

Why the Mute Button Matters: The Lived Experiences of College Students in Using Video Conferencing Applications in Online Class

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ABSTRACT

Academic institutions were compelled to transition to online learning when the pandemic hit. Many aspects of this online class, however, are yet to be systematically examined and understood. With a phenomenological approach, this paper: 1) describes the roles of video conferencing applications in selected students' online synchronous classes; 2) examines the lived experiences of students in using video conferencing applications; and 3) evaluates characteristics of a good video conferencing application for online classes. Online in-depth interviews were conducted with ten college students from Region IV-A. Data reveals that video conferencing applications can be mediums of continuous learning and communications amidst the lockdown. Valuable aspects of videoconferencing applications include real-time content sharing. While video conferencing applications' features are helpful, lived experiences and conditions of participants matter in understanding the context of online learning. Availability of gadget, issues on connectivity, and extremely limited resources like limited mobile data are some prominent concerns. For instance, data reveals that many homes are not as peaceful and conducive as traditional classrooms that is why the mute button becomes one of the most meaningful and important features of video conferencing applications. The lived experiences of participants reveal challenges like juggling tasks like helping at home and learning online. It is therefore understandable that based on lived experiences of participants, a good video conferencing application is something that is compact, easy to use, and more importantly, a data saver.

Keywords: *Video conferencing, online class, communication*

INTRODUCTION

Coming from the tradition of communication research, the researchers problematized the transition of classes from physical to online. This paper investigates the communication channels being utilized by the entire university. Specifically, the study mainly focuses on the synchronous class, the lived experiences of the students as they utilize video conferencing applications in their synchronous classes. However, students need to deal with considerable challenges, like unstable internet connection, lack of resources, distractions at home, financial problems, geographical concerns, lack of developing skills, etc. These are some of the experiences that most of the students encounter during their online synchronous learning. The researchers analyze the ideal video conferencing applications for students in line with technical and connectivity concerns.

To flatten the curve of COVID-19-cases, the government implemented to close the educational institutions. Filipino learners across the academic levels stayed at home and comply with the Philippine government's quarantine measures (Joaquin et al., 2020). Concerning that, Flexible-Online learning was implemented by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) starting the Academic Year 2020- 2021. Due to the continuous rising of COVID-19 cases in the Philippines, and it is not safe for the students to continue the typical face-to-face classes. According to CHED memorandum order, flexible learning does not always require being connected to the internet. There are three modes mentioned by CHED-Online, Offline, and

Blended. Universities and Colleges have the free will to choose whether to use purely online, pure modular, or the combination of both. Some choose to use purely online with the use of some popular video conferencing applications such as Zoom, Google meets, and MS Teams, which was introduced to the students during the proper implementation of Flexible-Online Learning.

Schools in the Philippines switches to flexible learning, starting the academic year 2020-2021. Zoom, Google meets, and MS Teams were the communication channels used in performing online synchronous classes. But it is not yet proven that the usage of such video conferencing applications is an effective communication channel.

Review of Literature

Online synchronous classes mean all students, despite their differences in location, discuss and learn lectures together simultaneously through various communication technologies (Simonson, 2020). Since the pandemic has made institutions transition from their usual and traditional offline mode of learning to online mode of learning (Dhawan, 2020), electronic communication channels and online platforms are necessary (Basilaia et al, 2020). Hence, lecture and discussions are now being done remotely through various video conferencing applications to sustain the education of students (Lalani and Li, 2020).

Video conferencing applications act as communication channels that creates an environment where all students can communicate with each other real time. Such applications enable students to see, hear, share, and exchange ideas, as well as help each other, the same way they would do in their face- to-face classes (Sedivy and Chromy, 2015). Their roles are vital and important since they are one of the reasons why schools are still able to teach, and why education continues to take place despite the ongoing pandemic (Sevilla, 2020).

Since video conferencing applications are founded from technology, access, and availability of such matters (Gilbert, 2020). There are also concerns when it comes to technical issues concerning online synchronous classes where students take some time to log in on their classes due to their lack of devices. There are also instances that although they have the necessary devices, they still experience difficulties logging in for their online synchronous classes because such devices are dead and are not fully charged (Jan, 2020).

Financial capability is a major factor that affects access to applications, even where the technology is available because of the high monthly subscriptions and varying telecommunications charges. Lacking disposable financial resources makes it difficult to purchase devices or gain access to digital services, as income levels are a key barrier to internet access. The lack of such gadgets makes it difficult for students to access the internet, as well as to operate the video conferencing applications needed for their online synchronous classes, posing a problem for students' learning. Students will not be able to connect with their teachers or classmates, do independent research, get online help, and they will not be able to participate in their online synchronous classes (West, 2015; Lynch, 2017; Anderson & Auxier; Enriquez et al, 2020).

What online synchronous classes offer could not compete with the traditional face-to-face classes when it comes to the communication and socialization it brings. During the traditional face-to- face classes, not only do students interact with their teachers, but they are also interacting with their peers and classmates. Since classes are being done online, where the environment is "void of human senses", students feel that it was "dehumanized, unnatural, and not real". Because of this, they feel frustrated and uncertain, making them reluctant to interact with each other the way that they used to (Childs & Symeonides, 2015). Unlike the traditional face-to-face classes, online synchronous classes, despite being done real time and simultaneously by students, it is

still not a physical place that enables students to meet physically, study and work together, and socialize just as how they would, given the usual and normal situations. Hence, they are struggling to build relationships as they do not know who they are talking to (Sun, 2014).

On the study presented by Bocar and Tizon (2017), there are distractions at home that affect the students' attention on their online education. Students revealed that they are being distracted by their younger siblings, household chores and other errands, not to mention the noises from their household. Unlike in the usual and traditional face-to-face classroom setting where students are within the vicinity of their schools, at home, no matter how hard they try to make their environment appropriate for online classroom setting, there are still distractions that will not enable them to do so. Students say that everything in their surroundings at home distracts them from being fully present during their online synchronous classes, not to mention that they are having a hard and longer time finishing their tasks and assigned works (Jan, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Media Richness Theory, developed in the mid-1980s by organizational scholars, Daft and Lengel, suggests the effective use of a communication channel (medium) by matching the richness of a medium and the equivocality of task (Ishii, Lyons, & Carr, 2019). The theory explains the effect of many types of media that these are the basic foundations of interactive online communications (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Furthermore, the theory also states that many communication media differ in richness. Indicators of rich communications media allow the transmission of a multiplicity of cues, provide immediate feedback, allow communication with both natural language and numbers, as well as to facilitate the personal focus of messages (Kurubacak, 2006).

Utilizing the theory in this study, the assumption in media richness theory, where richer media mediums - in this case, the video conferencing applications - are suited for more effective communication in more ambiguous tasks. In this study, such tasks are online classes, where it requires interactive communication like immediacy of feedback, communication with both natural language and numbers, not to mention to smooth out the personal focus of messages. Hence, the use of video conferencing applications, with its features like audio and video calls and chat messaging, allows interactive communication to take place.

Conceptual Framework

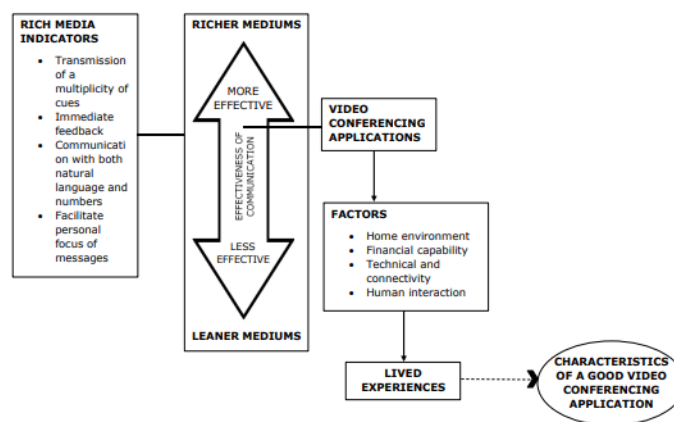


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

As shown in Figure 1, the indicators for media or communication channels to be considered rich, are met by the video conferencing applications. Hence, they are a more effective medium for communication.

Such media or communication channel richness, affect the communication of students while they are in their online classes. Using video conferencing applications, students can give immediate feedback and engage in an interactive and synchronous communication.

Although video conferencing applications are considered rich mediums and are more effective in communication, there are still challenges and lived experiences that affect the use of such communication channels. Describing and explaining the students' home environment, technical and connectivity concerns, financially capability, and human interaction while using the video conferencing applications, the researchers will then have the analysis and conclude the characteristics of a good video conferencing application, that is best suited for online classes based on the students' lived experiences.

