

Adapting to Change: Challenges and Opportunities of Hairdressing Students in A National Secondary Technical School

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/bjmas.2022.0440>

Published March 07, 2023

Citation: Pepito S.K.T. and Saab R.A. (2024) Adapting to Change: Challenges and Opportunities of Hairdressing Students in A National Secondary Technical School, *British Journal of Multidisciplinary and Advanced Studies: Education, Learning, Training & Development*, 5(2),1-9

ABSTRACT: *Students faced significant challenges in acquiring practical hairdressing skills as schools transitioned to distance or blended learning. The findings revealed two themes: transitional challenges and beneficial effects. Challenges during the transition include adjustments, drawback, financial constraints, feeling of inadequacy and limited equipment. The shift from modular to face-to-face learning introduced issues like time management struggles and dissatisfaction with the modular approach. These issues lead to more concerns about academic setbacks and motivation upon the transition to face-to-face classes called new normal. Moreover, financial constraints due posed a challenge. Despite these hurdles, participants found the transition beneficial as they appreciate the enriched learning, hands-on interactions, and engagement in extracurricular activities. The new normal was recognized for its practical engagement, facilitating networking, and attracting clients which led to improving communication skills and creating job and entrepreneurial opportunities. The study's findings strongly support the notion that hairdressing students thrive and excel when immersed in a hands-on, face-to-face learning environment. This suggests the need for further research to better improve their experiences and skill development.*

KEYWORDS: experiences, hairdressing, new normal, case study, senior high school students

INTRODUCTION

In response to the unprecedented challenges posed by the pandemic, the Department of Education (DepEd) has implemented the Basic Educational-Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) as its primary strategy. Intending to provide quality education in the context of the "new normal," the BE-LCP encompasses the dissemination of self-paced learning materials coupled with various alternative learning approaches, including online, blended, television-based, and radio-based instruction methods (Yacub & Eadie, 2022). The United Nations, UNICEF, WHO, and UNESCO support introducing limited face-to-face classes in the Philippines, praising the Department of Education's leadership and coordination with appropriate institutions, including the Department of Health.

During the lockdown, all the schools under DepEd adopted modular learning through printed and digital modules which was also the most preferred learning of the student's parents (Bernardo,

2020). This considers learners in remote regions who do not have access to the internet for online learning. Despite this, there are obstacles found during the implementation of this setup. This includes a lack of school funding in the creation and distribution of modules, students' challenges with self-studying, and parents' lack of understanding to academically assist their child/children (Dangle & Sumalinog, 2020). Thus, the former DepEd secretary Briones called for collective effort in designing future learning spaces and instructional design (Briones, 2022).

The 'new normal' posed a unique set of difficulties, particularly for the skill-oriented subjects such as Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) - Technical-Vocational Education (TVE) (Asuncion, 2021). As per DepEd Order No. 67, s. 2012, Technical-Vocational Education (TVE) constitutes a specific component within the execution of the K to 12 Basic Education Program (BEP). This facet is crafted under the training regulations (TR) stipulated by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). It centers its attention on nurturing technical skills in the student's chosen area of specialization like Hairdressing.

Hairdressing is a strand in senior high school that enables students to perform basic hair care services such as hair coloring, bleaching, haircutting, straightening and perming and basic facial make-up application. Hairdressing plays a role in individuals' self-esteem, as it impacts their physical appearance (McFarquhar & Lewis, 2000). People project a desired image through their hair and general look, underscoring the importance of hairstyling in creating and preserving a positive self-image. Additionally, services like hairdressing focus on interactions between the service provider and the customer, co-creating the experience and determining the level of service provided (Vargo & Lusch, 2008).

Thus, the shift to remote learning had greatly challenged the practical skills subjects (Yabut, 2022) like hairdressing, leaving the students struggling to acquire essential skills in the absence of hands-on training sessions (Johnson, 2020). Furthermore, the absence of in-person interactions hinders the development of interpersonal and customer service skills which are crucial facets of the hairdressing profession (Smith, 2021). Additionally, Tuazon and Tamayo (2021) highlighted the challenge posed by the limited practical training opportunities in hairdressing programs. This statement sets the stage for further exploration of the issue. Similarly, Bacus and Cañeda (2020) underscored the difficulties in simulating real salon scenarios and interactions with clients which are critical for skills development among hairdressing students.

