindrance for the students. However, it does indicate that they struggled to some extent in holding their attention and directing it towards their academic responsibilities. Further, this specific finding highlights the need for improvement in the students' ability to concentrate and stay focused during their school activities. By addressing this issue, students can enhance their learning experience and improve their academic performance.

Mental preparedness affects the performance of students in their academic activities thus being mentally prepared should be required in taking any learning challenges especially during this post-pandemic setup. However, the mental preparedness of students is solely dependent on their abilities and willingness to prepare themselves mentally and so this research encourages all people to train their mind to become the best asset in accomplishing any goals and can also be the great enemy.

The above finding emphasizes the significant impact of mental preparedness on students' academic performance, particularly during challenging times like the ongoing pandemic. It suggests that being mentally prepared is crucial for students to effectively tackle learning challenges. However, it acknowledges that the level of mental preparedness varies among students, as it is dependent on their individual abilities and willingness to cultivate a prepared mindset.

This study also encourages all individuals, not just students, to train their minds to become valuable assets in achieving their goals. It implies that by developing mental preparedness, individuals can enhance their ability to overcome obstacles and succeed in various endeavors. However, it also acknowledges that the mind can be a formidable adversary, emphasizing the importance of understanding and managing one's thoughts and emotions to avoid self-sabotage.

In short, this research highlights the significance of mental preparedness in academic pursuits and beyond. It emphasizes the need for individuals to proactively cultivate a prepared mindset to navigate challenges effectively. By doing so, individuals can harness the power of their minds to accomplish their goals while being mindful of potential barriers that their own thoughts and emotions can pose.

Level of Emotional Competence of Students during the Post-Pandemic Instructional Setup

Emotional competence is the capacity of the students to pass through any circumstances. It is the understanding of their own capabilities and behavior which can help them in advancing their lives. Table 2 presents the level of emotional competence of students.

Table 2. Level of Emotional Competence of Students

	Emotional Competence	Mean	Description
1	Self-awareness	3.70	High
2	Empathy	3.67	High
3	Stress-control	3.42	High
4	Emotional Support	3.71	High
Overall Mean		3.63	High

Legend: 4.20 – 5.00 – Very High; 3.40 – 4.19 – High; 2.60 – 3.39 – Moderately High;
 1.80 – 2.59 – Low; 1.00 – 1.79 – Very Low

As shown in table 2, overall mean of 3.63, which is classified as "High" represents the level of emotional competence of students. It indicates that students were emotionally competent during this post-pandemic classroom setup. This high level of emotional support was confirmed by the all indicators that received the verbal description of "High". This mean score indicates that students demonstrated a high level of emotional competence during this post-pandemic classroom setup. In other words, students exhibited a high level of emotional competence in the specific classroom setup that occurred after the pandemic. In this context, it suggests that the students displayed a strong capacity to deal with their emotions in a positive and constructive manner despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.

In particular, the indicator "Emotional Support" received the highest mean of 3.71 with a verbal description of "High" which indicates that majority of students received enough emotional support to continue studying amid the challenges posed by the return of full face-to-face classroom setup. In other words, the mean score suggests that the majority of students received an adequate amount of emotional support to continue their studies despite the challenges posed by the return to a full face-to-face classroom setup. The indicator "Emotional Support" reflects the level of support students received in terms of their emotional well-being. A high mean score indicates that students felt supported and cared for in terms of their emotional needs during this transition period. This support likely helped them cope with any anxieties, uncertainties, or difficulties they may have experienced during the return to full face-to-face learning.

In different manner, the lowest mean of 3.42 which was categorized as "High," indicates that the students lack stress-control. This mean score indicates that students exhibited a lack of stress-control during this post-pandemic classroom setup. This finding suggests that the challenges and changes associated with this post-pandemic learning environment may have contributed to heightened stress levels among the students. The low mean score indicates that there is room for improvement in terms of students' ability to control and manage stress. This implies that they may have experienced difficulties in effectively dealing with the various stressors that arose during the pandemic.

