



RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Discourse Analysis on Class Cancellations during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

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This research focused on the constructed meanings of the online public on the cancellation of online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis was used as an approach to understanding the phenomenon. Online comments of college students from Facebook posts of Official pages of universities, media outlets, and political personalities were used as sources of the identified discourses. Findings showed four broader discourses about the cancellation of online classes: (1) Window of Social Justice, (2) Way to Minimize Mental Health Issues, (3) Hindrance to Quality Education and (4) Cancellation of Classes Political Device. The findings are discussed about power, and justice, public health and safety, and equality.

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INTRODUCTION

On March 7, 2020, the Philippine Department of Health confirmed the first localized COVID-19 transmission in the Philippines. The next day, the Philippine president recognized it as a public health event that constitutes a threat to national security, thus declaring a State of Public Health Emergency on the entirety of the Philippines. However, the president disapproved of the lockdown on March 9, saying that it is "Too early" (Lopez, 2020). On March 12, the Inter-agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Disease released a resolution to suspend classes in all levels in Metro Manila until April 12, 2020. Furthermore, mass gatherings are also prohibited due to the imposition of Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) throughout Luzon (Duque et al., 2020).

This has resulted in restrictions on the movement of people. A Work From Home (WFH) scheme is applied to private and government workers except for the skeletal workforce that consists of uniformed personnel such as the Philippine National Police, Armed Forces of the Philippines, and Philippine Coast Guard (Medialdea, 2020). These personnel was scattered on different checkpoints to control movement. Furthermore, various establishments were also mandated except financial institutions (bank, money transfer services, and utility providers), capital markets (Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, Securities and Exchange Commission, and Philippine Stock Exchange), and business process outsourcing (Merez, 2020).

Health care professionals treat COVID-19 the same with Ebola, where transmission arises from contact with bodily fluids from a person who is either symptomatic or asymptomatic (Drazen et al.,

2014). Thus community quarantine was implemented since it was proven to control the spread of acquiring viruses such as COVID-19 (Liu, Yang, Tang, & Zhou, 2014). It is a method that people have always been using for centuries to prevent a communicable disease from entering a country, transmitting, and spreading (Barbisch, Koenig, & Shih, 2015). It was also seen effective during the A/H1N1 influenza pandemic in 2009 where China implemented campus quarantine where the movements of university personnel were restricted to slow down the initial spread of the disease from inside the university to the broader community (Tang, Xiao, Yuan, Cheke, & Wu, 2012). Its primary goal is to prevent the person-to-person spread of disease through the separation of people by maintaining social distancing and community containment (Wilder-Smith & Freedman, 2020). Another study suggests a difference. They identified quarantine decisions between people from individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Hui, Min, Yian, & Ying, 2011).

With the interruption of the usual routine of people due to the ECQ (enhanced community quarantine), mental health disturbance arises. A meta-analysis analyzed 24 papers found that most of the studies reported adverse psychological effects, including post-traumatic stress symptoms, anger, and confusion. It also includes prolonged quarantine duration, fear of being infected, frustration, boredom, scarcity of supplies, misinformation, poverty, and stigma (Brooks et al., 2020). It is found that some residents are comparing the COVID-19 situation to the end of the world since the hospitals are overwhelmed with the number of cases. Eventually, people will face food shortages (Rubin & Wessely, 2020). A study shows that people under lockdown engage in self-reliance due to the absence of health, infrastructural, and material support from the local government (Abramowitz et al., 2015).

On the other hand, another study comparing people between quarantined groups and non-quarantined groups using the Self-Report Questionnaire and Impact of Event Scale-Revised found out that there is no difference between the two groups (Wang et al., 2011). This is in line with the results in the Philippines, where the panic due to COVID-19 is the same regardless of the location and exposure to people infected (Nicomedes & Avila, 2020).

