

Challenges and Coping Mechanisms of Public Senior High School Learners in Distant Learning Education

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100900216>

Received: 20 September 2026; Accepted: 25 September 2026; Published: 06 October 2026

ABSTRACT

This study determined the mental, emotional, and psychosocial challenges experienced by Grade 12 Humanities and Social Sciences learners during modular distance learning and examined their coping mechanisms, group differences, and relationship. Using a correlational design, the study surveyed learners at Himamaylan National High School through a validated and reliable 45-item researcher-made questionnaire. Data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, t-test, ANOVA, and Pearson correlation. Learners were affected by difficult lessons, financial constraints, competing household responsibilities, limited gadgets, and unstable internet connectivity. Their main coping strategies were managing time, taking breaks, and seeking support. Challenges differed significantly by household size and income, but not by sex, and were significantly related to coping mechanisms. The findings emphasize the need for flexible learning arrangements, improved access to educational resources, and stronger school and family support to protect learners' mental, emotional, and psychosocial well-being.

Keywords: coping mechanisms, modular distance learning, mental challenges, emotional challenges, psychosocial challenges

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic compelled Philippine schools to shift rapidly from classroom instruction to distance learning. In settings where stable internet access and digital devices were limited, printed modular distance learning became an important means of maintaining educational continuity. The rapid transition, however, transferred a substantial share of learning management to learners and families and exposed differences in available time, resources, support, and study environments.

Distance learners may experience academic workload, financial concerns, family responsibilities, and repeated assessment demands as sources of stress (Kwaah & Essilfie, 2017). Philippine evidence similarly indicates that household responsibilities, nonacademic activities, gadget use, and time-management difficulties can interfere with modular learning (Barcenas & Bibon, 2021). Digital home schooling may also limit embodied participation and requires educators to balance technology with humane and supportive learning arrangements (Hung & Wati, 2020).

The study was guided by the stress, appraisal, and coping perspective associated with Lazarus and Folkman. In this perspective, coping involves changing cognitive and behavioral efforts directed toward demands appraised as stressful (Folkman, 2013). Applied to modular learning, coping includes deliberate responses through which learners organize time, seek assistance, regulate attention, and manage the emotional demands of independent study.

This study examined mental, emotional, and psychosocial challenges and the coping mechanisms of Grade 12 Humanities and Social Sciences learners at Himamaylan National High School during School Year 2021–2022. It determined the extent and prominent forms of challenge, described coping mechanisms, tested differences in challenge levels by sex, household size, and monthly household income, and examined the relationship between

challenges and coping mechanisms. The findings may inform school administrators, teachers, guidance personnel, curriculum planners, families, and education officials seeking to strengthen learner support during flexible or emergency learning arrangements.

METHOD

Research Design

The study used a quantitative correlational design. The design was used to describe learners' challenges and coping mechanisms, compare challenge-domain levels across selected demographic groupings, and examine the association between challenges and coping mechanisms. The variables were measured without experimental manipulation.

Participants and Setting

Participants were 144 Grade 12 Humanities and Social Sciences learners enrolled at Himamaylan National High School during School Year 2021–2022. The school population identified in the study was 228 learners. Simple random sampling was implemented through a fishbowl procedure during scheduled module distribution. The participants represented five Grade 12 HUMSS sections.

Instrument

Data were gathered using a researcher-developed questionnaire. The instrument included demographic information and 60 substantive statements: 45 challenge statements distributed equally across mental, emotional, and psychosocial domains, and 15 coping-mechanism statements. Challenge items used a five-point response scale from Never to Always, while coping items used a five-point importance scale. The instrument was reviewed by research and language experts using the Good and Scates validation rating scale and obtained a mean validation rating of 4.85. The reported Cronbach's alpha was .820, indicating high internal consistency in the original study.

