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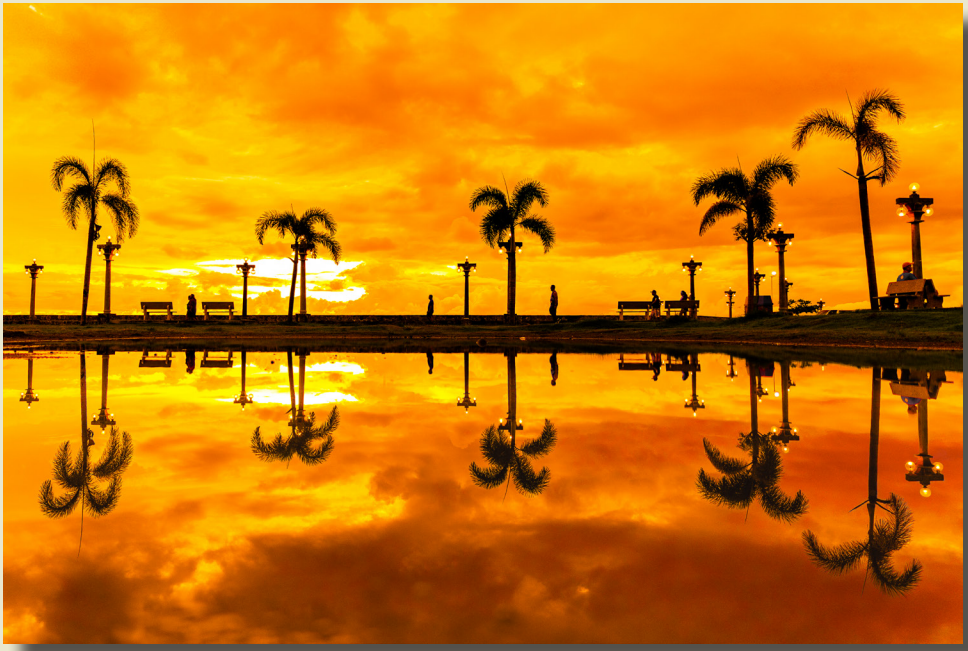

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IN THIS ISSUE

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Editor's Notes

Welcome to the second edition of Silliman Journal 2025, featuring six full-length articles and one research note.

The issue opens with a study by Katherine D. Maduro, Mary Hannah Lorraine S. Lauria, Gwyneth U. Lee, Maria Elizabeth H. Legaspi, Mitzi G. Malapitan, Gabriel Phoenix K. Manalili, Valerie Audrey P. Marcelo, and Tristan Jourdan C. Dela Cruz, which explores how online beauty content influences college students' acceptance of cosmetic surgery and its possible effect on self-esteem. Their findings show that while such content significantly increases openness to cosmetic procedures, it does not affect self-esteem, suggesting that digital beauty culture shapes behavior more than self-perception.

The second article, authored by Jaruvic C. Rafols, Rochelle Marie C. Remollo, Maria Roiselle D. Nacu, Rea Mae A. Cadeliña, Lynnie G. Lacse, Edna Gladys T. Calingacion, Johanna Edith B. Rodriguez, Anna Lynn L. Gio, Mewkam WS. Señerez, Sabinita P. Condicion, and Jessica B. Kitane, examines the challenges faced by college students in online distance learning. The study identifies unstable connectivity and power interruptions as major barriers, with most students turning to emotion-focused coping strategies, resulting in a generally moderate level of psychological well-being.

In the third article, Carla Melodillar investigates sources of conflict and conflict management styles among faculty in a higher education institution. She reports that task-related conflicts are most common and that faculty tend to use integrating and obliging strategies, showing a stronger concern for relationships than for authority, pointing to the need for initiatives that enhance collaboration and problem-solving skills.

The fourth article by Llewellyn I. Prejoles explores the social, health, and financial perceptions of long-term beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps). Despite over a decade of support, the study reveals persistent poverty and signs of dependency, underscoring the need for livelihood development, skills training, and values formation to enable self-reliance.

In the fifth article, Jan Cynth L. Palama and Dave E. Marcial analyze the relationship between students' profiles and their use of online cheating tools during assessments. The study finds that students with higher technological proficiency are more likely to engage in academic dishonesty through search engines, AI tools, and other digital platforms, emphasizing the need for redesigned assessments, stronger integrity policies, and more engaging learning environments.

The sixth article, written by Marfy M. Cabayao, introduces panalaysayon, an emerging queer oral autobiographical form from Negros Occidental. By centering queer voices and shifting narrative perspectives, this hybrid storytelling mode challenges dominant literary structures and offers a compelling alternative framework for queer narratives in Philippine literature.

Accompanying these six articles is a research note by Floramae Joyce Neri, which documents a large-scale mangrove reforestation initiative in South Negros. Aiming to plant 500,000 seedlings across five municipalities, the project has already established over 141,000 seedlings with a 67% survival rate, demonstrating both environmental impact and strong community participation—most notably among women.

The cover art for this issue is by Silliman alumnus Nathaniel Carampatana, titled Morning Gift. Capturing the quiet beauty of a Dumaguete sunrise, the artist reflects on its "warm colors and reflections" as reminders of life's balance, showcasing moments of calm that allow us to pause, breathe, and move forward.

Warlito S. Caturay Jr. , PhD

Online Beauty Content as a Predictor of Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance and Self-Esteem among College Students in a University in Quezon City, Philippines

Katherine D. Maduro
Mary Hannah Lorraine S. Lauria
Gwyneth U. Lee
Maria Elizabeth H. Legaspi
Mitzi G. Malapitan
Gabriel Phoenix K. Manalili
Valerie Audrey P. Marcelo
Tristan Jourdan C. Dela Cruz

Trinity University of Asia

Abstract

This study examined the relationship between online beauty content and cosmetic surgery acceptance, as well as the impact on self-esteem, among 220 college students at a university in Quezon City, Philippines. Employing a descriptive-correlational design and validated instruments, including the Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery Scale and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, the findings revealed that online beauty content significantly and positively predicted cosmetic surgery acceptance across multiple dimensions—information quality, credibility, needs of information, attitude toward information, usefulness, adoption, social influence, and product adoption intention. These results suggest that transparent, credible, and socially endorsed online beauty content increases the likelihood of students considering cosmetic procedures. In contrast, online beauty content did not significantly predict self-esteem, indicating that exposure to digital beauty culture may not directly shape students' self-perceptions. Overall, the study highlights the significant behavioral influence of online beauty content on cosmetic surgery acceptance, while also underscoring the limited role of self-esteem. This finding offers valuable implications for digital media practices and future research on youth well-being.

Keywords: online beauty content, cosmetic surgery acceptance, self-esteem, social media influence, college students

Introduction

Social media has become one of the most influential forces shaping beauty ideals and self-perception. While these platforms allow users to share information, photos, and personal experiences, they also normalize highly edited and filtered images that reinforce narrow standards of beauty (Henriques & Patnaik, 2021; Hogue & Mills, 2019; Jung, 2022). With the rise of online beauty trends, photo enhancement tools, and influencer-driven content, individuals are constantly exposed to unrealistic images of attractiveness. This exposure has been linked to increased body dissatisfaction, lower self-esteem, and greater acceptance of cosmetic enhancement as a means to meet societal standards of beauty (Chen et al., 2019; Hammad & Alqarni, 2021).

Despite global evidence on these associations, a gap remains in understanding how online beauty content explicitly affects the psychosocial well-being and cosmetic surgery acceptance of young adults in the Philippines. International surveys from the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (2019, 2020, 2021) show a steady increase in both surgical and nonsurgical cosmetic procedures; however, few studies have examined the underlying influence of digital content on college students' attitudes and self-esteem. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates perceptions of online beauty content—measured across information quality, credibility, usefulness, adoption, social influence, and product adoption intention—and their relationship with cosmetic surgery acceptance and self-esteem.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the relationships between college students' perceptions of online beauty content and their acceptance of cosmetic surgery, as well as their self-esteem. Specifically, it aims to (1) examine how different dimensions of online beauty content—including information quality, credibility, usefulness, adoption, social influence, and product adoption intention—are associated with cosmetic surgery acceptance, and (2) determine whether these same dimensions relate to students' self-esteem levels. Drawing on the demographic profiles, social media usage patterns, correlation analyses, and predictive modeling presented in this study, the research provides empirical evidence on which aspects of online beauty content most strongly influence cosmetic surgery acceptance, while also exploring the limited or nonsignificant associations with self-esteem among Filipino college students. Unlike prior international studies, which have primarily explored Western contexts or broadly focused on media influence (Fardouly et al., 2018; Perloff, 2014; Twenge et al., 2020), this research provides context-specific evidence insights for and

from Filipino college students—a population highly engaged with social media yet underrepresented in the existing literature. The outcomes include empirical evidence on how online beauty trends shape health-related decision-making, their influence on psychosocial well-being, and practical educational interventions, mental health support, and awareness programs tailored to young adults (Arnett, 2015; Rosenberg, 1965). By situating findings within both global and local perspectives, the study contributes to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 3: Good HealthWell-Being; SDG 4: Quality Education) and supports the Nursing Agenda for Research Advancement (NURA).

Materials and Methods

Study Design

This study employed a descriptive correlational design to investigate the relationships among perceptions of online beauty content, acceptance of cosmetic surgery, and self-esteem (Grove et al., 2019). A descriptive correlational approach was chosen to describe variables and examine their interrelationships without manipulation or control. Data were collected using a Likert-scale survey instrument, allowing for meaningful statistical interpretation. Correlations were analyzed between participants' perceptions of online beauty content, cosmetic surgery acceptance, and self-esteem.

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at a university in Quezon City, Philippines, with data collected online via Google Forms during the summer semester of 2022–2023. The population consisted of 4,362 college students.. College students were purposely selected because emerging adulthood is characterized by identity exploration, self-expression, and sensitivity to societal standards of attractiveness (Arnett, 2015). This age group is highly exposed to social media, particularly beauty-related content, influencing body image, self-esteem, and attitudes toward cosmetic procedures (Fardouly et al., 2018; Perloff, 2014; Twenge et al., 2020).

Sample Size

The study's sample size of 220 was determined using G*Power for a chi-square test with an effect size of 0.3, $\alpha = 0.05$, power = 0.95, and 5

degrees of freedom (Faul et al., 2009). The sample was proportionally allocated across seven college departments based on their population, totaling 220 participants. This exceeds the minimum recommended sample size of 100 for quantitative studies (Bullen, 2022). Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representativeness, dividing the population into homogeneous subgroups and selecting participants proportionally (Iliyasu & Etikan, 2021).

The inclusion criteria required participants to be enrolled at Trinity University of Asia, have an active social media account, have access to a device for the survey, and provide electronic consent. Those who withdrew or declined participation were excluded.

Instruments

The researchers used a four-part survey instrument. The first section collected demographics and social media usage, including age, sex, college department, primary platform, and daily usage. The second section assessed perceptions of online beauty content using an adapted survey based on the Extended Information Adoption Model and Phung's (2017) Social Influence Questionnaire, covering eight dimensions: Information Quality, Credibility, Needs, Attitude, Usefulness, Adoption, Social Influence, and Product Adoption Intention, rated on a 4-point Likert scale. Expert validation and a pilot study confirmed excellent reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.971$).

The third section measured cosmetic surgery acceptance using the "Consider" subscale of the ACSS (Henderson-King, 2005), administered on a 7-point Likert scale, with reported reliability ranging from 0.84 to 0.92. The final section assessed self-esteem using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), a 10-item, 4-point Likert scale with reversed scoring for negative items ($\alpha = 0.77–0.88$). All sections were adapted and validated for reliability and appropriateness.

Data Collection

The data gathering process began with written permission from the Vice President for Academic Affairs and ethics approval from the university's Ethics Review Committee. Selected participants were contacted via email to obtain consent, after which the survey—hosted on Google Forms and including the study background, objectives, consent statement, and questionnaires—was distributed.

To ensure a representative sample, the researchers collaborated with the University Student Council and local council to identify class

representatives, who then distributed randomly assigned survey invitations to students. Data collection was monitored for completeness, with Google Forms settings configured to restrict submissions to one per participant and to university email addresses only. Completed responses were also emailed back to participants for reference.

Data Analysis

The data analysis proceeded in three stages, corresponding to the study's variables: perception of online beauty content, acceptance of cosmetic surgery, and self-esteem. Normality was first assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test, which indicated non-normal distributions. Consequently, Kendall's Tau-b correlation was used to examine relationships among variables, with online beauty content assessed across eight dimensions: Information Quality, Information Credibility, Needs of Information, Attitude Towards Information, Information Usefulness, Information Adoption, Social Influence, and Product Adoption Intention. Correlation strength followed Schober, Boer, and Schwarte's (2018) guidelines: negligible (0.00–0.05), weak (0.06–0.25), moderate (0.26–0.48), strong (0.49–0.70), and very strong (0.71–1.00). Predictive relationships were evaluated using regression analysis, followed by path analysis to test both direct and indirect effects of online beauty content on cosmetic surgery acceptance, with self-esteem examined as a potential mediator (Byrne, 2016; Field, 2018).

Results and Discussions

Table 1 shows that most respondents were young adults aged 18–21 years (80.0%) and female (67.7%), consistent with Philippine and international evidence that women in emerging adulthood are the heaviest social media users and most vulnerable to appearance-based pressures (Canonigo, Uy, & Culajara, 2024; Fardouly et al., 2018; Veldhuis et al., 2020). Nursing students made up the largest group (38.2%), reflecting findings that health sciences students often display heightened body awareness yet remain influenced by beauty ideals (Carinio, 2018; Lozada, Fernandez, & Santos, 2023). Facebook (34.1%), Instagram (29.5%), and TikTok (21.4%) emerged as the most used platforms, aligning with national trends that Filipinos are among the world's most active social media consumers (Kemp, 2024). Notably, nearly one-third (29.1%) reported daily use of more than five hours, echoing local evidence that prolonged exposure to social media amplifies body image dissatisfaction and affects psychosocial well-being (Carinio,

2018; Davao City Study, 2024). Taken together, these demographics confirm that the study sample represents a population highly exposed to beauty-related content and therefore well-suited for examining its links to cosmetic surgery acceptance and self-esteem.