With all these panic behaviors from COVID-19, it cannot be denied that one of the distractions people can do is using social media. It is an avenue for people to release frustrations by posting or commenting on every issue presented. A study shows that the number of sentiments expressed in a tweet is statistically significant in predicting both size and survival of information flow (Burnap et al., 2014). This means that the more people react on social media, the longer the online discussions will be. Another study shows that the reaction of online communities is similar to public responses on the street (Fung et al., 2013). It is also found out that the prevalence of depression and anxiety increased since the outbreak of COVID-19. The result shows that this is due to frequent social media (Gao et al., 2020).

For a year, education systems around the globe have shifted mostly to utilizing learning management systems. There has been a mixed reaction from the students with regards to the class cancellation. A study found out that the responses of the students can be observed through the differences of socioeconomic status (Driessen, Beatty, Stokes, Wood, & Ballen, 2020). This suspension caused further concern from the tertiary students in which their courses require practical application of learnings such as medical and engineering courses. Students are also complaining about the decline of their mental health due to the significant increase of psychological, academic, and employment pressure. This results in further problems such as panic, anxiety and insomnia (Liu, Liu, & Sun, 2020).

Aside from the effects of the mandate of Enhanced Community Quarantine, and the existence of COVID-19, the persistent problem of the education system adds to the dilemma. The school authorities need to be prepared for individual and school-wide crisis. Strong school leadership deals with events, emotions, and consequences that lessens personal and organizational harm to the school community (Smith & Riley, 2012). The more prepared the school authorities are, the more effective their disaster response will be (Werner, 2014). It was also seen in a study that the presence of school authority in times of crisis helps the students with their emotional needs (James, Logan, & Davis, 2011). Furthermore, having prior crisis-related training, expectations of response, and need for self-care of school administrators aides to lessen anxiety among them (Crepeau-Hobson & Summers, 2011).

There are 188 countries worldwide that suspended the face-to-face education process (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020). Challenges arise from the lack of motivation and knowledge of most educators and learners to practice the use of technology in education (Jena, 2020). Furthermore, despite the readiness of some countries, it was found that students have low self-regulated learning, teachers hesitate to use technology, and parents lack understanding on the school activities carried out at home (Churiyah, Sholikhan, Filianti, & Sakdiyyah, 2020). Another study emphasized that liberalization, privatization and globalization of education has decreased due to the limitation of mobilization and limited exchange of academic activities among countries. Especially for the third world countries that are now experiencing policy paralysis in operating the shifting of educational planning, management and organization with their unstable technical infrastructure, academic incompetence and lack of resources (Mishra, Gupta, & Shree, 2020).

In the Philippines, a review by Durban & Catalan (2012) shows that the development of the local education system should be addressed. This includes the transformation of teachers by upgrading both their personal and professional development. It is suggested that the government supports this intervention. It was also recommended that educational policies need to promote poverty alleviation and human development in the Philippines (Okabe, 2013). However, corruption is the primary reason for inhibition in educational systems (Reyes, 2010). With the suspension of classes for more than a month, it is expected that there will be poorer outcomes on achievement tests regardless of any demographics of students (Losen & Skiba, 2010). A study also suggests that educators should do advising, engagement, and timely online support interventions to students to help students succeed in transitioning from in-person to remote learning (Adjei, Pels, & Amoako, 2021).

With all the announcements from national and local government units, people continuously express themselves through social media. Thus, this study aims to explore the discourses of students since the announcement of the month-long suspension of classes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Impact of COVID-19 on education systems

To promote social distancing, the government declared a lockdown, which significantly disrupted the entire education system (Tarkar, 2020). This shift in teaching methodology has posed numerous challenges for students, teachers, and parents. Distance learning emerged as the solution to maintain educational continuity. However, in developing countries, inadequate network infrastructure, limited access to computers, and poor internet connectivity have hindered the effectiveness of distance learning (Tadesse & Muluye, 2020). The closures of schools, institutions, and other learning spaces have impacted over 94% of the world's student population (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021).