Objectives

The researchers aim to explain the experiences of students in using video conferencing applications as communication channels for their online synchronous classes. In specific, this study aims to (1) Describe the roles of video conferencing applications in the selected students' online synchronous classes; (2) Examine the lived experiences of the students in using video conferencing applications as communication channels for their online synchronous classes; and (3) Describe the characteristics of a good video conferencing application for online classes based on the students' lived experiences.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative research design and phenomenology as a research method. In this study of seeking to interpret the students' experiences in using video conferencing applications as communication channels in their online synchronous classes, the researchers chose to use the hermeneutic approaches to phenomenology also known as interpretative phenomenology. The participant of the study is those who are currently enrolled in any colleges or universities within CALABARZON. The total number of participants is 10, two from each town of Cavite, laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon (CALABARZON)).

In facilitating the data gathering, the researchers used phenomenological interviews to gather e detailed descriptions of participants' experiences about a certain phenomenon through asking open questions that concern the participant's feelings, perception and understanding. The researchers prepared a three set of questions or interview guide to have a systematic way of asking and gathering the questions. Furthermore, before conducting the interview, the researcher provides a letter of invitation and consent form to be signed by the participants. After the interview, the researchers transcribed and after that, coding was do for the analyzation of the data.

Lastly, the researchers follow the ethical consideration to avoid conflicts and to protect the identity, information and to ensure the safety and confidentiality of the participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 shows the gathered Demographic Profile data from the participants of the study, the data above are the basic information of the participants. The first part is the location where it indicates that each of our participants came from the five regions in CALABARZON. Next in line

is six of the participants used Wi-Fi and data for their connection, and the last part is the gadgets they use for online classes. It shows that most of them use phones and laptops for their online class at the same time.

Table 1. Demographic profile

Demographic	Frequency
Location	
Cavite	2
Laguna	2
Batangas	2
Rizal	2
Quezon	2
Internet Connection	
Wi-Fi	6
Data	4
Gadgets	
Laptop	9
Cellphone	8

Table 2 presents the data and platform used during the interview properly. It indicates that the participants used zoom as their communication channel of the conference. The meeting schedule is based on the availability of the researchers and the participants.

	Date of Interview	Video Conferencing Application
Participant 1	June 2, 2021	Messenger
Participant 2	June 4, 2021	Zoom
Participant 3	June 9, 2021	Zoom
Participant 4	June 9, 2021	Zoom
Participant 5	June 11, 2021	Zoom
Participant 6	June 23, 2021	Zoom
Participant 7	June 23, 2021	Zoom
Participant 8	June 24, 2021	Zoom
Participant 9	June 24, 2021	Zoom
Participant 10	June 25, 2021	Microsoft Teams

RQ1: Roles of Video Conferencing Applications as Communication Channels in Online Synchronous Classes

Medium for learning and communication with others

As stated by Sedivy and Chromy in their study of communication activities using electronic devices in education in 2015, video conferencing applications function as communication channels, creating a place where students see, hear, share, exchange ideas, and help each other, similar to the way they do in face-to-face classes. And during this pandemic, such medium for learning and communication are vital, since they are one of the reasons why education and learning continue to take place (Sevilla, 2020).

Medium of continuous learning

Based on the interviews conducted, the participants, composed of college students, shared that video conferencing applications provide an environment where they can still learn despite being at home and even during this pandemic. Additionally, they mentioned how they can still learn from their teachers, who are professionally inclined, and people who can teach them what they need and must know for the course that they are taking. Considering that the country is transitioning entirely to distance and online classes, it is quite an experience for students to learn during these times. Not used to studying on their own entirely, being able to attend classes despite the current situation proves to be essential. Consequently, frequent communication during and after their scheduled meetings with their professors are critical.

“Ano, ang maganda sa video conferencing, syempre ‘yung ano nga, matututo ka na hindi lang ikaw mismo ‘yung nag-aaral. Syempre, ituturo din sa’yo ng prof mo, gan’an.”
- #1

[What’s good about video conferencing is, of course, you can learn not only on your own. Of course, your professor will also still teach you.]

“Sa unang-una, yun nga, sa katulad ng sinabi ko na nasa situation tayo ng pandemic. Importante yung mga gantong application para stay connected pa rin tayo sa mga profs natin, and matuloy pa din yung learning kahit sa bahay.” - #9

[First and foremost, just like what I said that we are in a situation of pandemic. Applications like these are important to stay connected with our professors and for learning to continue even at home.]

Medium to communicate with others even amidst the lockdown

Knowing that this pandemic entails being on lockdown for quite some time – not being able to physically see and meet with other people – knowing that video conferencing applications exist is one good thing. Video conferencing applications offers quite the extent of face-to-face communication, done virtually.

“Sa positive, siguro masasabi ko na medyo madali yung interaction ng mga taong gumagamit dito. Like, kase, actual naman sya e. Kumbaga e kung ano yung nangyayari sa’kin, mangyayari din sa’yo. Kumbaga, parang live lang, ganon. Parang face to face, ganon. Tapos, positive pa ng video conferencing...siguro ano, masasabi ko na sa’kin madali yung, yun nga interaction ng mga tao, unlike...halimbawa dito. Confident ako na sabihin yung opinyon ko, confident ako na ma-express yung sarili ko kapag ganitong set-up, ganyan.” - #5

[On the positive, I think I can say that it is a bit easier to interact with people who use this. Like, it is actual. What is currently happening to me, will be seen by others, and vice versa, like a live stream. It is like face to face. Then, another positive with video conferencing in my opinion is that people are confident to express themselves in this kind of set up.] - #5

Aside from being able to learn at home, students also mentioned how video conferencing applications allow communication to take place with their professors, especially with lessons that they are having a hard time understanding. Through video conferencing applications acting as communication channels, students are able to contact their professors during and even after their scheduled online classes and meetings. They also mentioned how professors are very reachable during these times.

“Positive ano, syempre may communication kami ng teacher ko. Nakakapagtanong ng mabilis.”

- #3

[Positive is, of course, my teacher and I have communication. I can immediately ask question.]

- #3

“Uhm, ang positive po is yun nga po, kahit po gan’to yung situation natin is talaga pong tuloy- tuloy po ‘yung pagtuturo po nila, gano’n. ‘Yung parang pag-eextend po ng effort ng bawat isa.”

- #7

[Uhm, the positive is, like I said, despite our current situation, their teaching continues. Like, how each of them exerts efforts.] - #7

“Sa positive nitong online class in terms of communicating with my prof...ang positive, very reachable sila ngayon. Kase kailangan din naman na reachable sila.” - #9

[The positive of this online class in terms of communicating with my prof...the positive, they are very reachable. Because they also indeed need to be reachable.] - #9

Medium to increase communication accuracy and reliability

Video conferencing applications provide a fast and secure way to communicate with other people, thus, increasing the communication accuracy and reliability. Since professors and students are meeting synchronously online, they are also engaging synchronously, hence, being on the same page during their online discussions. Such a situation increases the accuracy of information and communication that each of them relay to one another (Lifesize, 2020).

One student mentioned how during their online synchronous classes, they can easily ask questions and other clarifications to their professors. Not only that, but their professors can also answer right away, and even after they raise their questions. Like face-to-face classes, but only virtually.

“Sa positive...in terms of positive pag makikipag-communicate ako sa teacher namin, okay naman. Kumbaga ay kung may questions man that day, masasabi ko agad, ganon, kung may makaclarify man ako sa exact time na yon.” - #5

[In terms of positive when it comes to communicating with our professors, it is okay. For example, I have questions that day, I can easily say and raise it. I can easily clarify at that exact time.]

Video Conferencing Applications as a Way for Real-time Content-sharing

Aside from the roles of video conferencing applications as a medium of learning despite the pandemic and being on lockdown, not to mention a way for students and teachers to communicate despite the situation, video conferencing applications also allow real-time content-sharing. Rather than sending the files via email or posting them on a classroom portal online, video conferencing applications allow students and teachers to share documents and files in real time. And doing online classes for about a year now, students and teachers are now finding a way to make their discussions more engaging and interactive. Students are now sharing documents, files, and other contents related to their discussion during their schedule online synchronous classes (MacCormac College, 2020).

One student shared how it is a positive way when they have individual and group reports. Instead of speaking in front of the screen for the whole class to listen, what they do is they share the contents of their reports through screen-sharing. In this way, they can better report the topic assigned to them, while their classmates and professors are clearly following what they are currently discussing and saying.

“Tapos yung sa positive way naman po is yun nga po pag sa pagrereport po ganyan mas...kung kunwari po video yung ipapakita namin, ganyan. Mas madali ko pong nase-share screen sa iba para makita po nila yung pong ipapakita po namin as a group, or kung individual work naman po.” - #7

[Then, positive way is when we are reporting. Example, when we have a video to show to them, it is easier to share our screen for others to see what we are presenting as a group or even when it comes to individual works.]

Another student also shared how sharing their screens and presentation in their online synchronous classes help with the collaboration and sharing of ideas and concepts.

“Tapos ‘yung presentation naman ‘yung present now kemerlu na effect ni ano... nang mga video conferencing app ano nakakatulong siya sa akin para mag-share ng ideas ng concepts ayon.” - #8

[Then, when it comes to presentation, the screen-sharing of video conferencing applications, it is helpful for me to share ideas and concepts.]