Table 1

Frequency and Percentage Profile of College Student participants (n=220)

Profile	**f**	**%**
Age		
18-21 years old	176	80.0
22-25 years old	40	18.2
26-29 years old	4	1.8
Sex		
Female	149	67.7
Male	71	32.3
College Department		
College of Nursing	84	38.2
College of Arts, Sciences and Education	33	15.0
College of Business Management and Accountancy	32	14.5
College of Medical Technology	26	11.8
College of Hospitality and Tourism Management	20	9.1
College of Allied Health Sciences	15	6.8
College of Engineering and Information Sciences	10	4.5
Primary Social Media Platform Used		
Facebook	75	34.1
Instagram	65	29.5
TikTok	47	21.4
YouTube	19	8.6
Twitter	14	6.4
Daily Time Spent on Social Media		
More than 5 hours per day	64	29.1
4.5-5 hours per day	16	7.3
3.5-4 hours per day	38	17.3
2.5-3 hours per day	54	24.5
1-2 hours per day	40	18.2
Less than 1 hour per day	8	3.6

Table 2 shows that students moderately agreed that online beauty content is credible/useful (M = 2.93), strongly endorsed cosmetic surgery acceptance (M = 3.90), and reported only moderate self-esteem (M = 2.75). This pattern echoes international and local evidence suggesting that the media more reliably shape outward attitudes than core self-concepts. Specifically, past work indicates that exposure to idealized beauty content normalizes cosmetic procedures and raises acceptance (Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 2005; Liew et al., 2021), whereas global self-esteem is often more stable and less directly affected by short-term media exposure (Orth & Robins, 2014; Valkenburg, Meier, & Vossen, 2017). Philippine studies similarly show that appearance-specific constructs — body image, appearance comparison, and platform-specific trends (e.g., TikTok filters and outfit content) — are the proximal outcomes of heavy social-media use and better predictors of well-being than global self-esteem (Carinio, 2018; Canonigo, Uy, & Culajara, 2024; Lozada et al., 2023; Davao City Study, 2024). Where prior findings disagree (some studies report stronger self-esteem effects), heterogeneity in samples, platforms, and mediator selection likely explains inconsistencies; by reporting distinct means for perceptions, acceptance, and self-esteem, our results reconcile these differences by showing a clear dissociation: online beauty content is associated with elevated readiness to consider cosmetic procedures but not with equivalent declines in global self-esteem.

Table 2

Mean and Interpretation of Perceptions on Online Beauty Content, Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance, and Self-Esteem of College Student participants (n=220)

Variable	Mean Score	Interpretation
Perceptions on Online Beauty Content	2.93	Agree
Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery	3.90	Strongly Agree
Levels of Self-Esteem	2.75	Agree

Note: 1.00–1.80 = Strongly Disagree; 1.81–2.60 = Disagree; 2.61–3.40 = Agree; 3.41–4.20 = Strongly Agree; 4.21–5.00 = Very Strongly Agree.

Table 3 shows that online beauty content is significantly correlated with cosmetic surgery acceptance ($p < .001$), but not with self-esteem ($p = .462$). Similarly, cosmetic surgery acceptance and self-esteem are not significantly correlated ($p = .173$). These results suggest that exposure to beauty-related online content primarily influences Filipino students' acceptance of cosmetic procedures, but does not substantially alter their global self-esteem, nor is self-esteem strongly tied to their attitudes toward

cosmetic surgery. One possible cultural explanation lies in the Philippines' collectivist orientation and its colonial history: beauty ideals such as fair skin, mestiza features, and Western facial traits remain socially valorized due to both colonial influences and globalization (Mendoza & Palaganas, 2023; "Who's Defining Filipino Beauty?", 2025). Such standards may drive acceptance of cosmetic surgery through social approval and interfamilial or peer expectations, rather than through internalized feelings of inadequacy. Psychologically, global self-esteem tends to be stable and buffered by familial, communal, and religious values in collectivist settings (Grimm, Church, Katigbak, & Reyes, 1999; "Culture and spontaneous self-concept among Filipino college students," 2002), which may insulate it from appearance-focused media pressure. These findings align with prior research linking social media to cosmetic surgery attitudes (Walker et al., 2019; Fardouly et al., 2018) and contrast with the literature that reports a consistent undermining of self-esteem (Huang, 2017). In the Philippine context, recent evidence suggests that media exposure is more closely tied to appearance dissatisfaction or cosmetic intention than to broader self-esteem (Tadena et al., 2020; Canonigo et al., 2024), indicating that future research should examine mediators sensitive to appearance ideal internalization and social norms.

Table 3

Correlation Matrix of Online Beauty Content, Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance, and Self-Esteem of College Student Res (n = 220)

	Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance (p-value)	Decision	Self-Esteem (p-value)	Decision
Online Beauty Content	< .001	Significant Correlation	0.462	
Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance			0.173	No Significant Correlation

Note: The alpha level is set at 0.05.

Table 4 shows that online beauty content significantly predicted cosmetic surgery acceptance among college students, whereas self-esteem did not. This finding corroborates international evidence that social media and image-based platforms exert a powerful influence on attitudes toward cosmetic procedures (Fogel & King, 2014; Mingoia et al., 2019) and is

consistent with global data showing increased demand for aesthetic interventions (International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, 2023). In the Philippine context, recent studies similarly emphasize how digital beauty advertising and influencer-driven media shape cosmetic ideals and normalize beauty-related decisions (Canonigo, Uy, & Culajara, 2024; Lozada et al., 2023). However, the non-significant role of self-esteem contrasts with earlier work suggesting that body dissatisfaction and internalization of beauty standards mediate media effects (Perloff, 2021). This divergence may be due to differences in measurement, as global self-esteem scales capture broad self-concept but overlook appearance-specific vulnerabilities that are more sensitive to beauty pressures. Taken together, the results suggest that clear, credible, and socially endorsed online beauty content directly influences cosmetic surgery acceptance without substantially affecting global self-esteem, thereby refining existing models of media influence within the Filipino context.

Table 4

Regression Analysis of Online Beauty Content and Self-Esteem Predicting Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance among College Students (n = 220)

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	Decision
Online Beauty Content	0.52	0.08	0.48	6.50	< .001	Significant Predictor
Self-Esteem	0.09	0.10	0.07	0.91	0.362	Not Significant

Model Summary: $R = 0.49$, $R^2 = 0.24$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.23$, $F(2, 217) = 34.35$, $p < .001$

Note. Alpha level set at 0.05. Predictors with $p < .05$ are considered significant; those with $p \geq .05$ are not significant.

Table 5 shows that online beauty content significantly and positively predicts cosmetic surgery acceptance ($\beta = 0.48$, $p < .001$), while its relationship with self-esteem is not significant. Self-esteem likewise does not correlate with cosmetic surgery acceptance, indicating that the influence of online beauty content operates directly on students' willingness to consider cosmetic procedures. This suggests that exposure to beauty-focused media primarily affects appearance-related attitudes rather than broader measures of self-worth. Psychologically, global self-esteem tends to be relatively stable and buffered by internalized personal and social values, making it less susceptible to short-term media influences. In contrast, attitudes toward cosmetic surgery are more flexible and closely tied to perceived social benefits and aesthetic ideals. Culturally, Filipino students may interpret beauty content through collective norms and family or peer expectations,

reflecting a society where social approval and relational considerations strongly shape appearance-related decisions (Mendoza & Palaganas, 2023; Grimm et al., 1999). The results align with international evidence that social media exposure increases openness to cosmetic procedures (Fogel & King, 2014; Mingoia et al., 2019) and reflect global trends of rising demand for aesthetic interventions (International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, 2023). Philippine studies further support these findings, showing that influencer-driven campaigns and digital advertising normalize cosmetic ideals and encourage engagement in appearance-enhancing practices (Canonigo, Uy, & Culajara, 2024; Lozada et al., 2023). Overall, these findings suggest that online beauty content has a direct behavioral impact on cosmetic surgery acceptance, without substantially altering global self-esteem, highlighting the importance of considering cultural and psychosocial factors when examining the influence of media on appearance-related attitudes.

Table 5

Path Coefficients of Online Beauty Content, Self-Esteem, and Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance of College Students (n = 220)

Pathway	Standardized β	SE	t-value	p-value	Decision
Online Beauty Content → Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance	0.48	0.08	6.00	< .001	Significant
Online Beauty Content → Self-Esteem	0.05	0.06	0.83	0.407	Not Significant
Self-Esteem → Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance	0.06	0.07	0.86	0.392	Not Significant
Indirect Effect (Online Beauty Content → Self-Esteem → Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance)	0.003			0.401	Not Significant
Total Effect (Online Beauty Content → Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance)	0.483			< .001	Significant

Note. Alpha level set at 0.05.

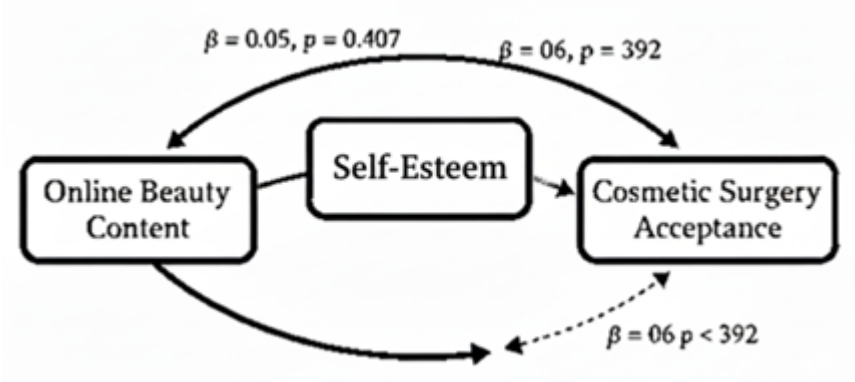
Figure 1 illustrates the predictive pathways between online beauty content, self-esteem, and acceptance of cosmetic surgery. The results indicate that online beauty content has a significant predictive value for cosmetic

surgery acceptance, but does not significantly impact self-esteem. Self-esteem likewise does not predict cosmetic surgery acceptance, indicating that the hypothesized mediating role is unsupported. These findings suggest that for Filipino college students, exposure to beauty-focused digital content directly shapes attitudes toward cosmetic procedures without substantially affecting broader self-worth.

Psychologically, global self-esteem tends to be stable and resistant to short-term media influences. In contrast, attitudes toward cosmetic surgery are more malleable, shaped by immediate perceptions of social approval, attractiveness, and aesthetic benefits. Culturally, Filipino students may interpret beauty content through collectivist norms, valuing peer and familial expectations over internalized personal inadequacy (Mendoza & Palaganas, 2023; Grimm et al., 1999). Such social and relational considerations can drive acceptance of cosmetic procedures without eroding self-esteem. These patterns align with Philippine research showing that social media heightens appearance concerns but does not consistently affect self-worth (Canonigo, Uy, & Culajara, 2024; Lozada et al., 2023), while diverging from international studies reporting stronger indirect effects through self-esteem (Nabi & Keblusek, 2014; Swami et al., 2009). Overall, the findings highlight a direct behavioral impact of online beauty content in the Philippine context and suggest that future models incorporate culturally grounded psychological factors—such as appearance comparison, body dissatisfaction, and social approval—better to explain the acceptance of cosmetic surgery among Filipino youth.

Figure 1

Path Analysis Model Showing the Predictive Relationship of Online Beauty Content, Self-Esteem, And Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance



Limitation

This study investigated the relationship between perceptions of online beauty content, acceptance of cosmetic surgery, and self-esteem among college students at a university in Quezon City, Philippines, employing a descriptive correlational design and survey questionnaires. The scope was limited to cosmetic surgery and beauty-related online content, excluding other surgical procedures or digital media. Although participants with prior cosmetic surgery or facial enhancements were included to ensure diversity, the findings remain specific to beauty-related cosmetic procedures and may not generalize to other contexts.

Several limitations warrant consideration. First, the reliance on self-report surveys may have introduced response biases such as social desirability and recall bias. To mitigate this, anonymity and confidentiality were emphasized, and the survey was administered online to minimize the influence of peers or researchers. Second, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference, as it captures associations at a single point in time. Longitudinal or experimental studies would be needed to establish temporal or causal relationships. Third, sampling was restricted to a single university, which may limit the generalizability to other institutions or populations. Broader, multi-site studies could address this concern. Fourth, the study relied on convenience and stratified sampling, which, while ensuring proportional representation, may not eliminate selection bias. Fifth, the adapted instruments—though validated and reliable—were initially developed in different cultural contexts, which may affect how Filipino students interpreted certain items. Lastly, unmeasured factors such as body dissatisfaction, peer comparison, and cultural beauty norms may also influence cosmetic surgery acceptance, but were not captured in this study.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study develops and tests a path analysis model to examine how online beauty content predicts cosmetic surgery acceptance and self-esteem among college students in Quezon City. The findings show that while online beauty content directly predicts acceptance of cosmetic surgery, it does not significantly influence self-esteem, nor does self-esteem mediate this relationship. This suggests that the behavioral effects of digital beauty culture—shaping students' attitudes toward cosmetic procedures—are more pronounced than its psychological effects on global self-worth. By clarifying these dynamics, the study contributes to ongoing debates on media influence

and highlights the need for locally grounded predictors, such as appearance comparison and body dissatisfaction, to explain cosmetic surgery acceptance in the Philippine context more effectively.

These results carry important implications for practice and research. For students, critical engagement with beauty-related content and the cultivation of healthy coping strategies, such as body positivity and self-reflection, can help reduce the pressures of unrealistic standards. For academic institutions, integrating media literacy and body image education into student wellness programs, particularly within nursing and allied health curricula, can strengthen resilience against external beauty pressures. Health professionals, including nurses and counselors, may also incorporate social media influence into psychosocial assessments and preventive interventions. Future research should broaden the scope to multiple institutions, adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to establish causality, and incorporate appearance-specific constructs to refine theoretical models. Through such efforts, both education and health systems can better address the influence of digital beauty culture on youth well-being and decision-making.

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Navigating the Challenges of Online Distance Learning: Silliman University Students' Coping Strategies and Psychological Well-Being

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Abstract

The study investigates challenges and coping strategies among college students during the rise in online distance learning, highlighting this demographic's limited knowledge of psychological well-being despite extensive research. A survey of 676 college students revealed internal and external challenges, primarily related to connectivity issues like limited Wi-Fi access, slow speeds, and power interruptions. The top coping strategy was emotion-focused coping strategies, like taking breaks. The study found that college students' psychological well-being is generally average or moderate despite their vulnerability to adverse mental health consequences in online distance learning.

Keywords: Psychological Well-being, Challenges, Coping strategies

Introduction

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO), through their director-general, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, declared COVID-19 a pandemic, citing over 118,000 cases detected over 110 countries and territories around the globe (Ducharme, 2020). The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically affected people's lifestyles.

All over the globe, the educational sector has suffered from these

setbacks. This health crisis not only impacted the physical health but also the mental well-being of individuals in societies. It has changed how people do things and pushed them to cope and adjust to uncertainties.

For more than a year, schools were forced to innovate and address the challenges brought about by the shift to online distance learning, flexible learning, or other means to facilitate student learning. Teachers, educators, and school staff were trained and retrained to deliver services to their clients.

In the Philippines, as early as January 30, 2020, and upon the declaration of the WHO which turned the epidemic into a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC), the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) released CMO No. 4 Series of 2020 on the implementation of the Guidelines on Flexible Learning by private and public higher education institutions (HEIs). However, with the lockdown in March 2020 under Proclamation No. 929, which proclaimed a nationwide state of disaster in the Philippines because of COVID-19, both private and public schools remained closed, with some opting to use the online distance learning platform for their classes, while most public schools and some private schools used blended and modular learning methods.

