Turning Setbacks into Comebacks: High School Students Academic Resilience in the Post-Pandemic Era

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ABSTRACT

After the government imposed lockdowns and restricted safety measures to combat the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the Department of Education has formally opened schools for face-to-face instruction. These new hurdles tested the students' mental toughness and coping methods. This study explores the academic resilience of Grade 10 students post-pandemic, focusing on their adaptation and coping mechanisms. Utilizing a qualitative-phenomenological approach, in-depth interviews with 12 students revealed four major themes: Rediscovering Academic Passion, Adapting to the New Normal, Redefining Interconnected Roles, and Acknowledging Disparities in Education. Their blending of concepts demonstrates resilience, demonstrating how failures can lead to powerful comebacks. Findings highlight how students transformed challenges into opportunities for growth, offering insights for policy and future research on education resilience and adaptation. Researchers can contribute useful insights into ongoing educational development by focusing on longitudinal studies, demographic differences, learning models, technological impacts, resilience programs, and policy evaluations.

Keywords: Academic Resiliency, Junior High School, New Academic Landscape, Post-Pandemic Era

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

During the COVID-19 pandemic, students worldwide struggled to continue their education, creating several obstacles. To satisfy rising academic standards, students had to establish a new learning environment, cope with academic and technical issues, and become more self-sufficient. These new hurdles tested the students' mental toughness and coping methods, compelling them to make the necessary adaptations to perform under the new, less-than-ideal conditions (Amine,2022). Two years after the government imposed lockdowns and restricted safety measures to combat the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the Department of Education has formally opened schools for face-to-face instruction. As the learning mode switched to face-to-face classrooms, classroom management, student activities, student understanding, and student concentration were revealed to have issues integrating with the restricted face-to-face education (Octavia et al., 2022). Given the academic and non-academic challenges mentioned above, students' academic resilience is essential to learning coping techniques to help them achieve academic success during the harsh conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic (Amine,2022). Thus, academic resilience will explain how students overcome various challenges or negative experiences that can hinder the learning process (Matusevych et al.,2024).

With these academic expectations, students must be highly resilient to survive difficult circumstances and accomplish lecture assignments and school activities. This resilience is known as academic resilience, defined by students' ability to adapt and progress in practically all the difficulties they face (Sholichah & Hasanah, 2021). According to Beale (2020), academic resilience focuses on a student-centric view and traces factors such as self-efficacy, coordination, sense of control, composure, and perseverance. Some of these

factors can also be postulated to focus on institutional resilience. Based on the categories provided above, resilient behavior refers to any behavior in which an individual perseveres in the face of adversity and makes intellectual, emotional, and cognitive modifications to complete a specific task. This similar behavior could explain why some students quit in the face of failures, poor performance, and stress, whilst others endure, recover, and adjust (Amine,2022).

Several studies have found that academic resilience and school involvement are strongly and favorably connected before, during, and after the pandemic (Versteeg et al., 2022). It was evident during the Covid-19 pandemic when students faced academic pressures due to changes in learning methodologies, resulting in reduced learning motivation and student involvement (Hill & Fitzgerald,2020). To handle these changes and obstacles, students must be resilient, as it allows them to adapt and cope with academic stress (Rodriguez et al., 2018). Trillanes & Baloyo's (2022) study emphasizes the need to develop resilience in students since it benefits their mental health, allowing them to cope with stress more effectively and perform well in school. It is also considered that the school must foster resiliency in their students since this allows them to emerge from complex events with a good sense of themselves and their futures.

As education began to recover from the consequences of COVID-19, the Philippine Department of Education implemented the return of full face-to-face classes in the Academic Year 2023. The Grade 10 students began their junior high school journey amidst the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. They were the first batch to experience this shift in learning modalities back when they were in Grade 7 and Grade 8, and hybrid learning modality in Grade 9. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted global education systems, challenging students to adapt to new learning environments and cope with various obstacles. While existing research highlights these challenges, there is a notable lack of studies focusing on how students in Asian countries have navigated educational disruptions and promoted resilience. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the academic resilience of Grade 10 students in the post-pandemic contexts, shedding light on their adaptive strategies and the evolving educational landscape.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore, describe, and interpret the academic resiliency experiences of Grade 10 Students of Colegio de Sto. Tomas Recoletos after the pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

Research design. This study employs a descriptive phenomenological design to explore Grade 10 students' lived experiences of academic resilience in the post-pandemic era. The phenomenological approach aims to understand how participants perceive and interpret their experiences during the transition back to full face-to-face learning. The study reflected on key themes, such as what constitutes the nature of this lived experience, as the participants go through the process (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The most appropriate design to utilize is learning more about and studying how Grade 10 students deal with their academic resiliency in the post-pandemic era, and what it means to the participants based on their experiences. As a psychology major with a history of studying student well-being, the researcher can make a constructive contribution to their transition.

Participants and sampling technique. This study utilized a purposive sampling approach to identify the participants. The inclusion criteria of this study were bonafide Grade 10 students of Academic Year 2023-2024. Participants should have sufficient proficiency in the language of the study to accurately express their experiences and perspectives, have a previous academic year GPA not lower than 85, have a diverse background, sports athletes, be active in extracurricular activities, willing to share their educational experiences and challenges, fostering candid and insightful responses. The sample size selection was twelve (12) and intervened after saturation was achieved.

Research instrument. This research study used an unstructured in-depth individual interview. Interviews are the standard method to gain rich data and help uncover the story behind a participant's experiences, conducting an in-depth interview about the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Unstructured interviews were preferred as it allowed the participants to express their experiences freely, using their own words to describe the phenomenon clearly. Further, the unstructured interview was designed to explore their academic resilience experiences using probing questions.

Data collection procedure. In phenomenological research, data collection procedures usually involve interviewing individuals who experienced the phenomenon. Various sources of information like natural observations and documents are considered to gather rich data (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

The researcher sent a letter to the institution's Research Office to obtain approval to conduct the study. After this, the researcher objectively selected the participants through inclusion criteria. The researcher conducted a face-to-face interview with the participants to obtain rich and accurate information, including their non-verbal language.

Before the interview, the researcher established rapport with the participants by giving them information about the purpose of the study, asking about their feelings, and responding to non-judgmental behavior to their responses. Moreover, the researcher explained the ethical components, emphasizing privacy, confidentiality, informed consent, and permission to record the audio interview. After reading, the researcher thoroughly discussed the informed consent with the participants and asked them to affix their signatures. The researcher oriented the participants to prepare their minds and hearts for recalling overwhelming memories that may arise during the interview.

During the interview, the researcher suspended knowledge about academic challenges and journeys in a post-pandemic era to maintain the conversation's objectivity and flow. The researcher jotted down the salient expressions and gestures of each participant delicately. The researcher summarized and clarified their responses after all the questions were raised. Finally, the researcher concluded the interview and assured their confidentiality and privacy.

After the interview, the researcher provided debriefing and emotional support. Specifically, negative emotions arose during the discussion, making them tense and uncomfortable. The researcher processed them by asking for their reflection on that specific incident and how they felt. Moreover, the researcher also gathered the participants' thoughts and implored specific strategies whenever there was a threat to the participants' transition experiences, well-being, or stressful situations.. Lastly, the researcher ended the data collection procedure by transcribing the recorded interviews.

Data analysis procedure. This qualitative research study employed thematic analysis. The data collected from the participants was analyzed using the Creswell model data analysis.

In the first step, the researcher organized and prepared the data for analysis. The researcher started transcribing interviews, scanning material, typing field notes, and sorting and arranging data into different types depending on the sources of information. These are essential for sorting information into categories (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

In the second step, the researcher read and looked at all data. The researcher started identifying notable statements of the participants. This provides a general sense of the information and an opportunity to reflect on its overall meaning. This involves writing notes in the margins of transcripts or observational field notes and recording general thoughts about the data (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

The third step was coding all of the data. This organizes the data by bracketing chunks(text or image segments) and writing a word representing a category in the margins. This is part of compiling all the codes on a separate sheet (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The researcher used the specific coding procedures of the eight

steps by Tesch (2013) in forming principles. After this, the researcher assigned code labels representing the participants' academic resiliency based on the participants' actual language.

