

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**CHALLENGES AND COPING MECHANISMS IN ONLINE LANGUAGE LEARNING OF ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS AT OCCIDENTAL MINDORO STATE COLLEGE**

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**ABSTRACT**

The pandemic has forced higher education institutions into online learning, affecting language learning, especially English. This study examines the challenges language learners face and their coping mechanisms in this new environment. We employed a descriptive-correlational research design focusing on English major students at Occidental Mindoro State College-San Jose Campus, utilizing a five-point Likert Scale and a validated questionnaire for data collection.

Analysis of the data revealed that English major students encountered moderate challenges in online language learning, with low internet accessibility, moderate learning environment issues, and high workload concerns. Students employed coping mechanisms to a moderate extent, particularly in managing behavioral distractions, behavioral activation, and seeking social support. The study also found a direct influence of internet accessibility on coping with behavioral distractions, while learning environment challenges had an inverse impact on coping mechanisms related to social support.

**Keywords:** *online language learning, challenges, coping mechanism, behavioral distractions, behavioral activation, COVID-19,*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The unexpected onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has precipitated a sweeping transformation in various facets of society, most notably in education. To ensure the continuity of learning, especially in higher education, traditional face-to-face instruction rapidly transitioned to online platforms (Mahyoob, 2020). This shift significantly impacted language education, catching both educators and learners unprepared (Hartshorn & McMurry, 2020).

Online language instruction became the new norm, compelling higher education institutions to adapt (Beatty, 2013). This study examines the adjustments and challenges faced by students, with a focus on English language acquisition. Filipino students encountered multifaceted challenges, including internet connectivity issues, reduced peer interaction, and limited speaking practice (Francisco, 2021). These challenges prompted resourceful coping strategies, such as relocating for better connectivity and peer support. However, ESL Filipino college students often found themselves self-reliant due to limited access to assistance from teachers and peers (Agum et al., 2021).

This study centers on Occidental Mindoro State College (OMSC), which initiated the transition to online learning in the 2019-2020 academic year. OMSC's diverse experiences with online learning platforms, such as Zoom, Google Meet, Messenger, and social media networks, garnered positive feedback from graduate students (Casanova & Paguia, 2021). Yet, it is evident that online learning presents challenges for tertiary students, especially in the realm of language education.

The abrupt shift to online learning, necessitated by the pandemic, has underlined the disparities between traditional and online learning, making language acquisition, particularly English as a foreign language, a formidable task for Filipino learners. Recognizing the vital role of technology in education during the pandemic, it is imperative to investigate the extent of challenges faced by students and the coping mechanisms employed in online language learning. This study, with a specific focus on English major students at OMSC-San Jose Campus, aims to shed light on these issues, given the evolving landscape of education and its impact on language acquisition.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design, which explored the challenges and coping mechanisms in online English language learning. This approach involved both descriptive analysis of the challenges and a correlational examination of how these challenges related to the coping mechanisms used by the respondents. Additionally, the study had a predictive aspect, identifying which challenges best predicted the specific coping mechanisms employed in online language learning.

### **Study Site**

The researchers conducted the study at Occidental Mindoro State College – San Jose Campus, Quirino St., San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, Philippines during the second semester of Academic Year 2021-2022. The figure shows the locale where the study was conducted.

## **Sample**

The researchers selected a total of 43 respondents who are second, third, and fourth-year English major students from the College of Teacher Education of Occidental Mindoro State College for the Academic Year 2021-2022 through complete enumeration. They were chosen respondents according to their involvement in studying English in their curriculum.

## **Research Instrument**

The research instrument used in this study was a researchers-made questionnaire and was designed based on the review of related literature and studies and the conceptual framework to measure the independent and dependent variables. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. To measure the independent variable of the study, the first section of the questionnaire consisted of three challenges encountered in online language learning: internet accessibility, learning environment, and workload issues. Meanwhile, the second section of the questionnaire measured the dependent variable of the study using three coping mechanisms used in online language learning: behavioral distraction, behavioral activation, and social support. Each section consisted of 15 questions, making a total number of thirty questions in the questionnaire. Respondents were asked to respond to the items provided on a scale rated on five sequential points, always=5 to never=1.

