

Academic goals and learning strategies of pre-service teachers during emergency online learning in the Philippines

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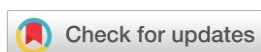
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ABSTRACT

Background: The COVID-19 pandemic has lasted an extended period, during which many students have reported being adversely affected by the escalating global crisis.

Objectives: This study examined the academic goals, learning barriers, facilitative strategies, and ways forward of pre-service teachers during emergency online learning.

Methods: This qualitative case study employed content analysis to examine data gathered through focus group discussions. To explore the implications of survey findings and gain deeper insights into students' perspectives on remote learning, the researchers conducted Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with twelve purposively selected pre-service teachers via Google Meet. The discussion transcripts were analyzed to construct a compelling narrative, supported by literature and prior research, to explain emerging themes.

Results: Among the twelve participants, ten reported experiencing psychosocial stress, eight cited recurring technical issues, and seven mentioned financial constraints as significant learning barriers. Despite these challenges, the participants remained motivated to complete their coursework, viewing academic achievement as a stepping stone toward improving their socio-economic conditions. They employed various strategies, including scheduling, note-taking, goal-setting, optimistic thinking, parental scaffolding, and systematic planning, to adapt to online learning. To ensure credibility, the researchers used member checking, peer debriefing, and FGD and survey data triangulation.

Conclusions: These findings highlight the resilience and adaptability of pre-service teachers in navigating the challenges of emergency online learning, underscoring the need for supportive institutional policies and resources. Future research may consider comparing student experiences in public and private institutions or examining the long-term impact of emergency remote learning on teaching efficacy. Pedagogical and academic implications are further discussed.

Keywords: emergency online learning, emergency remote teaching, goals, online learning strategies.

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INTRODUCTION

The global proliferation of COVID-19 threatens higher education on a scale not seen since the advent of technology-supported and online instruction ([Liguori & Winkler, 2020](#)). This virus has ushered in a new era for humanity, the implications of which we are only now beginning to comprehend. Numerous nations worldwide experienced a disruption in in-person education due to the pandemic ([Uluöz, 2020](#)). [Mospan \(2023\)](#) added that it impacted higher education systems, causing fundamental changes in teaching approaches, methods, classes, and curriculum. Studying at home has several advantages, including financial savings on commuting, reduced stress caused by traffic congestion, and increased free time. However, there are also disadvantages to learning at home, such as environmental noise, social media, chores, and more ([Mula et al., 2022](#)).

Research has been conducted on online learning in emergencies based on the COVID-19 emergency and the advantages and disadvantages of emergency remote teaching ([Ferri & Guzzo, 2020](#)). While recognizing that there are indeed multiple studies that explored the implications of emergency remote learning, there is still a massive gap in terms of how students were able to sustain and thrive in academic and personal engagements, specifically in the context of elementary teacher education during the pandemic. Most pre-existing research only focused on how the global pandemic affected instructional methods. However, only a few tried to explore internal strategies that students have developed to sustain themselves in times of crisis.

On the other hand, students in the twenty-first century are dominated by technology, and there is no denying that this significantly influences their ability to learn. Due to technology, students could adjust to the change in learning during the pandemic. [Prahami et al. \(2022\)](#) state that in this way, in the COVID-19 pandemic era, education innovations that consider global trends and realities emerge. In addition, there is a realistic difficulty with the digitalization of course learning in terms of quality. It significantly impacts the internal elements that relate to students' learning and the external factors that affect students. Thus, cybersecurity, cyberbullying, online violence, exploitation, and other psychological issues caused by anxieties and uncertainties associated with online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic were present when the odd shift to online learning happened ([Daniel, 2020](#); [Yan, 2020](#)).

Likewise, students struggle to organize their activities and time, leading them to do whatever they want without supervision ([Yates et al., 2020](#)). Since the pandemic ensued in an outbreak, students were necessitated to learn from home, where they went through difficulty adjusting. The worst-case circumstance is that numerous students are not absorbing information ([Lie, 2020](#)). [Wang et al. \(2020\)](#) stated that students who are inactive in their learning tend to spend more time with their gadgets, have an improper sleeping routine, and develop unhealthy eating habits that lead to weight gain and poor cardiorespiratory fitness. Students also have difficulty with their learning engagement.

COVID-19 has provided a plethora of difficulties, but there are also opportunities for educational institutions to improve, such as technical expertise and infrastructure ([Jena, 2020](#)), to better cater to the needs of students. Throughout the outbreak, countries have seen macro, mezzo, and micro changes. Education is one of the many institutions and systems that have significantly transformed ([Rashid & Yadav, 2020](#)).