Silliman University maximized and further strengthened its learning management system called MySOUL (Silliman Online University Learning), which the University has been operating since before the pandemic hit. The University's official Learning Management System (LMS) is an "all-in-one web-based teaching and learning platform" for synchronous and asynchronous classroom interaction and activities. Thus, the necessary upskilling of faculty and staff and preparations for online distance learning were adapted to address the needs of the students studying remotely from their homes.

Following the pandemic, other changes brought about by the climate crisis, which included critical incidents such as typhoons and, recently, the heat wave, have made it imperative to maximize the online distance learning platform. Online distance learning became the mode of delivery of education.

However, several challenges arose because of these changes. Ensuring an equitable and quality learning environment for the students, faculty, and staff was only one of the difficulties encountered. Other setbacks include having a slow internet connection, limited accessibility to gadgets like laptops, among others, adjustments in the use of technology, and the stresses and anxiety that come with these challenges.

The Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism chronicled the lives of Filipino individuals who battled with depression brought about by

the pandemic (Omengan, 2021). The Department of Health also reported that, at most, a quarter of Filipinos battled with "moderate to severe" anxiety issues, which were results of the COVID-19 pandemic and from working from home. This was based on a study by the University of the Philippines involving 1,879 respondents, a sixth of whom reported moderate to severe depression (Domingo, 2021). Disruption of work-life balance was highlighted, and limited face-to-face interactions with family and peers were also mentioned. The inability to move around easily and the implementation of travel restrictions were the difficulties they faced, not to mention access to healthcare facilities and ease of setting up doctor appointments.

The phenomenon is similar to the students' experiences. They also had to contend with fatigue due to screen time and adjusting to a different modality in teaching. A study by Rotas and Cahapay (2020) thoroughly discussed the difficulties of distance learning because of the pandemic. Online learning fatigue, increased anxiety, and depression were challenges faced by students and teachers alike. As a result, the Department of Education (DepEd) issued a memo (Memorandum-OUCI 2020-307) suggesting measures to reduce stress and anxiety and foster "academic ease" during online distance learning.

The study aimed to identify the different challenges, coping strategies, and the student's psychological well-being to help the school counselors and the Guidance and Testing Division create programs and possible interventions to address the needs, concerns, and problems of students resulting from the shift to online distance learning among students of Silliman University. The following specific research questions guided the investigation:

1. What challenges did college students face during online distance learning?
2. What were the coping strategies of college students during online distance learning?
3. What was the psychological well-being of college students in terms of positive relations, self-acceptance, Autonomy, personal growth, environmental mastery, and purpose?

With the study's results, the researchers were committed to adhering to and adapting to best practices concerning implementing mental health programs and interventions necessary to capacitate the learners to help them positively adjust to environmental changes.

Review of Related Literature

Several studies have been conducted to understand college students' difficulties and coping strategies in online distance learning worldwide and in the Philippines. This section reviews the related literature and studies on the topic to guide the researchers and the readers regarding the direction of this study and the interpretation of the results.

The body of literature regarding online distance learning and college students' challenges and coping strategies is diverse. Much research has been done on this topic, and the studies presented here are anchored on the most recent studies conducted in the Philippines and worldwide.

Challenges Faced

Presently, the propagation of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has become unbeatable, infecting more than 12 million people (Chen et al., 2021). The detrimental effects of the pandemic are not only limited to the individual's physical health but, more importantly, to the mental and social facets that COVID-19 has wrought. The coronavirus pandemic has significantly impacted every aspect of human life, including education (Saraswati et al., 2020).

The outcome of COVID-19 on Nepal's educational system, along with the difficulties and coping mechanisms it has forced upon students to learn to survive, have given rise to a critical examination and contemplation of the opportunities and problems the pandemic has presented for the technological advancement of the educational system.

In the Philippines, Cahapay and Rotas (2020) listed several methods of delivering education used in colleges, universities, and higher education worldwide. These methods include blended learning, online learning, remote learning, blended learning, and distance education. In their study, students reported that they experienced difficulty in the new educational setup.

Students' levels of isolation and independence have increased due to the sudden switch to remote learning, which has also become a major source of pressure for college students. According to Saraswati et al. (2020), the pandemic severely impacted students' learning and welfare, which probably widened the gap between privileged and unprivileged students in their fair obtainment of high-quality education.

College students have more severe physiological and psychological health problems, such as dealing with close relationships, coping with

financial stress, and managing responsibilities and roles (Chen, 2021). This study aimed to expand the knowledge by centering on college students as the respondents to examine the impact of various vital stressors on their well-being during the COVID-19 outbreak. Three significant stressors were identified among college students—academic responsibilities, detachment from school, and distress due to possible virus contamination (Chen et al., 2021).

The vulnerability of college students to experience harmful psychological and mental health repercussions brought on by the pandemic poses a probable danger to their mental, physical, psychological, and emotional well-being as well as their developmental and educational advancement (Singh et al., 2020).

Limone and Toto (2021) also stated the positive and negative impacts of online distance learning due to the increased technological usage during the pandemic. Communication gadgets enhance people's lives, but people cannot picture living without them once they utilize them (Amichai-Hamburger, 2009). Further, Amichai-Hamburger (2009) shared the positive effect of online relationships on people's well-being, such as the unique context of openness and self-disclosure. Limone and Toto (2021) cited video games as an example that regardless of being a problem to the potential development of mental illness, video games are found to lessen anxiety and depression and boost skills, creativity, and cognition in children. Similarly, Limone and Toto (2021) associated using smartphones as an escape to loneliness. Research proved that smartphones and other technologies during the pandemic have escalated significantly. This increase in technology usage is perceived as a risky condition for getting psychological conditions. They likewise reiterated that the overuse of technology is considered an alarming component that impacts the psychological well-being of individuals.

Angoluan (2021) also mentioned in her research that social media usage is a platform of information for gaining connections. However, the different and opposing opinions taking place on the platform have become a cause of stress to individuals. Depending on usage patterns, the growing use of technology can affect children's and adolescents' mental development in both positive and negative ways. During these trying pandemic times, parents should monitor their kids' behavior and mental health (Limone & Toto, 2021).

Coping Strategies Adapted

With all the mentioned challenges, remote learning is the most

appropriate instructional modality during emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. Amidst the challenges of remote learning, studies on coping strategies were also conducted worldwide. Coping is a strategy or mechanism people use to deal with or manage stress and uncomfortable feelings or emotions. Coping mechanisms are either active or avoidant. Active coping is when there is awareness of the cause of stress, and the individual addresses the concern.

On the other hand, avoidant coping happens when the cause of stress is disregarded or not addressed. Coping styles can either be problem-focused or emotion-focused. Coping mechanisms are often interchangeably used with defense mechanisms. That being said, not all coping mechanisms can be helpful to individuals. When it comes to coping strategies, adaptive coping mechanisms are useful, whereas maladaptive coping strategies are harmful (Bailey, 2022).

In the Philippines, coping strategies were reported in the study of Cahapay (2020), such as coping with the challenge by participating in online classes and downloading lessons using the student's 5-inch screen phone and making them easier to read by rewriting on paper. Additionally, personal coping strategies such as talking to oneself and motivating oneself, focusing on other things at home to avoid the stress caused by COVID-19, and connecting with friends and family to relieve stress were reported.

Saraswati et al. (2020) further support the studies mentioned above. The study shows that when schools reopen, students will likely experience more family-related issues. For example, some students may return with increased anxiety related to family or health problems brought on by the pandemic and the loss of learning during this time (Saraswati et al., 2020). Schools may find it difficult to manage students' health and welfare. The researchers suggest that to address the following issues, and schools should consider offering student and parent counseling.

During this pandemic, schools must continuously communicate with parents and students. This can be achieved by calling students through the telephone, interacting with them on social media, and conducting home visits while physically distancing. It is also important to emphasize that during this pandemic, the emphasis should be more on the welfare of the students than on their academics.

Psychological Well-being

A study by Bhat (2018), titled "A Study of Psychological Well-being of Adolescents about School Environment and Place of Living," aims

to analyze the influence of school environment and school type (urban or rural setting) on the mental health of senior secondary school students in Kashmir Valley. The study results show that students in rural and urban areas have very different psychological well-being, with rural students having greater levels than urban students.

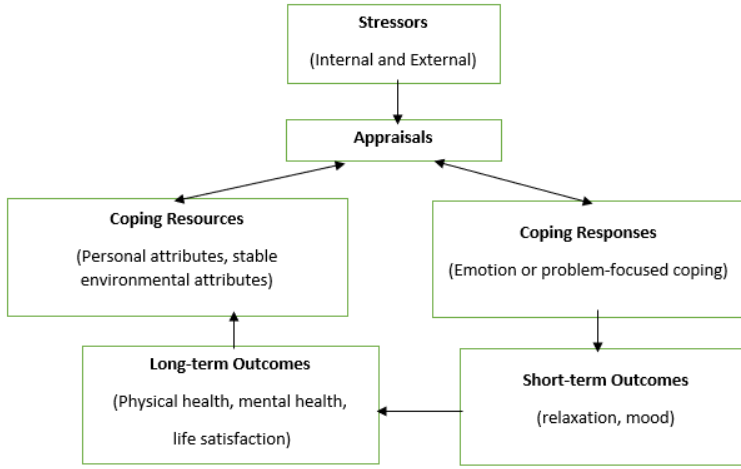
Another study conducted in India, titled "Relationship between Self-esteem and Psychological Well-being among Indian College Students," investigates the function of self-valuation in psychological health. The study sought to explore the function of gender in one's degree of psychological well-being and self-esteem and assess the relationship between the two. In this way, self-esteem influences an individual's overall psychological well-being. The study also revealed that self-esteem is inextricably linked to an individual's personal, cultural, and social realms. This means that one's environment considerably impacts how he perceives his image. Additionally, the "hassles of schoolwork, lacking fulfillment from oneself, parents, and peers result in the moderate level of psychological distress" among respondents are examples of the dynamics of such social realms. (Singhal et al., 2020) As a result, addressing issues such as "social belongingness and respect in society" may help individuals (students) perform better because it boosts the learner's self-esteem.

Framework of the Study

The Transactional Theory on Stress and Coping by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman (1984) was adopted to provide the theoretical framework in this study for understanding stress and the coping strategies or objective appraisals used to manage stressful circumstances. The theory further identified people's different coping resources and coping responses in dealing with stressors, whether internal or external. It also showed both the long-term (i.e., physical and mental health, life satisfaction) and short-term outcomes (i.e., relaxation and mood).

Figure 1

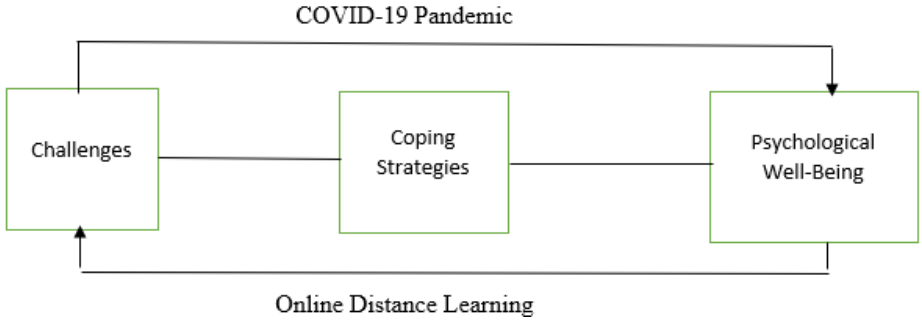
The Transactional Theory on Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)



Conceptually, this study identified pertinent variables that the researchers deemed necessary in understanding what the learners or students of Silliman University experienced during the pandemic concerning the shift to online distance learning. The variables were the challenges faced by the students, which affected their psychological well-being, as well as the coping strategies they used to deal with these challenges and how these techniques may have contributed to their psychological well-being. The variables identified were explored in the context of online distance learning as the student platform.

Figure 2

Conceptual Model



Methodology

This research study used a descriptive design. The respondents identified the challenges they encountered and coping strategies they adapted during the online distance learning. Furthermore, the study investigated the respondents' perceived level of psychological well-being.

The investigation was conducted at Silliman University with students engaged in Online Distance Learning (ODL). Online distance Learning in this study means using Silliman Online University Learning (MySOUL), an all-in-one web-based teaching and learning platform where students attend classes in real time and perform asynchronous activities.

The respondents of the study were bona fide Silliman University tertiary level students across all year levels and programs from the schools/institutes/colleges who were enrolled full-time in online distance learning in the institution in the second semester of school year 2021–2022, including those with at least one semester of online distance learning.

This study used the convenience sampling method. Of the 5,580 tertiary student population enrolled in the second semester of the academic year 2021–2022, only 12.11% or 676 respondents participated in the study.

Formal letters were sent to the Vice President for Academic Affairs, MySOUL Administrative Officer, University Registrar, and Deans of schools/colleges/institutes, informing them of the purpose and rationale of the research study and requesting their support in cascading the information to their faculty and students. A formal letter was also sent to the author/s of the psychological well-being instrument requesting permission to use the tool for the study, indicating the purpose and its rationale. Guidance Counselors and Personality Enhancement Program (PEP) facilitators did an open, active call for participation in the study on both online and offline platforms.

During the second semester of the school year 2021–2022, Silliman Online University Learning (MySOUL) posted the Google Survey form on the course page of each bona fide tertiary-level student. Students were asked to complete the survey after signing the consent form and agreeing to voluntary participation. The Google Questionnaire Survey results were collected, collated, and analyzed extensively.

Research Instrument

The data collection instruments consisted of two sections. The first section was a researcher-made questionnaire that presented the participants

The respondents were requested to list their top five challenges faced and the top five coping strategies in their distance learning setup. The study consisted of two parts, the first part being a questionnaire and the second part being the modified and adapted multidimensional scaling of psychological well-being (PWB) by Ryff CD and Singer B., an assessment that includes 18 items. The measuring instrument implemented in phase one was the Perceived Well-Being (PWB) questionnaire. It asks the participants to reflect on their overall quality of life and psychological health and express how much they generally appreciate their lives. The questionnaire used to assess psychological health consisted of 54 self-report items, responses to which were scored on a general term of well-being.

Autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance are the six subscales of PWB. Including a measure of the first PWB could lead to multicollinearity with measures of subsequent predictors of high well-being. These scales tap into one's self-concept, understanding self-esteem, and overall sense of well-being and decision-making to allow individuals to engage, explore, and adjust to situations, all while maintaining social relationships.

Data Analysis

The study used frequency distribution and percentages to identify patterns and to determine the challenges encountered and coping techniques adapted by the respondents during online distance learning.

Frequency distribution and percentages were also utilized to establish the respondents' level of psychological well-being.