In the fourth step, the researcher reviewed the codes to eliminate redundancy and overlapping. After this, the researcher started generating descriptions and articles. The researcher used a coding process to create a report as well as classes or themes for analysis that shaped a general description of the experiences of the participants. The researcher identified essential topics and sub-topics of the modified codes (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Fifth, the description stage included generating a setting description for the persons, places, events, and analysis categories (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This is the process where the researcher created reports for the types and themes from the modified coding. This step ensured that the qualitative findings represented the participants' diverse perspectives. Afterward, the researcher translated the group codes into pieces representing a common idea of the participant's experiences of academic resilience.

The final step involves interpreting findings and conclusions of qualitative data. The study's findings section will present a narrative for each theme or a general summary (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In this step, the survey outcomes are presented, and information was collected through reviews and personal experiences of the students on academic resiliency.

From the Creswell analysis framework, the researcher captured and described the essence of the experiences of the participants, the researcher combined the six topics in the study and conveyed the essence of their collective experience in this phenomenological investigation. Phenomenological research seeks to discover and illuminate the structure and meanings of such knowledge; it is where the "essence of things" cannot be revealed by ordinary observation (Moustakas, 1994).

According to Creswell and Poth (2016), validity and reliability attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings, as best stated by the researcher and participants. The current study will benefit from this understanding of validation. In qualitative research, researchers can use trustworthiness to persuade themselves and readers that their findings are significant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Using Lincoln and Guba (1985) established Trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In this study, these criteria can assist the researcher in understanding exactly how to conduct the research and generate new knowledge on academic resiliency.

Credibility is the first component of validation which is equivalent to internal validity. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the degree to which the research reflects the "truth value" of the research participants' actual meanings. The participants were then asked to review their responses to see if they accurately reflected their genuine intentions when answering the questions. The researcher allowed them to read and check their responses to ensure that they accurately reflected their experiences, and the participants agreed. The data processing process began after the participants' individual interviews were verified.

Transferability pertains to the degree to which the phenomenon or findings described in one study are applicable or valuable to theory, practice, and future research; the transferability of the research findings to other contexts recommends producing a thick and rich description of the experiences, like culture or setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure transferability in this study, the researcher interviewed the participants twice and wrote a complete and detailed explanation of their experiences so that they were meaningful to outsiders or readers. The researcher also describes the interview processes, protocols, and transcriptions.

Dependability relates to the consistency and reliability of research findings across time. When duplicating trials, the process and the research output must be consistent with collecting the same results. When readers can examine the research process, they can better judge the dependability of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher used field notes made shortly after the interview to write a report about the consistency of the research findings. Similarly, field letters, a diary for self-reflection, and interview

transcripts were all saved to aid data interpretation. The researcher strictly adhered to Creswell's technique when assessing the findings.

Confirmability suggests that the researcher has to demonstrate that the conclusions and findings are drawn from the data. It will show formulated results and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An expert in qualitative research examined the results. During the audit trail, the external validator checked the transcripts of the participants. The validator posed particular questions to ensure transcribing accuracy, the relationship between research topics and data, and the raw data analysis level. The external validator also remarked on the themes, providing feedback and suggestions.

Ethical Considerations The respondents were informed about the study's objectives, the interview, and the constructs that would be measured. Additionally, the researcher provided the benefits of the study for the institution and the scientific community. The respondents were required to provide their consent. They were also given the freedom to decide whether to participate or decline. Participants were also informed that there might be minor risks in their participation in the study, such as the feeling of being uncomfortable in answering personal and sensitive survey questions. Likewise, they were told that no monetary compensation would be provided for giving information. Given these circumstances, participants were free to withdraw or to ask for a debriefing of the study anytime.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Thematic Insights

The researcher used phenomenological bracketing before conducting the data analysis to put aside her biases and beliefs on aging and correctly represent the participants' experiences. The researcher bracketed biases to respect and comprehend the participants' opinions. To ensure that the researcher's perspective remained open to new information from the participant's experiences throughout the research process, the researcher made sure that the personal experiences with this population were limited and that the researcher only had acquaintances with the participants.

Four major themes emerged from the data: Rediscovering Academic Passion, Adapting to the New Normal, Redefining Interconnected Roles, Acknowledging Disparities in Education, and Managing a Demanding Academic Landscape. Each theme is supported by participant quotes and data.

The findings illustrate how students navigated the challenges posed by the pandemic, adapting their learning strategies and support systems. This resilience is crucial for educational recovery and future resilience programs.

Theme 1: Rediscovering Academic Passion

The return to face-to-face classes has reignited the participants' interpersonal connections and collaborative learning opportunities. The post-pandemic era offered the participants a unique opportunity to rediscover and reignite their academic passions. Through introspection, exploration of diverse learning resources, resilience in overcoming challenges, and meaningful interpersonal connections, participants embraced their academic journey with renewed enthusiasm and purpose. As they continued to navigate these transformative times, their rediscovered passions shaped their educational paths and inspired them to pursue their goals with determination and joy.

Prioritizing things is what I discovered about myself after the pandemic. I've become more organized; if something isn't needed, I don't spend much time on it. I choose my battles. If it's not urgent to use my cellphone, I focus my attention on my guitar or journal instead. If there's no need to go out, I avoid doing so. I've become more goal-driven; if something isn't part of my goals for the week, I don't give it much importance. *(Danny, personal communications, Lines, 240; 242-245)*

I've reduced my screen time on gadgets because, during the pandemic, I noticed extreme usage that seemed to affect my eyesight. Now, it's essential to complete activities on time, as there are deadlines, and submissions need to be punctual to avoid being marked late. With the pandemic over, time management is really challenging because you learn what to prioritize and what to do first. Since I have interactions at school now, I also learned to share my challenges because there are people who listen—like friends or even teachers. It feels like I have support for my struggles. *(Sheila, personal communication, Lines, 202-203;209-214)*

I've learned to prioritize things and allocate time for rest, as sometimes the opportunities in returning to face-to-face classes can be overwhelming. I also discovered that after the pandemic, my social skills are still intact. Although there was a struggle at first, I managed to get back on track and cope with the challenges in my academics and extracurricular activities. I've been able to balance the things I enjoy, such as being an athlete, achieving academically, and maintaining good relationships with my classmates and friends. *(Jhonny, personal communication, Lines, 238-244)*

Right now, my mantra is something like "suffer now, enjoy later." It's about making sacrifices, especially with my time, as I want to focus on my academics. I don't go out anymore, especially when there are deadlines and submissions. (*Hazel, personal communications*, *Lines, 254-256*)

After the pandemic, I realized that life is too short, and we need to savor every moment. Now that face-to-face classes have resumed, it feels like time is moving very quickly, and it's important to keep up. Ultimately, it's up to you to manage and complete everything promptly. (*Tony,personal communication, Lines 178-181*)

Always focus on the positive side. I've reflected on myself and become more organized; if something isn't needed or isn't a big deal, I don't spend much time on it. It's important to fulfill obligations, even when struggling, and to view challenges as opportunities to find solutions. *(Daisy, personal communication, Lines,224-228)*.

I reflected on the effects it's more like realizing that there's always a solution to every problem, so it's essential to maintain hope that you will get through the struggles and challenges. This is a very personal learning for me after the pandemic. (Wally, *personal communication, Lines, 212-214)*.

This theme represents the participants' journey of enthusiasm and eagerness. For the participants, the maze of their academic life after the pandemic, their habits and expectations outweigh personal enthusiasm, and rediscovering one's passion for studying can be a transformative experience. Their journey, which includes a revived interest in school and tasks, represents a significant transformation in motivation and self-awareness. It was a process by which they realigned their priorities and discovered latent potentials they never knew they possessed. According to Meniano & Tan's (2022) study, the difficulties faced by students during the Covid-19 pandemic in the modular remote learning implementation include challenging lessons and activities, distractions in learning, difficulty understanding instruction, a lack of support from others, poor module quality, and lack of time management. Rediscovering an academic passion implies a reevaluation of personal objectives and goals. Participants become actively involved in their studies; they frequently reevaluate their aims and desires. This introspective approach allows them to connect their behaviors with their newfound sense of purpose. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, students better understood the importance of reflection, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation (Alghamdi, 2021). In the study by Mese Sevilen (2021), students think online education hurts their motivation. Because of a lack of social connection, a mismatch between expectations and content, the organization, challenges, and the learning environments. Students' ability to deal with stress and form social networks may help them escape the detrimental impacts of the coronavirus outbreak on their mental and psychological health. However, Bordeos et al.(2022) revealed that face-to-face instruction emphasized connecting with teachers and students since these interactions benefited their learning by providing rapid feedback.