The questionnaire was validated by the experts to ensure that the questionnaire used can cope with the standard level of the test administration.

## **Data Collection**

In this study, the researchers gathered the data through an online survey with the following procedures: First, the researchers created a research-made questionnaire that answered the needed data for the study. Subsequently, the researchers underwent the questionnaire for validation. Then, the researchers sent a letter to the dean and program head requesting their approval to conduct the survey. Afterward, the survey questionnaire was distributed to the respondents through Google Forms. Lastly, after all the data was collected, the researchers tallied, analyzed, and interpreted it according to the specific problems set forth.

## **Ethical Consideration**

Participation in the study was required among the participants or English majors involved. Complete anonymity of the research participants was also observed. The respondents were informed of the right to confidentiality and privacy. Any clarifications were entertained by the researchers to facilitate an easy understanding of the statements and terminologies in the research instrument. The questionnaire was utilized through Google forms where the result was coded and listed in a separate sheet; the code from the list was later matched after data collection. Specific information on the questionnaires could not be linked to specific individuals. Access to the data was limited only to the researchers.

## Data Analysis

For the analysis of the gathered data, the researchers organized and encoded the data using statistical software. The data collected were also organized and presented in tabular form for simple interpretation. Meanwhile, to address the problems of this study, descriptive statistics, such as the computation of the mean, were employed in determining the extent to which the respondents have experienced challenges in online language learning. Likewise, it is also used in measuring the extent to which the respondents used coping mechanisms in online language learning. Moreover, Pearson product-moment correlation was used to examine the relationship between the extent of the challenges encountered and coping mechanisms used in online language learning.

## RESULTS

Data presented in Table 1 shows that respondents are moderately experiencing challenges in online language learning (grand mean=3.15). It also reveals that workload issues (overall mean=3.94) are perceived as the highest and internet accessibility (overall mean=2.46) is perceived as the lowest.

Table 1. The extent of challenges encountered by the respondents in online language learning.

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
<i>Internet Accessibility</i>		
I cannot attend online language classes due to the poor internet connection in my location.	2.42	Low
I cannot attend online language classes due to insufficient data caused by a poor internet connection.	2.23	Low
I have difficulty accessing online language lectures and downloading materials due to poor network connections.	2.53	Moderate
Due to slow internet speed, I encounter disruptions and difficulty when taking online tests and assessments.	2.79	Moderate
I cannot submit my assignments and activities on time due to slow internet speed.	2.30	Low
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>2.46</b>	<b>Low</b>
<i>Learning Environment</i>		
I find it more difficult to concentrate in class because of the distractions (e.g., household chores and noises).	3.65	High
I am distracted by using smartphones or other devices while having online language classes (e.g., messaging others, frequent notifications, surfing social media).	3.60	High
I procrastinate doing my activities and assignments because of lack of motivation and feedback from teachers.	3.00	Moderate
I procrastinate doing my activities and assignments because of lack of motivation from my parents.	2.23	Low

I am less motivated to attend online language classes because of lack of face-to-face interactions with teachers and classmates and collaboration with peers.	2.74	Moderate
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.04</b>	<b>Moderate</b>
<i>Workload Issues</i>		
I experience increased stress in doing assignments and activities during online language learning.	4.00	High
I find my activities and assignments in online language learning more difficult than in face-to-face language classes.	3.53	High
I experience an increase in stress in receiving many tasks from different teachers at the same time.	4.30	High
I experience increased stress in having activities with a very short deadline.	4.14	High
I experience difficulty in managing my time at home and school.	3.74	High
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.94</b>	<b>High</b>
<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>3.15</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

Data presented in the Table 2 shows that respondents are using coping mechanisms in online learning to a moderate extent (grand mean=3.18). It also reveals that behavioral activation (overall mean=3.27) is perceived as the highest and behavioral distraction (overall mean=3.11) is perceived as the lowest.