Bozkurt et al. (2022) conducted a meta-narrative review on the impact of COVID-19 on education, identifying key themes such as the great reset, the shifting educational landscape and emerging educational roles, digital pedagogy, emergency remote education, pedagogy of care, social equity, equality, and injustice, and the future of education. Upoalkpajor & Upoalkpajor (2020) also highlighted the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education, noting that schools require resources to address the educational losses incurred during the epidemic.

2.2 Psychological and social effects on students and teachers

Since the beginning of the pandemic, teachers have faced numerous psychological challenges. During the lockdown, they had to adapt to online teaching, and as schools reopened, they were greatly concerned about the unprecedented teaching situation (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021). Eşici et al. (2021) identified four key themes regarding teachers' psychological practices and career needs during COVID-19: the pandemic had both positive and negative effects on teachers; they needed psychological support, in-service training, and infrastructure support; teachers and school counselors adapted their professional activities to the online environment; and significant issues with student access to education emerged, prompting the proposal of solutions. Additionally, Gavriluță et al. (2022) found that students were affected by reduced contact with the university and peers, and the loss of routine. They experienced loneliness, panic, fear, aggressiveness, and intolerance due to the lack of cultural activities, disrupted routines, and restricted communication

and movement. Social relationships suffered, with many students returning home to parents for support during the lockdown.

3. METHODOLOGY/MATERIALS

3.1 Research design

The present study explored and identified the meanings that college students constructed concerning the cancellation of online classes following the extended community quarantine brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the researchers identified the sense-making of the online public regarding the cancellation of online courses from major universities, media outlets, and political personalities through their Facebook comments. This research used a qualitative research design, utilizing announcements in their official Facebook pages and the Commission on Higher Education as a strategy for data collection, and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis as the framework for data analysis.

3.2 Data gathering

Participants of the study are the Filipino online public community that commented on selected Facebook posts and announcements on the cancellation of online classes due to the COVID-19 lockdown. The online platform was used to get sufficient access to public opinion from the Filipino online community. Using the concept of a public sphere, which was defined by Habermas as a “realm of our social life” involving conversations with others and the formation of public opinion where “private individuals assemble to form a public body” (Fontana & Nederman, 2010).

A total of 1273 Facebook comments were shortlisted and included in this research, from different posts of the various official pages and Commission on Higher Education (CHED) was used. The said comments were selected based on the respondent’s meaning-making informed by the research question. The respondents were college students and parents from universities directly affected by the enhanced community quarantine. The main focus was the construction of both the parents and students of the cancellation of classes during the pandemic.

3.3. Data analysis

The analysis of the data followed the methodological framework of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. We used the procedures and guidelines used by Willig (2008). Upon manual scraping of the Facebook comments, we proceeded with the reading and re-reading the collected text for familiarization. Afterward, we moved to the Foucauldian discourse analysis after the second reading. The following are the procedures set forth by Willig (2008), which was used to study data:

Identifying discursive constructions. The first involved identifying how the respondents talked about the cancellation of online classes. We identified and highlighted how the cancellation of classes was referred to in the text with reading for the third time.

Discourses. We then explored the discursive constructions of the cancellation of online classes clustered into broader discourses. The researchers differentiated what appears to be the same discursive object and looked into how the participants constructed it in very different ways. We then locate the various discursive constructions within broader discourses or the practices the respondents see the world.

Analyzing action orientation. The third stage in this analysis identifies the function of constructing the cancellation of online classes in a particular way within the text. We also looked into the social objectives achieved when respondents take on particular discourses in their construction of meanings regarding the cancellation of online classes. These social objectives may include assertion, support, or disagreement, among others. In addition, what was gained when respondents constructed cancellation of online classes in particular ways were identified.

Distinguishing positions. In this stage of analysis, the question “What subject positions are made available in the discourses for the respondents to take up?” and “How are different persons positioned in the text?” were answered. Thus, with these discursive constructions, the rights and duties ascribed to the persons in the text related to the positions were also explored.