Ethical Consideration

A letter was addressed to all respondents to ensure that the Data Privacy Act was observed. A formal letter was sent to the author of the standardized testing tool, requesting permission to use the PWB instrument. Students' responses were treated with the utmost confidentiality, and their names were kept anonymous while the data were processed and interpreted. All data gathered was kept strictly confidential and in a file that will be deleted after five years.

Respondents

The respondents comprised Silliman University students at the

tertiary level who were officially enrolled during the online distance learning mode of delivery of classes during the second semester of the school year 2021–2022. The data gathered were from the 676 respondents of the fourteen schools/colleges/institutes of Silliman University, placed in five clusters.

The Allied Health and Sciences Cluster with the College of Nursing, Institute of Rehabilitative Sciences and Institute of Clinical Laboratory Sciences ranks first with 221 respondents or 32.70%. The College of Arts and Sciences have 136 respondents, or 20.11%, closely followed by the Science and Technology Cluster composed of the College of Engineering and Design, Institute of Environment and Marine Sciences, College of Computer Studies and College of Agriculture with 134 respondents or 19.82%. The Third Cluster, composed of the College of Education, College of Mass Communication, College of Performing and Visual Arts, Divinity School and School of Public Affairs and Governance, have 110 respondents or 16.27%, which the College of Business Administration follows with 75 respondents or 11.10%

Results

The findings of the processing and analysis of the data gathered are presented in this section. The different subscales of the Psychological Well-being Scale will also be discussed. The internal and external challenges faced by the respondents during online distance learning (ODL) and the coping strategies were also identified.

Challenges Faced

The transition to online distance learning (ODL) during the COVID-19 epidemic has posed many challenges for learners and teachers. One of the most prevalent issues raised by respondents was connectivity issues. According to 84.89 % of respondents, this is the most pervasive internal challenge. This can be attributed to the limitations in the Philippines' fixed broadband infrastructure, which ranks 64th out of 180 countries in terms of internet access performance (Barrot et al., 2021; Mollenkopf et al., 2020).

Aside from connectivity problems, respondents cited challenges related to internet access (26.91%) and power outages (23.45%), which were the top two external challenges encountered. These structural barriers have significantly impacted the quality of the learning experience, as highlighted by research conducted during the pandemic. (Barrot et al., 2021)

Interestingly, the challenges extended beyond technological constraints, as respondents also grappled with mental health concerns (17.55%), time management (10.07%), communication issues (9.06%), and distractions (8.20%). These findings align with studies that have emphasized the adverse effects of the pandemic on the physical, mental, and social well-being of students (Abdul-Hamid & Hamzah, 2021).

Table 1

Challenges Faced in Online Distance Learning, N=676

Challenges					
Internal	*f*	%	External	*f*	%
Interest Concerns	187	26.91	Connectivity Concerns	590	84.89
Mental Health Concerns	122	17.55	Power Concerns	163	23.45
Time Management	70	10.07	Discussions & Lessons	138	19.86
Communication Concerns	63	9.06	Financial Concerns	105	15.11
Distractions	57	8.20	Learning Environment	76	10. 94
Engagement & Interactions	46	6.62	Gadgets & Resources	63	9.06
Eye Problems	37	5.32	Academic Related	58	8.35
			COVID-19 Infection	32	4.60
Physical Exhaustion	16	2.30	Online Platform Concerns	16	2.30
			Family Problems	10	1.44
Eating Concerns	5	0.72	Post-typhoon Issue	5	0.72

Note: Multiple responses

Coping Strategies

Table 2 presents the primary ways students cope with online distance learning. Most respondents indicated 57 coping strategies in the Problem-Focused Coping category, accounting for 8.2% of 1,148 multiple responses. These strategies were further categorized into five distinct approaches: seeking support, utilizing technology, engaging in academic-related coping strategies, making plans, and practicing effective time management.

Table 2

Coping Strategies in Online Distance Learning, N=676.

Coping Strategies	*f*	%
Meaning-Making/ Religious	124	18.3
Problem-focused	57	8.4
Emotion-focused	48	7.1
Others	43	6.4

Note: Multiple responses

The majority of the respondents (18.3%) were found to have resorted to meaning-making or religious coping. The more frequent responses were adapting to a new environment (30), praying (17), self-motivation/rewarding the self (16), being patient, calm, and understanding (17), accepting the situation and enduring (15), practicing prioritizing/organizing (15), and having a positive mindset (14), among others. This was evident in the longitudinal study by Yang, Ji et al. (2021) on meaning-making as a coping technique in unfavorable situations. Findings revealed that respondents showed a high inclination to meaning-making in negative situations during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to before the pandemic.

Problem-focused coping ranked second (8.4) as the most frequently used strategy by the participants. This included communicating with teachers for clarifications or assistance (129), ensuring backup data for internet connections (99), finding a location with better Wi-Fi connections (88), communicating with classmates (56), and creating a schedule or plan of action. These problem-focused coping strategies were basically strategies used by participants to address the root cause of their stress.

The third most frequent coping strategies were emotion-focused, which were considered active and adaptive. Examples were engaging in activities that distract them from stressful situations and make them feel good about themselves (193), mindfulness (187), doing self-care (46), psychological distancing (24), selective attention and reframing (12), emotional disclosure (11), and seeking comfort from others (11).

Several respondents (6.4) reported that they did not have coping strategies or that it did not apply to them (30), had a hard time coping (12), and resorted to self-destructive coping (1). These may seem trivial, but they still need to be investigated to fill the gap in helping respondents be equipped with positive coping strategies to deal with their stressors.

Psychological Well-being

The Psychological Well-being Scale is a multifaceted assessment tool that examines various aspects of an individual's psychological state. This research paper examines the insights gained from analyzing the subscales of this measure, which are essential for understanding the respondents' levels of psychological well-being.

Positive Relations

The positive relations subscale provides a glimpse into the quality of an individual's interpersonal connections. Respondents who scored high on this subscale, representing only 12 of the sample, exhibited characteristics such as warm, fulfilling, and trustworthy relationships with others, a strong sense of empathy and affection, and a deep understanding of the reciprocal nature of human interactions. In contrast, those who scored low or very low, comprising 19 of the respondents, struggled to maintain intimate and trusting relationships, could not be kind and concerned for others, and felt isolated and dissatisfied in social situations (Wood et al., 2008) (Agarwal, 2021).

Table 3

Psychological Well-being, N=676

Subscale	Functioning level	f	%
	Very High	65	10
	High	81	12
Positive relations	Average	400	59
	Low	61	9
	Very Low	69	10
Total		676	100
	Very High	54	8
	High	110	16
Self-acceptance	Average	396	59
	Low	62	9
	Very Low	54	8
Total		676	100
Autonomy	Very High	35	5
	High	114	17

	Average	375	55
	Low	126	19
	Very Low	26	4
Total		676	100
Personal growth	Very High	4	1
	High	194	29
	Average	305	45
	Low	123	18
	Very Low	50	7
Total		676	100
Environmental mastery	Very High	30	4
	High	153	23
	Average	374	55
	Low	63	9
	Very Low	56	8
Total		676	100
Purpose	Very High	63	9
	High	83	12
	Average	384	57
	Low	74	11
	Very Low	72	11
Total		676	100
Overall	Very High	50	7
	High	109	16
	Average	339	50
	Low	104	15
	Very Low	74	11
		676	100

Self-Acceptance

The self-acceptance subscale reflects an individual's self-perception and attitude towards life experiences. Only 18respondents achieved a very high score on this subscale, indicating a positive outlook on their past and an acceptance of both their strengths and weaknesses. (Wissing & Eeden, 2002)(Wood et al., 2008)(Wissing & Eeden, 2002)(Wood et al., 2008). On the other hand, 19 respondents scored low or very low, expressing dissatisfaction with themselves, disappointment in their past, and a desire to change who they are. However, the majority of respondents (59) fell within the average range on this subscale (Agarwal, 2021; Wissing & Eeden, 2002; Wood et al., 2008).

Autonomy

The autonomy subscale offers insights into an individual's degree of independence and self-determination. At (19), some respondents scored low on this subscale, suggesting that they frequently worry about others' opinions, rely heavily on external validation, and may succumb to peer pressure when making important decisions (Kobau et al., 2010).

The insights gleaned from analyzing the subscales of the psychological well-being scale offer a nuanced understanding of the respondents' overall psychological state. Understanding these subscales can inform targeted interventions and support strategies to enhance the well-being of individuals.

Personal Growth

It was also shown that several respondents scored high in Personal growth. Personal growth is defined as experiencing a state of constant development, perceiving oneself as growing and changing, being receptive to new experiences, feeling as though one has reached one's full potential, witnessing gradual improvements in one's behavior and self, and evolving in ways that demonstrate increased efficacy and self-awareness. On the other hand, some respondents scored low (19), which suggests that they frequently feel as though they are stagnating personally, do not feel as though they are growing or improving over time, are uninspired and uninterested in life, and find it challenging to adopt new attitudes or behaviors.

Environmental Mastery

Additionally, some respondents scored high in Environmental mastery (24), which involves choosing or creating circumstances that suit one's needs and values, feeling competent and in control of a wide range of external activities, and effectively utilizing available opportunities.

Purpose

Moreover, on the subscale Purpose in life, those who scored high at (9) and very high at (11) possess aspirations and objectives for living; they feel a sense of purpose and direction in life; they think both their current and past lives are significant; and they have ambitions and goals for living. In contrast, those respondents who score very low (11 and 11, respectively) lack a sense of direction, few goals or objectives, a sense of meaning in life, an understanding of the purpose of their past lives, and a perspective or set of beliefs that provide meaning to life.

Based on the overall score of all subscales for psychological well-being, it was found that half of the respondents (50) fall under the average or moderate level of psychological well-being. Only 7 seven of the respondents scored very high on the psychological well-being scale. The average rating could indicate that respondents maintained a positive self-perception and mental well-being despite their struggles and difficulties. It could also be because they adapted or practiced positive coping strategies that helped them deal with their stress.

Discussion

Respondents reported difficulties participating in class discussions, understanding lessons, managing finances, and adapting to the learning environment. The stress of issues and academic demands has been highlighted as a concern for college students during the pandemic, emphasizing their diverse obstacles. With the shift to online learning, it is crucial to address these issues by providing students with essential support, resources, and effective approaches to navigate the complexities of remote education (Barot et al., 2021).

The current research aimed to explore the coping strategies employed by students to manage their stressors. As explained by Lazarus and Folkman (Rodríguez et al., 2016), problem-focused coping methods involve

identifying the issue, considering potential solutions, evaluating the pros and cons, and selecting a course of action. In line with this approach, the "seeking support" responses focused on interacting with teachers, family, and peers for clarification, help, and social connections (Rodríguez et al., 2016). Similarly, technology-related coping tactics, such as ensuring access to the internet and backing up data, reflected students' practical steps to handle their responsibilities. Academic-centred coping strategies, such as avoiding procrastination, minimizing distractions, and engaging in learning, highlighted students' proactive measures toward addressing their hurdles. Furthermore, tasks such as making to-do lists, taking up part-time jobs, and utilizing resources demonstrated students' ingenuity in managing their stressors (Rodríguez et al., 2016; Johari, 2020; Rafati et al., 2017; Poudel & Wagle, 2023).

The ways to deal with emotions involve taking breaks, relaxing, sleeping, exercising, playing video games, and breathing exercises. Previous studies have shown that these emotion-focused coping methods are effective in handling stress and difficulties. Psychological theories suggest that strategies for managing emotions play a significant role in shaping an individual's social and emotional well-being (Smith et al., 2022). Moreover, research indicates that coping through processing and expression leads to psychological distress and increased life satisfaction (Compas et al., 2014). Additionally, research highlights the importance of effective coping strategies in reducing work-related stress and enhancing employee well-being (Johari, 2020).

However, it is worth noting that while some coping strategies focused on emotions can be beneficial, others may harm one's health. This is why healthcare students and professionals must be mindful of their coping methods to deal with challenges as it can significantly impact their performance and overall well-being. The study findings discussed here indicate a need to understand coping strategies among the participants (Cavazos et al., 2010). Some individuals mentioned struggling with coping or not having a strategy in place. These minor issues warrant exploration to ensure respondents are equipped with effective and efficient ways to address their stressors.

The findings from this study are consistent with existing literature, indicating that while many individuals use coping strategies, some may face challenges in developing or accessing coping mechanisms (Anuradha et al., 2019). Exploring the factors contributing to these challenges can help shape interventions and support systems to improve individuals' ability to cope with stress and adversity. Research has shown that prioritizing coping

strategies can enhance well-being and health, particularly in challenging situations (Cortêz et al., 2023). Therefore, exploring the factors that impact individuals' adoption of coping strategies is essential. By addressing these gaps, experts and professionals can create tailored interventions to empower people with the tools and skills to manage their stressors effectively (Anuradha et al., 2019; Collins et al., 1999; Olmedo & Gempes, 2016; Cortêz et al., 2023).

Understanding a person's emotional well-being involves looking at aspects highlighted in a study by Wissing & Eeden (2002). This study examines components of well-being to gain insight into how individuals perceive their overall well-being. The research paper discusses the findings from analyzing these aspects, which are not explored in other literature, providing a deeper understanding of how students are performing.

One aspect, known as relations, focuses on how individuals connect with others. Only a small percentage (12%) of the participants in the study displayed characteristics of having trustworthy relationships and showing empathy and understanding in their interactions. On the other hand, a higher percentage (19%) struggled with maintaining relationships, felt lonely, and were unsatisfied in social settings, according to Kobau et al. (2010). Another important aspect is self-acceptance, which reflects how individuals see themselves and their life experiences. A small group (8%) of respondents scored highly on this scale, indicating that they have an attitude towards their past and accept their strengths and weaknesses.

However, 19% of the people surveyed expressed dissatisfaction with their past and a desire for change, while the majority, comprising 59%, fell within this category. The autonomy aspect provides insight into how independent and self-determined an individual is. A portion of respondents (19%) scored low on this aspect, indicating that they often worry about what others think and struggle to make independent decisions.

Regarding growth, the findings show that a significant number of respondents (81%) scored high, demonstrating a commitment to development, self-awareness, and reaching their full potential. This suggests that these individuals are open to experiences, see themselves evolving positively over time, and notice enhancements in their behavior and self-understanding. Conversely, a smaller group scored low on growth, which implies they frequently feel stuck or uninspired and have difficulty embracing new perspectives or behaviors.

The research also examined mastery, which refers to the ability to select or create situations, feel capable and in charge of external activities, and effectively utilize available opportunities. Many participants demonstrated

proficiency and control in managing their surroundings to fulfill their needs and values.

Furthermore, the results regarding the purpose in life indicate that a notable number of participants have goals, aims, and a sense of purpose and direction. They believe that their current and past lives hold significance and have a purpose. On the contrary, a smaller group of participants scored low in this area, indicating a lack of direction, limited goals or objectives, and an unclear understanding of the purpose behind their lives.