Table 2. The extent of coping mechanisms used by the respondents in online language learning.

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
<i>Behavioral Distractions</i>		
I watch television to divert my attention away from the stressful activities of online language learning.	2.49	Low
I listen to music to help me cope with the stress of online language learning.	3.95	High
I engage in recreational activities such as physical exercise (e.g. stretching and a 10-minute walk) to relieve stress.	2.42	Low
I spend my time doing my hobbies, such as reading books, to relieve stress and feel relaxed.	3.37	Moderate
I spend time on instant messaging to relieve the stress of online language learning.	3.33	Moderate
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.11</b>	<b>Moderate</b>
<i>Behavioral Activation</i>		
I incorporate offline features into my learning strategies to cope with online language learning (e.g., downloading the tasks and working on them offline).	3.58	High
I ask my teacher to consider extending the deadline of my activity if I am experiencing an unstable internet connection.	2.93	Moderate

I avoid spending too much time browsing on social media to be productive.	3.12	Moderate
I create timetables to manage my time well.	2.84	Moderate
I take breaks when I am overwhelmed by online language learning activities.	3.91	High
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.27</b>	<b>Moderate</b>
<i>Social Support</i>		
I receive encouragement from my family in dealing with the challenges during an online language class.	3.21	Moderate
I am assisted by my parents when completing school-related tasks and activities.	2.29	Low
I feel motivated by the social support that I am getting.	3.40	Moderate
I feel less stressed with the social support that I am getting.	3.44	Moderate
I have a positive mindset toward learning because of the empathy I receive from my teachers.	3.42	Moderate
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.15</b>	<b>Moderate</b>
<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>3.18</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

The study revealed that the challenges encountered in terms of internet accessibility have a significant positive relationship with coping mechanisms in terms of behavioral distractions ( $r= 0.499, p=0.001$ ). However, the learning environment ( $r= 0.275, p=0.074$ ) and workload issues ( $r= -0.001, p=0.997$ ) were not significantly correlated with coping mechanisms in terms of behavioral distractions. All of the three indicators of challenges encountered in online language learning which are internet accessibility ( $r=0.285, p=0.64$ ), learning environment ( $r= -0.094, p=0.549$ ), and workload issues ( $r=0.057, p= 0.715$ ) have no significant relationship with coping mechanisms in terms of behavioral activation. The three indicators of challenges encountered in online language learning which are internet accessibility ( $r=0.285, p=0.64$ ), learning environment ( $r= -0.094, p=0.549$ ), and workload issues ( $r=0.057, p= 0.715$ ) have no significant relationship with coping mechanisms in terms of behavioral activation.

Table 3. Relationship between the challenges encountered and the coping mechanisms used in online language learning.

Challenges in online language learning	Behavioral Distractions		Behavioral Activation		Social Support	
	<i>R</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Internet accessibility	0.499	0.001	0.285	0.064	0.285	0.064
Learning environment	0.275	0.074	-0.094	0.549	-0.094	0.549
Workload issues	-0.001	0.997	0.057	0.715	0.057	0.715

Legend:  $p\text{-value} \leq 0.05$  – Significant

## **DISCUSSIONS**

The pandemic has negatively impacted educational systems worldwide that leads to greater challenges and a complete transition to online language learning for language learners (Hartshorn & McMurry, 2020). The findings of the current study show that the respondents are moderately experiencing challenges in online language learning. Studies have revealed that students struggled in the new normal setup of education and they used coping mechanisms to overcome it all (Gheshlagh et al., 2022). Some of the studies that support the current study indicate that students in online language learning are having the burden with difficult assignments or tasks given by different teachers at the same time (Agustina et al., 2020) and use online learning platforms with slow-speed internet sometimes (Famularsih, 2020). However, the findings of the current study are opposed to the study by Muslem (2021), which indicates the main factors of the difficulties students face in online learning are lack of internet data packages, unbalanced internet data, and running out of internet data due to utilizing internet-consuming applications.