Examining social practices. At this stage, we explored how discourses on the cancellation of classes show possibilities for action related to future activities on pedagogy and the education system in general. Given the identified positions, we answered what social practices people and the Commission on Higher Education do (and not do) when they are positioned in a particular way by the discourse.

Postulating subjectivities. The last and sixth stage explored; thus, at this stage, we looked at the possible subjective experiences, thoughts, and feelings of particular social actors as they were positioned within certain discourses.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

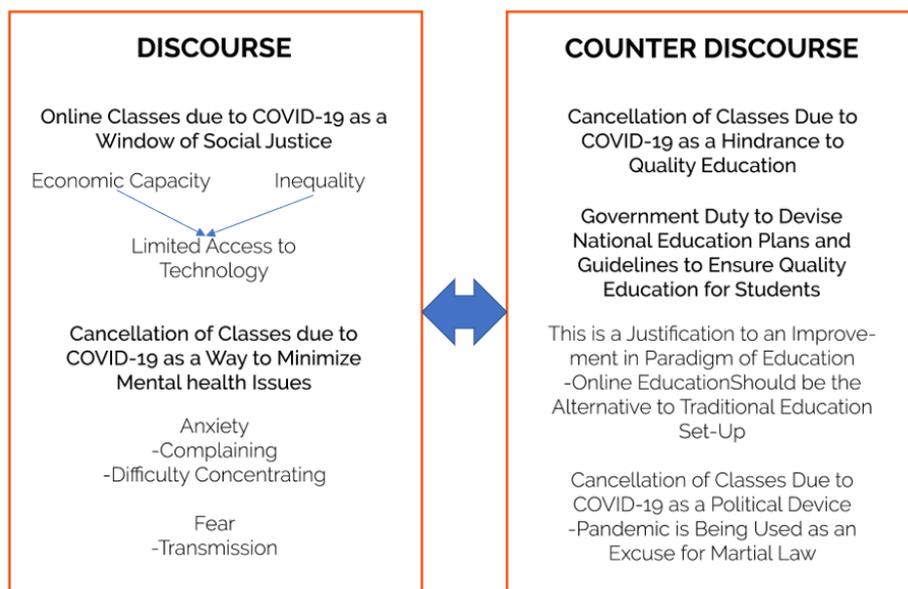


Figure 1: Discourse analysis on class cancellations during the COVID-19 pandemic

Fig. 1 shows the discourse analysis on class cancellations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings showed four broader discourses about the cancellation of online classes: (1) Window of Social Justice, (2) Way to Minimize Mental health Issues, (3) Hindrance to Quality Education, and (4) Political Device. We now turn to the detailed and in-depth discussion of the results.

4.1 Online classes due to COVID-19 as a window of social justice

Social justice, for us Filipinos, implies a rational, understandable arrangement of law, made known to us, enacted by a legitimate government freely chosen by us, and enforced relatively and equitable, genuine, unprejudiced and equipped police force, legal profession and judiciary, that first, respects our rights and our freedom both as individuals and as a people; second, seeks to repair the injustices that society has inflicted on the poor; third, develops a self directed and self-sustaining economy that distributes its benefits to meet, at first, the raw material needs for all, then to provide an improving standard of living for all; fourth, changes our institutions and structures, our ways of doing things and relating to each other, so whatever inequalities remain are not caused by those institutions or systems, unless inequality is needed temporarily to favor the least favored among us and its cost is borne by the most favored; and fifth, adopts mean and processes that are capable of attaining these objectives. (Panganiban, 2013).

4.1.1 Economic capacity

The prevalence of this feature should be enough to indicate social justice. Almost every definition of economic capacity involves the extent to which a polity can penetrate aspects of civil society to govern its claimed territory successfully (Murawaski, 2018).

“As a parent, I want my children to study in a right and decent school. Students will be burdened to pass their course on that class set-up. Tuition fees will be wasted as well as the miscellaneous. Let’s all remember that not all students in a private school are well-off. Especially now that everyone lost their jobs, their living stopped. I hope you consider thinking about it. Thank you.”