A student also shared how their professor share ideas and more information regarding their topic and discussion through the whiteboard feature of the video conferencing applications. The student mentioned that their professor writes on the whiteboard other additional information and facts related to their subject, similar to blackboards and whiteboards during their face-to-face classes. They can also type and write down their answers while the whiteboard feature is on, enabling their professors to see if their answers are correct and if they understand the lesson that they are discussing at the time.

“‘Yung teacher namin nagpapakita siya ng whiteboard and pwede kami don magtype or magsulat so doon makikita kung tama ba talaga ang sagot namin o naiintindihan ba

talaga namin as a class 'yung tinuturo niya and parang doon din sa way na 'yon nagkakapoints kami.' - #4

[Our teacher, they turn on the whiteboard feature, and we can type and write down. Through that, they can see if our answers are wrong and if we really understand their discussions. Also in that way, we can also receive points.]

Although video conferencing applications provide real-time content sharing, it is not always a good learning experience for students. The same student also shared how some of their professors simply leave them with instructional materials like videos, for them to watch and learn on their own. They said that such content-sharing during their online synchronous classes is difficult for them. They said that their professors simply let them watch those videos, but they will not explain the topic further. Because of this, they are left to search how to do their tasks online and how to solve the problems given by their professors.

“Kaso mas mahirap lang ngayong online kasi kapag nagtuturo sila hindi sobrang turo, alam niyo 'yun? 'Yung parang kapag synchronous may ipapapanood lang silang video hindi naman na-explain ng maayos. So, in the end kami rin ang magse-search online kung paano gawin 'yung tasks or paano kami mag-solve lalo na sa mga subjects namin like chemistry, physics, math, 'yun.’” - #4

[But it is more difficult online when they are teaching, it is not elaborate, you know? Like when we are doing synchronous classes, they will simply made us watch a video, but they will not explain it fully. So, in the end, we are left on our own to search online what to do with the tasks and problems given by our professors, especially with our subjects like chemistry, physics, and math.]

Avenue for Self-paced Learning to Take Place

Self-paced learning means that students learn in their own time and schedule. It also means that they do not need to complete the same assignments or learn at the same time as their other classmates. They can proceed from one topic to another at their own speed. Self-paced learning is exceptionally fit for students who prefer learning on their own by exploring, observing, questioning, and participating, where they can improve their own learning instincts (Prountzos, 2015 and Suvin, 2021).

Although students have scheduled online synchronous classes, there are still assessments and course work that they are free to do whenever they want, given that they can submit it within a period of time as instructed by their professors. A student shared how they handle self-paced learning even with online synchronous classes.

“(uhh) kasi kami is (uhh) ano tawag don? Kami ang parang self-paced kasi kami ngayon na depende kung ano 'yung kung anong subject ang uunahin namin, alin 'yung isusubmit namin so kapag kinailangan ko na gawin 'yung isang subject na 'yon kapag naisipan ko na, tsaka ko hahanapin 'yung video recording.’” - #2

[We are self-paced right now. We are free to choose what course or subject to do first and what we are going to submit. So, when it is time to do that specific subject, that is when the time that I will look for the video recording of our class and watch it.]

But then, self-paced learning is not for everyone. Since it requires better time management and initiative, some students are not appreciating such type of learning. They are having a hard time managing their time and keeping themselves motivated to do all their works without someone telling them to accomplish those. Not only that, but self-paced learning means being given materials to accomplish, without an instructor explaining things thoroughly, in which this can be challenging for most. And because of this, they tend to procrastinate, leading to unfinished, overloaded, and overdue assignments and works (EduWW Sapere Aude, 2021).

A student shared their schedule of online synchronous and asynchronous classes. They shared how during their synchronous classes, they tend to have more work than when they are conducting their schedule synchronous classes. They mentioned that their professors give more work, since they do not have online class discussions.

“Sa online class naman namin sa synchronous ano lang mostly two hours ang class namin two to three hours tapos ang synch class namin is (uhh) isang beses. Isang subject isang beses sa isang week or minsan isang beses sa isang buwan depende sa teacher, and then kapag nagpapa- asynchronous sobrang daming gawain as in.” - #4
[In online classes, when synchronous, we only have two to three hours per class. One subject per one synchronous class in a week or sometimes in a month, depending on the teacher. And when it comes to asynchronous classes, there are loads of work, as in.]

Another student shared how although video conferencing applications and their professors provide an avenue for self-paced learning to take place, it feels like they are forced to do so and study on their own.

“Tas parang kadalasan, yung mga prof nagbibigay na lang ng mga recorded, or yung mga links na lang po tapos sariling aral mo rin.” - #7
[Then usually, the professors, they just give recorded (videos) or links, then we need to study on our own.]

The findings for RQ1 emphasized that despite the use of technology-advanced video conferencing applications, online synchronous classes or the online learning set up, proved to be ineffective. Although such applications act as communication channel for learning and communication to take place for students amidst the ongoing pandemic, there are still external and internal factors affecting their use of it. One major factor affecting the students' online classes is their lack of gadgets and resources to access the video conferencing applications that are necessary for their learning set up. And because of the high poverty rate in the Philippines, not all families have the resources to get the required gadgets and resources for online learning set up. These families simply cannot adjust to the requirements for online schooling, thus being

left behind, or forced to find other methods of schooling for their children (Kritz, 2020). Further discussion regarding these factors will be tackled in RQ2.

RQ2: The Lived Experiences of Students in usings Video Conferencing Applications for their Online Synchronous Classes

Frequent technical and connectivity issues (but contingent upon class)

In the Philippines, which is known to have one of the worst internet connections in the world, online classes are a type of learning set up that should have been thoroughly studied and planned out first before being implemented. In Ookla's – the global broadband speed test – April 2021 report, the Philippines ranked on the 84th spot in the mobile internet speeds with an average download speed of 29.12 megabits per second (Mbps) and 80th in fixed broadband speeds with an average speed of 49.31 Mbps. Despite the country moving two spots from its previous mobile internet speed ranking last March, and a spot higher for fixed broadband, it is nothing to be celebrated for (Lalu, 2021). Not only this situation does not help with the implementation of shifting from the traditional learning set up to online, but it also only emphasized the digital divide between students from different socioeconomic classes (Aldama, 2020).

From the interviews conducted, students shared how they have many issues with connectivity, and how they cannot attend their classes due to lack of gadgets and resources to access the video conferencing applications it needs. Not only that, but they are also failing to submit their works on time because of such issues.

“Hindi naman lahat nakaka-attend ng synchronous (classes). Pag kase online classes, usapan na rito gadgets. So, what if yung iba naman walang gadget. Kunwari nasiraan sila ng laptop or nalowbat yung cellphone nila, ganon. Nasira kase yung HDD nung ano, nung laptop kongginagamit. Hindi ito, yung isa. Kase ito po na ginagamit ko ngayon ay sa pinsan ko. So nasira yung HDD nya. Tas sabi nung sa naggagawa ng computer, kailangan na raw paltan ng SSD. E wala pa kaming budget non kaya hindi nagawa agad yung laptop. So, kailangan cellphone yung gamitin. Tas e yung ano, yung laptop ko, one month yata bago napagawa. Kaya one month akong nagamit ng cellphone. Tas hindi ako agad nakakapagpasa ng mga assessments. Kailangan pa kong humiram ng laptop ng iba para makagawa, kase ang hirap maggawa ng sa Word, saka sa mga Powerpoints na gagawin dito sa cellphone.” - #3

[Not everyone can attend synchronous (classes). If it is online classes, we are also talking about the gadgets. So, what if others do not have gadgets? For example, their laptops are broken, or their cellphones are dead. Say for me, my laptop's HDD was damaged. Not this. Because the laptop I am using right now is my cousin's. So, my laptop's HDD was damaged. The repairman said that we need to replace it with SSD. At that time, we do not have the budget to fix it. So, I need to use my cellphone as an alternative. I think my laptop took a month to get fixed. So, I am also using my cellphone for a month. Because of that, I was not able to turn in my assessments immediately. I need to borrow someone else's laptop to do my works, because it is hard to work on Word and PowerPoint by only using cellphone.]

Other students also resort to using only data and prepaid loads to have a connection to access the video conferencing applications and attend their online scheduled classes. Because it has been a year since the implementation of online classes was done in the Philippines, those students are now following a technique. They have now designed a schedule of what time they are going to load for their data connection, how much load they would need, and when they will finally register it for a promo. They are doing this to save data, for it to last until their next scheduled online synchronous classes. However, it is still not enough.

“So, ang ginagawa ko, ang start kase ng klase namin is Monday hanggang Thursday. So, maglo- load ako ng Monday ng umaga, kase may klase ako ng 10 or 9, load ako, so abot sya hanggang Thursday. Kaya lang minsan, yung promo kase na yon, medyo maunti yung MB na available. Like, 1 gig lang sya per day, ganon.” - #5

[So, our classes are from Monday to Thursday. What I do is I would load on Monday morning, because I have class that day at 9 or 10. My load can last up until Thursday. But that specific promo has its limit. Data is only 1 gig per day.]

