



## **Analysis on the Impact of Limited In-Person Classes in Higher Education Institution Students Towards Psychosocial Support**

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### **Abstract**

This study explored the impact of transitioning from distance learning modality to limited in-person classes to students in a higher education institution in the Philippines had caused psychological impact to working students in a tertiary institution. Ten working students were chosen purposively to participate in this phenomenological study. They were breadwinners in their families and claimed they were psychologically impacted by the transitions brought about by the pandemic because of the emotional distress and anxiety. The data was gathered through interviews with a validated interview guide from field experts and was analyzed using thematic analysis. Researchers also considered ethical considerations in conducting research for participants. The results revealed that participants experienced varied impacts, particularly in adjusting their daily routines, facing technological and financial challenges, managing stress in physical, psychological, and mental aspects, and adapting to socialization and communication changes. Despite these challenges, they expressed increased adaptability and resilience, maintaining positive attitudes and aspirations to continue learning. Effective time management, adjustments to learning modalities, and clear policies were identified as key factors that could have eased their transition. The study recommends that students should fully commit to balancing both work and study. Higher education institutions (HEIs) can support them by providing psychological assistance, flexible learning options, academic guidance, wellness programs, financial aid, and partnerships with local businesses to help them sustain their education while working.

**Keywords: Limited In-Person Classes; Psychosocial Support; Learning Modality; Modality Transitions**

### **Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic exerted a profound impact on higher education institutions worldwide, disrupting traditional learning modalities and necessitating a rapid shift toward online and hybrid learning models (Mali and Lim, 2021). In the Philippines, this disruption led to the suspension of face-to-face classes for nearly three years, with academic institutions adopting remote learning approaches to ensure continuity (Ghazi-Saidi et al., 2020). As a response to the evolving situation, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) issued a memorandum in 2022, which allowed higher education institutions (HEIs), including state universities and colleges (SUCs), to conduct limited in-person classes while still offering flexible learning options, including online and offline modalities.

However, these shifts have introduced new challenges, particularly in the psychosocial well-being of students, many of whom had adapted to remote learning structures with minimal interpersonal interactions. The transition back to in-person classes has been met with mixed reactions. While some students welcomed the return to physical classrooms, others struggled with reintegration, especially those accustomed to the autonomy of distance learning. The pandemic-induced digital divide, alongside socio-

economic constraints and a lack of psychosocial support, has further exacerbated students' difficulties in social interactions (Simbre, 2021). Research has highlighted the psychological toll of the pandemic, with increased cases of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress among students who faced isolation, academic pressure, and economic hardships (Haleem and Javaid, 2020; Panchal et al., 2021).

Although the world has somehow learned to live and adapt with COVID-19 after following community health protocols that changed frequently and receiving immunization through varied COVID-19 vaccines Auerbach (2022); Haro (2020), the challenges associated with the transition to in-person learning persist. In 2022, most SUCs reopened their campuses for limited in-person classes, particularly for laboratory-based courses. However, many programs continued to rely on distance learning modalities, either synchronously or asynchronously, as students and institutions adjusted to the evolving educational landscape.

Despite institutional efforts to facilitate reintegration, some students opposed the return to physical classes due to personal, logistical, or psychological concerns. Many encountered significant difficulties in managing their academic workload under the new blended learning setup. Joaquin et al., (2022) emphasized the need to rethink and innovate educational strategies to ensure sustainable improvements in the quality of learning. In response, the Department of Education (DepEd) and CHED, with support from the Department of Health (DOH), fully implemented in-person classes to bridge the learning gaps caused by prolonged school closures (De Vera, 2022; Cruz, 2022).

Although students had grown accustomed to asynchronous and synchronous learning, research shows that distance learning has positive impact but cannot fully replace the benefits of in-person education Aquino et al., (2024); Freedberg (2020) reinforcing the necessity of face-to-face interaction in fostering holistic learning experiences. Despite these growing concerns, limited studies have specifically examined how HEI students, particularly working students, navigate the transition from fully remote learning to hybrid or in-person classes. Existing research has focused on the general academic challenges posed by online learning but has not sufficiently explored the psychosocial implications of reintegration into physical learning spaces, particularly for students balancing employment and education. Furthermore, while initiatives such as mental health webinars and the proposed establishment of mental health offices in SUCs Panti (2022) acknowledge the need for institutional support, there remains a gap in understanding the specific psychosocial adjustments required for students managing both work and academic responsibilities. This study aims to explore the impact of the transition from online learning to limited in-person classes on students' daily lives, feelings in dealing transition, and coping mechanisms. Specifically, it seeks to examine how the shift in learning modality affected students' routines, responsibilities, and overall well-being.