Al-Maskari et al. (2021) stated that educational concerns have limited students' ability to focus in online classes, such as learning challenges, a lack of attention from their teachers, and an increasing workload. In addition, Realyvásquez-Vargas et al. (2020) discovered that the increased workload associated with the switch to online learning impacted students' academic performance and intellectual fatigue.

Thus, students formulated strategies as teachers provided assignments and other online tasks and delivered lectures via video conferencing, utilizing various apps such as Zoom and Google Meet (Toquero et al., 2021). One of the main aims of this study is to contribute to the pool of local and global conversations about emergency online learning by emphasizing the authentic experiences and adaptive strategies of teacher education students. This study addresses the gap in the literature by providing fresh insight anchored from the lens of teacher education students at Mindanao State University – General Santos City, whose stories are often underheard in the international scope. In line with that, this study could guide teachers interested in encouraging student engagement in learning (Sutarto & Fathurrochman, 2020). Hence, academic achievement levels are impacted by the diverse academic goals of university students during the pandemic. This study sought to examine the undertakings of teacher education students, specifically, the student's academic goals that keep them pushing amidst the learning barriers they have encountered during the pandemic, the facilitative strategies they have executed, and their perspectives on moving forward beyond the pandemic.

METHODS

Study Design and Participants

This research applied a focus group research using a qualitative approach that analyzes an occurrence within its frame of reference using a range of data streams. Students' academic goals, learning barriers, facilitative strategies, and ways forward are the inputs to the research's Input-Process-Output, as shown in Figure 1 of the study. This study was conducted at Mindanao State University in General Santos City, Philippines. Specifically, this involved the pre-service teachers (Table 1) of the Bachelor of Elementary Education, College of Education. The institution of higher education in question was chosen primarily for the accessibility of data and participants. Researchers must have access to the data, and participants must be required to address their research inquiries. Purposive sampling is utilized in this study to examine pre-service teachers' experiences with the forced digitalization of course learning. The researchers selected the volunteers based on their familiarity with the study project. Hence, for the Focus Group Discussion, the researchers selected four students to represent four sections, for a total of 12 participants from the first-year level. The participants, chosen based on qualifications, review their hopes, dreams, hurdles, and solutions. The study aims to provide insights into how to help these teachers, considering their geographic location, family status, and socioeconomic standing.

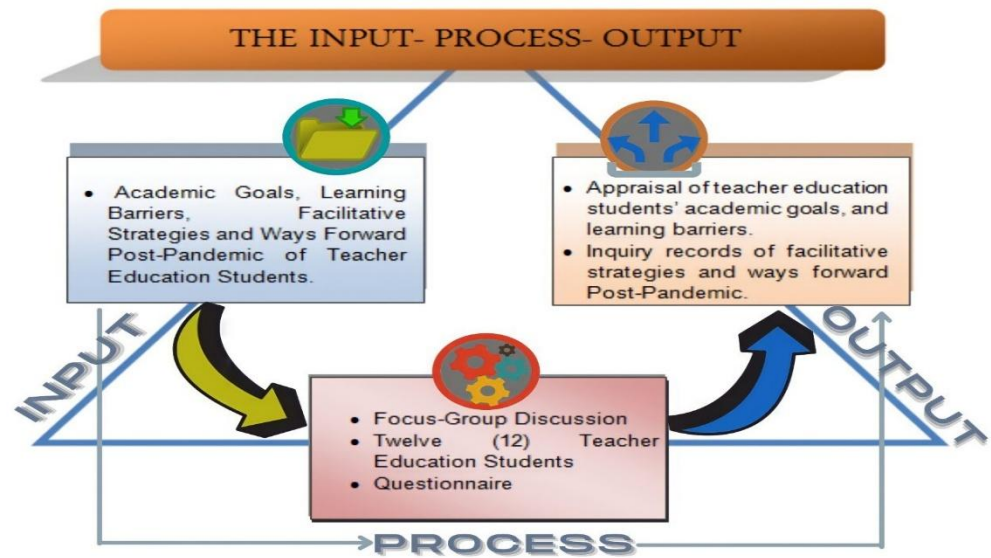


Figure 1. Research Design of the study through Input-Process-Output

Figure 1 delves into students' hopes, goals, challenges, solutions to forced digitalization of course learning, and pre-service teachers' strategies. The researchers used focus group discussions and questionnaires to assess students' hopes, goals, and strategies. Researchers aimed to emphasize students' hopes, objectives, roadblocks, and solutions during a sudden shift in course learning and to provide strategies for adapting to digital learning platforms. The study's outputs include a table outlining the researchers' surveys and their approach to resolving the research statement.