For those students who are privileged to have an internet connection at home, it does not necessarily mean that they have a fast and smooth access to the video conferencing applications. In fact, out of the six students who use Wi-Fi as their internet connection for their online classes, only one of them is not having any issues when it comes to connection and technical problems. The rest of the students are on the same page that their internet connection is not always stable. Additionally, there are times when internet providers cut off their subscribers' internet connection with very late notices. Most of the times, these internet providers do not even send out notices regarding when and what time they are cutting off the connection. Such cases led students to come late for their scheduled online classes or would not entirely be able to come to class. Should the situation that the students were able to connect, halfway or during their online discussions, they will be left out of the meeting, because their internet connection were cut off.

“Ang problem lang is kapag nawawala ng connection ‘yung (internet provider), ‘yung hindi sila nag-a-advice or nagpopost na mawawalan ng Wi-Fi ta’s do’n na magkakaroon ng problem na mawawala ako sa meet kaya ayon. Ayun lang ‘yung problem hindi sila nag-a-advice.” - #4

[The problem is when there is no connection. The internet provider does not advice or post that they will cut off the connection. That is when the problem occurs. I will be left out of the meeting because I do not have a connection. That is the only problem, internet providers do not post advice or notices about the cut off of internet connection.]

In an article in The New York Times written by Chen in 2020 about “everything you need to know about slow internet speeds,” he discussed the reasons behind the slow internet connection speeds as well as how to diagnose the problem behind such slow speeds. Some of the reasons are old routers, the area where the routers are placed, how big the home is, other devices slowing down the connection, and other people using the same internet. Apparently, if the router is more than five years old, they must be replaced. Routers should also be placed in open areas and not inside cabinets or under desks. How big someone's house also determines

the internet speed. When talking about the gadgets, gadgets with slower internet technology tend to slow down the speed of other devices. Finally, other people also using the same connection is one of the many reasons why the internet speed is slow. This is because, other people's devices' signals are fighting for room on the same radio channels. However, Chen concluded that if it is the internet provider that is at fault, there is not much to do.

From all the students that we have interviewed, not all of them the same experiences when it comes to slow and lagging internet connection. There is a single student who does not experience the same dilemma that most of our participants have experienced. This particular student can smoothly access the video conferencing applications because of their fast internet connection. Similar to what Chen (2020) mentioned in his article about devices and other people using the same internet connection affecting the speed, this student we have interviewed does not possess any issues regarding those.

"Since nag-start po yung pandemic tas nag-online class po agad tayo, wala pa naman po akong nae-experience na any problems, sa Wi-Fi namin ha, compare sa mga nararanasan po nung mga classmate ko na mabagal daw, ganan. So far naman po wala. So, wifi po talaga. Solo...uhm, wala naman. Kase sa umaga, si mo--solo lang akong anak. So sa morning, papasok sila (parents) sa office, tapos solo lang akong natitira dito." - #9

[Since the start of the pandemic, then we shifted to online classes, I have not yet experienced any problems when it comes to our Wi-Fi, compared to what my classmates' experiences how the connection is slow. So far, there is no problem. So, I am really using Wi-Fi. I am an only child. In the morning, my parents will go to work, so I have the house all to myself.]

Budgeting as a challenge to attend online class

In addition, finances are a mass concern of every student nowadays, especially the assistance for a load and school stuffs because not all of us have the privilege to avail Wi-Fi connection. Some students need to work and seek help from their friends to provide their load every week.

"(uhh) siguro 'yung sa, ang pinaka problema namin is (uhh) sa budget (uhh) kailangang medyo magtipid-tipid kaya most of the time hindi ako nakakattend ng mga online class para matagal ko nang isang linggo 'yung data." -#1

["Uhh I think our main problem is uhh the budget uhh we need to save money because of the time I am not able to attend classes just to save a lot data for the whole week"]- #1

"nagka-work ako, dun sa company nung ate ko. Online sya, uhm, Singaporean company. Tapos yung sweldo ko don, yun yung pinangbibili ko nung sa engineering drawing na kailangang gamitin. Ayon po."-#3

[I am working at my ate's company through online. It is a singaporean company ad I spent my salary to engineering drawing that I need.]- #3

“Tapos e magchachat lang ako...minsan ano, kapag kailangan talaga, nagchachat ako sa mga kaibigan ko, ganon. Tapos sa kabutihang palad naman, napapahiram naman nila ako ng pampaload.”-#5

["after that I'll send a message sometimes it is needed, I will message my friends, like that and I am lucky that they lend me money for my load."] -#5

“Pagka naman minsan, may pagkakataon na mabibigyan ako ng ano, ng medyo malaki-laki ganyan, o kaya minsan nag-iipon ako ng mga...minsan kase nanghilingi ako ng pabarya-barya sa nanay ko na, ma, bigyan mo naman ako ng 10 [pesos] o 5 [pesos], ganon. lipunin ko sya, ganon, tapos makakapag-load ako ng malaki-laki.”-#5

["Sometimes there are instances that I am able to receive large amount of money, or I will save money. Sometimes I asked coins from my mom, and she will give me some so with that I am able to save money for my load"]- #5

“Uhmm, ano naman, sa budget, hindi naman s'ya problema. Kase nag-aalaga ako ng pinsan ko. Tapos ay binibigyan nila ako ng parang sweldo din na 750 per week. So, okay naman 'yung ano, hindi naman ako masyadong nanghilingi sa magulang ko, pera ko din.” -#1

["Uhhmm. When it comes to budget, it is not our problemat all because I am taking care of my cousin then they will give me my salary which is 750 per week. So, it is okay, and I am not asking money for my parents."] -#1

But in the case of some students, they are not experiencing any problems or concerns when it comes to finances. They also have a Wi-Fi connection at home and a financial assistance from their parents.

Communication and interaction with professor and classmates *Belongingness to the group*

In switching to online classes, many are not favor with it because there is no physical interaction at all. The only thing that connects us to other people is the video conferencing application which can make your sense of belongingness questionable. Childs and Symeonides (2015) supported this as their study observed that Students feel "lost interpersonal interaction" in synchronized online courses. Since the course is taught online, the environment "lack of human senses", students feel it is "dehumanized, unnatural and unreal." According to Jan (2020) research, he observed that students cannot have the opportunity to interact with each other because they can only ask or answer their teacher.

“Tapos number four yung belongingness ko kasi kapag ka nasa classroom ako mas feel ko 'yung presence kasi magkaka grupo kami ganyan mas feel mo kasi harapan kayo naguusap, nagshashare-an ng ideas, nagcoconceptualize tapos ngayon parang kapag may mga groupings minsan hindi mo alam kung belong ka pa kasi once na nagsasalita ka tapos sila tahimik na hindi mo alam kung nakikinig sila eh or ikaw.... Kunwari sila nag-uusap tapos maguunmute ka para makisabay, mag-share ng ideas, pero hin moam kung naririnig ka nila kasi sabay-sabaya sila nag-uusap eh. Hindi mo

naman alam kung sino yung nagtatake note, kung kaninong idea 'yung natatake nila tapos maraming time na naiinvalidate ako sa belongingness kasi parang hindi na ako belong ayun lang.'- #8

[“and for number 4, the belongingness because in the classroom, I feel the presence if there is a grouping, like that I feel the presence more if face to face communicating, sharing the ideas and conceptualizing. And now if there is a grouping sometimes you are not sure if you still belong once you speak up, they are in silent mode. You are not sure if they are listening of or for instance, they are talking each other and then you are going to unmute your microphone to communicate also to share your ideas, but you are not sure if they are listening because they are talking in chorus. You are not sure who is taking down notes, or who’s ideas is that. There are a lot of times that I felt I do not belong at all.”]-#8

In other cases, students are struggling in dealing with and communicating with their professors, especially during discussions and quizzes. They are also shy to ask queries and clarifications, and because some professors focus solely on the discussion.

“hm, ang negative naman, minsan yung teacher, hindi sya masyadong focus sa'min. Yung, focus lang sya ron sa tinuturo nya. Tas hindi nya kami tinatanong kung naiintindihan ba namin, ganito, ganyan. E hindi nga namin naintindihan, so...e kami namang mga estudyante, syempre nahihya kami na i-disturb sila sa pagsasalita. Kaya ayon, hindi na rin kami nakakapagtanong sa kanya.” -#3

[hmm for the negative, sometimes my professor, he/she is not focusing on the students. He/she solely focusing on the lecture and then he/she will not ask questions if we understand the lesson which is not. So, we the students got shy to disturbed him/her while discussing. So, we ended up not asking questions at all.

Frustrated when classmates are unreachable when deadlines are near

In this online class setup, students is facing a more different way of dealing with their classmates, particularly if in location. Students tend to get frustrated because they can reach them at all, and it affects the group work.