It also aims to understand students' perceptions of and reactions to this sudden change, including the challenges they faced and the strategies they employed to navigate the new learning environment. Furthermore, the study investigates the adjustments students made and the preparations they undertook psychologically, physically, and mentally to adapt to limited in-person classes. As HEIs move toward the full reinstatement of in-person learning, it is imperative to consider students' holistic well-being, both academically and socially. By understanding their challenges and needs, institutions can develop targeted interventions to support students' mental health, foster social reintegration, and enhance the overall learning experience. Through this study, the researchers aim to provide insights that will inform institutional policies and programs, ensuring that students are adequately supported in navigating the evolving educational landscape.

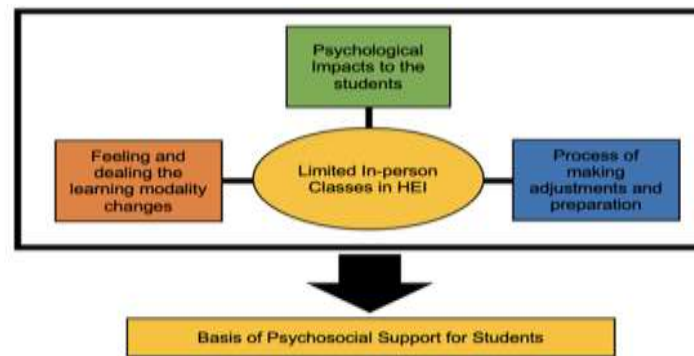


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The shift to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic significantly transformed higher education, leading to both positive and negative outcomes for students in terms of mental health, social connections, and academic performance. As higher education institutions transitioned back to limited in-person classes, students faced new challenges in readjusting to traditional learning environments. Some struggled with social reintegration, while others had difficulty balancing academic and professional responsibilities, particularly those who had adapted to the autonomy of online learning (De Vera, 2022).

Studies recommends that while in-person learning offers improved engagement and comprehension, the transition back required students to make psychological, physical, and mental adjustments to cope with new academic demands and social expectations (Auerbach, 2022). This conceptual framework illustrates the relationship between key variables in analyzing the effects of limited in-person classes after an extended period of distance learning. It focuses on three major aspects the impact of learning modality transition on students' daily lives, their emotional responses and coping mechanisms, and the adjustments they make to prepare for in-person learning.

By examining these dimensions, the study aims to determine the psychosocial challenges students face and the support systems they require to reintegrate successfully into face-to-face learning environments. The findings of this study will serve as a basis for designing psychosocial support programs that higher education institutions can implement to ease students' transition and ensure their well-being. Understanding their challenges and adaptive strategies will enable institutions to develop targeted interventions that promote mental health, foster social reintegration, and enhance overall academic success.

## Method

The researchers employed a phenomenological research design to explore the significance of modality transitions for students balancing work and studies. This approach examines individuals' lived experiences while setting aside researchers' preconceptions (Vagle, 2018). Similarly, purposive sampling was utilized to identify the most relevant cases, a common method in qualitative studies for optimizing resources (Etikan et al., 2016). The participants were HEI students psychologically affected by limited in-person classes, experiencing emotional distress and anxiety. These students, also family breadwinners, had class schedules impacted by their work hours and were on the dean's list. A total of 10 students (6 females, 4 males, aged 19-23) from different university year levels participated in semi-structured interviews. Their identities were anonymized using coded names. Moreover, an interview guide, validated by field experts, ensured comprehensive data collection (Morris, 2015). In-person interviews gathered significant insights, with thematic analysis used to code and categorize data (Clarke et al., 2015; Braun and Clarke, 2012). Furthermore, ethical considerations included obtaining

informed consent, emphasizing voluntary participation without monetary compensation, ensuring data confidentiality, and conducting interviews at participants' convenience. Audio recordings were transcribed for analysis.

## Results and Discussion

During the discussion, the participants talked about the impacts of attending their face-to-face classes from distance learning modality in their daily life. They stated that they experienced various challenges with their learning transition especially that they have learned to adjust themselves with distance learning which the university used for two years.