The emotional competence displayed by students after the pandemic is truly commendable. Despite the challenging situations and transitions they have faced, they have shown remarkable resilience and adaptability. During the pandemic, students experienced a significant shift from traditional face-to-face classes to blended learning. This sudden change in the learning environment required them to navigate new technologies, adjust to online platforms, and adapt to self-directed learning. This transition may have caused feelings of uncertainty, isolation, and a sense of disconnection from their peers and teachers.

However, despite these challenges, students were able to demonstrate emotional competence by effectively managing their emotions and persevering through the difficulties. They were able to adapt to the new learning methods, seek support when needed, and maintain a positive attitude towards their education.

As the situation improved and schools gradually transitioned back to a full face-to-face classroom setup, another significant change occurred for the students. They had to readjust to the physical presence of their peers and teachers, reestablish social connections, and adapt to the structured classroom environment once again.

In this post-pandemic phase, students showcased their emotional competence by effectively managing the potential anxieties and stress accompanying the return to the classroom. They were able to regulate their emotions, engage in meaningful learning, and maintain positive relationships with their peers and teachers.

In both situations, whether during the transition to blended learning or the return to full face-to-face classes, students demonstrated emotional competence by exhibiting resilience, adaptability, and the ability to cope with change. They displayed a willingness to learn, adapt, and thrive in the face of challenging circumstances.

These examples of emotional competence highlight the strength and determination of students to navigate through uncertain and changing times. Their ability to regulate their emotions, maintain focus, and build positive relationships has contributed to their overall well-being and academic success.

Level of Academic Success of Students during the Post-Pandemic Instructional Setup

Academic success encompasses the achievement of learning objectives, acquisition of subject knowledge, and the development of essential skills for employability. Attaining academic success is crucial as it equips students with the necessary tools to transition into adulthood and pursue occupational and economic prosperity. In the context of this post-pandemic classroom setup, the level of students' academic success is presented in Tables 3. This table provides insights into students' performance and progress in their academic endeavors during this specific period. It offers a comprehensive overview of how students have fared in terms of meeting learning objectives and achieving academic milestones.

Table 3. Level of Academic Success of Students

	Indicators	Mean	Description
1	Learning Competency	3.55	High
2	Academic Performance	3.33	Moderately High
3	Personal Growth	3.39	Moderately High
4	Self-paced Learning	3.27	Moderately High
	Overall Mean	3.39	Moderately High

Legend: 4.20 – 5.00 – Very High; 3.40 – 4.19 – High; 2.60 – 3.39 – Moderately High; 1.80 – 2.59 – Low; 1.00 – 1.79 – Very Low

As shown, academic success of students during this post-pandemic had an overall mean of 3.39 described as “Moderately High”. This means that students had a moderate high level of attaining academic success this re-implementation of full face-to-face classroom instruction after its hiatus for almost 3 years. They were slightly able to cope up and performed well in their studies, having a face-to-face consultation to their teachers and out from their natural setting of blended learning. This implies that students moderately

adapted and learned on the new modes of learning. This moderate level of students' academic success was strongly supported by the one of the indicators which received a descriptive rating of "High" and the three indicators that acquired a descriptive rating of "Moderately High". In other words, despite the challenges posed by the transition, they were able to slightly cope and perform in their studies. The return to full face-to-face classroom instruction marked a significant shift for students who had become accustomed to blended learning during the hiatus. This change required them to adapt to a different learning environment and interact directly with their teachers and peers in a physical setting. The finding suggests that students achieved a notable level of success in their studies. However, there is room for further improvement.

In particular, the highest mean of 3.55 described as "High" was acquired by the indicator "Learning Competency". This means that students were able to progress at their own paces. They were consistent in showing their learning interest on every subject and were able to work on the same competency at the same time. This implies that students had the ability to succeed in their studies at their own individual paces. This also means that they were given the opportunity to learn and advance through the curriculum according to their own learning needs and abilities.