Table 1. Academic Goals of Teacher Education Students during Emergency Online Learning

Profile	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	0	0
Female	12	100
Age		
18 years old	3	25
19 years old	7	58.33
20 years old	1	8.33
21 years old	1	8.33
Ethic Affiliation		
Blaan	1	8.33
Cebuano	9	75
Ilonggo	2	16.67
Household Income		
1,000- 5,000	2	16.67
6,000- 8, 000	1	8.33
9, 000- 10, 000	8	66.67
10, 000 and above	1	8.33
Year Level/ Course Section		
First Year- ELGEN A	4	33.33
First Year- ELGEN B	4	33.33
First Year- ELGEN C	4	33.33
Status		
Single	12	100
Address		
Alabel	2	16.67
General Santos City	5	41.67
Koronadal City	1	8.33
Lake Sebu, South Cotabato	1	8.33
Polomolok, South Cotabato	2	16.67

Tupi, South Cotabato	1	8.33
Number of Siblings		
1	2	16.67
2	2	16.67
3	6	50
4	0	0
5 and above	1	8.33
Gadgets Available		
Cellphone	12	100
Tablet	1	8.33
Laptop	6	50
Internet Connectivity		
Mobile Data	8	66.67
Wi-Fi Vending Machine	6	50
Home Broadband Wi-Fi	2	16.67
Total	12	100

Ethical approval statement

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the College of Education Ethics Committee at Mindanao State University – General Santos. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided their consent voluntarily. To ensure confidentiality, participant identities were anonymized, and all procedures adhered to ethical standards for research involving human subjects.

Research Instruments

To gather, analyze, and evaluate the information required, the researchers employed Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to study the implications of survey data that cannot be assessed statistically. The focus group was an excellent way to learn more about the students' views and opinions on online learning. FGD is the most appropriate means of conducting this study because it allowed the participants to contribute to and build on each other's ideas. This approach is more open-ended and less threatening than a traditional one-on-one interview. In addition, by utilizing FGD, the researchers gained more in-depth insight from a specifically selected group of individuals rather than just a statistical representation of a larger population of pre-service teachers (Nyumba et al., 2018). The discussion was pre-planned, and most moderators used an outline to ensure that all questions were covered. Thus, the process shown in Figure 2 below was introduced by De Negri and Thomas (2003). The researchers adapted and modified this process. The participants' personal information was safeguarded to protect their identities. The focus group discussion was held through Google Meet. The focus group was carried out on Google Meet, given that Google Meet is a popular virtual platform for online meetings, allowing participants to converse and publish videos from anywhere with an internet connection. It is lightweight, fast, and easy to manage. It is also a teaching-learning tool for English classroom speaking practice, improving students' communication and exploration abilities (Fakhruddin, 2019).

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis entails describing, categorizing, and correlating phenomena with a researcher's notions. As a result, the occurrences under investigation must be explained in detail (Graue, 2015). The researchers applied content analysis in the data transcripts, ensuring credibility through thick responses and a balanced distribution of participants' responses as part of the evidence. Data

processing started following the activation of the first interview. The transcriptions, complemented by the video recordings, were used during the analysis.

Regarding data organization and analysis of responses, the researchers manually encoded the participants' responses using software tools such as Microsoft Excel and Google Sheets. With this, the researchers could systematically break down the data into specific themes. The researchers could not utilize software such as NVivo or Atlas due to unavailability and limited familiarity with these tools. However, proactive means were used to ensure that the coding of the participants' responses was systematic and to ensure the results' consistency and accuracy. In addition, as a means to solidify the validity of the findings, the researchers utilized various ways to verify the gathered data. First, the researchers conducted member checking by allowing the participants of this study to review the transcript and summaries of their responses ahead of time. This way, the participants could confirm or correct the transcript content, ensuring more accurate representations of their experiences and insights. After that, the researchers also conducted triangulation by comparing results from the FGD and survey responses. By doing this, they ensured the reliability of the FGD and survey responses. Lastly, peer debriefing was conducted with co-researchers who were considered experts in qualitative data. These co-researchers provided feedback on the interpretations and suggestions for improvement. These different steps allowed the researchers to provide credible, accurate, and trustworthy results.