Table 1. Impacts On Attending Limited In-Person Classes

Major Themes	Sub-themes	Description
Challenges and Adaptations in the Learning Experience	Changes in Daily Routine (Adjustment in Time and Distance)	Students faced difficulties in adjusting their schedules due to the transition from online to in-person classes, requiring them to manage work, study, and commuting while maintaining productivity.
	Technological and Financial Challenges	Limited access to stable internet, suitable devices, and financial constraints made online learning challenging, affecting students' ability to engage in coursework effectively.
	Stress (Physical, Psychological, and Mental)	The increased academic workload, financial struggles, and balancing work and studies led to exhaustion, anxiety, and burnout, significantly impacting students' overall well-being.
	Socialization and Communication	The shift back to in-person classes improved student interactions, as many struggled with the lack of engagement and communication barriers during online learning.
	Positive Outlook Towards the Learning Modality	Despite initial challenges, students acknowledged the benefits of both online and in-person learning, improving their technological skills and self-discipline.

### 1. Challenges and Adaptations In The Learning Experience

Most of the participants expressed eagerness to go back to the usual in-person classes but some were hesitant because of different reasons.

#### a. Changes in Daily Routine (Adjustment in Time and Distance)

Most participants expressed eagerness to return to in-person classes, yet some were hesitant due to personal challenges. Leadership behavior plays a key role in ensuring quality education despite these transitions (Aquino and Alvarez, 2023). A common challenge was adjusting daily routines and schedules, particularly in the first year of transition. Roselle and Emma initially struggled, with Roselle feeling disengaged due to the difficulty of balancing work and online classes. Emma had to negotiate schedule adjustments with her manager, stating, It's a good thing that my manager is very understanding. This highlights how working students actively sought solutions to maintain both academic and professional responsibilities.

The findings align with research indicating that time management is crucial for balancing academic and personal commitments (Dube and Ndofitripi, 2024). Studies also show that the pandemic disrupted daily routines, making schedule adjustments difficult (Sriram and Bhargava, 2024). The importance of engagement in online learning is further emphasized, as Roselle found distance learning less interactive (Soriano et al., 2022). Emma's ability to adjust her schedule, with the support of an understanding manager, reinforces the role of a supportive work environment in reducing stress (Yang and Jo, 2022).

#### **b. Technological and Financial Challenges**

Technological and financial constraints were among the greatest difficulties faced by working students. Kaycee described feeling drained due to unreliable internet access, which affected both her studies and work. Marky admitted that before the pandemic, he primarily used his phone for gaming but was forced to learn new educational technologies. However, Jaycee and Jacky struggled due to the high cost of internet data and poor signal quality, leading to difficulties in keeping up with online lessons. I find it difficult to keep up with my online classes because of my poor signal, Joey explained.

The findings highlight the crucial role of digital resources in online education, as limited access can negatively impact learning outcomes (Aldossari and Altalhab, 2022). Financial constraints further complicated students' ability to engage in online learning (Adedoyin and Soykan, 2023). Additionally, participants such as Maria, Roselle, and Rapunzel reported that balancing school, work, and home life was overwhelming. Emma and Jacky even mentioned attending school without sleep due to work schedules, leading to physical exhaustion. These findings align with research on how financial and technological challenges impact students' academic performance and well-being (Riinawati and Noor, 2023).

#### **c. Stress (Physical, Psychological, and Mental)**

The transition back to in-person classes introduced new stressors affecting students physically, psychologically, and mentally. Jacky stated, physically, it is difficult because I will be more tired, but I have no choice. Marky added, I'm physically losing weight because I can't buy food at the canteen... my income is low. These statements highlight how commuting and increased time in school led to fatigue and financial strain. Research demonstrates that increased academic and financial pressure can lead to stress and anxiety (Nasr et al., 2024). The struggle to manage school and work obligations also placed a psychological burden on students, with some experiencing burnout and mental exhaustion (Klinkenberg et al., 2024). To cope, students emphasized the importance of self-care, stress management, and maintaining a work-life balance (Slowiak and DeLongchamp, 2022).

#### **d. Socialization and Communication**

The lack of in-person interactions during online learning affected students' ability to communicate effectively. Jake expressed frustration over difficulties understanding lessons remotely, stating that in-person classes allowed for better explanations from professors. Joey agreed, adding, when I see the people I talk to, I can better understand what they are saying and feel more comfortable asking questions. Studies confirm that in-person interactions improve engagement and foster a sense of community (Lopez, 2024). The pandemic disrupted these interactions, reducing students' ability to build social connections. Participants also reported struggling with online communication due to internet issues, further impacting their ability to participate in virtual classes (Deep et al., 2024). Moreover, students expressed relief at returning to face-to-face discussions, reinforcing the importance of social interactions for well-being (Zengilowski et al., 2023).