The aforementioned studies have shown the challenges faced by TVE-TVL. However, there is limited in-depth research on the TVL hairdressing students' experiences during the transition to new normal education setup. With the change, interventions may be created to improve the academic and skills development of students studying hairdressing by understanding the possibilities and barriers that the students faced. This study intended to shed light on the special circumstances surrounding hairdressing education during the new normal brought by COVID-19 pandemic.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Social Constructivism Theory, which emphasizes meaningful social interactions and active student participation in learning. The theory recognizes the importance of observing changes in the mind over time and using tools and signs to support cognitive activities (Hausfather, 2012). Students engaged in problem-solving, critical thinking, and reflection, negotiating meaning and constructing knowledge through social interactions (Van Hout-Wolters et al., 2000). By putting knowledge in real-life contexts, students create personal representations and connect new information to existing knowledge and context (Kim, 2001; Brown et al., 1989). The study highlights the importance of creating supportive and collaborative learning environments in hairdressing education to foster active engagement and meaningful interactions among students.

The Experiential Learning Theory proposed by Kolb (1984) is another pertinent idea guiding this investigation. According to Kolb, learning is most effective when cyclical. It involves active exploration, concrete experiences, reflective observation, and abstract conceptualization. In hairdressing education, active engagement in hands-on experiences coupled with reflective thinking, enabled students to develop applicable knowledge and skills for practical settings (Kolb, 1984). This approach encourages students to make connections between theory and practice, leading to deeper understanding and improved learning outcomes.

Albert Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1997) offers valuable insights into the experiences of hairdressing students, emphasizing individuals' beliefs in their capabilities to perform tasks successfully. In hairdressing education, students' self-efficacy beliefs play a crucial role in motivation, engagement, and perseverance in learning. High self-efficacy beliefs contribute to goal-setting, effort exertion, and persistence, ultimately enhancing performance and career development (Bandura, 1997).

In the the Philippine education, Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) Education, integral to the senior high school curriculum, emphasized practical skills and real-world teaching-learning situations, with courses like Hairdressing to equip students for successful careers (DepEd, 2015).

The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), mandated by the Technical Education and Skills Development Act of 1994 (Republic Act No. 7796), plays a crucial role in vocational education by establishing national occupational skill standards and implementing certification and accreditation programs (TESDA Act, 1994). TESDA ensures that competency-based curriculum, instructional materials, and assessment methods are align with industry standards, preparing hairdressing students for employment (TESDA Act, 1994).

This study aimed to understand the experiences, challenges and opportunities of hairdressing students in the new normal. To achieve this, it integrated several theories, including Social Constructivism, Experiential Learning Theory, Self-Efficacy Theory and Cognitive Load Theory. The study also examined the effectiveness of TVL education in the Philippines in preparing students for successful hairdressing careers, taking into consideration the legislative frameworks and educational policies. Through the theoretical underpinnings and contextual considerations, the study aimed to contribute to a deeper understanding of vocational education and the educational needs of hairdressing students.

METHODS

This study used qualitative case study research design in exploring the experiences of ten Grade 12 students who took hairdressing course during the new normal. Purposeful sampling was used to choose the participants, following the criteria of being enrolled in hairdressing strand and experienced modular distance learning and the transition to face-to-face classes that align with the research objectives. The study used the in-depth interviews, class observation, field notes and artifacts to collect data. In doing so, ethical considerations such as voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality (Paoletti et al., 2013) was followed. Following that, raw data were coded and analyzed using The *HyperResearch* software to code and to develop categories and themes, following the recognized standards of Lincoln and Guba (1985) of trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability to enhance the validity and reliability of data. Adhering to these ethical principles and guidelines, this study aimed to ensure the protection, welfare, and rights of the participants while maintaining the highest ethical standards in research conduct.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

From the data analysis, 2 themes emerged. For the participants, they experienced transitional challenges and beneficial effects during the transition to new normal.

Theme 1: Transitional Challenges

The participants experienced transitional challenges during the transition to the new normal. It made them experience adjustments and drawback, as well as financial constraints and feeling of inadequacy brought by the limited equipment. This shows that the new normal has ushered in a complex array of challenges, especially for hairdressing students, who must navigate health and safety protocols, adapt to constantly changing learning techniques, potentially deal with financial hurdles, and keep up-to-date with rapid shifts in industry trends. These challenges are multifaceted, affecting not only their ability to afford educational resources but also influencing their mental and emotional well-being (Zambianchi & Ricci Bitti, 2014).