“So, may mga times talaga na pag asap na, tas wala sila, dun lang nakaka-frustrate. Kase dun mo sila kailangan tapos hindi sila reachable, hindi sila online, yon. Sa mga classmates ko yon yung mga negative.” -#9

[So there are times that in urgent situation and then they are missing, in that case I get frustrated because that is the time that I need them and they unreachable, they are not online. So that is the negative effect towards m classmates.”]-#9

Home and Living Environment

Before the pandemic, most students enjoy the comfortable and peaceful life of face-to-face learning at school. Back then, their classes are being conducted in fairly lit rooms, with

electric fans and/or air conditioning, with various facilities where they can easily go to study or to meet with others due to group activities. Face-to-face learning is an effective way to learn various knowledge and skills, considering that it often combines many ways of learning for students such as writing, reading, discussion, presentations, projects, group work, film clips, demonstration, and practice. However, when students are at home and not in a school setting, they tend to unwind, become lazy, and get distracted, because they are at the comfort of their own properties (Pitt, 2020 & Headspace, 2021).

Noise Disturbances

Based on the students' accounts, they are experiencing various distractions at home while using video conferencing applications for their online synchronous classes. Such distractions are noises coming from barking dogs and crying roosters, people talking, noise from house appliances in the background, sounds of vehicles passing by, construction sites nearby, and noises from neighbors.

"Sa disturbances number one ito 'yung aso ko (char) pero may mga time na maingay sila hindi mo sila mapipigilan kaya sila 'yung number one.' - #8

[When it comes to disturbances, number one is, barking of dogs. Although, there are times that they keep on barking, you can't prevent them from doing that. So, that is number one.]

Since they are at their homes with their families, other noise disturbances also come from them. Family member who are talking, and sometimes, they are even shouting in the background, add to the list of distraction that students are experiencing. Also, family members tend to forget and overlook that students are conducting online synchronous classes; hence, their noises can be heard during meetings. To add, they usually go on with their everyday lives where they listen to music and use the various appliances at home. But then again, such noises, although unintentional, add to the students' disturbances and distractions.

"Tas ayon, minsan naman, uhm, yung pagpapatugtog naman ng daddy ko. Kase yung daddy ko medyo mahina na yung pandinig nya. So pag nagpapatugtog sya or nagse-cellphone sya, kinig na kinig yung sounds. Kaya minsan tatawagin ko pa yung daddy ko, daddy, hinaan mo naman yung sound mo kase nakikita sa meeting, eh, nakikinig sa meeting. Eh magsisigawan pa kami sa kwarto, e sa bahay para lang marinig nya. E antagal pa bago makasagot, ayon. Yun lang naman po. Yung TV, minsan, hihinaan, ganon. Kase sa bahay po namin, ano, minsan nagsisigawan yung mga ate ko, lalong-lalo na hindi nga makadinig yung daddy ko. So, magsisigawan talaga sila sa bahay." - #3

[Sometimes, my daddy's music. My dad's hearing is a bit impaired. So, when he listens to music at home, or when he's using his cellphone to listen to music, you can clearly hear the sounds. So sometimes, I will call him and tell him, 'daddy, please lower down the volume of your music because it can be heard in our meeting.' Because his hearing is not good, we tend to shout at each other just so he can hear me. And then he takes a long time before answering. Our TV, sometimes we lower its volume. Because in our

house, sometimes, my siblings are shouting at each other, especially since my dad can't hear properly, tendency is they shout to communicate at home.]

Another on the list of the students' noise disturbances, is when there is a nearby construction that is going on. Aside from this, the noise coming from vehicles passing by seemed to distract them as well. And they can't do anything about it, because it is not like they can prevent those constructions from happening and those vehicles to pass by.

"Yung sa mga kotse-kotse, sa mga motor nila tas may mga construction, 'yun yung mga problem lalo na kapag may mga recitation kami or presentations, sobrang nakaka-gambala 'yung mga ganong bagay." - #4

[Cars, and other people's motorcycles. Then construction that is happening nearby. Those are the problems, especially when we have recitation or presentations, those things are very distracting and disturbing.]

Noises from nearby businesses also add to the disturbances that students experience while attending their online synchronous classes. And since they are at home with their family members, those family members tend to unconsciously walk behind them, distracting the meeting participants, especially when their cameras are on. Consequently, since students are fully staying at home while attending their classes, and with the abundance of online shopping, couriers dropping by their houses with their packages and orders sometimes also distracts them.

"Yung katabi pa po naming bahay is ano, tindahan po ng lechon ng manok. E maingay po yung pagpupukpok, ganon. Tapos yun pong bigla-bigla na lang pong may susulpot sa likod ko, ganon. Kaya po nahirapan din po ako kung sa online class po namin, gawa po ng ganito." - #7

[Our neighbor has a lechon manok business. So, it's noisy when they are chopping the lechon manok parts. Then, when there is someone who will suddenly appear behind me. So, it's been difficult for me during online classes because of those things.]

"Pag ano lang siguro, 'pag nasaktuhan na may naggagawa dito sa labas, tapos synchronous. Ayon lang siguro. Or halimbawa, may courier na tumawag, nandyang na yung parcel, ayon." - #9

[I think when there is a construction outside, and we have synchronous (classes). Or for example, when there is a courier calling because the parcel is already there.]

With these noise disturbances that students are experiencing, there are features and qualities of video conferencing applications that help them. They usually use the mute feature when their professors or classmates are speaking and discussing something. And when it is their time to speak or when their professors call them to ask and answer something, they will simply unmute their microphones. Through this, other participants in the meeting will not be distracted because of their background noises, and vice versa.

Another feature that helps with background noises is the noise reduction feature. Students can simply turn this on, and the video conferencing applications can automatically lessen and help with their background noises.

When speaking, students can also hear and choose the volume of their microphones, so their audio will not be heard too loud or too low.

On the other hand, they also use the virtual background feature when they do not want others to see their real backgrounds. They also use this feature for family members who are unconsciously walking behind them and can clearly be seen on cam. Other students also choose to turn off their cameras so their professors and classmates will not be distracted by their backgrounds.

Challenges at Home

Aside from various noise disturbances, there are also challenges where students face and experience at home while conducting their online synchronous classes. And despite the technology- advanced video conferencing applications, they are no use with these challenges that they are experiencing.

One student with younger siblings who are on modular classes, shared how difficult it is to balance being an eldest sibling, and being a student. Consequently, this student is also the one responsible for their household chores, because their mother is the one working for them. This particular student expresses the challenges of doing household chores and other errands, and helping their younger siblings with their module, not to mention that this student is also attending online synchronous classes while juggling all of these.

“Tapos habang nagkklase ako yung tutulungan ko yung mga kapatid ko na sagutan yung module nila. Kase may mga kapatid ako na maliliit pa. Panganay ako, syempre ako yung panganay, kailangan tulungan ko sila sa kanilang mga schoolwork. So, habang nasa online class ako, tinutulungan ko sila, ganon. Tapos, ano pa ba...yung mga...uh...gawain sa bahay. Like for example, may klase ako ng before lunch, 10. Ngayon, syempre, panganay ganon may gawain din sa bahay, gagawin mo sya kahit nag-online class ka. Like, halimbawa, kung nagdidicuss yung teacher, dadalin ko na lang yung phone ko, io-off ko na lang yung mic ko or i-off ko na lang yung microphone ko. Tapos habang nagdidiscuss yung teacher, ako naggagawa ng mga gawaing bahay, mga ganon.” - #5

[Then, when I'm attending classes, I'm helping my siblings to answer their modules. Because my siblings are still very young. I'm the eldest, so of course, I need to help them with their schoolwork. So, while I'm attending my online class, I'm also helping them. Then, household chores. Like for example, I have a scheduled class at 10, before lunch. Now, of course I'm the eldest, there are chores at home, I need to do them even if I'm attending online classes. Like, for example, my teacher is discussing, I will just bring my phone, and turn off my microphone. Then, while my teacher is discussing, I am doing household chores.]

A student also shared how their parents think that online classes are simply sitting in front of their computers and listening to their professors while they are discussing. Because of this, their parents call them for errands, despite the student being loaded with works.

“Siguro pag nagkasabay-sabay...pag work from home si mommy. Tapos nagkasabay yung gawaing-bahay saka yung school. Pag nandito kase sa bahay si mommy, pag work from home sila, sila dito sa bahay, akala kase nila basta ka lang nakaupo sa laptop, wala kang ginagawa. Tapos, may iutos sa’yo. Tapos andami kong gagawin. ‘Yun na yung pinakachallenge sa’kin kase kailangan kong i-balance yung gawaing bahay tapos mag-focus sa online class, ganon.” - #9

[Maybe when I need to do things simultaneously when my mom is working from home. Then, household chores and schoolwork, they need to be done both. When my mom is at home, when she is working from home, when my parents are at home, they thought that you are simply sitting in front of your laptop, you are not doing anything. Then, they will call you to do errands. But then I also have many things to do. That’s my most challenging experience because I need to balance doing household chores while focusing in my online class.]

On the other hand, another student shared how time management plays a big part during their online synchronous classes. The challenge of managing their time of rest and their scheduled online classes seemed to be not going well, especially with loaded and piles of schoolwork that seemed to only worsen the situation.