**e. Positive Outlook Towards the Learning Modality**

Despite initial challenges, participants acknowledged that they had adapted to distance learning. Roselle shared that she became more comfortable with digital tools, while Jake appreciated the convenience of attending classes from home. Rapunzel emphasized how distance learning helped her develop focus and better time management skills. These findings align with research indicating that exposure to digital tools improves technological literacy (Thelma et al., 2024). Additionally, online learning fosters self-regulation and time management. Participants’ ability to adapt reflects their resilience, a key factor in overcoming academic challenges.

Table 2. Students’ Feelings In Dealing Limited In-Person Classes

Major Themes	Sub-themes	Description
Perseverance in Academic Transitions	Adaptability and Resilience	Students demonstrated perseverance in overcoming academic and work-related challenges, adjusting to new learning environments while maintaining their commitment to education.
	Attitude Towards Distance Learning Modality	While students faced difficulties with distance learning, they made necessary adjustments, prioritized their studies, and sought ways to balance academic and work responsibilities.
	Students’ Aspirations	Motivated by their desire to improve their lives and support their families, students remained determined to complete their education despite hardships.

**2. Perseverance in Academic Transitions**

Perseverance in academic transitions highlights students' ability to adapt to changing learning environments while balancing personal, academic, and professional responsibilities. Despite challenges such as shifting from online to in-person classes, managing work-study commitments, and facing financial or technological difficulties, students demonstrate resilience and determination to succeed. Their ability to adjust, maintain motivation, and strive for academic achievement reflects their strong commitment to personal growth and future aspirations.

**a. Adaptability and Resilience**

Students displayed resilience and adaptability in their transition from online to flexible learning. Jaypee shared, My studies have changed a lot... I would have learned more in person but had to rely on reading. Similarly, kaycee initially struggled with technology but adapted over time, stating, I feel drained sometimes and frustrated because I don’t know how to start, but I’m learning. Research highlights that adaptability is essential for navigating new learning environments and overcoming obstacles (Lynch, 2024). Additionally, resilience enables students to persist in their education despite external challenges (Methi, 2024). Maria shared, It was tiring, but who am I to quit I don’t have any choice. There were many breakdowns, exhaustion, and hard moments, but we got used to it. Her statement reflects the determination that working students exhibited despite adversity.

**b. Attitude Towards Distance Learning Modality**

Students demonstrated a willingness to adjust their schedules to accommodate both work and study. Marky explained, I tell my boss when I have school, and I make up for lost days. I always attend class so I don’t miss lessons. Emma shared, I asked my

manager to adjust my duty schedule instead of changing my class schedule. These statements align with studies showing that balancing work and academics requires strong motivation and adaptability (Myrvang and Skaar, 2024; Nayak and Kachhi, 2025). Additionally, institutional policies and support play a crucial role in helping students succeed in flexible learning environments (Benabid et al., 2025; Dikilitas and Fructuoso, 2023).

**c. Students’ Aspirations**

Participants expressed strong aspirations to complete their education despite challenges. Marky shared, i go to school every day even though it’s hard. I want to repay my parents’ sacrifices. This statement reflects the deep motivation that drives many students to persevere despite financial and academic hardships. Educational aspirations are key motivators in academic success, as students often pursue higher education to improve their family’s financial situation and future opportunities (Russell et al., 2022). Intrinsic motivation, such as the desire to support one’s family, is a significant factor in student persistence (Mtshweni, 2024).

Table 3. Students’ Adjustments and Preparations in Limited In-Person Classes

Major Themes	Sub-themes	Description
Navigating Academic Transitions Through Self-Management	Time Management (Multitasking)	Students demonstrated strong time management skills by multitasking between work, online classes, and in-person sessions, efficiently balancing multiple responsibilities. Effective time management allowed them to meet academic deadlines while maintaining work commitments.
	Adjustment to Learning Modality	Transitioning from online to in-person classes required students to adapt to new learning environments, engage in face-to-face interactions, and adjust to different teaching styles. This shift brought both excitement and anxiety as students navigated the changes in their academic routines.
	Adjustment to Policies and Guidelines	Students had to familiarize themselves with and comply with updated policies and guidelines, such as health protocols and academic requirements, to ensure a safe and effective learning experience. This adjustment highlighted their ability to adapt to evolving institutional expectations while maintaining academic progress.

Attending limited in-person classes required students to make significant adjustments and preparations, particularly in managing their time, adapting to new learning modalities, complying with policies and guidelines, and handling physical, psychological, and mental stress.