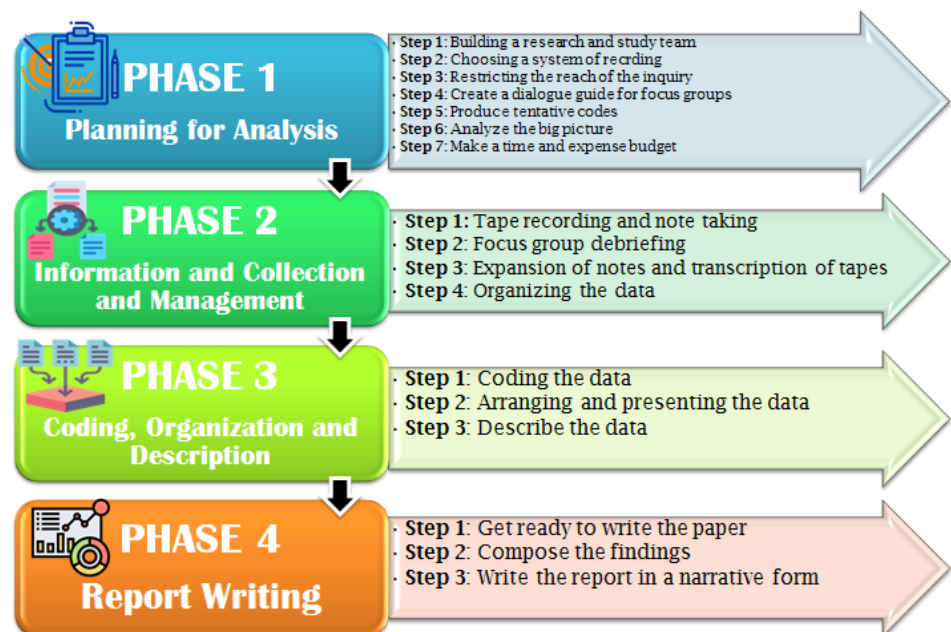


Figure 2. Focus Group Discussion Process

RESULTS

Academic Goals

College serves as a training ground for future teachers, building one's self to be an effective and efficient educator. This thinking is highly evident in Table 2, which shows that Completing the Course (50%) and Building One's Self (25%) are the two highest indicators in terms of academic goals of pre-service teachers during emergency online learning. With an eye toward the future, upon completion of the learning course, students aspire to be skilled teachers once they enter the field of

education. Knowing what they need to think and becoming proficient is a straightforward definition of mental preparation and performance readiness resulting from course learning. This strong perception of their self is supported by self-determination theory, which explains how we determine our self, which is highly influential in our life and well-being by explaining the motivational basis of our personality and social behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2024). In the unfamiliar world of emergency online learning, their desire to "prove themselves" becomes a call for self-preservation and motivational anchor.

“the desired success I eagerly want to achieve is that to build myself to be equipped because when you create yourself, all of your manifestations... Your goals, your dreams, will follow. In this online setting. And also build myself first so that I can have a strong foundation. And that is something I really desired to achieve...”(S#7)

Table 2. Academic Goals of Teacher Education Students during Emergency Online Learning

Category	Description Codes	Frequency	Percentage
Building One’s Self	Self-development	3	25%
Completion of the Course	Pass learning tasks	6	50%
Learn from the Course	Gain in-depth understanding	1	8%
Lift Living Status	Improved economic situation	2	17%
Pass the LET	Pass the LET	2	17%
Shift to Normal Set-Up	Face to face Learning	1	8%

In third and fourth place, with 17% frequency, are uplifting their living status and passing the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET). The overwhelming majority of students are dreamers. They are constantly striving to improve their status in life and fulfill their dreams for themselves and their family. Numerous students are impoverished, and the only way they believe they can escape is through education after passing the licensure examination for teachers. This pattern of recognizing family as a primary school motivation is deeply rooted in the Philippine culture. In a study conducted exploring people's motivation in their social life by Ko et al. (2025), which was participated by 27 societies worldwide, they cited that kin care (family) is included in the top 10 fundamental social motives. This mindset can be deeply rooted in our DNA as we are bound to extensive biparental care and juvenile dependency (Kaplan et al., 2000). Students become aware of the reality that, in order to survive, they must take steps to increase their earnings. With that, their goal has been to complete their studies by finishing their course and passing the licensure exam to improve their living conditions. Regardless of these modifications, students hope to shift to the standard setup to fulfill their dreams.