The participants rediscovered that their academic passion was also a process of rejuvenation and self-discovery. It entails rekindling their interest in learning, executing tasks passionately, and discovering previously unexplored potential. This method improves their educational experience and builds a stronger connection to their aims and ambitions. The participants created a more rewarding and productive attitude to their academic and personal lives by reassessing priorities and focusing on what was genuinely important. In essence, rediscovering passion celebrates the limitless possibilities within each human, ready to be discovered and fulfilled.

The findings have implications for educational institutions rediscovering academic interest among students, emphasizing the importance of innovative teaching methods and curricula. Schools and institutions should pursue more personalized and flexible learning approaches that accommodate students' specific interests and learning styles. This could entail incorporating project-based learning, providing elective courses that pique interest, and encouraging interdisciplinary studies. This allows educational organizations to develop more exciting and relevant learning experiences, which can lead to higher academic performance and student happiness. As a result, by implementing theory-tested interventions or programs, families, friends, and educators can encourage psychological resilience and develop positive coping strategies in pupils (Yang et al.,2022).

Theme 2: Adapting to the New Norm

The pandemic has brought attention to how crucial adaptation and flexibility are in the classroom. Schools had to quickly innovate as a result of the disruption of traditional schedules and routines. However, in the post-pandemic era, schools have to adapt to a new normal learning modality which includes, blended learning strategies, that combine online and in-person training, which are familiar to high school students. Because of this flexibility, learning experiences may now be tailored to each student's preferences. Additionally, encouraging students to take a more active role in their education, it has helped them develop a sense of independence and accountability.

"Comparing Learning Experiences"

With the first sub-theme, *"Comparing Learning Experiences,"* the participants' academic journey experienced a significant adjustment and had to embrace collaborative platforms while learning. And these innovative strategies have opened up new avenues for exploration and interaction. Participants have learned to navigate digital resources and even manage their time more independently. Beyond the academic realm, the significance of their well-being, the participants' unique interactions prompted them to prioritize their social-emotional learning and support systems, and also their strategies highlighted the importance of empathy and strengthened peer relationships.

I feel comfortable now that we are back in school and learning again through face-to-face delivery of lessons. I am now more engaged and I have improved. Compared to learning while I was stuck at home, I am learning more now that I am able to go out of the house daily. *(Peter, personal communication, Lines, 42-44)*

It's difficult, especially managing time, since we're no longer just at home or studying from home. Unlike before, when you were used to having breaks and could handle household chores. *(Lorry,personal communication,Lines 49-51)*

Face-to-face learning is also stressful on a different level compared to that of the pandemic learning modes. I like learning now because of the interaction with my teachers and my friends. I also have time to enjoy with my friends. Although I have stress even now, I am also enjoying because there are no more restrictions, especially where health is concerned. I am also more comfortable learning now because teachers are delivering right in front of me and there is no more worry of losing internet connection or not having enough data load. *(Sheila, personal communication, Lines, 45-50)*

In terms of my academic journey, there was initially a bit of struggle, but meeting classmates and teachers provided support during those struggles, which has been really helpful for me.*(Tony, personal communication, Lines 96-97)*

After the pandemic, everything is really different compared to the previous years, when I was in Grade 7, 8, and 9. I prefer the return to face-to-face classes now because students can better enjoy the opportunities offered by the school. Now that I'm in Grade 10, there are many new activities and opportunities available.*(Jhonny, personal communication, 46-48)*

I didn't expect that the limitations experienced during the pandemic would turn into opportunities. I enjoy going to school because it allows for interactions with classmates and participation in activities. So far, entering Grade 10 has been full of surprises in terms of my academic journey. (*Daisy, personal communication, 55-56)*

Coping with the Evolving Challenges

The global pandemic introduced unprecedented challenges that continue to shape students' paths. The participants adapted to the evolving landscape in the post-pandemic, and several key strategies helped them navigate and thrive in their academic pursuits. In the second sub-theme, *"Coping with the Evolving Challenges,"* the lessons learned during this period will undoubtedly shape their future endeavors and prepare them to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

The integration of various techniques in the new educational norm offers exciting opportunities for growth and innovation. The participants coping skills created a sudden shift from remote learning during the pandemic to transitioning to full face-to-face learning taught students the importance of being able to adjust to changing circumstances. By embracing change, students navigated the evolving challenges of their academic journey with confidence and success.

Now that we've returned to full face-to-face classes, it's challenging due to the deadlines for Performance Tasks. The requirements are just enough, but sometimes they overlap. Managing my time, mental health, and physical health can be quite challenging because sometimes I don't know what to prioritize. *(Peter, personal communication, Lines, 55-58)*

The most challenging thing for me is how to properly manage my time. During the pandemic, it was like we had control over our own time. You could do whatever you wanted with your time and submit tasks at any time because the teachers were very understanding about deadlines. But now it's completely different. You have to keep up with deadlines, and sometimes I end up cramming because I thought the deadline was still far off, only to find out it's the next day. I forgot that we're now in face-to-face classes. *(Danny, personal communication, Lines, 82-87)*

Absolutely, there are still challenges, especially with deadlines for Performance Tasks and exams. During pandemic every time I struggled, I could ask my classmates for help. I must say It was easier back then. But now, I find it difficult to manage my time. (*Sheila, personal communication, Lines 59-61*)

I find that the length of time given for deadlines is quite short, and there's a lack of time, which makes time management challenging. Some teachers give very tight deadlines, while others provide them late, and by then we already have a lot of tasks to complete. As a result, the workload piles up and becomes overwhelming. *(Daisy, personal communication, Lines, 69-72)*

During the pandemic, with modular learning, it was self-study at your own pace, so you could manage your time as you wanted. Now, you have to submit everything by the deadlines set by the teachers. *(Wally, personal communication, Lines 56-58)*

It seems like the adjustment is minimal, but it feels like there's a lot of pressure to keep up with your grades and project submissions because you have to meet the deadlines. It made me value deadlines more than ever, since it was crucial in order to cope with my grades. (*Linda, personal communication, Lines 91-93*)

With deadlines, you really have to submit on time, so there's pressure to stay on track, which sometimes causes me to be anxious as I try to meet these deadlines. *(Lorry, personal communication, Lines, 71-72)*

Now that we're back to face-to-face classes, especially with performance tasks and groupings, it's quite challenging for me because I have a leadership personality. It's a bit tough since I still don't know the personality types of my classmates. *(Rene, personal communication, 113-115)*

Flourishing in Adversity

The flourishing in adversity among the participants after the pandemic involves resilience, creativity, collaboration, adaptability, and a growth mindset. By embracing these qualities, students not only navigate the challenges of their academic journey but also emerge stronger, more resourceful, and better equipped to face future obstacles.

The maintenance of a growth mindset was instrumental in overcoming academic challenges in post-pandemic. The participants embraced the idea that intelligence and abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work and approached setbacks as opportunities for learning and improvement. They set ambitious goals, persisted through difficulties, and celebrated their progress along the way, fostering a sense of achievement and fulfillment in their academic pursuits. The lessons learned during this transformative period will undoubtedly shape their personal and academic growth, preparing them to thrive in a world that values resilience and innovation.