The outcomes suggest that the participants exhibit varying degrees of well-being, with most falling within the average to moderate range. Only a small proportion achieved scores on the well-being scale. These discoveries underscore the complexity of psychological well-being and emphasize the importance of a comprehensive evaluation to grasp the intricacies of personal experiences (Kobau et al., 2010; Wissing & Eeden, 2002).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the diverse nature of psychological well-being among the respondents. While a significant portion demonstrated strengths in personal growth, environmental mastery, and purpose in life, a subset grappled with feelings of stagnation, lack of control, and a limited sense of direction (Wissing & Eeden, 2002). These findings underscore the importance of recognizing individual differences in psychological well-being and emphasize the need for tailored interventions to support individuals who are struggling in specific areas. Further research could delve deeper into the factors contributing to these variations and explore potential strategies for enhancing overall well-being.

Wrapping up the transition to learning amid the pandemic has challenged students, impacting their academic journey and overall welfare (Barot et al., 2021). Noteworthy obstacles include limitations in courses and adjusting to new learning settings. Educational institutions need to adopt an approach to supporting students during this transition. This involves offering assistance in creating online learning experiences and providing resources to address the technical and emotional challenges students encounter. By recognizing and addressing these challenges, we can create a supportive and equitable online learning environment for all students.

Exploring coping mechanisms reveals a range of strategies that individuals employ when faced with challenges. While problem-solving coping methods like seeking assistance and managing academic pressures were evident, emotion-focused coping techniques such as relaxation and

physical activity also played a role (Njoku et al., 2005) (Johari, 2020) (Rafati et al., 2017). This highlights the importance of addressing stressors and handling their impact.

It is important to understand that not all coping strategies are equally effective. While some strategies mentioned here can promote well-being, others may have effects.

This underscores the importance of encouraging effective coping methods and assisting individuals who may be resorting to unhealthy coping mechanisms, especially vulnerable populations such as healthcare students and professionals. It is crucial to research the intricacies of coping strategies, including those that may seem insignificant or counterproductive, in order to create targeted interventions and cultivate resilience in various situations.

Exploring the aspects of well-being provides a nuanced insight into individual experiences. While a few survey participants exhibited high levels of relationships and self-acceptance, a considerable percentage reported difficulties in interpersonal relationships, self-image, and independence (Wissing & Eeden, 2002). These results underscore the complexity of well-being. Stress the significance of considering its diverse dimensions. Further research is needed to understand the factors that influence these variations and to devise interventions that promote well-being throughout life.

To summarize, this study sheds light on the nature of well-being among the respondents. While many showed strengths in development, environmental competence, and finding purpose in life, some struggled with feelings of stagnation, a lack of Autonomy, and a sense of aimlessness (Wissing & Eeden, 2002).

The results highlight the importance of acknowledging the aspects of health and emphasizing the necessity of personalized interventions to support individuals facing challenges. Future studies could investigate the underlying reasons for these differences. Consider methods to further improve well-being through post-pandemic education that balances flexibility with equity, mental health with academic rigor, and technological innovation with human-centered design. Moreover, a unique contribution of the study is that it can help thriving students identify strategies that promote well-being, such as peer mentoring or flexible pacing, and provide actionable answers rather than simply documenting challenges.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the researchers therefore recommend that it builds upon the need for a holistic approach:

1. To effectively tackle the learning challenges, the University is advised to establish a Student Online Learning Support Center. This center would serve as a hub, offering various services tailored to meet the needs of students. The key roles of this center should encompass providing comprehensive support to address platform, software, and internet connectivity issues. Educating students on online learning techniques, time management skills, and digital literacy through workshops and personalized sessions. Creating environments and activities fosters a sense of community and belonging among learners. Establishing an Online Learning Support Center showcases a dedication to ensuring student success in the demanding landscape of online education.

2. To promote coping strategies, it is recommended that coping skills training be integrated into guidance and counseling services. This could involve offering workshops and courses on stress management, emotional regulation, and positive coping strategies as part of student programs. Particularly beneficial for students who lack effective coping mechanisms, this initiative emphasizes recognizing signs of burnout, practicing self-care, and accessing support resources. Developing approaches for addressing coping behaviors is crucial. Evaluate strategies based on research findings, such as behavioral therapy and mindfulness practices tailored to address specific unhelpful coping behaviors. Ensure these strategies are easily accessible and culturally sensitive to meet the needs of individuals struggling with coping methods. By empowering individuals with the knowledge and skills to effectively navigate challenges, we can enhance resilience, support emotional well-being, and mitigate the impacts of maladaptive coping mechanisms.

3. To cater to a spectrum of well-being needs identified in the study, it is advisable to implement the following interventions: (a) Personalized Interventions; Training in intrapersonal skills; Execute programs to enhance social interactions, communication skills, assertiveness, self-esteem, and emotional regulation. These programs should be tailored to address the needs highlighted in the research, such as improving relationships and fostering self-acceptance. Tailored Support for Specific Areas; (b) Offer individualized counseling and group support initiatives targeting challenges related to development, environmental adaptation, and finding purpose in life. This targeted approach ensures individuals receive help where they need it most. Promote holistic well-being programs, community engagement initiatives, and outreach efforts in

communities to foster connections, offer opportunities for personal growth, and cultivate a sense of belonging. By combining targeted actions with programs focused on enhancing well-being, we can create a supportive environment that empowers individuals to thrive in all aspects of their lives.

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Conflict Management and Decision-Making Styles of Faculty Members of a Higher Education Institution in Laguna Province, Philippines

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Abstract

Conflicts in higher education institutions (HEIs) are common due to the interaction of diverse groups of people; therefore, conflict management is an essential activity to ensure that various HEI functions are performed effectively. Using a mixed-methods research design, the study showed that the most common source of conflicts in the HEI is task-related conflicts. In dealing with conflicts with subordinates, the majority of faculty members applied Integrating and Obliging conflict management styles, and fewer used Dominating or Compromising styles. In terms of decision-making, the majority of faculty members were rational and independent decision-makers. Guided by the Dual Concern Theory and Choice Theory, it can be concluded that respondents tend to have a higher concern for their subordinates than for themselves when dealing with conflicts. Moreover, the infrequent occurrence of relationship-related conflicts in the HEI indicated that the respondents had a higher need for love and belongingness than for power, as they placed importance on relationships. It is further concluded that conflict management and decision-making styles are not zero-sum; each person can choose and control their responses depending on what the situation requires. Activities that foster relationship-building among faculty members in the HEI, as well as capacity-building initiatives to enhance problem-solving skills, are hereby recommended.

Keywords: conflict management, choice theory, decision-making, dual concern model, GDMS, ROCI

Introduction

Conflicts are natural, especially among interactive groups of people (Sulich, Soloducho-Pelc, & Ferasso, 2021; Adham, 2023; Anuddin, 2025). These disagreements are brought about by several factors, including incompatibilities, dissatisfaction, and dissonance (Barbuto & Xu, 2006;

Karadakal, Goud, & Thomas, 2015). Conflicts are not always detrimental to the organization, but may improve decision-making, leadership, work performances, job satisfaction, and motivation, among others, when appropriately handled (Tabassi et al., 2024; Mejia & Arpon, 2021; Barbuto & Xu, 2006; Anastasiou, 2020; Abuzaid, Al-Haraisa & Alateeq, 2022; Adham, 2023). Therefore, conflict management is a strategy used to minimize conflicts, if they cannot be totally resolved, to ensure and sustain organizational functions (Barbuto & Xu, 2006). Conflict management may involve a combination of procedures, equipment, expertise, policies, or information that leads to resolution (Bang-i, Rulloda Jr., & Ticangen, 2024). These are reflections of one's behaviors, ethics, perception, values, personal interests, and intellectual perspectives (Karadakal et al., 2015; Barbuto & Xu, 2006; Yin et al., 2022). Leaders' conflict management or conflict resolution styles vary from one another (Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020; Anastasiou, 2020); thus, their effectiveness is also dependent on context and various contributing factors (de Heredia, Arocena & Garate, 2004; Hamayun et al., 2014; Lukman, 2021; Anastasiou, 2020).

Conflict management significantly influences decision-making in organizational settings. In the study by Kuhn & Poole (2000), it was elaborated that conflict management can effectively improve decision-making among American organizations, particularly through close evaluation of alternatives and decision options, proper risk assessment, and increased group cohesiveness. Moreover, conflict management and decision-making were said to require the same set of operational skills and may affect interpersonal relationships among group members (Kuhn & Poole, 2000). On the other hand, as part of organizational culture (along with decision-making and incentive strategies), Asfahani (2017) emphasized how conflict management styles affect ethical group decision-making in Saudi Arabia. They concluded that conflicts may impede a leader's abilities to make sound decisions, therefore requiring a reliable conflict management style to improve the decision-making process (Asfahani, 2017). Leadership styles have also become more flexible when it comes to conflict resolution among entrepreneurs in India (Karadakal et al., 2015). While entrepreneurs tend to be more cooperative in dealing with disputes, the study by Karadakal et al. (2015) emphasized that a leader's behavior, perception, and overall organizational vision influence conflict resolution, and ultimately the decisions they make. Significant relationships between maladaptive decision-making patterns and conflict management styles were also observed in the study by de Heredia et al. (2004), with an emphasis on the role of self-esteem as a mediating factor. Generally, these studies have indicated that conflict

management has a positive and significant relationship with decision-making (Kuhn & Poole, 2000; de Heredia et al., 2004; Nadia, Mohsin, & Adnan, 2014).

The relationship between conflict management and decision-making was not only evident in work organizations but also in educational institutions (Hamayun et al., 2014; Shanka & Thuo, 2017; Siraji, 2019; Chandalia & Anastasiou, 2020). School leaders, according to Shanka & Thuo (2017) and Chandolia & Anastasiou (2020), are expected to possess the ability to manage and resolve conflicts at all levels, emphasizing that schools are bureaucratic in nature and that conflicts may occur in almost every process (Shanka & Thuo, 2017). In their respective studies, they pointed out that leadership styles influence conflict management of school leaders in Greece (Chandalia & Anastasiou, 2020); effective communication facilitates dispute resolution among teachers and school leaders in primary schools in Ethiopia (Shanka & Thuo, 2017); and demography (age, designation, experience, etc.) significantly influences conflict management strategies of higher education institution (HEI) faculty members in Pakistan (Hamayun et al., 2014).

In the Philippines, on the other hand, Mejia & Arpon (2021), Mangulabnan et al. (2022), and Bang-i et al. (2024) discussed the various conflict management strategies employed by school leaders in the basic education sector. In their studies, Mangulabnan et al. (2022) and Bang-i et al. (2024) concluded that the presence of the Department of Education's policies about conflict management in schools made Dominating the most preferred strategy among school principals in Central Luzon. Meanwhile, Collaborative conflict management was recommended by Mejia & Arpon (2021) in their study as the most effective approach for improving job satisfaction and work performance among teachers in Biliran province. Similarly, Quinal & Dupa (2024) found that educational attainment significantly influences the decision-making and leadership effectiveness of public elementary school administrators in the Tarragona District, Davao Oriental. Effective leadership and decision-making among school administrators was said to have improved the work performance of teachers in Eastern Samar (Capacite, 2022). However, it is worth noting that the organizational setup in the basic education sector differs significantly from that in the higher education sector.

In performing their primary mandate of providing high-quality tertiary education, HEIs face numerous challenges, including internal and organizational conflicts (Khoury & McNally, 2016; Siraji, 2019; Anuddin, 2025). Conflicts exist in HEIs as it is a place where people from different

backgrounds come together and interact (Hamayun et al., 2014; Shanka & Thuo, 2017; Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020; Tabassi et al., 2024; Anuddin, 2025). In addition, while the complex functions of HEIs (instruction, research and extension, production, innovation, among others) enable their faculty members to become well-rounded, it also makes them vulnerable to disputes as they all serve as leaders in their own respective groups and fields of expertise (Siraji, 2019; Anuddin, 2025). These were reflected in the studies of Siraji (2019) and Anuddin (2025) in the Sulu region, where they concluded that conflicts among faculty members are more complex and require a wide range of strategies to manage, if not resolved.

With complex roles of faculty members in HEIs, effective leadership has become a challenge. Undoubtedly, appropriate conflict management and decision-making approaches contribute to enhanced leadership (Sulich et al., 2021; Anuddin, 2025). On the other hand, unmanaged and unresolved conflicts lead to low morale, reduced output, and teacher retention, and in the worst cases, organizational malfunction (Sulich et al., 2021; Bang-i et al., 2024). Unresolved disputes further hinder communication, lead to inefficient and one-sided decisions, and foster unhealthy workplace relationships among teaching staff and students. Therefore, studies on conflict management and decision-making in educational institutions are significant for crafting appropriate support mechanisms for school leaders and administrators (Siraji, 2019; Sulich et al., 2021; Bang-i et al., 2024; Anuddin, 2025). However, studies on conflict management and decision-making in HEIs in the Philippines are mostly localized and still limited. To date, no study has been conducted on the conflict management and decision-making styles of faculty members at the HEI-of-study in Laguna. Furthermore, conflict management studies typically employ the Thomas-Kilmann Instrument (1976) to determine conflict management styles. Combining the use of ROCI-II (Rahim, 1983) with the General Decision-making Instrument (Scott & Bruce, 1995) is very limited, particularly in the Philippine context. Thus, this study aimed to investigate and sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants?
2. What are the sources of conflict among faculty members in the HEI?
3. What are the conflict management styles and decision-making styles of the faculty members in the HEI?
4. How does conflict management style relate to the decision-making style of the faculty members in the HEI?

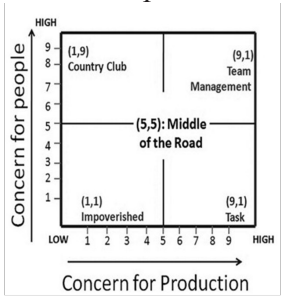
Theoretical Framework

To understand the conflict management styles of the participants, the Dual Concern Theory was applied. The Dual Concern Theory is widely used in conflict management studies, examining personal motivation and behavior that manifest as concern for others and concern for self (Barbuto & Xu, 2006; Tabassi et al., 2024). The Dual Concern Model serves as the basis for determining the conflict management styles of individuals, particularly in organizational conflicts at the workplace (Lukman, 2021).

Historically, the Dual Concern Theory was developed by Blake and Mouton (1964) and is also known as the Managerial Leadership Grid (Cai, Fink, & Walker, 2021). From this model, several subsequent models emerged, including those developed by Thomas-Kilmann in 1974, Rahim & Bonoma in 1979, with revisions in 2005, and Pruitt and Rubin in 1986 (Karadakal et al., 2015; Cai et al., 2021). Currently, the Dual Concern Model, patterned after Blake & Mouton's (1964) work, remains widely used in conflict management research (Tabassi et al., 2024). Figure 1 illustrates the dual concern models proposed by various authors.