In contrast to the above finding, the lowest mean of 3.27 described as "Moderately High" was received by the indicator "Self-paced Learning". This means that students were able to slightly understand the lesson and partially answered all the activities given to them. They managed their time in a moderate level and were able to submit some of their requirements on time, too. This finding suggests that students had a basic understanding of the lesson and were able to partially answer the activities assigned to them. They exhibited a moderate level of time management skills and were able to submit some of their requirements on time. In other words, students encountered some difficulties or challenges in fully addressing the requirements. However, their attempts to engage with the tasks demonstrate their willingness to participate and learn.

During the initial transition from full modular learning to blended learning, students faced the challenge of adapting to new learning modalities and online platforms. This shift required them to navigate virtual classrooms, online assignments, and self-directed learning. While some students may have experienced a smooth transition and excelled in this environment, others may have faced difficulties in adjusting to the new format. Blended learning, with its combination of online and in-person instruction, provided students with opportunities for more flexibility, personalized learning, and access to a wider range of resources. Students who were able to effectively manage their time, stay organized, and take advantage of the online resources available to them experienced academic success in this blended learning setup.

As the transition continued towards full in-person classes, students faced another significant change. They had to readjust to the physical classroom environment, face-to-face interactions with teachers and peers, and a more structured learning setting. This transition allowed students to benefit from real-time interactions, immediate feedback, and in-person support from teachers. The academic success of students during this transition period varied depending on various factors such as individual learning styles, adaptability, access to resources, and support systems. Some students may have thrived in the blended learning environment, while others may have struggled with the lack of in-person interactions. Similarly, the return to full in-person classes may have been challenging for some students who had become accustomed to the flexibility of blended learning.

Teachers played a crucial role in supporting the academic success of students during these transitions. They provided guidance, resources, and tailored instruction to meet the

diverse needs of students. Additionally, schools implemented measures to ensure a safe and conducive learning environment, which contributed to the academic success of students. In short, the transition period from full modular learning to blended learning and now to full in-person classes has presented both challenges and opportunities for students' academic success. Students who were able to adapt, effectively manage their time, utilize available resources, and receive support from educators demonstrated higher levels of academic success. By recognizing and addressing the unique needs of students during these transitions, educators and schools can continue to foster a supportive and inclusive learning environment that promotes the academic success of all students.

Relationship of Students' Mental Preparedness and Emotional Competence on their Academic Success during the Post-Pandemic Instructional Setup

The relationship between students' mental preparedness and emotional competence and its impact on their academic success is a topic of great significance in the field of education. Table 4 presents the relationship of mental preparedness and emotional competence of students on their academic success during this post-pandemic classroom setup.

Table 4. Correlation Analysis on Students' Mental Preparedness, Emotional Competence and Academic Success

Variables	r	t _{comp} value	t _{critic} value	Decision	Interpretation
1 Mental Preparedness versus Academic Success	0.892**	29.202	1.968	Reject H ₀	Significant
2 Emotional Competence versus Academic Success	0.903**	31.103	1.968	Reject H ₀	Significant

** - significant at two-tailed test with 0.01 level of significance

Mental Preparedness versus Academic Success. As shown, the first correlation coefficient of 0.892 was proven highly significant since the t-computed value = 29.202 is greater than the t_{critical} value = 1.968 using 0.01 level of significance. This goes to imply that the null hypothesis “*There is no significant relationship between the mental preparedness and academic success of students amid COVID-19 pandemic*” is rejected. This means that mental preparedness of students this post-pandemic setup had a very strong connection with their academic success. Mental preparedness of students was highly related to their academic success. Students who were mentally prepared amid COVID-19 pandemic had a very big chance to be academically successful. In other words, students who had strong minds and high level of cognitive skills had likely to be more academically inclined enjoying the benefits of receiving good academic standing, better study habits and positive outlooks in studies.