Category 1: Adjustments

One of the major challenges they highlighted was time management, particularly pronounced since the return to face-to-face classes. Participants described their struggle with a more structured schedule, marked by fixed class times and related activities. Such patterns of punctuality can directly impact academic performance, as consistent tardiness can lead to missed learning opportunities and gaps in understanding (Gottfried, 2014). Furthermore, the participants' narratives also underscored the social adjustment they underwent during the transition. They conveyed that the two years of limited interaction had a significant effect on their social engagement.

Category 2: Drawback

Participants voiced concerns about the drawbacks they encountered during the period of modular distance learning which have cause them of hurdles during the transition, highlighting issues such as academic dishonesty, knowledge gaps, and a lack of motivation. They shared that modular distance learning created a gap in their learning making them feel disconnected with the actual learning process having left on their own understanding to answer their modules. This led them to answer their modules for the sake of compliance. As participants justified, they do not understand it fully even after reading the modules. The participant's statement suggests a perceived lack of substantial learning or knowledge acquisition through the modular method. The feedback aligns with the broader concerns in related studies (Diaz & Namoco, 2023; Magubat et al., 2022).

Category 3: Financial Constraints

While they acknowledged the value of the face-to-face setup during the new normal, participants expressed a sense of burden associated with the transition. This burden primarily stemmed from the heightened financial demands that came with the new learning setup. This was due to the effect of the pandemic like the decrease in income and an increase in financial constraints (Gewalt et al., 2022). This concern proved to be a nationwide concern, the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (2020) reported that almost 7 million Filipino lost their jobs since the pandemic began (Villegas, 2020).

Category 4: Feeling of Inadequacy

Participants also conveyed the upsetting emotions they had during modular distance learning. These feelings encompassed stress and confusion, arising from the perceived inadequacy of the learning experience. The participants expressed a feeling of attending school without gaining any knowledge. The modular setup left them feeling adrift without any guidance or instruction. This made caused them low self-esteem and anxiety during the transition to face-to-face classes, students mental health and wellbeing declined, and their feelings of stress, depression, and anxiety increased (Bai, 2023; Machado et al., 2023).

Category 5: Lack of Equipment

Additionally, participants stressed that the lack of equipment necessitates a major challenge during the transition. They lacked the proper learning area equipped with the equipment they need. Participants recognized that access to advanced facilities and state-of-the-art equipment is pivotal for their skill development. Updated salon equipment, modern styling stations, and high-quality hair products create a more authentic and professional learning environment, enriching their overall educational experience. The participants narratives resonate with concerns highlighted by

Bakri et al. (2019), underscoring the crucial importance of establishing well-equipped and functional workshops to ensure the effective implementation of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs.

Theme 2. Beneficial Effects

Amidst the evolving challenges they faced, the new learning setup provided beneficial effects to the participants. They find the transition back to face to face to enriched their learning, allowed for practical engagement, entrepreneurial opportunities, and demonstration of skills. They also shared some positive aspects of both the modular and face-to-face setup. This signifies that the obstacles they confronted had a profound impact on igniting their drive to excel in their academic pursuits (Mega et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2015). It stood as a testament to the resilience and adaptability of students when confronted with adversity (Southwick & Charney, 2018), emphasizing how transformative experiences can yield positive outcomes when met with unwavering determination and self-assuredness (Fogarty, 2018).

Category 1. Enriched Learning

The participants expressed their preference of the face-to-face learning setup over the modular distance learning. From the data gathered, evident reason over this preference is the enriched learning brought by hands-on interaction of their learning environment that extends to the participants involvement in extracurricular activities. The essence of this preference resonates with the established notion that motivation for learning is a dynamic process shaped by internal factors within individuals and their external interactions with the environment (Bandura, 1986; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Quinone, 2010).

Category 2: Practical Engagement

The participants found the new normal a great advantage and convenient to build network and attract clients. Participants recognized the profound impact of practical engagement, reinforcing theoretical knowledge and deepening their understanding of the craft. Integrating hands-on activities helps develop skills and provides students a tangible connection to their chosen field (Schwchow, 2016). This holistic approach equips individuals with the proficiency needed to become adept service providers in the field. This in turn builds their network and establish their reputation (Klope & Hedlin, 2023).