At first, I never realized that I would surpass the pandemic. Little did I know that my efforts to get through the challenges during the pandemic and looking at myself now, having reached Grade 10, meant that I had managed to help myself through that situation. Even though I still struggle, I continue to face challenges. I guess that's how I define academic resilience. *(Danny, personal communication, Lines, 116-120)*

Now that face-to-face classes have resumed, I've been able to continue my studies without feeling demotivated. I think the pandemic didn't affect my interest in learning, which is why I'm still able to continue with my study habits, especially since extracurricular activities have also returned. *(Jhonny, personal communication, Lines, 103-106)*

For me, academic resilience involves a step-by-step process in coping with challenges. It means making visible improvements every day despite the difficulties faced as a student. For example, we came from a pandemic period with no face-to-face classes, and now we're back to face-to-face learning. I've had to make many adjustments, such as managing deadlines and adapting to my classmates. *(Peter, personal communication, Lines, 67-69)*

I'm gradually learning how to deal with these changes and developing my character, even with the challenges from the pandemic. It's about accepting and embracing the challenges after the pandemic. *(Hazel, personal communication, 112-113)*

When we talk about academic resilience, it means that a person does their best to handle the difficulties in their life. For instance, if you face challenges in your studies, you need to study hard and do your best to overcome these challenges. *(Sheila, personal communication, Lines, 90-92)*

If you make mistakes, you need to improve or develop yourself so you can continue facing life's challenges and learn from your mistakes. Keep going forward. *(Tony, personal communication, Lines 66-67)*

For me, it's the ability to regain motivation and interest, especially in studies, since we came from the pandemic. Even after the pandemic, you really need to push yourself to get back on track. So, it's about regaining your focus in academic life, and not just in academics but in life in general. *(Lorry, personal communication, Lines, 99-102)*

As participants navigate this "new normal," it is critical to understand how they can adapt and prosper in an ever-changing educational environment. The new normal also requires adapting to changing educational paradigms. The traditional classroom model is making way for more adaptable and personalized teaching methods. Students must prepare for a future in which education is increasingly personalized to individuals' needs and interests. According to Purwanto et al. (2020), the new learning modality during the pandemic is deemed new, implying that not all pupils are habituated to online learning activities. In this situation, the students encounter many problems and difficulties, particularly in adjusting to the new learning approach, which is less successful than face-to-face learning. Most participants found out to be more comfortable now that face-to-face classes are back. The participants can adapt to these changes, which entails keeping up with the evolving educational trends and being open to new learning approaches. They have embraced the possibilities for lifelong learning which are increasingly important for their future endeavor. One of the most convincing reasons participants prefer in-person sessions is the enhanced involvement and efficacy of learning. They have experienced that in-person classes provide a more dynamic and immersive educational experience than virtual platforms. The study by Chakraborty & Maity (2020) found that student learning modalities have shifted significantly during the pandemic. The efficiency of a hybrid learning approach and the academic achievement of middle school students may be influenced by their learning attitudes.

Eight of the participants were able to compare their learning experiences after the pandemic they have opened up new avenues for exploration and interaction that helped them to adapt to the new normal. They have experienced stressful and challenging situations yet managed to surpass the threats of returning to face-to-face learning. Moreover, not all pandemic experiences were seen as bad, and perceptions may have varied across school levels given that adolescents are at different phases of educational and personal development in middle versus high school, one such positive ability is hope, a mental ability, a motivational concept that may function as a protective component in supporting feelings of connection to school (Bryce & Fraser,2022).

The following areas that the participants identified as the most challenging in their academic journey include dealing with deadlines, time management, threats to mental health, coping with grades and even dealing with different personalities. The participants revealed in their narratives that attending in-person classes helps them develop better study habits and time management abilities. The presence of active involvement leads to a more productive and disciplined approach to learning. Students' preference for face-to-face lessons following the pandemic demonstrates a need for traditional education's interactive, social, and structured components. Despite advances in online learning technology, many students believe that in-person instruction provides a more productive and rewarding educational experience. Bryce & Fraser (2022), conducted a study in order to understand and comprehend how students should adjust to the new way of learning. It is vital to discover not only how students struggled during the pandemic, but also what helped them thrive, especially if those good areas of their lives may be cultivated and used for support. Face-to-face classes are favored by the participants and they are looking for a thorough and friendly learning environment because they found out that it has benefits like increased engagement, social connection, routine, and mental well-being. During the pandemic, the learners demonstrated significant signs of mental health impairments, as well as key behavioral alterations in dealing with work assignments, attendance, punctuality, and learning motivation. The social relationships within the peer group are the most affected by distance learning and the frequency and quality of contact between teachers and students were also considerably a major adjustment (Senft et al.,2022).

The transition to face-to-face presented the participants with immediate challenges including the need to adjust to the new normal, manage their time effectively, and remain motivated in an unfamiliar learning

environment. Initially, the participants had to deal with deadlines, the rigorous accomplishing of performance tasks, and even the distractions at home but despite these challenges, the participants have shown an extraordinary ability to adapt and even flourish in the face of adversity. The participants made their personal definitions of how they combat adversity through resiliency. They have identified specific factors that enable them to recover from the pandemic. Trilliannes & Baloyo (2022) argue that, despite the pandemic's migration and economic repercussions, education must continue. One technique for dealing with the current situation is to instill the virtue of resilience in students so that they do not lose up on their goals while becoming secure.

Despite the challenges, the experience of navigating to the new normal has inspired the participants to adopt a growth attitude. They have come to see problems as opportunities for personal and academic growth. Resilient students may endure during hard times despite several difficulties, students in educational environments maintain a strong desire to succeed (Rao & Krishnamurthy, 2018). This thinking adjustment has helped the participants build resilience and maintain a good attitude towards their educational experience. According to Masten & Motti-Stefanidi (2020), developing resilience in teenagers is critical for mitigating the negative psychological and academic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. This moment of adversity has been transformative, providing the participants with skills and experiences that will benefit them far beyond their academic careers. As they progress, the lessons learned from overcoming these obstacles will continue to influence and inspire future triumphs to the participants. Academic resilience may be a key component for students who come back and recover in the face of academic hardship, as opposed to those who give up and fall into a downward loop of inadequate performance (Amine, 2022). Face-to-face interactions were tested. However, participants have found innovative ways to maintain social connections and support networks, which are essential to their academic and emotional well-being. Thus, in the study of Hendriani (2017), academic resilience depicts how students or students overcome various negative experiences or challenges that are overwhelming, pressing, and inhibiting during the learning process so that they can adapt and carry out any academic demands well. Face-to-face classes have also provided the participants with both academic and psychological support. They have narrated that the opportunity to connect with peers and teachers in person can reduce feelings of loneliness and improve one's mental health.

The findings have implications on how participation can engage in spontaneous discussions, collaborate on group projects, and participate in activities that build interpersonal skills. Schools must organize programs and activities to break the barriers brought about by the pandemic. These social interactions contribute to a more holistic educational experience, which includes not only academic learning but also personal growth and development. The ability to form friendships and networks in a physical setting is something that many students find lacking in the virtual learning environment.

Theme 3: Redefining Interconnected Roles

As students reintegrate into a post-pandemic world, these interconnected roles are being redefined to enhance their overall educational experience. By embracing these elements, educators and communities can foster a supportive and enriching environment where students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. The first sub-theme, *"Reintegrating Extra Curricular Activities,"* extracurricular activities are reemerging as crucial components of the participants' holistic development. During the pandemic, many traditional activities were paused or adapted to virtual formats. Now, as schools transition back to face-to-face, these activities are returning with renewed importance. The activities provided opportunities for participants to explore their interests beyond academics, develop leadership skills, and build social connections. Whether it's sports or volunteer work, extracurriculars foster personal growth and well-roundedness, contributing to a balanced educational experience for the participants.

Participants have recognized that participation in extracurricular activities such as athletics, club membership, and youth advocacy has helped them understand the importance of these activities in building key life skills. Activities that encourage teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving have demonstrated how different experiences contribute to their personal and academic progress.

Reintegrating Extra Curricular

The shift, like extracurricular in the new normal, has the potential to influence student engagement in a variety of ways. The transition period serves as a gateway for institutions to ensure that organized and planned activities can adapt to the new normal to create certainty and engagement among students.