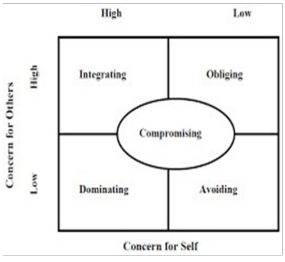
Figure 1

The Different Dual Concern Models Developed by Various Researchers in Various Years (Sources: images were obtained from Google database for comparison, credits to respective owners)

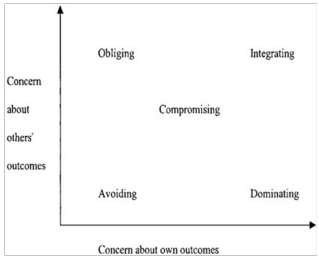


Blake & ( )

Thomas & Kilmann (1974)



R & ( )



Pruitt & Rubin

From the Dual Concern Model in 1979, the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory (ROCI) I and II were developed by Rahim in 1983 (revised 2005) (Barbuto & Xu, 2006). The
ROCI-II determines one's conflict management style depending on their respective level of concern for themselves and for others (Barbuto & Xu, 2006; Karadakal et al., 2015). For this study, Rahim's (1983) Dual Concern Model of the Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict was used.

In terms of decision-making, the study was guided by Glasser's Choice Theory. The Choice Theory, developed by Dr. William Glasser in the 1950s, states that an individual has two primary motivations for making choices: to empower themselves and to improve relationships (Glasser Institute for Choice Theory, n.d.). The Choice Theory emphasizes a person's ability tocontrol their thoughts and actions, which ultimately result in a desired response behavior in a given situation. This ability enhances one's control over one's own life by making one accountable for one's respective choices (Glasser Institute for Choice Theory, n.d.; ABA Program Guide, n.d.). Dr. Glasser mentioned that all behavior is driven from the inside (intrinsic), particularly to satisfy the need to be loved and accepted, powerful, free, to have fun, and to survive. These needs vary from person to person, relevant to their respective "quality world" or the ideal world they aspire to have. Conflict arises when a person tries to make another person satisfy their "quality world" (ABA Program Guide, n.d.).

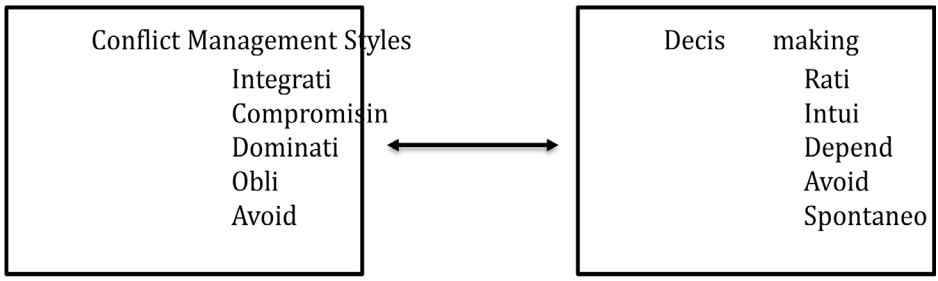
In the workplace, the application of Choice Theory can be observed through conscious recognition of individual differences, needs, and motivations, which would foster mutual respect and collaboration; provision of opportunities for growth, autonomy, and decision-making to subordinates; and creation of a work environment that promotes employee engagement, satisfaction, and productivity (ABA Program Guide, n.d.). Studies involving Choice Theory showed that having the control to one's behavior made the students more responsible for their actions (Sharifkani, Zomorodi & Ghodrati, 2020); having alternatives increased the chances of selecting the correct choice (Stibel, Dror & Ben-zeev, 2009); and delegating decision-making to subordinates empowers them while giving leaders more time to focus on strategic issues (Freschi, 2023).

Conceptual Framework

The study involved the concepts concerning conflict management styles and their relationship with decision-making styles (Figure 2):

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework for the Study (source: Developed by the Author)



Following the Dual Concern Model of Rahim & Bonoma (1975), the study examined how the different conflict management styles (Avoiding, Obliging, Dominating, Integrating, and Compromising) relate to how faculty members as temporary group leaders make decisions (Rational, Intuitive, Dependent, Avoidant, Spontaneous) based on the General Decision-Making Style of Scott & Bruce (1995). The operational definitions of these terms were referenced in relation to those of Barbuto & Xu (2006) and Chandolia & Anastasiou (2020) for conflict management styles, and Berisha, Pula, & Krasniqi (2018) for decision-making styles. Furthermore, the socio-demographic profiles of the participants and the sources of conflict were gathered to establish context and support the findings of the study. While these variables may have significant impacts in other research, this study focused on the dynamics between conflict management and decision-making.

Methodology

Place and Duration of the Study

The study was conducted in an HEI in Laguna, Philippines, in May 2024. The HEI for this study started as a provincial national high school in 1952. Through Republic Act 1807, it was converted into a National Agricultural Vocational School in 1957, which later became a college in 1971 under the mandate of Republic Act 6327. In 1983, Batas Pambansa 482 converted it into a state college, and later expanded into four satellite campuses under Republic Act 8745 and Republic Act 8292. The state college then formally became a state university in 2007, as a result of Republic Act 9402. The HEI rests on a 33.5-hectare land area bounded by the Laguna de Bay on the west and Sierra Madre on the East. Of the 33.5 hectares, 14

hectares were devoted to infrastructure, while the remaining 19.5 hectares are for research and income-generating projects. Aside from these, the HEI also manages a 100-hectare Land Grant located in a nearby municipality in the province of Laguna, where ruminants are pastured and planted with forest, fruit, and other crops for the university's future development (HEI's official document retrieved in May 2024).

The conversion of this HEI from a college to a state university signified its commitment to providing quality education that transforms lives and communities. Currently, the HEI is primarily mandated to educate its students in the fields of Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, Science, Engineering, and other related disciplines. They also undertake research and extension services, providing progressive leadership in their areas ofspecialization (HEI's official document retrieved in May 2024). The HEI offers nine (9) curricular programs with 95 regular faculty members across programs.

Currently, no studies have been conducted that explore the relationship between conflict management and decision-making styles among faculty members in the HEI or the province. The HEI was chosen as the study site due to its notable transformation, its operational size, and the functions the faculty members perform therein.

The study was conducted from May 2, 2024, to May 28, 2024. The key informant interview (KII) was conducted on May 2, 2024. Meanwhile, the survey instruments were disseminated to faculty members from May 2, 2024, to May 22, 2024, in print and via Google Forms. The data was encoded from May 22, 2024, to May 28, 2024. Secondary data were also collected during the same timeframe, while initial coordination was conducted prior to the actual visit and data-gathering activities.

The Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study were faculty members of an HEI in Laguna Province. Faculty members are mandated to perform instruction, research, extension, and production functions, as well as administration when necessary, as they are considered for management positions in the HEI. These functions were deemed essential for the institution's continuous accreditation as a learning institution. Therefore, they are anticipated to serve as program leaders, project leaders, and administrators in their respective colleges and units, where they will manage several subordinates. On the other hand, the administrative staff were excluded from the study.

For the KII, there were three respondents representing top and

middle management positions. For the survey, a total of 95 faculty members in the HEI were given the survey instrument; however, only 75 responses were returned (a response rate of 78%).

Research Instruments

In terms of sources of conflict, the study adapted the identified sources of organizational conflict from the study of Siraji (2019) in HEIs in Sulu, Philippines. These include a list of task-related and relationship-related conflicts, which the respondents were asked to rank from 1 to 10 according to the frequency of occurrence, where 10 represents the most common and 1 represents the least common.

To determine the conflict management styles, the study used the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory II (ROCI-II). The ROCI II was developed to measure conflict handling styles by rating statements on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The styles were then determined by computing the weighted average of corresponding items, where each respondent had a score for all the conflict management styles, and the highest weighted average represented the most frequently used style. The ROCI II is classified into three forms (A, B, and C), each with varying reference to a conflict with a boss, subordinate, or peer, respectively. Conflict management styles can be Integrating, Obliging, Dominating, Avoiding, and Compromising (Rahim, 1983). For this study, the respondents were given the ROCI-II Form B, on which they answered by assuming a hypothetical scenario of a superior-subordinate conflict. For the decision-making styles of the faculty members, the General Decision-making style (GDMS) of Scott and Bruce (1995) was given. It consists of 20 statements, which the respondents rated using a three-point scale. The scores were summed, and the highest score represented the greatest usage of that particular decision-making style, including Rational, Intuitive, Dependent, Avoidant, and Spontaneous. Respondents were also asked about their age range, gender identity, employment status, monthly income, and years of service for participant characterization.

While the instruments used were developed decades ago, their application remains relevant and is still widely used across disciplines. According to the Center for Advanced Studies in Management (n.d.), ROCI II remains the gold standard in studying conflict management in education and organizational research. While ROCI-III was developed in the early 2000s, its primary application is in determining the types of conflict rather than managing interpersonal conflicts (Chiarelli, Parrish, Cantrell, & Benge,

2024). Similarly, Olcum & Titrek (2015) stated that while other measuring instruments for determining decision-making styles are available, the GDMS of Scott & Bruce (1995) is a well-validated instrument in the fields of educational and organizational research, and is often used in conjunction with studies on conflict resolution and team dynamics. Thus, they were deemed applicable for this study.

Data Gathering and Analysis

The study employed an exploratory case study research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The data was collected through key informant interviews (KII), surveys, secondary data collection, and ocular inspection. Narratives from the key informants were obtained through interviews, while descriptive and correlational analyses were applied to the survey data. The relationships among the variables of conflict management and decision-making were determined. The KII was conducted face-to-face, lasting for 1.5 to 2.0 hours per respondent. Among the guide questions were:

1. As an administrator, what are the common complaints you have received?
2. What are the strategies you apply to address the complaints? What strategies are employed by the HEI?
3. Do you think your strategies are effective in resolving or managing the conflicts? How about the strategies of the HEI?
4. What do you think are the impacts of managing conflicts in your unit?
5. How do you feel every time you address a certain conflict in your unit, or among your subordinates?

For the survey, a total of 95 faculty members were given a questionnaire. Faculty members who were physically reporting for work were given a print copy of the survey questionnaire, while those working from home were provided with a Google Form link to respond. Furthermore, the official documents from the HEI were thoroughly reviewed for relevant information.

To characterize the research participants, the data collected were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis. The participants were also asked to rank the common sources of organizational conflict as identified by Siraji (2019); their average scores were computed to determine the final rank.

Further, the weighted mean were computed to determine the dominant conflict management style. In contrast, the sum was computed to determine the dominant decision-making style based on the ROCI-II Form B and GDMS, respectively. Finally, the relationship between conflict management and decision-making styles was computed using Pearson correlational analysis.

In compliance with the ethical considerations for research involving human participants, an informed consent statement was attached to every questionnaire, both in print and online. The informed consent statement included the rights and level of participation needed from the participants, as well as the objectives and rationale of the study. A section certifying the voluntary participation and consent of the participants was also included, where they affixed their signature. For online surveys, however, their consent was manifested by thoroughly completing and submitting the Google Forms. The freedom to withdraw from the study at any time, without any implications, was explicitly presented.

Results and Discussion

The Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Participants

The majority of the participants are middle-aged (41 to 55 years old), female, highly educated, and relatively 'new' in the HEI, with one to 10 years of service. They earn a net income between 20,000 and 35,000 pesos per month (approximately 900 to 1,500 pesos per working day), which can be considered higher than the minimum wage (610 pesos per day) in the Philippines. Table 1 summarizes the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 1

The Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Participants (n=75).

Variables	f	%
Age range (in years)		
18 to 28	7	7
29 to 40	28	28
41-55	31	31
56-65	8	8
No Answer	1	1
Gender orientation		
Male	27	27
Female	43	43
No Answer	5	5
Net Income (in Pesos)		
Below 20,000	4	4
20,000-35,000	29	29
35,000-50,000	27	27
More than 50,000	9	9
No answer	6	6
Years in Service		
Less than a year	2	2.7
1 to 10	28	37.3
11 to 20	23	30.6
21 to 30	5	6.7
More than 30 years	4	5.3
No answer	13	17.3
Educational Attainment		
Bachelor's degree	7	9.33
Master's degree	25	33.3
Doctorate degree	27	36.0
No Answer	16	21.3

(Source: Developed by the Author)

According to HEI policy, the minimum educational attainment required for academic positions in state universities and colleges is a Master's degree, as mandated by the Civil Service Commission Memorandum Circular 22 series of 2016. Thus, more than half of the participants held Master's degrees and doctoral degrees. Considering their degrees, a high level of competence in their respective fields, as well as professionalism, was expected by their students, peers, and superiors.

Sources of Organizational Conflict

Organizational conflicts, such as task-related or relationship-related conflicts, may arise at any level of the organization (Karadakal et al., 2015; Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019). Task-related conflicts (such as structural factors, work design, etc.) pertain to incompatibilities or disagreements in relation to the task being performed (Karadakal et al., 2015; Khoury & McNally, 2016; Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019). Relationship-related conflicts, on the other hand, are individual or personal issues or differences that are irrelevant to the task at hand but cause disagreements among individuals (Karadakal et al., 2015; Khoury & McNally, 2016; Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019).

In 2019, Siraji conducted a study on the sources of conflict among HEIs in the Sulu Region involving four private and public universities and colleges. From the study, they identified the common sources of organizational conflict from these HEIs in Sulu. The list was adapted for this study and followed the same ranking procedure. Table 2 summarizes the most common and least common sources of conflict in HEI in Laguna province.

Table 2

Most Common and Least Common Sources of Organizational Conflict in an HEI in Laguna Province (n=75)

Sources of Organizational Conflict	Mean Score (n=75)	Rank
Differences in goals and objectives	6.05	1st
Personality differences	5.61	2nd
Differences over procedures or measures to be used	5.20	3rd
Frustration with people and/or resources	5.07	4th
Problems related to areas of authority	5.04	5th
Substandard job performance	5.01	6th

Lack of clearly defined areas of responsibility	4.96	7th
Communication misunderstanding	4.93	8th
Non-compliance with rules and policies	4.88	9th
Lack of employee cooperation	4.77	10th

(Source: Developed by the Author)

Based on the survey, the top three common sources of conflict in HEI in Laguna are:

Differences in goals and objectives, personality differences, and differences over procedures and methods. Two of them are task-related conflicts (1st and 3rd), while the second most is differences in personality, which is a relationship-related conflict. As mentioned earlier, the faculty members have five mandates to fulfill (instruction, research, extension, production, and administration), and in doing so, temporary groups are expected to be formed. Temporary groups, according to Tabassi et al. (2024), are temporary organizations, typically small in size, formed to achieve specific organizational goals. These include projects, programs, task forces, committees, etc., which will dissolve once the goals have been achieved (Tabassi et al., 2024). In the case of the faculty members, they become part of temporary groups in compliance with their mandate. Based on the KII,the goals and objectives of one temporary group may sometimes coincide with, overlap with, or conflict with those of another temporary group. Thus, these differences in goals and objectives are the most common source of conflict in their organization. This was also evident in the study by Shanka and Thuo (2017), who mentioned that goal incompatibilities are one of the common sources of conflict among school leaders in Wolaita Zone, Ethiopia.