“Sa online class naman namin sa synchronous ano lang mostly two hours ang class namin two to three hours tapos ang synch class namin is (uhh) isang beses. Isang subject isang beses sa isang week or minsan isang beses sa isang buwan depende sa teacher, and then kapag nagpapa- asynchronous sobrang daming gawain as in. sobrang hassle kapag iresched ‘yung classes kasi imbes na pahinga siya or (uhm) gagawa ng ibang assessments nagiging synchronous class siya (uhm) kaya nababawasan ‘yung time namin but ‘ayon nareresolbahan namin siya and naresolbahan namin siya kung kailan patapos na ‘yung school year pero okay lang.” - #4

[In our online synchronous classes, mostly we only have two to three hours of class, then our asynchronous is one time only. One subject per week, or sometimes, one time per month, depending on the teacher. And when they call for asynchronous, the pile of works is loaded, as in. Not to mention that it is a hassle when they try to reschedule classes. Because instead of that being our time to rest or the time where we can do our other assessments, it becomes a synchronous class. So, it lessens our time. But then again, we resolve it. But we resolve it when the school year is on its end. But still, it’s okay.]

Having mentioned the pile of workloads in this online learning set up, another student mentioned being pressure because of time constraints and hectic deadlines. This student also shared how online classes and the traditional face-to-face classes are entirely different from one another. How online classes revealed that students are simply forcing themselves to work on their assessments and to attend their online classes, on the purpose of simply passing. Online learning set up with its pile of works and many email notifications about deadlines, causes stress and anxiety for students, not to mention that they are also being overwhelmed with everything that is happening. This student expressed how mentally draining this type of learning set up is.

Since they will soon be young professionals, they are uncertain if they will be capable to tackle on the “outside world,” and if they are prepared for the careers they wanted to take once they graduate.

“Challenges. Unlike nung face-to-face kasi nakadorm kasi ako so kapag ka may student work, student works lang talaga ginagawa ko pero unlike ngayon na online classes syempre nakakapressure talaga. May mga time na nakakapressure talaga almost every day kasi may deadline na ibinibigay sa school tapos may kailangan gawin sa bahay tapos may kailangan ka pang gawin external affairs kaya ayon ‘yung pressure...I mean oo matatapos tayo dito sa ganitong set up, ga-graduate tayo sa ganitong set-up medyo anxious na kung saan ka pupulutin pagkatapos. Ayon sobrang uncertain lang nung ganung feeling nakacause siya ng anxiety sa akin most of the time kasi ano kasi hindi ko alam kung anong klaseng graduate ako. Kung kaya ko ba makipagsabakan sa ano labas, ayun. Tapos ‘yung ano ‘yung stress. Ayun challenge din siya para sakin kasi maraming time na ano eh na ayaw mo talaga pumasok, pero kailangan kaya pipilitin mo ‘yung sarili mo tapos kapag natapos na ‘yung klase parang sobrang mentally drained ka na parang nakaupo ka lang pagod na pagod ka. Nakakastress ‘yung ganung feeling tapos sunod-sunod na mageemail sayo ‘yung mga deadlines mo.” - #8

[Challenges. Unlike face-to-face (classes), I have a dorm before, so, when I have student work, I am only doing student works. Unlike during this time of online classes, of course, I am very pressured. There are times that it’s very pressuring almost every day because there are deadlines given by my school, then there are household chores, and I also need to do my other external affair works. I mean, yes, we will finish in this type of set up, we are going to graduate with this kind of set up, I am slightly anxious about where I will be after all these. I am very uncertain about such a feeling, that it causes me anxiety. Most of the time I ask myself what time of graduate I am going to be. If I can compete in the “outside.” Then, the stress. It is a challenge for me because there are many times that I do not want to attend my classes. But then, I need to force myself. And after those classes, I am very mentally drained, like you are simply sitting but you are exhausted. It’s very stressful, that kind of feeling. Not to mention the simultaneous emails about deadlines.]

Home environment provides the foundation for learning and is an element of the students’ life that can affect their learning and academic performance (Hill, 2018). However, not

all homes are conducive for learning. Most often than not, students' home and living environment are in chaos. Students are having a hard time balancing being a student and a child to their parents. In this online learning set up, the students are multitasking in doing household chores, helping their younger siblings with their schoolwork, all while also attending their online synchronous classes. Many people, students in this case, do not have a luxurious home office or workplace, away from young children, visitors, and household chores (Okereafor & Manny, 2020). Moreover, research has found that learning environments play a vital role in students' success. Many factors can affect the students' learning ability such as seating, light, noise, and even color. Those who study in a positive learning environment have shown to be more motivated, engaged, and have a higher overall learning ability. On the other hand, those who are learning in poor environments with uncomfortable, loud, and full of distractions, will find it more difficult to absorb information and stay engaged (Hendrix, 2019).

RQ3: Characteristics of a Good Video Conferencing Application for Online Class

Table 3 shows the most used features used by the participants that has been a great benefit for them while using the video conferencing application during online synchronous classes. It is said to be relevant and helpful for them.

Table 3. Most used features of the respondents

Features	Rank
On/off camera	1
Mute/unmute of the microphone	2
Share screen	3
Recording	4
Chat box	5
Virtual background	6
Raise hands	7
Reaction button	8
Large gallery	9
Whiteboard	10
Breakout rooms	11
Unlimited acces (Google meet)	12
Assignments/activity bin	13

Table 4 shows the summary of the lived experiences of the participants while using the video conferencing applications during online synchronous learning. In addition, it summarizes the good and bad characteristics for research question number 3 which is the characteristics of a good video conferencing applications for online classes.

Table 4. Good and bad characteristics of video conferencing applications

Good Characteristics	Bad Characteristics
Easy to interact with people	Excessive use of data
Chat box feature	Data Consuming (on cam and on mic for data users)
Favorable features for non-technical professors	Nonfunctional features
Virtual backgrounds helps with messy background	Complicated features/buttons for non-technical professors
Noise reduction for background noises	Lagging
Security protections	
Identity protections	

Video Conferencing Applications should not be Data-consuming

In an online class setting, not all students can use Wi-Fi. Some students used data as their source of internet connection to attend classes. However, some video conferencing applications are not data user friendly, and it became a problem for some selected students. In addition, as claimed in the study of Okereafor & Manny, 2020, the fast network provides a channel for establishing and maintaining a remote communication link during a remote work session. They provide a platform for the system to retain the good connections required for high-quality audio, video, text, and images. Any factors that affect the quality and ease of use of the data network may affect the output and may reduce the integrity of the system and the network security rating.

Excessive Use of Data

The results of the data gathered show that adequate characteristics of video conferencing applications is when it is data user friendly, and it is not cost too much money even if you used to load every week. As stated in Okereafor & Manny, 2020, poor network conditions and insufficient bandwidth are the two main network-related problems of remote video technology.

“Supposedly is ‘yung friendly din for (uhh) data users like me kasi pakiramdam ko minsan nakakalimutan nung mga professors na hindi lahat is nakaWiFi.” -#2
[Supposedly friendly for data users like me because sometimes professors forgot that not all students are using Wi-Fi.” - #2]

In addition, it is not friendly for those students who rely on load for their online classes. It may cost too much, especially if the video conferencing application is very data-consuming.

“For example, you always rely on load because you don’t have Wi-Fi at home. The video conferencing applications will cost too much money if you need to load them every day.” -#10

[Ang negative naman non halimbawa wala kayong WiFi diba practicality, wala kayong WiFi lagi ka lang nagpapaload. Kung araw-araw ka magpapaload edi ang laki ng gastos mo sa isang linggo makaka seven hundred ka na ganon eh ang hirap naman ng ganon diba kaya ayun lang para sa akin kain load sila ayun yung negative aspects nila in terms of practicality kain load yun lang.] -#10

Data Consuming (On Camera and On Mic for Data Users)

Another reason that occurs is video conferencing application is extremely data-consuming whenever the microphone and camera are on. Some other students are bothered by this kind of situation that their classmates are experiencing.

“It is really data consuming lalo na kapag naka-on cam ka on mic pa. Ang bilis makaubos ng data.” #6

[“It is really data consuming especially when the camera and microphone is on. It became excessive in data consumption.” -#6]

Prepaide Data Limitations/Prepaid Data Cap

Furthermore, some students have a budget limitation in availing the load per week, which leads to choosing not to attend some classes. So they can use the data in working and submitting their school- works.

“Opo hanggang 2gig lang po usually ang kaya namin i-avail kada week nang aking magulang.” - #2

[“Yes, my parents can only avail 2gig per week.” -#2]

“(uhm) siguro personally (uhh) my problem is it's quite excessive, especially for me na I only rely on data connection most of the time. So, it's quite excessive, especially if I have to attend classes na inaabot ng ilang oras kaya most of the time hindi rin ako nakakaattend kasi bitin na yung data.” -#2

[“Uhhh personally my problem is it is quite excessive, especially for me, I only rely on data connection most of the time. So, it's quite excessive especially if I have to attend classes for hours so most of the time I decided not to attend because my data is not enough.” -#2]

Pointless Features

The video conferencing applications has features that help/guide the students during their online classes. However, some aspects seem to be pointless or useless. Some aspects are incompatible, complicated, and non-functional.