After dismissal, if possible, when I have free time, I work on my assignments in advance to avoid them piling up. For example, during our preparation for inter-private training, it was very exhausting, and there were times when I lacked the time for my activities, which sometimes caused me to submit late. My strategy is to tackle the most difficult tasks first so that I don't end up delaying them. I handle tasks from most difficult to least difficult. Additionally, I avoid overworking myself and always prioritize my health. *(Peter, personal communication, Lines, 116-120;121-122)*

I volunteer for a school organization and am also a scout leader. I keep notes and track my tasks on my cellphone, adding remarks for things that need to be done so I can keep track of my activities. I prioritize them from most urgent to least urgent. I organize them this way to see what needs the most time, which helps me manage my schedule better. This way, I can also allocate time for relaxation. *(Sheila, personal communication, Lines, 143-146)*

At first, it was also a struggle because I was used to not having extracurricular activities during the pandemic. I'm happy that I joined because I learned how to prioritize things. Now, if there's something important to do, I keep track of my activities and schedule, deciding what needs to be done first and allocating time accordingly. *(Danny, personal communication, Lines, 173-174)*

But I always make sure to have time for myself as well. Sometimes, if I don't need to be at a particular activity, I schedule some alone time, like taking a walk at the mall, to ensure I have time for myself. *(Tony, personal communication, 176-181)*

I keep a planner where I write down my schedule, almost like a diary of activities. Right now, I'm involved in several organizations and I'm also a Varsitarian. One of my strategies is to limit my cellphone use. Since I've gotten used to not using my phone, I have more time to spend on other activities, such as doing assignments, studying, conducting research, and training. *(Jhonny, personal communication,Lines, 164-171)*

When arranging my schedule, I track my training and the time I need to allocate for studying. This way, I can see when I have time to rest, relax, study, and sleep. If you really want to, you can organize your time effectively. However, it does require some sacrifices. No matter how many extracurricular activities you join, academics should always be a priority. *(Wally, personal communication, Lines,183-185)*

I had a feeling that the pandemic experience will not last forever, so I figured out what to do next or what organizations I will join. I was also scouting different clubs. I made sure that I will make myself available if I joined school organizations, since it will help me strengthen my social skills. *(Rene, personal communication, Line 125-128)*

During pandemic I struggled engaging on school's extra-curricular activities. My parents reminded me to open my doors for new activities even. I am more excited to join again and it's never late to make up for the loss time. *(Daisy, personal communication, Lines 121-123)*

Bridging Digital Integration

The role of technology in learning has become more integrated and essential than ever before. The pandemic accelerated the assimilation of digital tools and platforms for remote learning, highlighting their potential to enhance education. With the participants' return to in-person classes, technology continues to play a pivotal role in supporting personalized learning experiences, facilitating collaboration, and providing access to

resources beyond the classroom. From interactive educational apps to virtual labs and online study groups, technology empowers participants to engage with content in dynamic and innovative ways.

It feels like an aid when you don't understand a discussion and you go online to seek more explanations. It plays a huge role for me, acting as an alternative teacher to make things easier. Although it's better if we use our own knowledge, I still prefer using my human brain. I like to push my limits. I still face challenges and prefer not to rely too much on apps. *(Peter, personal communication, Lines, 140-145)*

They can provide aid, but definitely, not all of your answers should come from these tools. I check Google and sometimes YouTube for "how-to" videos, explanations, and experiments. *(Lorry, personal communication, Lines,209-212)*

They are very helpful for communication and for doing research, especially for things you keep thinking about. However, I don't rely too much on apps for my assignments. The reason I don't depend too much on apps is that some people might misuse AI by relying too heavily on it. *(Jhonny, personal communication, Lines, 206;208-210;212)*

I've really embraced the presence of technological tools since they were a great help to me during the pandemic. Now, they still act as educational aids for me. Whenever I don't understand a lesson, I turn to these applications. I must admit, they are a great help, but it's still best to use your own brain. I'm more challenged when I work things out on my own. *(Danny, personal communication, Lines, 215-219)*

When I'm tired of doing something, it's tempting to use these tools because of their accessibility, so why not use them? They are helpful, but it really depends on the student and how much they rely on them. For me, nothing beats the human brain. (*Hazel, personal communication, 224-225*)

Although some materials provided by teachers can be found online, I also use some apps, like AI, to help with my assignments. However, I don't rely on them all the time because I am aware of my own capabilities. *(Sheila, personal communication, Lines, 176-178)*

I still prefer to challenge myself. I must admit they are helpful, but it really depends on the student. I also check YouTube if I don't understand an explanation or if I want more detailed information. *(Tony, personal communication, Lines, 182-183)*

It plays a big role in my studies. Sometimes there are lessons that I don't understand, so it becomes automatic for me to seek assistance online, like Googling or watching YouTube videos. I'm okay with using these apps because they can be helpful, but I don't rely on them too much. Although they make things easier by providing answers, it's important not to depend on them entirely. *(Daisy, personal communication,Lines, 180-182;185-187)*

Enhancing Supportive Connections specifically the support system surrounding participants has evolved to encompass a broader network of parents, educators, and peers. The pandemic underscored the importance of emotional and academic support in navigating challenges and fostering resilience. Face-to-face interactions fostered strong relationships with teachers and peers and also played a crucial role in providing guidance, encouragement, and personalized academic assistance.

My parents motivate me to use my time wisely. They encourage me and help me find ways to stay motivated, reminding me to take breaks and balance my time between activities and academics. I'm grateful that they're always there to remind me, especially if I start to lose focus. *(Jhonny, personal communication, Lines, 190-194)*

My mother and friends are a great support. Sometimes, I have things I can't open up to her about, but she encourages me to share because she's always willing to understand. I'm really grateful for that gesture. She constantly reminds us not to fall behind in our lessons. As for my friends, we help each other, even with

small things, and they are supportive in making sure I complete my tasks. That's why having face-to-face classes back has been a huge help for me; it gave me the confidence to make new friends. Even though school requirements are stressful, they help ease the burden. *(Daisy, personal communication, Lines, 161-166;170-171;173-174)*

With the teachers, we've developed a bond. It's actually better now that we're back to face-to-face classes because we can connect more with the vibes. Although we had to adjust at first, especially compared to Grade 7 and Grade 8 when we weren't very familiar with the teachers, and Grade 9 was hybrid. *(Peter, personal communication, Lines, 89-95)*

Now, I really appreciate having interactions with the teachers; I can ask them about the lessons anytime. I also value seeing my classmates every day. We now have a strong bond, unlike during the pandemic when I only knew my friends and classmates from elementary school. *(Wally, personal communication, Lines 171-173)*

My parents, especially my mom, always encourage me. Even when I'm tired, she consistently cheers me up and tells me to keep going. My close friends at school have also been a huge help during the transition, making it easier for me to adjust. *(Danny, personal communication, Lines, 198-205)*

I remember when we returned to face-to-face classes, they specifically looked for me during the flag ceremony. Having trusted friends gave me a strong sense of security, which made the transition to face-to-face learning much easier.*(Rene, personal communication, Lines 156-158)*

My classmates and close friends have also played a significant role in helping me during the transition. They were very welcoming, especially since it was the time when we fully returned to face-to-face classes and could see each other every day. This support has been a big help in coping with my struggles in my studies. *(Sheila, personal communication, Lines, 157-164)*

My family, especially my dad, is also important. Even when I feel disappointed or make mistakes, they don't pressure me. They appreciate my efforts and always congratulate me whenever I achieve something in school. *(Linda, personal communication, Lines, 134-136)*

Extracurricular activities, technology, and support networks have all played essential roles in changing participants' perceptions of their academic journeys in the post-pandemic era. Extracurricular activities have emphasized the benefits of a comprehensive education and the significance of emotional and social well-being. Technology has transformed perceptions of learning, demonstrating its potential as a significant educational tool while increasing flexibility and accessibility. Support systems have emphasized the necessity of comprehensive help in developing academic resilience. These factors have helped students embrace a more integrated and appreciative view of their education, acknowledging that academic achievement requires a balance of learning, personal growth, and support.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly changed education, accelerating the transition to distance learning and profoundly affecting students' experiences. As all school constituencies work together to restore normalcy, encourage student growth, and maximize academic accomplishment, extracurricular activities may become more critical than ever (Lang,2021). The participants' experiences reveal that incorporating these aspects has altered participants' perceptions of their education, focusing on their growing sense of learning and personal development in the post-pandemic period. This is supported by the study of Stoian (2022), which states that the COVID-19 pandemic has left a mark on education as it had been known before. Beyond this, attention must be paid to the transition back to face-to-face learning and its implications.