> *"Kami dito sa college namin, dahil maliit lang kami na college, magkakasundo naman kami pero minsan sa trabaho, magkakaiba kami ng gusto at paraan na naiisip so minsan may mga simple misunderstandings… naaayos naman ito agad kasi nag-uusap usap naman kami."* [Here in our college, since we are a small college, we generally get along well, but sometimes we get into simple misunderstandings due to differences in preferences and strategies… those were easily cleared up because we communicate with each other] (Respondent 2, 38, 9 years in service).

> *"Required kami Ma'am magkaroon ng mga projects, part yan ng mandate namin dito sa college. Pero syempre minsan, lalo pag*

> *madaming project involvements yung mga tao, minsan patong-patong at nag o-overlap yung mga trabaho. Kaya nagkakaroon minsan ng confusion kasi, sino ba ang dapat gagawa nito ganyan…"* [We are required to have projects; those are part of our mandate here in the college. Well, sometimes, especially when we have so many project involvements, our tasks overlap with the other projects. Sometimes we get confused as to whose tasks they should be.] (Respondent 3, 36, 3 years in service)

Personality differences come second, which is reasonably expected as the faculty members came from different provinces and have different academic and professional backgrounds (KII, May 2024). During the interviews, the KII participants mentioned that their HEI is a diverse community, with faculty members mostly coming from neighboring provinces in regions 4A, 4B, and 5. Due to these differences, their interaction may, in one way or another, ignite conflicts among them as mentioned earlier (Hamayun et al., 2014; Shanka & Thuo, 2017; Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020; Tabassi et al., 2024).

> *"Ako po from [redacted]. Napapunta lang po ako dito sa Laguna para magturo dito sa school. Siyempre, iba yung ginagawa noon sa pinanggalingan ko at tsaka dito. Iba din yung expectations sa akin ng mga kasama ko. Iba din yung ginagawa nila kase galing din sila sa ibang lugar."* [I am from [redacted]. I relocated here specifically to teach at this school. Of course, what I was doing in [redacted] is different from what I am doing here. The expectations of my colleagues from where I came from and here are also different. Their strategies are also different because they came from a different place (Respondent 2, 38, 9 years in service)

> *"Galing ako sa ibang posisyon bago ako maging [redacted, current position] Syempre sa una, hindi madali kasi nangangapa ako sa mga tao dito. Pero as an administrator, kailangan balanse na nakikisama ka at the same time na-a-achieve yung goals ng school."* [I came from a different position before I became [redacted, current position]. At first, it was difficult because I am getting to know the school community. But as an administrator, there should be a balance between getting along with them and achieving the school's objectives at the same time.] (Respondent 1, 51, 16 years in service)

The personality differences of these anticipated leaders may also cause differences in leadership styles and conflict management styles (Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020; Tabassi et al., 2024). It was mentioned during the KII that the middle management (i.e., college deans) were given the liberty to manage their unit. Top management fully trusts the capabilities of its deans in executing policies and strategies in line with their respective thrusts. While this freedom is beneficial for the deans, they may have differences in procedures and measures in their respective units. For instance, the deans employ different strategies in dealing with student-to-student conflict and student-teacher conflict, where one is more lenient and the other strictly enforces the protocol as stated in their Committee on Decorum and Investigation (CODI) manual (KII, May 2024).

> "Iba yung conflict management namin when it comes to our colleagues and our students. May kasabihan nga kami dito: ibigay ang hilig para walang ligalig. Yung maliliit na bagay, hayaan mo na 'yan. Kung doon sila masaya, OK na 'yun. Pero sa mga students kasi, lalo sa amin sa Criminology, may rules and regulations kami na pinapatupad strictly. Hindi kami pwedeng mag give in kasi discipline ang importante sa course na ito". [Our conflict management is different when we are dealing with a colleague and when we are dealing with a student. We have a saying here, give in to their wishes so there will be no complaints. We can give in to simple whims if they will be happy with it; it is fine. But it is different when it comes to our students, especially here in Criminology, we have rules and regulations that we strictly impose because discipline is important in this course. (Respondent 2, 38, 9 years in service)

> "Wala naman kaming problema sa conflict management kasi may CODI kami na sinusunod, lalo sa students. Kung may problema sa estudyante, may tamang proseso sa CODI na susundin. Sa staff naman, kami na mismong mga [redacted, current position] ang umaayos…tama 'yon ibigay ang hilig para walang ligalig. 'Pag di pinagbigyan, sasama ang loob. Pero minsan talagang hindi pwede at lalabag din naman sa university policies. So depende sa issues, pag kaya na sa amin, sa level namin, kami na ang umaayos. So far, wala pa naman kaming issues na hindi nasolusyunan sa level ko palang, wala pa naman umaakyat sa higher level." [We do not have problems when it comes to conflict management because we are guided by CODI, especially with students. If there are issues with them, there

is a right process to follow as specified in the CODI. When it comes to staff issues, we as [redacted, current position] are in-charge of managing them. That's right, give in to their whims so there would be no complaints; if we do not give in, they might get offended. But, sometimes, we cannot do so easily especially if giving in would violate certain university policies. So, it really depends on the issues, if we can deal with it on our level, we manage it. So far, there have been no issues that we were not able to manage at our level; they did not escalate to higher authorities] (Respondent 3, 36, 3 years in service)

On the other hand, the least common source of conflict is lack of employee cooperation. (10th), non-compliance with the rules and policies (9th), and communication misunderstanding (8th). Two of these are relationship-related conflicts (8th and 10th), while the 9th is a task-related conflict.

"We have an open communication here…. Sa totoo lang, ang mga kapareho kong administrador dito sa campus at ngayon ang ibang nasa kabilang campus na ay mga dati kong teachers. Ganyan kasi, dati kong mentors at nung naging administrator ako ay naging friends ko na. I learned from them." [We have an open communication here. In fact, my fellow administrators here and the others who are now assigned to another campus are my former teachers. Before, they were my mentors, and when I became an administrator, I became friends with them. I learned from them.] (Respondent 1, 51, 16 years in service)

"Ang function naming administrators kasi, having a friendly atmosphere among us administrators, ay isang factor that influences our relationships with our fellow teachers. Ako, I believe that keeping a friendly atmosphere among us administrators would also lead to a friendly atmosphere with my fellow teachers as subordinates namin in the college… Napaka importante din ng role ng communication to the kind of job that we have here in campus." [Our function as administrators, having a friendly atmosphere among us administrators, is a factor that influences our relationships with our fellow teachers. I believe that keeping a friendly atmosphere among us administrators would also lead to a friendly atmosphere with my fellow teachers as subordinates in the college… Communication

> plays an important role to the kind of job that we have here on campus (Respondent 2, 38, 9 years in service)

Following the results of the survey, it can be observed that faculty members are highly cooperative, despite having personality differences; they comply with rules and policies, and communicate openly with one another. It was also mentioned during the KII that faculty members are amenable to conflict resolution and deal with it proactively. In fact, top management and the deans meet monthly to discuss their progress, share experiences and lessons learned, and address any conflicts informally. This was also done to improve communication and build trust and rapport, as they believe that working smoothly, hand-in-hand, would advance institutional development (KII, May 2024).

> "Meron kaming informal gatherings, isang hapon na parang magkakape lang kami kasama yung mga ibang officials. We discuss matters informally. Nag-she-share kami ng mga experiences namin, kung ano yung effective strategies at best practices, para magaya din ng ibang colleges. Masaya sya, informal yet educational." [We have informal gatherings, like one afternoon, we sit with other officials and discuss matters informally over a cup of coffee. We also share our experiences, best practices, and strategies so that other colleges can adopt. It was fun, informal yet educational.] (Respondent 1, 51, 16 years in service)

The results of the survey differed from those of Siraji (2019), who found that the most common source of organizational conflict in HEIs in Sulu was a lack of employee cooperation, while the least common source was personality differences. Shanka & Thuo (2017) also identified scarcity of resources, task interdependence, and bad political interference as the most common sources of conflict among school leaders in Ethiopia. Miscommunication or poor communication was also observed as a common source of conflict among public HEIs in Pakistan (Hamayun et al., 2014) and among school leaders in Greece (Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020). Khoury and McNally (2016) therefore suggested that effective communication is crucial in conflict management and resolution, a notion also observed in the HEI in Laguna province. Despite varying sources, conflict management is necessary to enhance work stability, foster self-efficacy, and promote the long-term growth of companies (Tabassi et al., 2024), which is particularly

relevant in the context of an HEI.

Respondents' Conflict Management and Decision-making Styles

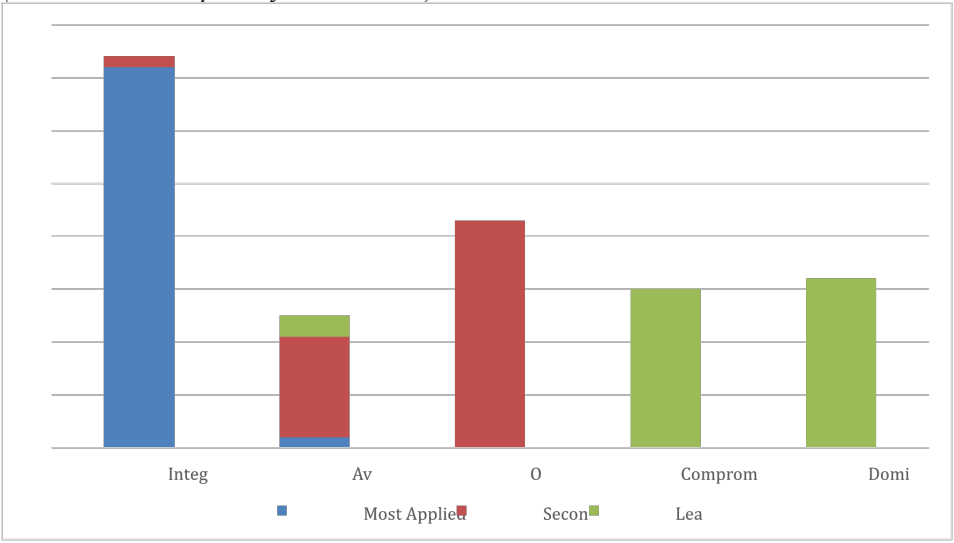
As mentioned by Tabassi et al. (2024), the Dual Concern Model remains widely used in conflict management research. Under the Dual Concern Model, there are five conflict management styles regardless of whether the model was developed by Thomas & Kilmann (1974), Rahim & Bonoma (1979), or Pruitt & Rubin (1986) (Figure 1). However, in some studies, these styles are grouped into three categories: cooperative, competitive, and avoidant (Karadakal et al., 2015; Yin et al., 2022; Tabassi et al., 2024). In their respective studies, they defined cooperative conflict management as a positive style that involves integration of suggestions to formulate solutions that satisfies or benefits all parties; competitive conflict management as a positive style which involves domination of another party by advancing one's own interest; and avoidant conflict management as a negative style which involves evasion, sidestepping, disengagement by showing no concern for the outcome (Yin et al., 2022; Tabassi et al., 2024).

This study, on the other hand, applied the Dual Concern Model of Rahim & Bonoma (1979) to determine the conflict management styles of faculty members at an HEI in Laguna province. Similar in other conflict management researches, this study classified the conflict management styles into five composed of: Integrating (high concern for self and others), Dominating (high concern for self and low concern for others), Obliging (low concern for self and high concern for others), Avoiding (low concern for self and for others), and Compromising (medium level of concern for self and others).

Based on the survey, 72 faculty members mostly apply the Integrating conflict management style. To elaborate further, the second most frequently applied conflict management styles among faculty members were also determined by obtaining the second-highest weighted mean from all the conflict management style scores of the respondents. Interestingly, 43 faculty members apply Obliging, and 19 apply Avoiding as their second conflict management style (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Conflict Management Styles (CMS) of Respondents in the HEI (n=75) (Source: developed by the author)



Moreover, the least applied was determined by identifying the least weighted mean among the respondents' scores per conflict management style. Based on the survey, 32 faculty members least apply the Dominating strategy, and 30 faculty members least apply the Compromising strategy (Figure 3). It can be observed, however, that the number of respondents does not equal the total of 75. That is because some faculty members appeared to have been practicing two conflict management styles, including Integrating and Avoiding (most applied, by one respondent); Obliging and Avoiding (second most applied, by 11 respondents); and Dominating and Compromising (least applied, by 9 respondents).

According to Barbuto and Xu (2006), individuals' conflict management styles vary depending on their motivation. Whether motivated by external or internal factors, leaders tend to practice Obliging, Integrating, and Compromising conflict management styles to maintain harmonious relationships with others (Barbuto & Xu, 2006). Dominating was effective but was seen as inappropriate, as it may escalate conflict, while Avoiding was observed as the least effective approach (Barbuto & Xu, 2006). Further, Obliging was observed to be effective in increasing job performance, job satisfaction, and leadership effectiveness (Barbuto & Xu, 2006), while Integrating was found to be more suitable for managing conflict (Lukman, 2021).

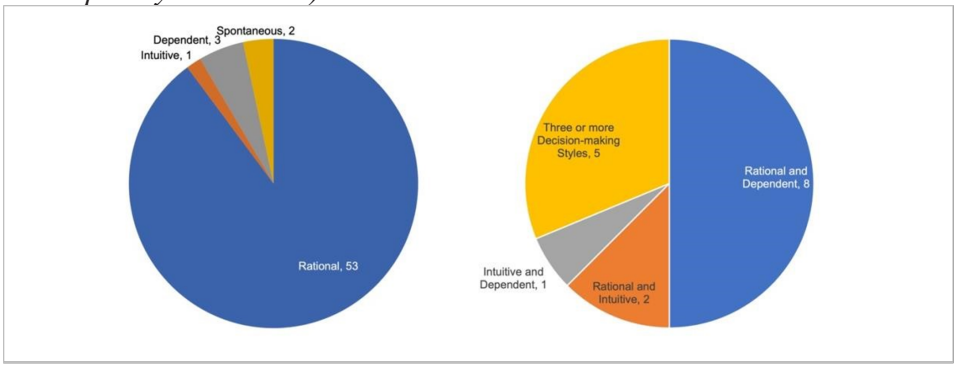
Following the results of the survey, both the most applied and the second most applied conflict management styles (Integrating and Obliging) showed a high concern for others. In contrast, the least applied styles (Dominating and Compromising) showed a medium to high concern for oneself. According to the key informants, for simple requests from subordinates, it is a common culture in the HEI to accommodate the wishes of others to avoid conflict. However, when important decisions have to be made, especially when the decision is crucial to their colleges and the HEI, the key informants mentioned that consultations with the right people were made beforehand. Moreover, while Compromising style is ideal in some cases, the respondents chose to either completely give in (Obliging) or seek to collaborate to reach a conflict resolution that is amenable to all parties. The results of the survey also highlighted the importance of maintaining healthy workplace relationships in the HEI, as its faculty recognize and care for the needs of their colleagues. This was consistent with the study by Yin et al. (2022), which stated that the culture of harmony was deemed precious; thus, the Dominating style of conflict management was least, if not, practiced.