Emotional Competence versus Academic Success. Further, the second correlation coefficient of 0.903 was proven highly significant as the t-computed value = 31.103 is greater than the t-critical value = 1.968 using 0.01 level of significance. This implies that the null hypothesis “*There is no significant relationship between the emotional competence and academic success of students amid COVID-19 pandemic*” is rejected. This means that students who had higher level of emotional competence were very inclined to improve the level of their academic success. Emotionally competent students in this time

of full implementation of in-person classes had higher extent of academic success. Emotional competence and academic success of students were strongly related to each other. In other words, students who had higher emotional competence were those students who were very successful in terms of their academic performance, class standing and most importantly they had the accomplishment of the learning process; gaining subject knowledge; and developing employability skills.

The relationship between the mental preparedness and emotional competence of students and their academic success is a multifaceted and significant aspect of their educational journey. Mental preparedness refers to the psychological state and mindset of students, including their motivation, resilience, and overall well-being. Emotional competence, on the other hand, encompasses the ability to recognize, understand, and effectively manage one's own emotions as well as navigate interpersonal relationships with empathy and adaptability.

The mental preparedness of students plays a critical role in their academic success. When students possess a positive mindset, they are more likely to approach challenges with resilience and determination. A strong sense of motivation and self-belief empowers students to set goals, persist through difficulties, and maintain focus on their studies. Students who cultivate a growth mindset, embracing challenges as opportunities for learning and growth, are more likely to overcome obstacles and achieve academic success.

Emotional competence is equally essential for students' academic success. The ability to recognize and understand one's emotions enables students to effectively manage stress, anxiety, and other emotional challenges that may arise during their educational journey. When students are equipped with the skills to regulate their emotions, they are better able to stay focused, make rational decisions, and handle setbacks constructively. Additionally, emotional competence allows students to navigate social interactions, communicate effectively, and build positive relationships with peers and teachers, creating a supportive learning environment.

CONCLUSION

In the post-pandemic era, where a complete return to in-person classrooms has been implemented, students exhibited a notable level of mental preparedness, indicating a strong sense of self-confidence, motivation, focus, and goal orientation. Their emotional competence was also highly developed, demonstrating self-awareness, empathy, effective stress management skills, and emotional stability. Moreover, their academic success was remarkable, reflecting their competence in learning, exceptional academic performance, personal growth, and ability to engage in self-paced learning. Students who approached these full in-person classes with a strong mental preparedness achieved academic success that exceeded expectations. Additionally, the students who demonstrated adeptness in managing their emotions were more likely to attain success.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the previous study, it is recommended to implement the following strategies to support students in maintaining focus and prioritizing their lessons during the challenging times of full in-person classes:

1. Students should be consistently reminded of their priorities to help them stay focused on their lessons. This can be done through classroom discussions, individual check-ins, or visual cues. By emphasizing the importance of their academic goals and the value of their education, students can better resist distractions and maintain their commitment to learning.

2. Teachers should create an atmosphere where students feel supported and encouraged to stay on track with their studies. They should establish open lines of communication, allowing students to voice their concerns or seek guidance when needed. They should encourage peer support and collaboration, as this can help students stay motivated and accountable to their learning goals.
3. Teachers should provide students with practical strategies for managing their time effectively. They should teach them how to prioritize tasks, break them down into manageable steps, and create schedules or to-do lists. By equipping students with these skills, they can better allocate their time and avoid getting overwhelmed by distractions.
4. Teachers should leverage technology to help students minimize distractions during class time. This can include implementing digital tools or applications that block access to social media or non-educational websites. Encourage students to use productivity apps or browser extensions that promote focus and limit distractions.
5. Teachers should incorporate active and engaging learning strategies: Foster active learning experiences that engage students and enhance their focus on the subject matter. Incorporate hands-on activities, group discussions, and interactive learning techniques that promote student engagement and participation. By making lessons interactive and relevant, students are more likely to stay focused and retain information.

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