**d. Time Management (Multitasking)**

Students had to balance in-person classes, online learning, and work responsibilities, requiring effective time management skills. Emma shared, despite being difficult at managing time, I'm still able to do my tasks and responsibilities in school and do my job. Joey added, it’s a bit difficult because my time is divided school on weekdays and work on weekends, plus assignments. The need for multitasking was evident, as students had to navigate synchronous and asynchronous learning while fulfilling work obligations. Effective time management has been linked to higher academic performance and reduced stress (Salleh et al., 2023). Research suggests that while multitasking is common among students, prioritization and organization are essential for efficiency

(Anteneh et al., 2023). Strategies such as planning, prioritizing tasks, and using digital tools can help students manage multiple responsibilities (Evitha, 2024; Soatova, 2023).

#### **e. Adjustment to Learning Modality**

Transitioning back to in-person classes required students to readjust to face-to-face interactions, new teaching styles, and classroom dynamics. Marky shared, when limited face-to-face classes were approved, I made a big adjustment studying on M-W-F and working on my free days to earn money for fare and food. His experience highlights the struggle of balancing financial responsibilities alongside academic commitments. Jake expressed mixed emotions about returning to in-person learning, It's actually a mix of feelings for me. I felt quite nervous and excited because it's the first time in a while I'll be facing my teachers and classmates.

Similarly, Rapunzel admitted, I'm worried I won't do well in face-to-face classes because I'm used to studying independently in a space where I feel safe. These experiences reflect common challenges faced by students transitioning back to physical classrooms, including anxiety, excitement, and uncertainty (Boamah, 2023; Elangovan and Sundaravel, 2024). Studies emphasize the importance of fostering a supportive learning environment to help students overcome these concerns (Ria and Eliasa, 2024). Institutions can provide orientation programs, academic advising, and mental health support to ease the transition (Perez and Sabato, 2023).

#### **f. Adjustment to Policies and Guidelines**

Students were also required to comply with HEI policies and guidelines to ensure a safe and effective learning environment. Jaycee shared, I experienced how I can adjust to new online class guidelines, meet deadlines, and balance work at the same time. However, transitioning back to in-person classes required additional adjustments. when I went back to school, I missed what I used to do, but I had to adjust again because there were new guidelines getting vaccinated and submitting a lot of requirements, Jaycee added. Similarly, Roselle noted, I just followed the guidelines to avoid COVID-19 and stay safe when I go home, even though I want to socialize with my friends.

These statements emphasize the need for students to be flexible and adaptable when policies change. Research indicates that adherence to institutional policies is crucial for maintaining a secure learning environment (Patton et al., 2022). The ability to adjust to policy shifts, such as those introduced during the pandemic, demonstrates students responsibility and commitment to their education (Guardia et al., 2021; Crume, 2022). Furthermore, policies such as social distancing and vaccination requirements had social implications, affecting students' ability to interact with peers. Akbik and Heun (2022) highlighted that while such measures are necessary for safety, they can impact students' social connections, requiring innovative ways to balance compliance with social engagement.

### **Conclusion**

Changes and transitions are never easy, especially during the disruptive times of the pandemic. The findings of this study reveal that the transition to limited in-person classes significantly impacted students' work-life-study balance. Despite the challenges, students demonstrated resilience, showing a positive attitude, strong aspirations, and determination to succeed. Their motivation to provide for their families, achieve academic success, and maintain mental well-being helped them navigate the complexities of balancing work and study. However, the study also highlights the mental wellness risks that come with these transitions, underscoring the importance of psychosocial support. While many universities offered psychological support, students often did not seek help from these services. Many handled their challenges independently, and there was a lack



of utilization of available resources. This points to the importance of seeking support when needed and practicing self-care. Based on the responses from participants, the researchers recommend that students should improve their time-management skills, set realistic goals, and consider jobs with flexible hours or negotiate work arrangements where possible. Students should also take advantage of university support systems, such as psychosocial support, academic advising, and counseling services. Proactive communication with professors and administrators is vital for balancing responsibilities, and peer support is valuable for sharing experiences and strategies. For universities, the study recommends adopting flexible learning models to accommodate students' needs, offering specialized advisors for working students, and strengthening partnerships with organizations that offer scholarships or grants. Collaboration with local employers to offer flexible work schedules for students would further support their academic and personal well-being. Universities should also promote wellness programs and ensure that students feel comfortable seeking help from counselors. By intentionally providing support, universities can create a more inclusive environment for working students, helping them achieve academic success while maintaining a healthy balance between work, study, and personal life.

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