Due to the challenges of online learning, students have developed learning strategies to help them learn more efficiently and effectively (Ariffin et al., 2021). The findings of the current study show English major students are sometimes exhibiting coping mechanisms to deal with and survive all the stressors in online language learning. Such finding is affirmed by a study by Rotas and Cahapay (2020) that Filipino students employ several coping strategies in order to overcome adversities and succeed in distance online learning in the midst of the crisis. The current study affirms the study of Wasil et al. (2021) that behavioral activation was one of the most frequently reported effective strategies used by students who take online courses.

The results show that there is a significant positive relationship between the challenges encountered in terms of internet accessibility with coping mechanisms in terms of behavioral distractions. The more students face the problem with internet accessibility, the more they use coping mechanisms in terms of behavioral distractions. Such finding is not parallel to the study of Matswetu et al. (2020), that instead of diverting the students' attention toward the stress and problem they face in online learning, students who do not have access to the internet will look for all options to find good and stable internet connectivity. Likewise, the study's finding is not aligned with the study conducted by Cakrawati (2017), which indicated that students sought to find better places to get a high-speed internet connection for their studies.

On the other hand, the learning environment and workload issues were not significantly correlated with coping mechanisms in terms of behavioral distractions. Students rarely employ coping mechanisms in terms of behavioral distractions whenever they experience challenges in the learning environment and workload issues. Instead of diverting attention, the students, who are taking online courses move to a quieter location (Barrot et al. (2021), practice time management, do learning activities ahead, and extend the time for learning activities rather than diverting their attention to other activities.

In addition, the results indicate that internet accessibility, learning environment, and workload issues have no significant relationship with coping mechanisms in terms of behavioral activation. Students did not use behavioral activation, as a coping mechanism, in dealing with their difficulties and challenges in terms of internet accessibility, learning

environment, and workload issues. However, such finding contradicts the study of Wasil et al. (2021), which indicated that behavioral activation was one of the most frequently reported effective strategies used by students to their difficulties in online learning amidst COVID-19.

The results also show that there is a negative significant relationship between the challenges encountered in online language learning in terms of the learning environment and coping mechanisms in terms of social support. The findings imply that the more the students face challenges in the learning environment in an online language class, the less they receive social support, as a coping mechanism, and vice versa. Such finding is in line with the study of Maqableh and Alia (2021) which indicated that students taking online courses found it difficult to concentrate during online classes as the distractions at home were more prevalent and the lack of an organized learning environment made it more difficult for students to focus during class. However, internet accessibility and workload issues were not significantly correlated with social support. The students did not receive social support, as a coping mechanism, when it comes to the challenges in terms of internet accessibility and workload issues. This is not aligned with the study of Wasil et al. (2021) that revealed social support is one of the most frequently, commonly, and effectively used coping mechanisms by students taking online courses and wherein English language learners incorporate social support from teachers, parents, and peers as factors that enhance their learning engagement in the virtual classroom (Luan et al., 2020.)

A limitation of this study was the fact that the study utilized a small sample of English major students as it is the whole population of English majors in the research site. This research does not claim findings representative of all English major students in the country. It is important to conduct further studies to validate the quality, frequency, and limiters of the different kinds of challenges and coping mechanisms used in the study.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The study shows that the English majors of Occidental Mindoro State College are encountering challenges in online language learning to a moderate extent, specifically low in terms of internet accessibility, moderate in terms of learning environment, and high in terms of workload issues. The results also show that the English majors are coping with online language learning to a moderate extent, specifically, their extent of usage of the different coping mechanisms in online language learning is moderate in terms of behavioral distractions, behavioral activation, and social support. Lastly, it was found that the challenges encountered in online language learning in terms of internet accessibility directly influence the coping mechanism in terms of behavioral distraction, while the challenges in terms of the learning environment inversely influence the coping mechanism in terms of social support.

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