Based on a study, parents consider private schools due to their syllabus, environment, enrollment facilities, academic performance, and the quality of teachers (Yaacob, Osman, & Bachok, 2014). With all these considerations, parents often work hard to provide proper education to their children. Due to the poverty of most of the population, it cannot be denied the practicality of getting their money's worth. Parents who choose private schools for their children show more preference for academic outcomes (Lincove, Cowen, & Imbrogno, 2018). One possible reason would be the aim of getting up from poverty.

4.1.2 Inequality

Another feature of social justice is Inequality. Research shows that Inequality is very rampant in democratic countries. From a higher point of view, inequality starts from political dynasties that comprise 70% of the current congress. It results in low living standards, more tropical human development, and higher inequality (Mendoza, Beja, Venida, & Yap, 2012). Thus living the low-income population trapped in poverty. Even with this inequality, there is still historical evidence of slow poverty eradication even when the economy is developing (Witt & Redding, 2014).

"Having canvas on hand has been very helpful, and a good number of my students said they enjoyed having to use it even now during the quarantine as it saved both on time and costs. Still, I have observed four (4) opportunities for improvement arising from the utilization of online learning: 1. The current circumstances, since some had gone back home to the province or elsewhere where access to the internet is limited, resulting in an incomplete roster. 2. The attitude of the student, where some may be lax in terms of going online, believing that with such technologies on hand, they can easily circumvent the providing institution's guidelines, policies, and procedures. 3. The academe's passion for imparting knowledge, experience, and wisdom as some, just as the previous item had pointed out for students, may similarly use it to leave students to their own devices. 4. Lastly, the human handshake, as some students and academe such as myself, believe it to be necessary to add more of a personal touch to the process, allowing people to see that we are truly there for them as well as keep them in line, which does not come out as convincing as it should be online. Godspeed and stay healthy, everyone!!!"

4.2 Limited access to technology

Another blatant result seen in the reaction upon the announcement of suspension and using online classes as an alternative avenue for learning is the problem arising from the limitation of access to technology. Though we are one of the most internet users, we also have one of the worst internet connections. There are about 30-40% of the population in the Philippines is already using smartphones. Still, the majority lacks access to such technology. With the previous discussion on the prevailing poverty in the Philippines, having these kinds of gadgets is still not considered a basic necessity. Thus shifting to online classes had given students a dilemma:

"Sir, we hope you understand the situation of your students. Not all of your students can access the internet and cannot comply with the said requirements. The internet connection is prolonged all day except night time. There is also rain in our area that slows our internet connection even more. God bless you, sir!"

Even with the adaptation of cities in technology, most provincial dwellers suffer from the challenge of scarcity of signal reception. One of the most common concepts of provincial dwellers is that the opportunity resides in the city; thus, their goal is to leave their province to get up from poverty. From the announcement of the suspension, many students were forced to go back to their provinces that are not well equipped to sustain online classes.

"Please consider more on offline tasks because not students have unlimited and good Internet access... And also, they are adjusting to the current situation. Also, consider the concentration of students at home since they are not the only person living inside. There are many challenges, indeed."

The use of technology in education is a diverse process. Modern technological advancements have contributed not only to people's daily living but also to academic institutions that adopt these media to formulate innovative learning approaches. Moreover, technology plays a significant role in students' academic success, but we have to consider overcoming barriers when integrating

technology. External factors such as poor infrastructure, limited network bandwidth, and a lack of enough devices might affect student's learning. It is essential to address those barriers as our education system continues to grow with the use of technology (Harrell & Bynum, 2018).

"Despite news of the outbreak, many students have stayed behind in the absence of an early advisory on the suspension of online classes. Most didn't have strong internet connections and good equipment at home for these classes, so we are still dependent on facilities in Los Baños".