“To help my family to have a bright future because I want to give back to the hardships of my parents, it is my dream to help them have a nice future (S#18)
“I dream to finish my education because if I will graduate, I will be the first in the family to have a degree and through education I can able to look for jobs that will help my family in the future” (S#5)

Learning Barriers

Mental health issues range from the frustrations that students face daily during these challenging circumstances. Table 3 shows that the two most significant learning barriers the pre-service teachers encounter during emergency online learning revolve

around mental and physical health. These two concerns were raised by 92% of the respondents. The result can be connected to students who have mental health problems reporting increased stress, lack of sleep, panic attacks, anxiety attacks, being easily irritated, and being extremely sensitive. Mental distress may have physical manipulation, and the distress that this global pandemic has caused hits these pre-service teachers the same way as all individuals who are forced to be locked inside their homes. These are the sentiments they expressed throughout the course on distant learning execution. These problems can be attributed to Cognitive Load Theory, which explains how emotion acts as an extraneous load and can positively or negatively impact learning (Hawthorne et al., 2019).

Table 3. Learning Barriers of Teacher Education Students during Emergency Online Learning

Category	Description Codes	Frequency	Percentage
Distant Learning Execution	Forced Adoption of Technology-Delivered Pedagogy	7	58%
Inadequate Learning Environment	Uncontrollable environmental disturbances	6	50%
Internet Infrastructure Factors	Accessibility of Internet	10	83%
Personal Difficulties	Physical Health Issues	11	92%
Social-economic Status	Financial Expenses	4	33%
Student's Connectedness	Social Deprivation	9	75%
Uncertainties	Mental Health Issue	11	92%

Students' learning experiences become less meaningful when their space is restricted in online learning. The table also reveals that 58% of pre-service teachers expressed concern about the forced adoption of technology-delivered pedagogy. Additionally, 83% attributed learning barriers to limited Internet accessibility, and 50% mentioned uncontrollable environmental disturbances. These multiple technological and environmental constraints are not isolated to these pre-service teachers; the same concerns were also raised by Kujur et al. (2019), where 60 university students cited a lack of available funds and educational technology tools as factors that affected their academic progress. Similar situations were also observed in the study of Wankhade et al. (2017), which showed that 91.67% of college students encountered problems with computer maintenance, and 83.33% did not even have access to computers, which may have contributed to their low academic performance.

Students appeared to struggle to maintain motivation, focus, and self-direction during emergency remote learning due to COVID-19. Their anxiety is heightened by a lack of resources, Internet infrastructure, and location, as well as personal difficulties at home. Students' academic performance struggles due to their low socio-economic status because their essential requirements are unmet. They indicate that their mindset at home is different from at school and that they have been experiencing emotional distress due to a lack of interaction with their peers.

“to be able to have fun while learning and not stress myself out on studying because I know that if I don’t stress myself I will be able to do well in my studies”. (S#1)

“free myself from stress in doing activities, it is important that we students also pause for a moment and have time to relax ourselves. Mental health is very important to prioritize because if we are mentally okay we can perform well” (S#9)

Facilitative Strategies

Table 4 shows that 75% of the pre-service teachers practice identifying their priorities during emergency learning theory. This is followed by 25% of them focusing on their academic tasks. Equally important are maximizing time, note-taking, communication, and having a positive mind, each identified by 17% of the pre-service teachers. One of the possible reasons for the result above is how convenient and intentional planning can be. It can allow teacher education students to easily identify urgent concerns and pin their priorities, allowing them to accomplish the task systematically. In addition, organizing tools help pre-service teachers organize their thoughts and retain them for extended periods.

Table 4. Facilitative Strategies of Teacher Education Students during Emergency Online Learning

Category	Description Codes	Frequency	Percentage
Making use of the time	Maximizing Time	2	17%
Planning	Knowing your priorities	9	75%
Always pay attention	Focus	3	25%
Note-taking	Notes	2	17%
Getting in touch with family and friends	Communication	2	17%
Positive Mind	Optimism	2	17%

This result is consistent with the study of [Sirén & Kohtamäki \(2016\)](#), involving 182 small and medium-sized software firms that aimed to identify the connection between strategic planning and performance. Their study revealed that low to medium levels of learning offer an integral element in enhancing positive performance from planning. In addition, [Katheria et al. \(2013\)](#) wanted to explore how checklists affect the performance of neonatal workers. Thus, they conducted a study that involved 445 individuals who utilized checklists in recording the review process. The result showed that the use of these checklists helped improve communication by allowing urgent identification of problems and identifying urgent concerns.