Eleven participants have chosen to engage in extracurricular activities. It helped them nourish their social, emotional, and personal development. It provided them an opportunity to discover more about resiliency. These areas of their development created a well-rounded educational experience that helped the participants

navigate the hurdles of learning in the new normal. Participation in extracurricular activities is associated with increased well-being (Finnerty et al.,2021), and also LaForge-MacKenzie et al., (2022) found that extracurricular activities and school sports provide students with experiential learning opportunities, allowing them to learn new skills, develop hobbies, and form friendships. The four participants narrated the importance of extracurricular activities in their academic journey. They also recognize that these characteristics will be critical in developing their resiliency and adaptability as students. Two participants opted to skip extracurricular activities to catch up academically, believing they had missed out on crucial learning opportunities due to the pandemic. This is understandable. Schools are trying to recover from the detrimental effects the COVID-19 pandemic has on student development, academic success, and school culture (Lang, 2021). The pandemic has accelerated changes in how extracurricular activities are structured and offered.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further institutionalized the use of digital technologies in education. Digital technology has caused a paradigm shift in the entire educational system (Abid et al.,2022). The participants have acknowledged the role of technology in learning and collaboration. Digital platforms were rapidly adopted during the pandemic, revolutionizing education and opening up new interaction possibilities. The participants narrated how they used electronic resources to improve their grasp of subjects, connect with friends, and access educational opportunities outside the classroom. In today's digital age, online learning, blended learning, social media, and open learning are all significant developments for effective teaching (Bates,2018). Quality education is critical to the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all. Digital technologies have emerged as an essential tool for achieving this goal.

Technology has brought new degrees of flexibility and accessibility to learning. The participants have seen firsthand how online resources and virtual classes can fit a variety of their learning styles and schedules. This flexibility has altered their perception of education, making the participants more open to new and innovative learning approaches. They now perceive technology as a way to personalize their learning experiences to their specific needs and preferences, which improves their overall academic engagement. Korkmaz & Toraman (2020) emphasized that we have reached the result of digitalization and individualized learning. In other words, students have been forced to compel themselves to accept responsibility for their learning despite getting together with educators attempting to reach them through online channels.

The participants narrated how they took advantage of using digital apps to improve their skills. The study of Saha (2023) reveals that many students also took advantage of the option to participate in free online courses from various platforms, which helped them improve their skill sets. The findings have implications for the emphasis on using adaptive learning technologies to adjust educational experiences to each student's unique requirements and success. Moreover, it ensures that students can access diverse online resources and educational platforms to enable independent learning and research. The study by Eri et al., (2021) recognized that students and even teachers have demonstrated perseverance in embracing digital learning platforms, and the study provides valuable insights and investigates the consequences of this transition and how institutions might improve online learning practices in the future.

The participants recognized the role of the support networks and how they played an essential part in assisting with their needs and problems during and after the pandemic. Their perspectives have changed as each support network has a role in the support of their academic journeys. They identified parents, friends, and classmates who have underlined the importance of comprehensive support networks in their academic journeys. Participants have learned that academic achievement is based not only on individual effort but also on available access to the support system. They now understand the need to seek assistance and become more proactive in their academic performance and resilience. The majority of the participants identified that one of the most profound ways families contribute to students' academic journeys is by providing emotional support and stability. The pandemic has introduced a host of stressors, including uncertainty about the future, disruptions to daily routines, and increased isolation. They recognize that the family members have played a

crucial role in offering comfort, encouragement, and a sense of normalcy for them and have helped them deal with post-pandemic setbacks. Families may promote a positive outlook by celebrating little victories and supporting perseverance in the face of adversity.

The participants emphasize that positive praise and support from family members can enhance confidence and drive, allowing them to tackle their academic duties with a revitalized sense of purpose. The family becomes the primary source of motivation for participants to study seriously in the educational process undertaken. This is because the family is one of the social components that has direct contact with students throughout the pandemic (Nirwana et al.,2021). When an individual thought they were receiving appropriate assistance, the adverse effects of stress were reduced. Social support reduces school maladjustment indicators, particularly social support from parents and classmates, which become the most significant interpersonal indicators (Siriwiyanti & Siti, 2021).

In the post-pandemic era, teachers' roles have altered to address the pandemic's long-term effects and the need for a fresh emphasis on student well-being and academic achievement. According to certain studies, students saw learning platforms during the pandemic as brutal. However, students believe that teachers' assistance through empathy, genuineness, and emotional and educational support on the platform will help them succeed (Siriwiyanti & Siti, 2021). Teacher plays a vital role in the educational experience of the participants. Engaging with students, both academically and personally, enhances the educational experience. This presence extends beyond the confines of a classroom to embrace many areas of the educational environment (Darling-Hammond et al.,2020). The participants recognized that teachers became important sources of emotional support, offering stability and reassurance during difficult times. Most of the participants noticed how their teachers could listen to students' problems, provide encouragement, and establish a friendly environment.

The classroom comprises a mix of human ties that form a unique community (Tsang, 2021). Research has shown that students who report receiving emotional support from teachers perform better academically. According to empirical research, students adapt better to school settings (Frenzel et al.,2021). The study of Lobo (2023) found that emotionally resilient academic students benefit from their professors' emotional support, which increases engagement. Therefore, emotionally supportive teachers have more engaged students.

Peer-to-peer contact is a crucial 'component' of this community, enabling connection, dialogue, and communication while supporting constructive learning. Close friends' and classmates' support remains crucial (Siriwiyanti & Siti, 2021). Amrullah & Nanzah (2022) emphasized that, especially now, given the limitations imposed by an online setting, Nonetheless, the pandemic has compelled students and instructors alike to adjust to this new environment. In other circumstances, projects, group work, and assignments were relocated to WhatsApp groups where students could cooperate on the specified tasks to improve interaction. Creating a secure and supportive classroom climate, responding to students' particular needs, and encouraging healthy peer interactions are all components of what we mean when instructors provide emotional support (Pakarinen et al.,2020). Friend support is the most effective way to moderate academic stress and improve students' perceived ability to overcome stress in real-life situations. It is caused by students maintaining a regular schedule to discuss their academic burdens, such as workload, approaching deadlines, and overall stress levels, with their classmates (Siriwiyanti & Siti, 2021).

The involvement of parents in students' learning processes will guide them to acceptable performance during a difficult period of pandemic adjustment (Tus, 2021). The family setting appears to be associated with the likelihood of academic resilience, and parents' academic expectations significantly predict educational outcomes (Garcia-Crespo et al.,2021). Family support is demonstrated through love, attention, admiration, and aid to children to improve their well-being and resilience to academic problems (Ika, 2019). Fulfilling individuals' social support needs will make them believe they have good social support to improve their abilities in dealing with stressful situations, overcoming these experiences well, and passing obstacles more favorably (Akob et al., 2020). As a result, perceived social support, particularly from peers, family, and

teachers, can contribute to the individual's ability to face, survive, and adapt to adverse situations, including the load in the Academic field (Nirwana et al.,2021).

Theme 4: Acknowledging Disparities in Education

The disparities in education during the pandemic era have manifested in several dimensions, including access to technology, quality of instruction, socio-emotional support, and participation of student's in school activities. High School students, in particular, have faced notable disparities in their educational experiences due to pandemic. The disparities in education during the pandemic are not just immediate concerns but have long term implications. Addressing these challenges is critical ensuring that all students have equitable opportunities to succeed, both during the pandemic and beyond.