4.3 Cancellation of classes due to COVID-19 as a way to minimize mental health issues

Amidst COVID-19, people are critical towards securing their physical health through acquiring necessities for survival, such as food, water, and others. In addition, the current situation might also elicit unpleasant reactions to people that might signal a threat to their psychological well-being. A previous study found out the psychological effects of COVID-19. This includes various negative thoughts and behaviors such as nihilism, paranoia, fear, shock, and anxiety (Nicomedes & Avila, 2020). Furthermore, the continuation of online classes was highly debated as it implies that the students are still responsible for complying with academic requirements. The added school-related responsibilities amid the COVID-19 pandemic might add to the students' psychological and emotional distress. To lessen the panic experienced by the residents, class cancellations were mandated aside from its purpose in preventing the spread of the virus.

4.3.1 Anxiety

Anxiety is very evident among the students, parents, and school authorities. It manifested through complaining and difficulty concentrating. A study shows that high anxiety students have reported lower academic performance (Nordstrom, Goguen, & Hiester, 2014).

4.3.1.1 Complaining

Students are resorting to complaints through questioning. Primary concerns include requirements, tuition, professor, and grades. A student expressed its concern for having a professor that does not comply with the released memorandum:

"Are all the professors following this memorandum? As far as I know, this prof is imposing online classes and even posting something on social media. Hello, Ma'am. I hope this message reached you already."

Furthermore, complaints on the continuance of plenty of workloads despite the anxiety caused by the pandemic is also evident in the responses:

"These days, the last thing a student needs is ongoing research work. The world is at war, and It's already hard as it is. Why add more to the suffering? I'm sure you know what every household is experiencing right now. A month away from research/assignment doesn't harm their studies. Teach them more values by making them go out of their room and mingle with their loved ones rather than bond with their laptops."

Another common complaint is from students who are maintaining their scholarships since there is an existing proposal of letting the primary grades be the final grade of college students:

"How about those rooting for their grades to maintain their scholarships? That (suspension) would be a big hindrance."

Lastly, due to the limited resources during the enhanced community quarantine, both students and parents are concerned about utilizing the tuition paid. This strengthens the view of the researchers on the evocation of social injustice due to the mandates:

"Good morning!. I just want to ask if we get a refund or discount for our tuition fee since we are not using most of the facilities offered by the school?"

These discourses are in line with resources available regarding the effects of anxiety on academic performance. A previous result shows that the three main concerns of students are academic performance, pressure to succeed, and post-graduation plans (Beiter et al., 2015).

4.3.1.2 Difficulty concentrating

Anxiety due to the awareness of the threat of COVID-19 and the complaints as mentioned earlier causes the difficulty in concentration on students even with the policy on online classes:

“Emotionally, so much going on and stressful. Imagine a kid worrying about homework etc when the family is worried about safety, health, and food? Yes, education is a life priority. But in this case, perhaps we should rethink the way we are of service to the student community and their parents. Praying for the kids.”

4.3.1.3 Fear

Fear has been identified as one of the emotions experienced by students and other educational system stakeholders. This fear is rooted in the worry of their security and safety amidst the COVID-19 quarantine. To illustrate, one of the respondents said:

“Online classes are just a waste of time. Students in a state of fear and nervousness should be relaxed and motivated by the university instead of adding depression to their already hard time.”

Thus, the cancellation of online classes was deemed as an act that can minimize the adverse effects of the pandemic, particularly fear and nervousness. In addition, fear of acquiring COVID-19 and transmitting it to the elderly such as parents and the students, was exemplified through the following text:

“I’m a mother of one of your students. They are already stressed inside their house to protect themselves from acquiring the virus outdoors, yet this academic institution will add more stressors to them? Really? We are in the middle of a crisis because of this virus. Hopefully, this academic institution will avoid creating a scene that will cause students to have headaches just to pass all their subjects. We have other times for these scenes. Please don’t be a stressor as well. Think of the welfare of each of your students, that they will not get sick and will not get infected by the virus. Please consider them amid this situation. Are they going to prioritize their studies or their health? If all your students get sick due to the additional burden you have caused, we’ll see if your conscience can handle that. And that’s my opinion. Be safe, everyone, and God bless us all.”