Pre-service teachers can cope with the overwhelming task load by arranging and planning the tasks they must complete to avoid missing deadlines. The pre-service teachers have varying approaches to planning and organizing the assigned tasks. Some believe that prioritizing simple tasks will enable them to be completed quickly. In contrast, others believe note-taking will aid them in completing the activity. Family, according to pre-service teachers, plays an important role. It is critical to avoid isolation during difficult times. Indeed, it is determined by the preferences of each pre-service teacher.

“In order for me to work thoroughly I always make a to-do list so that I can see my progress and the things that I still need to do” (S#3)

“Since we are bombarded with a lot of work by our Professor, I make sure that I have my time-table before I start doing my requirements because it helps me organize and complete my task easily since all I need to do is look at my time-table to distinguish the task that I am already done with”. (S#7)

Ways Forward

Filipinos are known to be adaptable to any circumstance, and this innate sense of adaptability and flexibility is highly evident in the response of the pre-service teachers' ways forward during emergency online learning. Sixty-seven percent of them prioritized setting a positive mind and setting academic goals. This was then followed

by self-care, which was mentioned by 58% of the teacher education students. Hitting an equal mark by being raised by 33% of the pre-service teachers are intermittent internet connectivity and ingenious. Reaching the last two places is getting in touch with family and friends and financial support, which is mentioned by 25% and 17%, respectively. The result can be attributed to our mindful and optimistic cultural behavior. It is well-known in the global community that Filipinos always set their best foot forward regardless of their situation. Setting a positive mind can also be correlated with taking good care of oneself. If you prioritize mindfulness, you will naturally seek ways to glorify yourself by practicing self-care.

Table 5. Ways Forward of Teacher Education Students during Emergency Online Learning

Category	Description Codes	Frequency	Percentage
Place with strong internet connectivity	Intermittent Internet Connectivity	4	33%
Setting goals	Mind positivity; academic	8	67%
Taking good care of oneself	Self-care	7	58%
Getting in touch with family and friends	Communication	3	25%
Financial Support	Budget the allowance	2	17%
Resourcefulness	Be ingenious	4	33%

The result from [Table 5](#) is parallel to the study of [August and Dapkewicz \(2021\)](#), involving 63 college students in pursuit of identifying positive coping strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic. They identified that benefit finding was the most common strategy in setting a positive mind by the students during that time. In addition to that, they were also able to identify self-related benefits, including practicing gratefulness, unexpected personal growth, and a new insight for the future. These self-related benefits opened a glorious impact, as those who were involved in the study were less likely to express anxiety, stress, and fear. Their study also suggested that setting a positive mind is an important coping strategy during emergency online learning.

The result was also validated by [Meine et al. \(2021\)](#), who assessed 117 university students' resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their results showed that more self-care is associated with higher resilience, which is interrelated with the stress an individual experiences. They also highlighted how self-care is integral in coping with real-life stressors during the global pandemic. This justifies how positive thinking and self-care may serve as a way forward in navigating emergency online learning.

For the pre-service teachers to become productive and motivated to fulfill their tasks, some set daily and weekly goals to help them stay on track and manage their time correctly despite the learning barriers ([Figure 3](#)). The pre-service teachers feel that by developing a strong attitude and presence of mind, they will be able to overcome the obstacles they face as future educators. They believe that having a strong mentality will enable them to accomplish the goals they set for themselves; they believe that having a strong mentality will enable them to be more driven to accomplish their life goals.