Online learning was different in the sense that it offered limited learning because of limited internet connection. Compared to face-to-face learning now, it was really a struggle despite the ample time to work on the given activities. The teachers also gave us ample time before the deadline. (*Peter, personal communication, Lines,45-47*)

During the pandemic, learning was a struggle because our interactions were very limited. We were in Grade 7 at that time; we were not even matured enough and we thought we were just playing. There was no pressure at all because our teachers were very considerate of the pandemic situation. (*Danny, personal communication, Lines, 68-71*)

It's effect was that I became isolated—that feeling of having no one to talk to and of being stuck at home without a choice but to stay there. *(Rene, personal communication, Lines, 222-223)*

There was no interaction while learning during the pandemic. I felt isolated because communication was online. There were even times when we did not interact at all. Its effect was that I became isolated—that feeling of having no one to talk to and of being stuck at home without a choice but to stay there. (*Lorry, personal communication, Lines, 57-59;66-69*)

While in modular learning deliver, it took a lot of time for teachers to address students' concerns on our lessons. Communication was not immediate. *(Sheila, personal communication, Lines, 51-53)*

I was learning through modules during the pandemic and there were a number of limitations. I could not even ask my classmates because we were not even close. We were not able to establish our connection. *(Jhonny, personal communication, Lines, 56-59*)

The pandemic affected my social skills. I was not shy before. After going through the pandemic, I would always feel shy. *(Tony, personal communication, Lines, 68-69)*

Struggle was I think the hardest word I experienced during the pandemic, up to now, I still consider myself in the coping stage, but somehow it opened also a lot of learnings, from learning how to operate new application operations to adjusting my social skills. Struggled with connections, struggled with relationships, struggled with deadlines. (*Linda, personal communication, Lines, 166-169*)

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered almost every part of their lives, including schooling. The transition to remote learning and the subsequent adoption of new educational practices has had a revolutionary impact on high school pupils worldwide. In the transition into the post-pandemic era, it is critical to reflect on these changes and understand how they shaped lthe participants' learnig experiences. In the transition into the post-pandemic era, it is critical to reflect on these changes and understand how they have shaped the participants' learning experiences. Most participants emphasized their limitations, including internet connectivity, beating the deadlines for performance tasks and assignments, interactions, and even isolation. According to the participants, as they look back on their academic journey and the educational disparities during the pandemic, the struggle was real, and they felt lost as to where to begin in their

transition to remote learning. Four participants admittedly that it has affected their interactions with other people, their social skills being stuck in the house, and the feeling of being left alone, leaving them with no choice but to stay home with their family. The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically impacted people's lives, including education, economics, and equality across generations. In particular, pupils' learning formats have shifted dramatically (Chakraborty & Maity, 2020).

The transition to remote learning revealed disparities previously concealed in traditional classroom settings. This transformation had a substantial impact on students' overall educational experience, as well as their academic success. This is supported by the study of Ramezanpour et al., (2019), which found that education challenges during the pandemic affected both schools and pupils. A lack of awareness of how to adapt to a quick shift can reduce the quality of learning. Some pupils have reported feeling pressured since they struggle to overcome internet obstacles. Additionally, their academic resiliency was unstable.

According to Almaiah et al., (2020), schools adopted relevant technologies, prepared learning and staff resources, set systems and infrastructure, established new teaching protocols, and adjusted curricula. However, the transition was smooth for some schools but rough for others, particularly those from developing countries with limited infrastructure. Disrupting social contacts, necessary for personal development and academic collaboration, amplified many students' feelings of isolation and decreased motivation. COVID-19, as a new environmental component, impacted middle school student's academic performance because they were compelled to shift their learning and study environments from face-to-face to online. Furthermore, limiting everyday activities, such as less communication with classmates, can impact their academic achievement (Lee et al.,2021). At the same time, Elhadary et al. (2020) emphasized that their findings showed that various factors influenced students' academic achievement during the COVID-19 pandemic. They discovered that worry (60.3%), social issues (41.8%), and internet access (43.2%) all hurt student and teacher motivation.

The pandemic also influenced students' emotional health, which intensified academic challenges. Prolonged isolation, uncertainty about the future, and the stress of adjusting to new learning techniques hurt students' emotional well-being. Anxiety and tension reduced their ability to concentrate, participate in online classes, and finish tasks, negatively impacting their academic achievement. Furthermore, limiting everyday activities, such as less communication with classmates, can impact their academic achievement (Lee et al.,2021). Acknowledging these differences is critical for tackling the imbalances amplified by the pandemic. Moreover, educational policies and practices must prioritize closing the digital divide, improving student assistance, and addressing mental health concerns. Despite the obstacles experienced by teenagers globally since the COVID-19 pandemic began, researchers have observed resilience, or the ability to overcome or bounce back from challenges, among adolescents (Dvorsky et al.,2020).

Thus, schools and government agencies like the Department of Education must invest in resources to guarantee that all learners will have equal access to technology and educational support, both online and in person. Understanding and resolving these gaps will allow the community to move towards a more equitable educational system that supports all students, regardless of circumstance, and helps them excel academically during times of crisis like the pandemic.

Theme 5: Managing a Demanding Academic Landscape

Navigating the demanding academic landscape post-pandemic presents a significant challenge for one participant who find herself overwhelmed and fatigued by the workload and expectations. As face-to-face resume in-person learning and extracurricular activities regain momentum, managing these demands effectively becomes crucial for maintaining balance and well-being.

It's exhausting. The activities seem to come up suddenly, and deadlines sometimes overlap. For me, I was able to manage myself during the pandemic because the deadlines set by teachers were longer, giving more

time to complete tasks due to the pandemic situation. Now, deadlines are very tight, and the time given is limited. Additionally, our classes are up to five (5) pm, so sometimes it feels overwhelming with the numerous responsibilities both at school and at home. That's why I'd describe my academic journey as tiring. During the pandemic, I didn't need to go to school since classes were online. *(Daisy, personal communications, Lines, 53-57;61-64)*

This divergent theme describes one participant's post-pandemic reality. The transition to a post-pandemic academic environment has been difficult, marked by an increase in academic demands and a shift in learning approaches. The post-pandemic academic landscape has presented a variety of new challenges for one participant, including higher deadlines, accumulating activities, and a constrained schedule to complete academic responsibilities which also include personal obligations such as family obligations and household responsibilities. This difference in experience, in which one participant perceives the current academic scene as markedly different from the others, throws insight into the broader ramifications of these changes and emphasizes the significance of good management measures. This is supported by the study of Zhao (2023), where several problems faced by these students during the transition were found, including policy issues, infrastructural limits, academic impediments, and financial obligations. Furthermore, academic, social, and resource issues all have an impact on the quality of the transition. According to Lobos et al.,(2023), currently, in this "post-pandemic" stage, when students and teachers are returning to campuses, attention is being given to how to restructure teaching and learning processes to transition from a traditional expository model to a hybrid model that takes the best of face-to-face and virtual instruction and responds to the new demands placed on those involved.

The participant regards this as the new academic reality. Her adjustment to a post-pandemic academic environment has been tumultuous, marked by increased academic demands and shifts in learning modes. The difficulties include juggling an influx of tasks, managing hybrid or online learning platforms, and dealing with a tight academic schedule. This has resulted in a high-pressure environment in which time management and organizational skills are critical. The educational environment shifted when the pandemic compelled everyone to reset. The transformation, often known as the transition from one modality to another, allows different stressors and tensions to surface among teachers and students Moreover, stress is a natural consequence of change. During this transition, many stresses emerged. These stressors may be found in all major changes in one's life. Stressors are common in education, but the change in modality intensified them (Villar et al., 2022). The struggles are evident.

Many people experience increased stress and anxiety as a result of the restricted time available. The constant juggling of deadlines can lower the quality of work and limit possibilities for genuine connection with the subject matter. Students may find themselves focusing on performing assignments rather than genuinely understanding and mastering the material. It is a legal responsibility to produce and manifest in a classroom that is learner-centered, relevant, and responsive K-12 basic education is inclusive and contextualized. This emphasizes the importance of acquiring an education. Despite the dangers that this pandemic poses. Therefore, it is expedient to examine options in forwarding Quality education through meaningful learning experiences regardless of the modality being used (Ando et al.,2022).

Navigating the post-pandemic academic world poses a unique combination of problems, including extended deadlines, accumulating activities, and limited durations. The contrast in experience, as indicated by the participant, who finds the contemporary academic atmosphere significantly different, emphasizes the importance of appropriate management techniques. Prioritizing activities, embracing flexibility, developing resilience, using technology, and fostering self-care can help students and educational institutions handle the demanding academic landscape and produce a more balanced and productive learning experience. Understanding and tackling these problems is critical to ensure that students succeed in an increasingly complicated educational environment. In a face-to-face setting, students liked open conversations, student involvement activities, and fast feedback, but had to work even more. The increasing difficulty for pupils

may be related to greater expectations as teachers seek to strike a balance of successful teaching practices (Hoel et al., 2023).