Category 3. Entrepreneurial Opportunities

The participants showed appreciation of the transition to face-to-face setup as the setup improved their communication skills and the overall benefits that the transition to new normal brought for the hairdressing students including job and entrepreneurial opportunities. This finding on the improved communication skills of students strongly aligns with Vygotsky's theory of Social Constructivism, which emphasized the pivotal role of social interactions and tool utilization in the construction of knowledge (Ahmed, et al., 2019). While the entrepreneurial opportunities are in alignment with a key objective established within the Philippine Educational Framework. The incorporation of vocational subjects, as advocated by Republic Act 10533 (K to 12 Act), serves as a vital pathway for high school graduates to gain middle-level skills.

Category 4. Demonstration of Skills

Participants shared the positive prospects within hairdressing education amidst the challenges of the changing times. The face-to-face learning setup enabled participants to develop and showcase their skills. From the data gathered, students improved their skills because of the presence of teachers and regimented activities. This includes teacher's scaffolding incrementally reduce assistance as students master the skills, coaching for goal-setting and reflection, and modeling, where teachers demonstrate skills for student emulation (Lea, 2023). This approach, which personalizes learning, fosters collaboration, and promotes exploration under expert guidance (Dennen, 2013; Mamun, 2022), is instrumental in creating effective learning environments.

Leveraging the identified themes from the study, the visual representation was crafted. The figure below encapsulates the corresponding themes that illuminate their experiences, providing a comprehensive and visually engaging overview of the study's findings.



Figure 1: Experiences of Hairdressing Students

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings suggest that hairdressing students face a multifaceted transition marked by challenges such as adjustments, financial concerns, and psychological impacts, as they move from remote to in-person learning. These difficulties, including issues with time management and socialization, align with experiential learning theory, emphasizing hands-on experience. Despite these challenges, positive outcomes emerge, including improved learning environments, practical engagement, and access to career opportunities. Ultimately, the transition to face-to-face learning proves beneficial, empowering students with enhanced skills, financial independence, and optimism for their futures in the hairdressing industry.

It is recommended for teachers to blend face-to-face and remote learning methods, prioritize student support services, and foster adaptability through skills development. Schools should offer financial aid, quality vocational workshops, and effective student support services while integrating technology and fostering collaboration. Future researchers are encouraged to study the long-term effects of the New Normal on vocational education and innovative solutions to improve students learning experience.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The completion of this academic paper is not just a personal triumph but a collective symphony, harmonized by the invaluable contributions of a remarkable group of individuals. Each one played a unique and indispensable role, weaving their expertise, support, and inspiration into the very fabric of this work. It is with a heart full of gratitude that these significant individuals are acknowledged, as they are the pillars upon which the success of this endeavor firmly stands.

Foremost, heartfelt gratitude is extended to Dr. Raquel A. Saab, the mentor, whose guidance transcended professional bounds. Her patience and insightful contributions infused a personal touch that significantly shaped the paper's development.

The panelists, Dr. Judith C. Chavez, Dr. Miguela B. Napiere, Dr. Kriscentti Exzur P. Barcelona, and Dr. Alice M. Diel, also played an integral role. Their timely assistance, perceptive feedback, and valuable recommendations were pivotal in refining the paper, enhancing its academic rigor.

Special attention is extended to key individuals from the Lourdes College Graduate School: Ms. Marcelinda G. Perez, the faculty recorder; Mr. Noel N. Pit, the qualitative auditor; and Ms. Doris

Dee M. Maisa, the Graduate School Secretary. Their diverse forms of assistance were indispensable, contributing significantly to the project's success.

The participants of the study, who generously shared their time and experiences, were central to the research's richness and depth. Equally, the advisers and subject teachers added substantial value through their comprehensive interviews.

The researcher's circle of support, comprising friends and family, receives warm gratitude. Her mother's continuous support and prayers, along with the patience and understanding of her brothers and sisters-in-law during the research process, were foundational to her perseverance.

Special recognition is bestowed upon her husband, Neill A. Pepito, whose encouragement, sacrifices, and wisdom were instrumental in the journey. Her son, Neill Zacharius T. Pepito, is also acknowledged for his understanding and adaptability during the demanding periods of the research.

The spiritual support that played a crucial role in guiding and fortifying her throughout this academic journey is also warmly and gratefully acknowledged. It was this unseen but deeply felt guidance that provided her with the strength to persevere through challenges and the resilience to stay focused on her goals, shaping her journey in profound ways.

This paper represents more than an individual accomplishment; it is a shared success. It highlights the collective support, guidance, and wisdom from all the contributors involved.