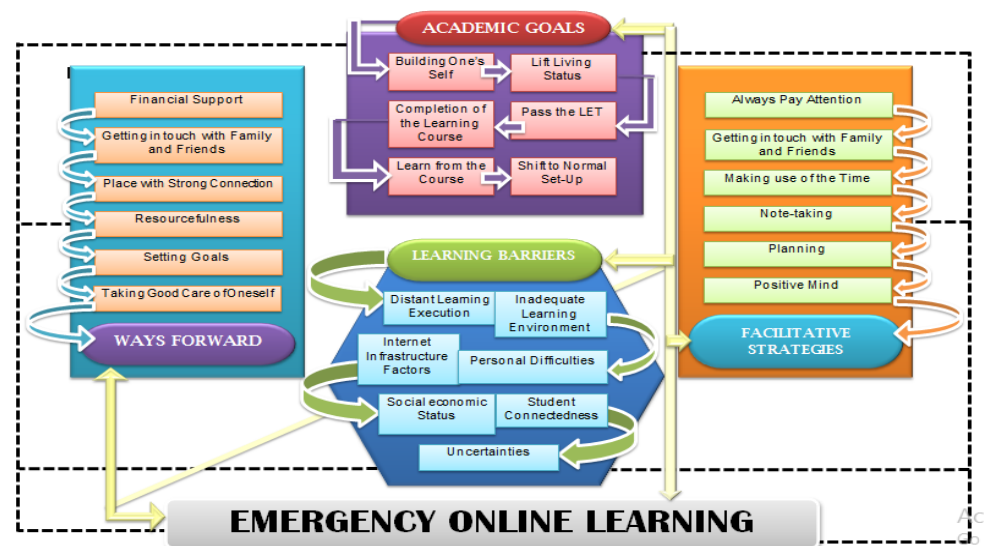


Figure 3. A Conceptual Framework highlighting the academic goals, learning barriers, facilitative strategies and ways forward of teacher education students

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to determine students' academic goals, learning barriers, facilitative strategies, and ways forward for pre-service teachers. Findings revealed that the pre-service teachers aim for course completion and learning despite complex home situations. As reported by [Agrawal \(2021\)](#), e-learning, a technologically dependent approach, necessitates the integration of hardware, software, and network infrastructure, which is typically accessed via the Internet and a web browser. It also facilitates disseminating and advancing web-based skills, awareness, ideas, and learning capabilities ([Piotrowski, 2010](#)). With the incorporation of education, it has become practically accessible through software applications, the Internet, and other web-based platforms. It provides learning materials, tests, communication, and course management tools ([Cakrawati, 2017](#)). E-learning assists students in improving their linguistic competence, embracing new repertoires, and improving their comprehension of particular lesson content. It is particularly beneficial throughout the COVID-19 pandemic ([Allo, 2020](#)). To equip them with the knowledge and skills, they need effective instruction and guidance—not generic instruction, but instruction tailored to the individual via communication.

Passing the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) has always been the ultimate aim of higher education institutions in the Philippines to match the prevailing needs of local and worldwide parties and communities ([Dagdag et al., 2017](#)). The same is true for pre-service teachers: it serves as a barometer for elevating their degree and a stepping stone to teaching in public schools, allowing them to get a higher rating. Hence, to increase the morale of the pre-service teachers in their future endeavors, students must believe in themselves and manifest the law of attraction even if they are in the long run ([Krueger & Dickson, 1994](#)).

Pre-service teachers at the university face the same challenges as Ghanaian tertiary students, especially College of Education students ([Aboagye et al., 2020](#)). Moreover, some of the health concerns faced by pre-service teachers in the ERT include physical (e.g., academic strain and burnout), social (e.g., social deprivation) ([Redmond et al., 2018](#)), and mental health issues (e.g., worry, frustration, and

doubts) (Daniel, 2020; Gillett-Swan, 2017). More significantly, their learning context and time management (Yates et al., 2020) make it more stressful due to their many obligations and personal preoccupations at home (Duraku & Hoxa, 2020). From a socio-economic lens, most participants have a monthly household income below 10,000.00 pesos, which could highly influence their ability to access the Internet, conducive learning space, and convenience of time. With these in mind, external factors such as campus support and limited access to guidance counselors and mental health services can also affect how these pre-service teachers adjust their academic strategies in emergency online learning.

In addition, O'Keefe et al. (2020) mentioned that students still need academic advising, career counseling, and mental health assistance throughout this period. However, the technological and humanistic infrastructure to scale these services to an online world may have been insufficient. While the findings shed light on the present literature, obtaining technological tools such as mobile phones, laptops, or computers does not guarantee learning. External factors such as unstable internet connection and limited access to more appropriate technological tools might hinder achieving an effective teaching-learning process, especially during emergency remote learning.

However, pre-service teachers apply systematic planning and time arrangement to maximize efficiency and effectiveness. Effective time management enables one to plan and manage time effectively and efficiently in the short and long term (Putri & Mahmudah, 2021). According to pre-service teachers, planning, goal setting, and time management assist them in overcoming difficulties with tasks at school and home during the abrupt transition in learning. The advantage of having a plan for pre-service teachers is that it makes completing activities and accomplishing goals easier (Gollwitzer et al., 2010).