Data Collection and Ethics

The questionnaire was reviewed and revised before pilot testing with 60 learners who were not included in the main sample. Permission was obtained from the school principal through the relevant academic coordinators. Questionnaires were distributed and retrieved during the module-distribution schedule. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw, and confidentiality was maintained in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

Data Analysis

Frequency and percentage summarized sex, household size, and monthly household income. Weighted means and ranks described the challenge domains and coping mechanisms. The original study used t-test and analysis of variance to examine group differences and Pearson correlation to examine the relationship between challenges and coping mechanisms. Statistical decisions used a .05 significance level.

RESULTS

Participant Characteristics

Table 1. Participant Profile

Variable	Category	n	%
Sex	Male	46	31.9

	Female	98	68.1
Household size	1–4	14	9.7
	5–8	83	57.6
	9–12	39	27.1
	12 and above	8	5.6
Monthly household income	Below ₱10,000	68	47.2
	₱10,000.01–₱20,000	52	36.1
	₱20,000.01–₱30,000	20	13.9
	Above ₱30,000	4	2.8

Note. $N = 144$.

Most participants were female (68.1%). More than half lived in households with five to eight members (57.6%), and nearly half reported monthly household income below ₱10,000 (47.2%).

Extent of Learner Challenges

Table 2. Challenge-Domain Summary

Domain	Weighted mean	Interpretation
Mental	4.04	Affected
Emotional	4.03	Affected
Psychosocial	4.08	Affected

Note. Interpretations follow the scale used in the original study.

All three challenge domains were interpreted as Affected. Psychosocial challenges obtained the highest domain mean ($M = 4.08$), followed by mental challenges ($M = 4.04$) and emotional challenges ($M = 4.03$).

Table 3. Highest-Ranked Challenges by Domain

Domain	Indicator	M	Rank
Mental	Tempted to play mobile games when using a phone	4.75	1
Mental	Stayed overnight to meet module deadlines	4.60	2
Mental	Lessons were difficult through online/modular delivery	4.52	3
Emotional	Parents struggled with the household budget	4.86	1
Emotional	Managed modules and household chores simultaneously	4.57	2
Emotional	Worried about extended instruction at home	4.55	3

Psychosocial	Parents could not buy newer gadgets for distance education	4.60	1
Psychosocial	Poor relationship with parents	4.45	2
Psychosocial	Limited or no internet connectivity	4.39	3

The highest mental concern was distraction from mobile games, followed by staying overnight to complete modules and difficulty learning through modular delivery. The leading emotional concerns involved household budget pressure, simultaneous school and household responsibilities, and prolonged instruction at home. The most prominent psychosocial concerns involved access to devices, family relationships, and internet connectivity.

Coping Mechanisms

Table 4. Highest-Ranked Coping Mechanisms

Coping mechanism	M	Interpretation	Rank
Budget time wisely	4.79	Extremely observed	1
Take breaks from news and social-media stories	4.75	Extremely observed	2
Ask a trusted friend or family member for help and support	4.70	Extremely observed	3
Exercise daily	4.68	Extremely observed	4
Address emotional aspects of stress while working on the task	4.60	Extremely observed	5

Note. Overall coping mean = 4.18, interpreted in the original study as Very observed.

Time management was the highest-ranked coping response, followed by taking breaks from news and social media and asking trusted people for assistance. Exercise and deliberate management of emotional stress also ranked highly.

Group Differences in Challenges

Table 5. Differences in Challenge-Domain Scores by Participant Profile

Grouping variable	Domain	Statistic	p
Sex	Mental	t(142) = -2.04	.044
	Emotional	t(142) = -2.33	.021
	Psychosocial	t(142) = 5.22	< .001
Household size	Mental	F(3, 140) = 14.59	< .001
	Emotional	F(3, 140) = 9.28	< .001
	Psychosocial	F(3, 140) = 5.72	.001
Monthly household income	Mental	F(3, 140) = 5.52	.001
	Emotional	F(3, 140) = 3.25	.024
	Psychosocial	F(3, 140) = 8.63	< .001

Note. Sex comparisons use independent-samples t tests with equal variances assumed, consistent with nonsignificant Levene tests in the appendix. Household-size and income comparisons use one-way ANOVA.