Non-functional Features

Some participants say that the features in the video conferencing application, specifically in google meets are not working, especially the google grid, which is a function for the participants to be able to see them on one screen but in the case of #2, it is not working. According to her, it is okay if that specific feature does not exist at all. In addition, the caption feature is also useful based on her experience.

“Palagay ko is ‘yung, (hmm) yung I forgot what its called. I think it’s google grid? I mean it didn’t work for me kasi when I tried ‘yung para macapture lahat nung kung sino mang umattend sa classes namin. So, I just ignored it na and didn’t use it again.” -#2

[“I think it’s Google grid? I mean it didn’t work for me because when I tried to use it to take a screenshot of all the students who attended the class. So, I just ignored it and didn’t use it again.” -#2]

Another reason is that she only has her phone to use for online classes. The non-functional features affect how she should do her activities. Instead of having an effortless experience, it may take so much of her time.

“Parang required kami gumawa ng journal every (uhh) end ng sem so gusto ko sanav magscreen capture nung buong klase sa google meets kaso hindi ayun magawa kasi hindi compatible sa akin ‘yung google grid which is feature din supposedly ng google meets so ‘yun siguro.” - #2

[“As a scholar, we are required to make a journal every end of the term, so I wanted to take a screen capture of the whole class in google meets, but I can’t because the feature google grid is no compatible to be which I supposedly a feature of google meets.” -#2]

“siguro ‘yung caption I mean I don’t think it’s really useful especially for us na hindi naman diretsong english ang ano conversation so I think it’s really not useful to us.” - #2

[“I think the caption, I mean I don’t think it’s really useful especially for us that not communicate fully in English. So, I think it’s really not useful to us.” -#2]

Complicated Features and Buttons

Moreover, features should be user friendly, but according to #1 and #10 it is complicated to use and it affects their usage of the video conferencing applications. It became more complicated during virtual classes, especially the zoom application.

“Ayon, kase ano, uhmm, masyadong complicated ‘yung ibang buttons kapag nag virtual class.” #1

[“During virtual class, the buttons are kind of complicated.” -#1]

“pero sa zoom naman po (uhh) familiar din naman po ako sa zoom pero medyo nahihirapan po ako kung saan po magchachat, kung saan po pwede magtanong sa teacher ganon po tsaka kung dun saan ‘yung mga makikita ‘yung activity medyo komplikado po kumpara sa google classroom or google meet yun po.”-#10

[“I am familiar with the zoom application, but I find it complicated and hard to use because I don’t know where to chat, where to ask my professor, like that. Also, I find it complicated to find the activities. So, it is complicated for me unlike google meet.” -#10]

Access to Video Conferencing Applications

Ever since we switch to online classes, video conferencing applications serve as our way of communicating and interacting with our classmates and professors. It is indeed a good thing to have access to the video conferencing applications.

Easy interaction with people

In addition, as stated by #5 in the interview, it makes them easier to express themselves even virtually. Having all in access to the video conferencing applications make them feel like it is like face- to-face classes.

“Sa positive, siguro masasabi ko na medyo madali yung interaction ng mga taong gumagamit dito.” -#5

[“For positive, I can say that interacting to people using it is much easier.” #5]

Chat box features helps shy students to participate without speaking

On the other hand, having access to video conferencing applications connects the students in a way they can express themselves with the help of the chat box. Obviously, there are so many ways to express yourself during online classes.

“Katulad din po yung sa chatbox din po dito, kase po pag nag-online class po, minsan po kase, natatakot po akong umimik, ganon. Kase hindi po ako comfortable agad dun

sa mga kasama ko dun. Katulad po sa Zoom, ganon, kase po hindi ko po sila kilala. Nasa isip ko po is baka i-judge nila ako, the way ako umimik, ganon. Kaya po pag yung prof ko po nagtatanong, kunwari, dun na lang po ako nasagot.” -#7

[“Like the chat box here, whenever I am in class, sometimes I feel afraid to speak up because I am not comfortable with my classmates. Like in Zoom, I am not familiar to them. I think they may judge me the way I speak, something like that. That is why if my professor is asking, I just use the chat to rely on my answer.” #7]

Using chat box feature to ask professors with bad connection

Even if the professors have slow internet connection, the students were able to use the chat box to cooperate on the discussion and stay engage as much as they can or if they need to clear something from the discussion.

“Kase po, minsan po, yung prof po, hindi rin maganda yung connection, kaya parang hindi nya rin po ako naiintindihan. Which is kung ginagamit naman po namin yung chatbox dito, mas madali nya pong maiintidihan agad yung sinabi ko.” -#7

[“Most of the time if I cannot understand the prof, I use the chat box to ask questions especially if the prof has a bad connection and I can’t understand the discussion.” -#7]

Favorable features for non-technical professors

Video conferencing applications is indeed not friendly for professors especially for the those who are old. They are not familiar with the features and functions of the applications. It became a challenge for them in teaching classes. With that, having a favorable feature for non-technical professors It will be easier for them to teach in this online class setting.

Challenges because of complicated buttons for non-technical professors

In addition, it is indeed difficult for the professors every day to face the challenges of dealing the video conferencing applications. Like what #1 stated on the interview it is good if it is easier to navigate so that professors will not consume so much time infixing the problem.

“Tapos ‘yung ito kase, ‘yung nangyari sa prof namin, parang ano, nag, nasa class kami. Tapos parang may napipindot s’yang iba-ibang controls do’n tapos ire-refresh n’ya ulit ‘yung pinaka, pinaka class namin. Tapos uulit ulit kami sa umpisa kase nga may napipindot s’ya na hindi naman n’ya masyadong gamay, gan’on. Kaya sana ay easy to navigate, ayon” -#1

[There is an incident, and we are in a class then suddenly our professor is clicking different controls and then refresh it. So because of that we wil start again from the beginning because my professor is not familiar with the controls. So it should be easy to navigate.] -#1

Tas parang syempre, hindi naman po lahat, hindi naman po karamihan is yung gantong age lang yung nagamit nitong app. Na parang kumbaga po is kahit po yung mas nakakatanda po sa'tin, kumbaga mas madali po nilang maintindihan in a way na hindi complicated, ganon po. -#1

["Not all of them, not all of them used with the gadgets with this age. Even the older people than us should understand in a way it is not complicated at all."]- #1

Importance of virtual background feature

Not all of us has the most presentable study area to use for online classes. Most of the used rely on using the virtual background that every video conferencing application provides. Having a presentable background is an alternative way to helps the people in the meeting to focus on the one who is speaking and not on the surroundings. In this way, they can avoid or cover the distractions and messy things on the background.

Virtual background feature helps cover messy background

In connection, the virtual background feature is like a magic eraser tool. Even if you do not have a presentable study area, the virtual background is there to save you. We can also choose what background we want depends on the situation. The students can stay where they are.

"Kung sa features po nung application po katulad po nitong Zoom po, late ko na lang po na- discover yung paggamit po ng ano, yung virtual background po. Na-discover ko lang po sya nung magre-report po kami tas tinuruan po kami nung group leader namin. Yung feature po na yon is natuwa po ako kase parang, katulad nga po nito, ano po, magulo yung background ko po tas kung ano-ano pa pong nakalagay ron sa cabinet. "

-#7

["If the features of the applications like zoom, I was late when I discover the virtual background. I discover it when we will be doing a report and our group leader taught us how to use it. I am happy with that feature because like right now, I have a messy background and there is a cabinet."]- #7

"Saka 'yung ano, 'yung virtual background. Ayon, kapag ayaw mong makita 'yung ano, nasa paligid mo, pwede s'yang mag-appear, sa virtual background." -#1

["The virtual background. If you don't want them to see what's in your surroundings, you can use a virtual background."]- #1

"Kaya po naghahanap po ako ng space dito na maayos para mag-online class. Which is very inconvenient naman po sa'kin. Kase po, dito po sa location po ng bahay namin, along the highway ganyan, ang pinaka-accessible ko po talagang spot para po sa pag-

online class ko pois dito po sa living room namin. Kaso nga po dahil po katabing highway, maingay ganyon. Kaya, yun po, natuwa po ako don sa feature po nung virtual background po. Hindi na po ako nahihirapan maghanap ng maayos na background.” - #7

[“I was looking for a place here in our house for my online class set-up. Which is very inconvenient for me because our location is along highway and the most accessible spot of our house for online classes is the living room, but because we are in a high way, it is cater so many noises. Because of that I am glad that there is a virtual background feature. It is nt difficult to find a nice background.”]- #7

There are instances that professors require to have a presentable and clean background and if you do not have a place to be, students can choose the virtual background.

“Mahalaga po yon, tsaka natuwa po akong gamitin kase po meron po akong mga prof na napaka-sensitive po sa background po ganon. Na andami po nilang sine-set na bawal ang ganto, bawal ang ganyan.” -#7

[“It is important, and I find it enjoying using because I have very sensitive professors when It comes to background, they are setting this rule.”]- #7

Noise reduction to avoid distractions

Noise reduction for background noises

Some participants claimed that noise reduction or using sound filters can help them avoid distractions, especially during these times wherein we are in no control of our surroundings. We only rely on clicking the mute button to cancel all the noises. So having noise reduction will be an edge for the students.