One of the most obvious implications is the need to review academic schedules and deadlines. The compacted nature of academic calendars has put undue strain on students, perhaps leading to burnout and impaired learning. Educational institutions should consider extending deadlines and creating more flexible academic calendars to handle the increased demand. This flexibility can assist to reduce stress and ensure that students have the time to fully engage with their studies. Students can thrive in an increasingly complex educational environment. Learning systems with face-to-face interaction, also known as offline learning systems, are learning methods that are disconnected from a computer network. All of the instruction and learning that goes on during an offline session takes place in real-time, face-to-face, between the teachers and the students (Fathoni, 2018). The rising demand for students emphasizes the significance of strong support services. Educational institutions must fund comprehensive academic and mental health support services. This involves offering academic assistance, tutoring, counseling, and stress-management options. By improving these support services, institutions can assist students in better handling their academic duties and maintaining their well-being. And lastly, educational institutions and the Department of Education must constantly examine and change courses to meet the changing requirements of students. This includes a review of course material, assessment methodologies, and instructional strategies to ensure that they are current and supportive of student achievement.

The Essence of Experience: Turning Setbacks into Comebacks Stories on High School Students' Journey of Resiliency in the Academic Landscape

Twelve participants have faced unprecedented challenges in their academic journey in the wake of the global pandemic. However, amidst these obstacles, they have exhibited remarkable resilience, turning setbacks into comebacks as they navigate a transformed educational landscape. The essence of the participants' lived experiences surfaced from the five themes from the subjective meanings created by the participants. Their academic journey is a testament to their strength, adaptability, and determination. By embracing challenges as opportunities for growth, participants are overcoming setbacks and forging pathways to academic success and personal development. As they navigate this evolving educational landscape, their stories inspire them to cultivate resilience and embrace change with optimism and perseverance.

Figure 1 shows the essence of the lived experiences of high school students. The essence of their academic resiliency is visualized as a monochrome of colors. Students reveal characteristics that make them better equipped to deal with life's trials and setbacks after the pandemic, much like a monochromatic color scheme that blends multiple tones to produce depth and richness. Students have developed a variety of adaptive approaches and resilience skills to deal with challenges, much like a monochromatic palette creates complexity through its numerous tones. These represent many emotions and experiences, but they also show academic resiliency. For instance, lighter shades signify moments of optimism and resilience, but darker hues represent struggles and setbacks. The wavy patterns show the dynamic and changeable nature of their coping strategies and learning styles. Students' motivation and coping abilities can ebb and flow in the same way that wavy lines do. These lines depict the ups and downs of their academic achievement and mental health, demonstrating how their journey is not linear but filled with highs and lows as they adjust to new difficulties. The pyramid represents the accomplishment of goals that students worked towards following the pandemic. The divergent theme, located at the pyramid's base, enables one participant to navigate life challenges with greater awareness and flexibility and to be prepared to overcome and handle challenges more successfully. As they progress, they develop academic resiliency, which helps them stay motivated and create goals. The pyramid's higher tiers show how resiliency helps participants achieve academic success and personal fulfillment. The peak represents the highest point of their efforts—a condition of equilibrium in which their developed resiliency facilitates academic performance and personal health. Together, these elements created a comprehensive picture of the evolving and resilient nature of students' post-pandemic academic experiences.
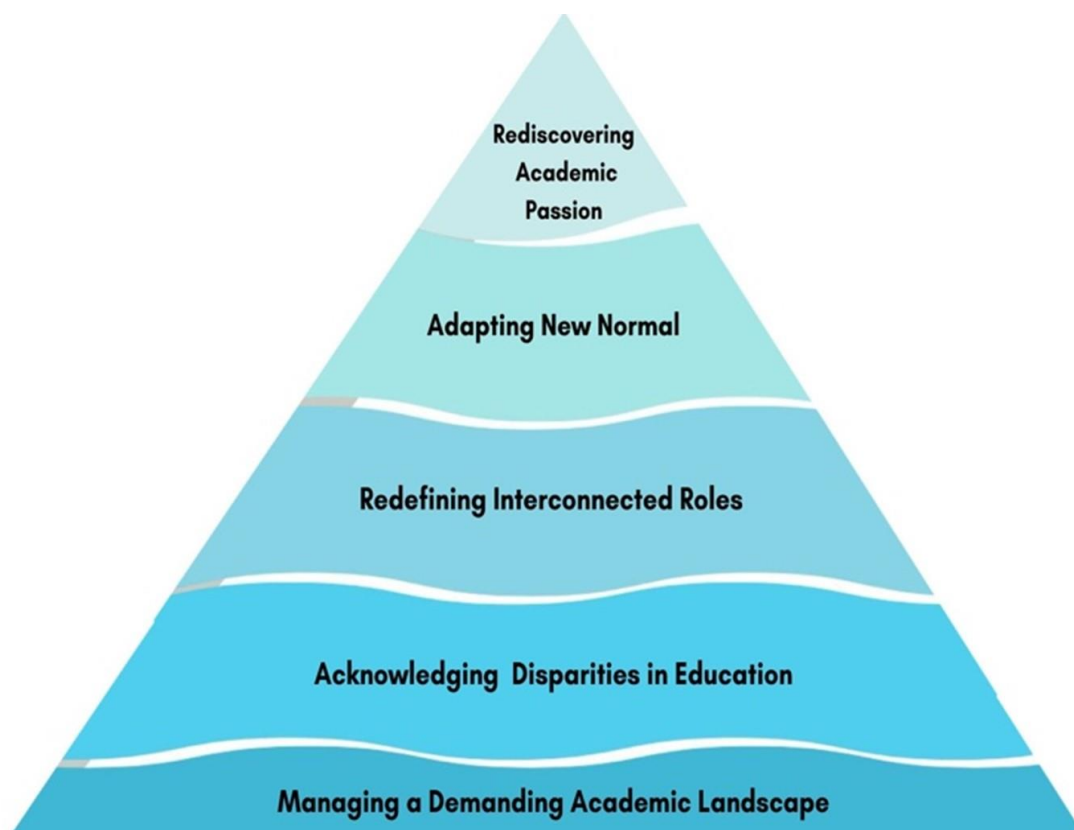
Figure 1 The essence of the lived experiences of High School Students' Journey of Academic Resiliency

CONCLUSION

The post-pandemic academic landscape has both challenged and demonstrated participants' ability to grow. They have developed a rich and diverse tapestry of learning experiences by transforming problems into developmental opportunities. The seamless integration of their ideas highlights their tenacity and adaptability, demonstrating that setbacks may be great catalysts for comebacks. As participants continue their academic journey, the skills and insights gained from surviving this pandemic era will provide a solid basis for future challenges. Their ability to integrate many tactics into a unified strategy will allow them to face new challenges with confidence and innovation. In essence, their journey demonstrates a remarkable transition in which individual coping mechanisms, like shades of a monochrome, combine to make a strong and bright academic path. The journey of turning setbacks into comebacks highlights participants' perseverance and adaptation in the post-pandemic world. Their ability to integrate many techniques and experiences into a cohesive strategy demonstrates the rediscovering of academic passion and a thorough awareness of their strengths and capabilities. As the participants continue on their academic journeys, their resilience will be a valuable asset, allowing them to overcome future problems and grab new chances.

LIMITATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The scope was limited to the Northern Negros region, and the number of participants in this study was within the allowable range of twelve (12). The participants were all grade 10 students at a private school. As a result, the findings are not conclusive, and this limitation made it difficult to investigate their experiences in the larger context of their life.

Practical Application

The transformative journey of the participants overcoming setbacks and making comebacks in the post-pandemic academic landscape provides useful insights for the Department of Education (DepEd) and other educational institutions. Understanding and utilizing these observations enables both entities to build

strategies that promote student resilience, flexibility, and success in a dynamically changing educational environment. Furthermore, the findings will serve as baseline data to improve the policies and implement programs and initiatives that promote resilience and a growth mentality. This could include workshops, seminars, and curricular elements that emphasize adaptation and tenacity.

DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should be conducted using more extensive samples of this demographic, including students from public schools. Researchers can contribute useful insights into ongoing educational development by focusing on longitudinal studies, demographic differences, learning models, technological impacts, resilience programs, stakeholder views, and policy evaluations. This study will not only expand our knowledge but will also aid in the creation of strategies that promote academic performance and well-being in an ever-changing educational setting.

Contributions of Authors

The author was solely responsible for all aspects of the work including: conceptualization, methodology, data curation, formal analysis, reviewing and editing, and overseeing the entire project and ensuring its successful completion.

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Conflict of Interests

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