Mental, emotional, and psychosocial challenge scores differed significantly by sex, household size, and monthly household income. The table reports domain-level tests from the appended statistical output rather than the inconsistent aggregate summary table in the thesis.

Relationship Between Challenges and Coping Mechanisms

Table 6. Correlation Between Challenges and Coping Mechanisms

Variables	r	p	N	Decision
Extent of challenges $\times$ coping mechanisms	.998	< .001	144	Significant

Note. Pearson product-moment correlation, two-tailed.

The reported correlation indicated a very strong positive association between the extent of challenges and coping mechanisms, $r = .998$, $p < .001$. As challenge scores increased, coping-mechanism scores also tended to increase.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that modular distance education presented interconnected mental, emotional, and psychosocial demands. Domain means were closely grouped, suggesting that learners did not experience these concerns in isolation. Difficult lessons, compressed module deadlines, distraction from mobile-phone use, household responsibilities, financial constraints, limited learning devices, and unstable connectivity formed a combined learning environment that required both academic and personal adaptation.

The prominence of time pressure and household duties is consistent with Philippine work describing nonacademic activities and family responsibilities as barriers to effective time management in modular learning (Barcenas & Bibon, 2021). Financial and family concerns also parallel evidence that workload, financial problems, and family problems can contribute to stress among distance learners (Kwaah & Essilfie, 2017). The results therefore locate modular-learning difficulty not only within the learner but also within the household and resource conditions surrounding study.

Technology functioned both as a learning resource and a source of difficulty. Mobile phones enabled access and communication but also created opportunities for gaming distraction. Limited gadgets and intermittent connectivity constrained participation. These findings support the need to view digital or modular learning as an arrangement requiring instructional, technological, and social support rather than merely the distribution of materials.

Learners' most highly observed coping mechanisms were practical and relational. Budgeting time, taking breaks, and seeking help from trusted people reflect efforts to organize demands, regulate exposure to stressful information, and mobilize social support. These responses are compatible with the stress-appraisal-and-coping perspective, in which coping consists of changing cognitive and behavioral efforts directed toward demands appraised as stressful (Folkman, 2013).

Differences by household size and income indicate that learner challenges varied with available household space, responsibilities, and financial resources. The domain-level statistical output indicated differences across sex, household-size, and income groupings. Because the available output does not include post hoc comparisons for the multi-group variables, the specific groups accounting for household-size and income differences cannot be identified from the present record.

The relationship between total challenge and coping scores was positive and extremely large. Substantively, learners reporting greater challenges also reported greater use or importance of coping responses. The magnitude

should be interpreted cautiously because near-perfect correlations can reflect substantial construct overlap or scoring characteristics. The finding should not be interpreted as proof that challenges cause coping responses because the design was correlational and cross-sectional.

Practical Implications

Schools can respond through flexible deadlines, clearer module instructions, regular learner check-ins, accessible teacher feedback, and coordinated referral to guidance services. Support for devices, connectivity, and learning materials may reduce resource-related barriers. Parent and caregiver orientations can clarify realistic expectations for household duties and learning support. Time-management tools and structured peer or family support may strengthen coping while preserving learner autonomy.

Limitations

The study involved one public secondary school and one senior high school strand, limiting transferability to other settings. Findings relied on self-reported responses and a researcher-developed instrument. The correlational design does not establish causation. The study was conducted during pandemic-related modular learning, so the conditions may differ from later forms of flexible education. The unusually large correlation warrants cautious interpretation, and the absence of post hoc tests limits identification of the specific household-size and income groups that differed.

CONCLUSION

Grade 12 HUMSS learners experienced substantial mental, emotional, and psychosocial challenges during modular distance education. Their responses emphasized time management, purposeful breaks, and support seeking. Challenge-domain scores differed across sex, household-size, and income groupings, and challenge and coping scores were strongly related. The findings support flexible instructional arrangements, improved access to learning resources, responsive teacher communication, and stronger school-family support.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author acknowledges the learners and school personnel who supported the conduct of the original master's research. Specific individuals should be named only after permission is obtained.

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