4.4 Cancellation of classes due to COVID-19 as a hindrance to quality education

To minimize the spread of the COVID-19 in Luzon, announcements from different academic institutions were made to lessen the risk of students acquiring the said virus. This implies that various academic institutions should provide alternative media wherein students could meet the learning objectives in the coursework. On the other hand, a shift in the learning platform could be one factor to consider upon assessing whether the students have learned important information about their enrolled courses. Consequently, the deviation in the traditional learning set-up could be a challenge among students to attain their educational or academic goals. It was seen that class disruptions cause a variety of undesirable behaviors such as incivility, disrespect toward the professor or classmates, academic dishonesty, and bullying (Gallo, 2012). It has been evident in the following sample statement from a student:

“To be honest, having online classes is more tiring and stressful. Why? Because of the workload that we have is not this plenty if we are in school. But now, every day, tons of requirements per subject are needed to be submitted. I think they expect us to be monitoring the Learning Management System all day for announcements and deadlines. Like the other inconsiderate professors. It is not the fault of the students if they cannot access the server portal; however, those who have not taken the quiz were not given second chances. But then they want the students to pay tuition on time. Instead of having a chance to recover on grades, it adds burden just because of the sick system. We are also children whenever we are at home. We cannot be a fulltime student.”

4.4.1 Government duty to devise national education plans and guidelines to ensure quality education for students

It is a call on the government to devise a plan and guidelines to ensure that there is still the quality of education for the students in this time of crisis. Some universities and colleges are offering Open University (OU) programs. However, the vast majority of the schools are still practicing the traditional delivery of instruction as supported by the Department of Education (DepEd) and Commission on Higher Education (CHED). Policies and guidelines must be formulated to monitor student learning engagements and establish protocols on how teachers can effectively deliver instruction. Learning materials for the students must be developed while in their respective houses and the full internet access for the effective delivery of education and enriched learning processes.

“...If we stop whatever alternative forms of instruction, we are wasting time. We can be flexible, lenient, and considerate. It is said that students who say they do not have access to the internet are the ones who post their complaints via social media. What is more important is that the students are safe at home. What must be done is to regulate because there are really those who are very strict with deadlines.”

4.4.2 This is a justification to an improvement in the paradigm of education

The Philippine education system is behind the neighboring countries when it comes to its curriculum and methods. One example of this is the recently adapted K-12 program that adds another two years so that the graduates will be able to study abroad. Another is the adaptation of our school system to technology. Due to the deprived budget for education, many schools lack utilities and facilities such as an adequate number of rooms to accommodate all enrolled students and enough computer units. Thus having this online classes scheme justified this discourse:

“These are challenging times, and we need university officials and faculty members to rise to the challenge. Universities are the bastions of knowledge and brilliance. They must show the way in innovation and adjustments.”

People often ignore problems until it is experienced. In consequence, we often fall into a pit of endless dilemmas whenever crises happen.

4.5 Online education should be the alternative to traditional education set-up

As an alternative form of learning, universities and colleges took a shift from traditional classroom learning to a modernized approach of delivering instruction amid the COVID-19 pandemic. With the use of technology, classes were conducted with video conferencing, chats, emails, and the universities' respective Learning Management Systems (LMS). This movement has a good effect on the part of the teachers and the learners. Equipped with their enhanced knowledge in educational technology, teachers can deliver instructions with the use of their devices even at home. They can explore different teaching methodologies involved in the learning process. On the other hand, students can access learning even at the tips of their fingers. They can be able to engage in learning even if they are not physically present in school. This is exemplified in the text below:

“I just wanna ask, isn't it that we have no classes for more than one month? What are the prepared alternatives that you can provide for our grades? If the classes resume, there is no guarantee that we can accomplish all the requirements for the missed lectures and topics.”