“Uhm, kung sa ano, uhmm, ‘di naman, ‘yung sa kanina nga, noise reduction. Kapag gusto mong, tawag dito, mawala- ma-lessen ‘yung noise background, gan’yan.” -#1

[“If on the uhmm not really because earlier the noise reduction. If you want, call here, remove, or lessen the nosie background.”] #1

“When it comes to video conferencing... ewan ko kung kaya ‘to pero at least sana magawan nila ng paraan ‘yung parang sound filter ganon ba ‘yung boses lang nung nagsasalita ‘yung maririnig hindi ‘yung background noise nila kasi may mga time na sa mismong lugar nung professor nanggaling ‘yung sounds dun nanggagaling ‘yung interruption ‘yung communication barrier nasa kanila eh sa kanila nanggaling ‘yung discussion sa kanila nanggagaling ‘yung knowledge ‘yung idea.” -#8

[“When it comes to video conferencing.... I don’t know if it they can but at least make a solution on how to... like sound filter like that, like the only the voice of the one who is speaking is registering and not the background noise because there are times that in

the same place where my professor is located is where the noise coming from. The communication barrier there. They are the one conducting the discussion the knowledge and ideas came from them.”- #8

Security protections

Identity protections

According to Okereafor & Manny, 2020, the ability of network components to maintain the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of data transmitted between sessions provides a fair assessment of the overall security of the service and is often the basis for technical evaluation.

In using the internet, we are not sure if all the information we encoded is safe and protected, especially today, we are in an online class. We always use our emails, cameras, and microphones. So, to have a stress-free online class, the participants wanted to have secured protection of their identity as well as their pieces of information. The features of the video conferencing application cater secured function in order for the students to use it without even worrying.

“Ano, para sa’kin, uhmm, dapat maprotektahan ‘yung ano identity nu’ng, tsaka, ay wait lang. Kase last time, ano, nagkklase kami tapos eh may isa kaming kasama dun sa ano na ‘yon sa room na ‘yon na hindi naman namin kklase. So, ang iniisip namin ay pa’no n’ya nakuha ‘yung link dun sa conference namin na ‘yon. So, sana ay ano, ‘yung sa security, uhmm, may certain ano na lang sana, may certain code para do’n sa mga estudyante na ‘yon. Tho meron namang code, pero ano eh, nakukuha pa rin ng iba, kaya nakakapasok pa rin dun sa pinakaconference.”-#1

[“For me, the identity should be protected. Because last time while we were hava class there is someone who entered the room. So we were thinking how did that person gt the link of the conference. So I am hoping that the security, there is a certain code only for students. Although we have a code, but it is still accessible to others that is why random people can enter the conference.”] - #1

“yun yung safety tsaka yung kapag wala ring camera wala ring talagang camera hindi yung nagloloko tsaka yung kapag nakamute, nakamute talaga unless na lang mapindot mo hindi mo alam diba so ayun naman yung safety.” -#10

[“The safety, and if there is no camera, the camera should stay off and not fooling around. Also, if it is on mute, it should stay on mute unless if it is I accidentallhy click the button and turn it on. So that is it the safety.”] -#10

In Addition, security tools also provide continuous communication encryption to prevent or minimize the risk of spying on confidential information. (Okereafor & Manny, 2020).

“Uhm, safe sya kase hindi naman ano...syempre may choice ka pa rin kung...di ba nga, gaya nyo po uhm, nag-ano kayo ng consent form kung pwede akong, kung pwede kong

ipakita yung mukha ko at pumayag ako, ayon uhm, once na pumayag ako, pwede ko nang ipakita yung mukha ko. Pero yung mga, yung iba, na kahit hindi man, kahit hindi sila magpaalam tas nag- open cams or naka-close cam sila, so ayon, uhm feeling ko uhmm naaalagaan, e naaalagaan, parang naaano nila yung privacy nung taong yon. Na, choice ko pa din kung gusto kong buksan or saraduhan yung video, yung mic.”- #3 [“Uhm, it is safe even though.... Of course, you still have the choice if like you... you provided me a consent form if I will allow you guys to show my face and then I agree. Once I agree I can show myself, but unlike in other situation they did not gave ask permission to open or off the camera. So, I felt like I was taken care of, like the privacy of the person. I have the power to choose if I want to open or close my camera and my mic.”] - #3

In utilizing the Media Richness Theory in this study, the researchers are confident that It supports the findings of this study. It explains how the richer media mediums – in this case, the video conferencing applications – are suited for more effective communication to take place. Moreover, it explains how video conferencing applications play a big role for online classes to take place, and how its rich features cater the needs of the students, and somehow help them for a better learning experience. Based on the findings, and as shown in this study, the students’ use of the video conferencing applications in their online classes paved way for an interactive communication with their professors and classmates. During their synchronous classes, students can raise questions and clarifications, that can also be answered immediately by their professors. Furthermore, the researchers’ analysis on the roles and lived experiences of students in using video conferencing applications in their online classes are supported on the Media Richness Theory. It assumes that richer media mediums – which are video conferencing applications – provides more interactive communication to take place. Additionally, it supports the assumption that the effective use of a communication channel is by matching its richness, and the equivocality of task, which in this case, are online synchronous classes.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the gathered data, the study concluded that online learning via video conferencing applications is not as relaxed and comfortable as we all think it is. The participant experiences several situations wherein it explains why not all video conferencing application is advisable as a communication channel for online synchronous classes.

In connection to research question number 1, which is to describe the role of video conferencing applications as communication channels in online synchronous classes. It concludes that despite the use of technology-advance video conferencing applications, online synchronous classes or the online learning setup proved to be ineffective. One major factor affecting the students’ online classes is their lack of gadgets and resources to access the video conferencing applications that are necessary for their online learning setup. On the other hand, despite all of the hindrances, students can still be able to learn from their teacher, even in online

learning. Professors are still reachable and can answer queries from the students. Moreover, the role of video conferencing applications during online classes is visible.

On research question number 2, which seeks to examine the lived experiences of students in using video conferencing applications for their online synchronous classes, based on the gathered data, the researchers concluded that technical issues and concerns occur predominantly in all the respondents. Having a strong or stable internet connection is a privilege in this online class setup. Also, noises from the surroundings affect the attention of the students while having classes because not all of them have an absolute and peaceful home and living environment. Balancing their time as a student and as a child of their parent is also a challenge during online classes. A positive learning environment has a motivating and engaging effect on the side, and those who have a poor learning environment are prone to experiencing difficulties during online classes.

Moreover, research question number 3 which intends to describe the characteristics of a good video conferencing application for online classes based on the students' lived experiences, the researcher observed that most of the students describe that a good video conferencing application is if it is not excessive in data consumption. For instance, even if the camera and microphones are on, video conferencing applications should not consume a massive amount of data considering it may lead to students becoming absent in class to save the load for the remaining weeks. On the other hand, based on the participants' experiences some features are said to be incompatible, complicated, and most especially non-functional. In terms of accessing the video conferencing applications, we discovered for the respondents to call it a good video conferencing application, the application should make their life easier to interact with other people, especially in this kind of setting.

As shown in the paper, the participants also wished to have double security protection, to protect their information and identity whenever the classes are happening. In conclusion, for the students to claim the video conferencing application has good characteristics, it should be accessible in all ways for both students and professors. It can protect their identity and pieces of information encoded. As shown in this paper, the experiences of the participants are valid and support the research questions provided by the researchers. The lived experience of the participants claimed that online classes are not easy as it seems. There are a lot of flaws that should be furnished.

Recommendations

Based on the concluded findings of the study, the following recommendations were drawn by the researchers.

1. Video conferencing application developers should consider several features that can support data users, and non-technical professors equally at the same time.
2. The platform developers should improve some features, remove the non-functional or the useless ones, and replace some of its features. If impossible to make it more relevant to use for the students and professors during online synchronous classes.

3. Institutions should conduct technical seminars and workshops for their faculty members since not all of them are equipped with today's technology and applications.
4. For institutions mandating online synchronous classes, they must consider the students' homes and living environment before fully implementing such type of learning setting. They must understand that not all homes are conducive to learning and that various factors affect the students' learning experience.
5. The institutions should pick/choose the most advisable and suitable video-conferencing application as a communication channel for their students and professors during online synchronous learning.
6. The institutions should conduct a seminar or orientation for the parents or guardians of the students to inform them that home and living environment may be factors that affect the students' online learning experiences.
7. The family, especially the parents of students, should understand/acknowledge that online classes are the same as face-to-face classes being in a classroom. The students need to have a peaceful and quiet environment and a clear distinction between being students and being a son/daughter.
8. Future researchers who will consider this topic for their future research should expand their grounds and examine more video conferencing applications. Methods and design of this research can also be adopted in future research.

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