Redmond et al. (2018) indicate that students' learning needs include online social interaction with peers and professors. Thus, creating and fostering a social atmosphere, offering prompt feedback and continual communication, and displaying compassion and care should be priorities in enhancing ERT experiences (Shin & Hickey, 2020). As Martin & Parker (2014) and Sun (2011) emphasized, developing abilities—such as imparting English proficiency and evaluating students' learning outcomes—requires frequent synchronous and asynchronous engagement with their instructor, educator, and other learners. Likewise, parental scaffolding and the instructor's language and pedagogy of empathy can help motivate the students in their learning.

Moreover, a new era exists where many students' academic lives are increasingly centered on technological devices such as cell phones, computers, tablets, and even watches. Instructional approaches must adapt to this new reality (Almusharraf et al., 2020). Some ways to set future directions for pre-service teachers include planning, scheduling, and goal-setting strategies. Teachers can use goal setting with their students to analyze prior knowledge, set short-term aims for additional learning, and plan the academic and social-emotional actions required to accomplish their tasks in emergency online learning. With these results in mind, an urgent call should be directed to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to consider flexible modes of instruction to cater to students with little to no resources. These modes can take the form of asynchronous instructional materials, modules, webinars, and more, which are more advantageous for financially challenged students. This way, we can ensure that quality education is accessible for all, especially during crises. In addition, merit

alone should not serve as the sole basis for scholarships so that inequities can be addressed through the full participation of students in quality learning. Scholarships should be accessible to all, even those not as academically gifted, because many students are economically deprived, affecting their learning.

This study is limited to 12 all-female participants from Mindanao State University – College of Education, Bachelor of Elementary Education Department. Given the demographic, the participants might not represent a diverse experience of pre-service teachers nationwide. It is also worth noting that the result is subject to self-reporting bias and might not be credible enough to capture the actual learning behavior of the pre-service teachers. However, this can be improved in future studies by exploring a gender-diverse and geographically dispersed sample to provide a more intensive and reliable understanding of the experience of pre-service teachers all over the Philippines. Examining the long-term impact of technological support, pedagogical innovations, and university-wide mental health services on academic persistence during emergency online learning is also highly recommended. These recommendations can most likely improve the data quality that future researchers can gather and may serve as a benchmark in preparing a proactive approach for emerging online learning. After all, UNESCO's goal is education for all.

Limitations of the study

This study is limited to a small, purposively selected sample of twelve female pre-service teachers from Mindanao State University – General Santos. As such, the findings may not be generalizable to a broader population of pre-service teachers across the Philippines or other disciplines. Furthermore, reliance on self-reported data through focus group discussions may be subject to recall and social desirability biases. Future research may consider a more diverse and representative sample, including male participants, and using mixed-methods or longitudinal approaches better to capture evolving learning strategies in emergency remote learning contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

As the world dealt with an unparalleled pandemic, it transformed the learning environment. There is a great deal to consider when transitioning to online pedagogical processes. The findings uncovered concerns that exacerbated the students' situations, resulting in complex conditions that pre-service teachers may confront when participating in emergency online learning scenarios. This study contributes to the growing body of literature exploring the elements of emergency remote learning by providing insight into authentic experiences, academic goals, coping strategies, and challenges encountered by teacher education students representing low-income backgrounds in the Philippines. However, students know they have goals, learning strategies, and visions that motivate them to thrive despite the complexities of their emergency online learning. Based on their experiences, pre-service teachers have suggested ways of dealing with an abrupt transition to learning. They were able to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic's impediments through the application of various context-specific virtual learning strategies. Students should be encouraged to achieve their goals while retaining a laser-like focus on the process.

Furthermore, universities should also play a more significant role in supporting learners through the transition. Universities should empower students to attain their aspirations, foster an enabling atmosphere for personal challenges, and showcase

instructors' knowledge and sympathy for students. In order to counter this challenge, HEIs should actualize policies that position flexible learning as a convenient option. This may include asynchronous modules and offline materials, which can benefit students with limited internet access. In addition, pedagogical support from instructors should be strengthened, as well as the integration of time management training, academic goal-setting workshops, and equitable and easy access to mental health services. This study can guide future researchers in exploring the impact of socio-economic factors on learning strategies under emergency online learning using a mixed-methods design. This is a stepping stone in exploring the effectiveness of university-based interventions for student wellness, such as academic advising and counseling programs that are responsive to the needs of diverse students. Universities should emphasize resilience and drive because online education is challenging and should not be taken for granted.

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DATA AVAILABILITY

The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Due to confidentiality and ethical considerations, raw transcripts from focus group discussions are not publicly shared but may be provided anonymized for academic purposes.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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