4.5.1 Cancellation of classes due to COVID-19 as a political device

In a sociopolitical context, the issue regarding the COVID-19 pandemic may be perceived and interpreted differently. Given that the Philippine government plays a crucial role in planning and implementing actions addressing the immediate and secondary concerns caused by the pandemic, they could attract attention from the people and be criticized by their shortcomings. Furthermore, it can be seen that some politicians are taking advantage of the situation as a promotion of their “programs”:

“Thank you, mayor, for suspending the classes, and we hope to receive alcohol and masks for each household of every barangay. God Bless.”

Announcement of the first suspension as a leader of a local government unit elicits satisfaction among residents:

“Thank you, Yorme (mayor), for taking care of all the students and teachers of our city. We are proud to have you.”

4.6 Pandemic is being used as an excuse for martial law

The Martial Law years were among the darkest in our history, accounting still for most ills that we continue to suffer today (Abulad, 2017). People who are traumatized by these experiences tend to divert the pandemic enhanced community quarantine and lockdown protocols as an excuse to exercise martial law. Aside from the people who directly experienced Martial Law, younger generations are also aware and fear experiencing it. The fear arises from the knowledge learned in historical subjects. These younger generations were exposed to different literature that feeds them with critical thinking. This includes movies, plays, and books. Thus, fearing the Martial Law by these younger generations is justifiable. This is shown by an online commenter below:

“In short, Lord Duterte is exploiting the situation to declare his disguised martial law. The red flags are all over the place”.

Especially with the similarity of behavioral patterns of the current president to Ferdinand Marcos, it cannot be denied that there is an on-going threat of announcing a Martial Law. It has been done during the Marawi Siege and can be done anytime in any part of the country. The level of distrust is another lens for the source of the paranoia of the residents.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Cancellation of online classes: overwhelming shared meaning for justice and equality

The cancellation of online classes only did not show what constitutes the social and psychological discourses in education; it also revealed the underlying reasons and rationale for their discursive construction. For instance, the lack of access to technology and poor internet connection reflected how the Philippines lags behind our more developed neighbors. The Covid-19 pandemic forced closures of Colleges and Universities, but most of them still provided online education (UNESCO, 2020). Low technology solutions to support online instruction, such as freeware, Skype, Moodle, Google Classroom, Facebook, and narrated PowerPoint (Crawford et al., 2020) are assessed as challenging to be accessed in the Philippines due to economic and technical challenges. The act of cancellation of the online classes became an act of compassion, empathy, and, ultimately, justice. Continuing online courses would mean the oppression of the poor and incapable. Agreeing with the action shows the online public's support for each other, and the acknowledgment that inaccessibility to some should merit discontinuance of services to everyone. The compassion and empathy initiated by the government through CHED are resonated through the online public.

Mental health as a discourse connects to the state as an institution that has to look for the psychological welfare of its citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the online public latched on to the constructed meaning of taking care of their mental health as support to the decision of CHED. This constructed meaning strengthens the Psychological discourse that mental health affects academic performance (Frazier et al., 2019). In addition, the value of mental health is given more importance than academics in times of an emergency health crisis.

5.2 Counter discourses: of ideals and political distrust

Alternative, albeit very few constructions from the texts talk about educational standards. The majority of Colleges and Universities, both from developed and developing countries, are now progressing to alternative learning forms. In transitioning to the online environment, the focus is now on online pedagogy. This ideal is aspirational and is framed as something that the educational system should strive to attain, amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic. Given the economic and social situation and challenges of the country, this shift to a different mode of learning is seen as something that is needed so that the quality of education will not be hampered. Another weak counter-discourse is the cancellation of online class as a political device, particularly to initiate martial law. This discourse reflects some of the online public's distrust towards the government. It implies that the government is seen to be imposing its agenda on people's interests.

The identifying discourses shape the receiver of educational services and other stakeholders during pandemics has to consider. With these considerations, we can pursue positive action with the goal of optimistic change and equity..

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