The presence of multiple styles of conflict management suggests that leaders adapt their conflict management styles according to the situation, as observed in the studies by Karadakal et al. (2015) and Anuddin (2025). According to Siraji (2019), Integrating and Compromising were the most effective in addressing the differences in goals and objectives, personality differences, and disagreements over procedures and measures. Lukman (2021) also noted that conflicts are complex and may therefore require a combination of approaches to resolve. Nevertheless, the ability to reduce conflict is a reflection of leadership effectiveness (Barbuto & Xu, 2006; Sulich et al., 2021).

In terms of decision-making styles using GDMS, the majority of respondents are Rational and Dependent decision-makers, while some respondents practice two or more decision-making styles (Figure 4). According to Olcum & Titrek's (2015) study, school administrators employ various decision-making styles, considering factors such as each person's values, ethics, and events, among others, when making logical decisions. In contrast, public corporate workers were found to Be Avoidant and Spontaneous decision-makers (Olcum & Titrek, 2015). Rational decision-making also increases job satisfaction, while Spontaneous decision-making decreases it (Sari, 2022).

Figure 4

Decision-Making Styles of the Respondents in the HEI (n=75) (source: developed by the author)



The application of a Dependent decision-making style was also evident among heads of public elementary schools in Eastern Samar (Capacite, 2022). Dependent decision-making, according to Berisha et al. (2018), involves searching for advice, direction, and support from other people as the person is uncomfortable making decisions by themselves. As mentioned earlier, the policies in the basic education sector provide structured guidance to the school administrators, which aids them in decision-making. Nevertheless, this type of decision-making was found to have a significant positive relationship with teachers' work performance, especially when compliance with rules and regulations is taken into account (Capacite, 2022). On the contrary, these findings may not apply in the context of HEIs. While university rules and regulations are being implemented, faculty members are given academic freedom in performing their multiple functions. Thus, rigid policies may restrict instead of guide them. Hence, the Rational decision-making style was observed to be the most preferred by faculty members in this HEI. According to Berisha et al. (2018), this type of decision-making involves thorough research for information and logical evaluation of alternatives prior to making decisions—a common practice for faculty members in HEIs, especially those who also serve as program and project leaders (temporary groups).

Moreover, with the theoretical guidance of Glasser's Choice Theory, decisions are made based on one's needs, leading to choices that will "feel beneficial" to oneself. Since one is in control of their thoughts and actions, choosing alternatives that were perceived as aligned with their 'Quality World' would result in satisfaction of one's needs (ABA Programs Guide, n.d.). In this context, therefore, most respondents felt the need to examine alternatives and consult others before making decisions (need for love and

belongingness), rather than making decisions based on hunches or impulse. It is worth noting that the majority of respondents hold advanced degrees, and therefore are expected to be critical thinkers and problem solvers. In addition, the multiple decision-making styles exhibited by some respondents reflected flexibility and adaptability in making decisions across various situations (Olcum & Titrek, 2015). Nevertheless, having options and the ability to make good choices or decisions is empowering (ABA Programs Guide, n.d.; Sulich et al., 2022; Quinal & Dupa, 2024).

Relationship of Conflict Management Style and Decision-making Style

The relationship between conflict management style and decision-making style has been studied by previous researchers in various fields. De Heredia et al. (2004) stated that there is a negative relationship between Collaborative (or Integrating) conflict management and maladaptive decision-making (Avoidant and Dependent). The negative relationship showed that the more Collaborative a leader is in terms of conflict management, the less likely they are to become Avoidant and Dependent decision-makers. This further suggests that when a person avoids conflict management, they also tend to avoid decision-making or delegate it to others (de Heredia et al., 2004). On the contrary, the Avoidance conflict management did not show any significant relationship with any of the decision-making styles in terms of group decision-making (Kuhn & Poole, 2000). Instead, integrating conflict management showed a significant relationship with Rational decision-making (Kuhn & Poole, 2000). This proved that the more a person collaborates to address conflict, the more they get to know alternatives, closely examine them, and eventually make rational decisions (Kuhn & Poole, 2000). In this study, the relationship between conflict management and decision-making styles of faculty members was determined using Pearson correlational analysis in MS Excel. Table 3 summarizes the correlation coefficient (r), indicating significance at the 90% confidence level ($\alpha = 0.10$).

Table 3

Correlation Coefficient (r) of Conflict Management Styles and Decision-Making Styles

CMS/GDMS	Rational	Intuitive	Dependent	Avoidant	Spontaneous
Integrating	0.16	- 0.05	0.17	- 0.18	0.09
Obliging	0.02	0.00	0.02	- 0.02	0.32*
Dominating	0.11	0.49*	0.25*	0.12	0.44*
Avoiding	0.23*	0.17	0.25*	0.03	0.10
Compromising	0.05	0.09	- 0.02	- 0.11	0.26*

(Source: developed by the author)

Strength of relationship:

> 0.70 = very strong
0.40 to 0.69 = strong
0.30 to 0.39 = moderate
0.20 to 0.29 = weak
0.01 to 0.19 – very weak
0.00 = no relationship

** p-value < 0.10*

Based on the survey, most relationships are positive (direct), which means that as the frequency of applying a particular conflict management style increases, the frequency of using a particular decision-making style also increases. On the other hand, the negative (indirect) relationship indicated that when the frequency of applying a particular conflict management style increases, the frequency of using a particular decision-making style decreases. However, it can be noted that the strength of the relationships is mostly "very weak" to "weak"; one had no relationship at all (Table 3).

The most applied conflict management approach, Integrating, as shown by the respondents (Figure 3), did not exhibit a significant relationship with the decision-making styles; the relationship was generally weak (Table 3). On the other hand, Obliging conflict management, as the second most applied (Figure 3), showed a moderately strong and significant relationship with Spontaneous decision-making (Table 3). This means that the more a person prioritizes the concerns of others over their own in an effort to reduce conflict, the quicker the decision-making process becomes, and decisions are made based on feelings and impulse. It is worth noting that, as part of their organizational culture, HEI faculty members who also serve as administrators typically accommodate the simple requests of their subordinates to avoid conflict and stress (KII, May 2024). This type of organizational culture is prevalent among all faculty members at the HEI.

Moreover, the Dominating conflict management showed a positively strong and significant relationship with Intuitive and Spontaneous

decision-making, and a positively weak yet significant relationship with Dependent decision-making (Table 3). Since Dominating is the least used conflict management style of the respondents (Figure 3), and guided by the direct relationship it showed (Table 3), it can be stated that the less frequent the Dominating conflict management is applied, so does the Intuitive or Spontaneous decision-making. Inversely, the more a person prioritizes themselves in managing conflicts, the more they make decisions based on what "feels right" at the moment. Similarly, a higher concern for self during conflict management would mean a higher need for support from others during decision-making. This finding applies to all faculty members of the HEI.

The Avoiding conflict management showed a positively weak but significant relationship with Rational and Dependent decision-making (Table 3). From the survey, it can be observed that avoiding or delaying conflict resolution, or sidestepping to avoid getting involved in a dispute, is more logical than dealing with it head-on. It was mentioned earlier that while the key informants accommodate the concerns of their colleagues over their own to avoid conflict, they ensure that whenever important decisions need to be made, they consult their colleagues and school management (KII, May 2024). Further, as mentioned earlier, part of their organizational culture is the belief that avoidance (of disputes) is better than resolution. Therefore, culture is a factor in how a person chooses to respond to conflicting situations and make ethical decisions based on their principles and beliefs (Asfahani, 2017). It was also mentioned by Holt and DeVore (2005) that avoiding conflicts is a characteristic of Asians, as they demonstrate respect for others by refraining from arguing or imposing their views.

On the other hand, the positive relationship between Avoidant conflict management and Dependent decision-making (as a maladaptive decision-making pattern) is consistent with the study by de Heredia et al. (2004). This further supported the claims made during the KII (May 2024) that superiors or management delayed conflict resolution to allow their subordinates to deal with it on their own first – an application of Choice Theory in the workplace (ABA Program Guide, n.d.). This applies to all the faculty members of the HEI.

Finally, the Compromising conflict management showed a positively weak yet significant relationship with Spontaneous decision-making (Table 3). Similar to Dominating conflict management, Compromising is the least preferred by the respondents (Figure 3). Therefore, based on the survey, it can be observed that the less frequent a person gives in to minimize conflict, the less frequent they make decisions spontaneously. In other words, the

more a person gives in to others to avoid conflict, the more they make decisions based on what "feels right" at the moment.

Generally, some relationships, while significant, were found to be 'weak' to 'very weak'. Moreover, some relationships apply only to the set of respondents and cannot be assumed to be representative of all faculty members in the HEI. Furthermore, Pearson correlation values highlight the relationships between conflict management and decision-making, but do not indicate causality. The socio-demographic data collected were used to describe participants; their relationship with conflict management and decision-making was not a part of the study. Nevertheless, consistent with other studies, a significant relationship exists between conflict management and the decision-making styles of faculty members in the HEI.

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Faculty members were mandated to perform five official functions, and are considered for leadership positions mainly in temporary groups (programs, projects, offices). As leaders, they would be involved in conflict management and decision-making to ensure smooth organizational operations while achieving their respective objectives. Several studies have been conducted on conflict management and decision-making in both organizational and educational institutions. However, these kinds of scientific endeavour are still limited in the Philippines setting, especially among HEIs. Thus, the study was conducted in an HEI in Laguna province to discuss the sources of organizational conflicts; determine the conflict management and decision-making styles of the faculty members; and determine how conflict management relates to decision-making. A total of 75 responses were returned, with the majority of respondents being females, highly educated, aged 41 to 55 years old, and having been with the HEI for one to 10 years. Results showed that the most common source of conflicts in the HEI was task conflicts; relational conflicts were also present, but were the least common. Assuming a superior-subordinate relationship, the majority of faculty members apply Integrating and Obliging conflict management styles, and less often Dominating or Compromising. In terms of decision-making, the majority of the faculty members are rational and dependent decision-makers. On the other hand, some of the faculty members possess two or more conflict management and decision-making styles. Significant positive relationships were observed between: 1) Obliging conflict management and Spontaneous decision-making; 2) Dominating conflict management and Intuitive, Dependent, and Spontaneous decision-

making; 3) Avoiding conflict management and Rational and Dependent decision-making; and 4) Compromising conflict management and Spontaneous decision-making.

Based on these results, and following the Dual Concern Theory, it can be concluded that majority of the faculty members of the HEI, have higher concern for their subordinates than for themselves by applying collaborative problem-solving (Integrating) and giving in to the wishes of their subordinates while neglecting their own interests (Obliging) when dealing with conflicts most of the time rather than trying to win at all cost (Dominating) or bargaining (Compromising). Moreover, with reference to Glasser's Choice Theory, it can be concluded that the respondents have a higher need for love and belongingness than for power, as they prioritize relationships, as shown by the infrequent occurrence of relationship-related conflicts in the HEI and the least application of the Dominating conflict management style. The respondents also choose to be rational in making decisions, including avoiding conflict altogether (as an alternative option) rather than having to solve it later on, and giving opportunities to their subordinates to resolve conflicts on their own first. While a Dependent decision-making style was seen as a maladaptive pattern of decision-making (Fischer, Soyez, & Gurtner, 2015), it was highly applied in this HEI, considering their respect for colleagues, especially superiors, whom they consult during critical decision-making times. In general, the respondents are collaborative conflict managers and rational decision-makers. On the other hand, faculty members are less dominant conflict managers and tend to be less intuitive, dependent, and spontaneous decision-makers.

The significant relationships established between various combinations of conflict management and decision-making styles, as well as the presence of multiple-style respondents confirms to the study of Asfahani (2017) which stated that there are no right or wrong styles, but there is a critical time that a particular style is more appropriate than the other, thus a person can change their styles depending on situation (Asfahani, 2017). Furthermore, other variables, such as culture (Holt & DeVore, 2005; Asfahani, 2017) and self-esteem (de Heredia et al., 2004), also influence preferences for conflict management and decision-making styles. Nevertheless, it is further concluded that conflict management styles and decision-making styles are not zero-sum; each person has the ability to choose and control their responses, depending on the situation's requirements. Regardless of one's preference, conflict management and decision-making are a reflection of one's values system and leadership capabilities (de Heredia et al., 2004; Barbuto & Xu, 2006; Hamayun et al., 2014; Karadakal et al., 2015; Anastasiou,

2020; Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020; Lukman, 2021; Yin et al., 2022).

Based on the study, it is recommended that grievance committees be updated and regularly monitored for compliance, as they are already in place. Activities to foster camaraderie and rapport among faculty members are also recommended to further strengthen their relationships as colleagues and as superior-subordinate, such as making the monthly meeting of university administrators and faculty leaders a regular activity. Further, as conflict management and decision-making are "skills" that can be developed (Quinal & Dupa, 2024; Sulich et al., 2021), capacity-building activities are also recommended to equip faculty members with effective leadership qualities. Having skilled leaders who are reliable in managing disputes and making the right decisions would future-proof the academic community. For theoretical recommendations, similar studies using the Dual Concern Models of Thomas-Kilmann and Pruitt & Rubin may be employed to confirm the results, either within the same HEI or in another one.

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Social, Health, and Financial Dimensions of 4ps: An In-Depth Study of Beneficiary Perceptions

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Abstract

The beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, or 4Ps, despite receiving program benefits for a maximum of 13 years, still live in poverty, with 3.82 million, or 90%, of the 4.26 million household beneficiaries affected. Given this, a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews (IDIs) was employed to analyze the social, health, and financial perceptions of the 4Ps beneficiaries in the Municipality of Katipunan, Province of Zamboanga del Norte. Four themes emerged: positive educational and health perceptions, positive social perceptions through role performance, issues of economic sufficiency leading to problems of financial perceptions, and indications of dependency and mental mendicancy among other beneficiaries. Rethinking the voices from the '4Ps' beneficiaries, the paper calls for the government to help further beneficiaries shift from dependency to self-reliance. This can be achieved by enhancing the effectiveness of the Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) and other 4Ps initiatives through increased economic opportunities and skills training, livelihood diversification, and a shift in mindset through values formation and empowerment programs.

Keywords: 4Ps, social perception, health perception, financial perception, poverty reduction

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a 17-point plan that aims to "end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all" (UN, 2022). It acknowledges the eradication of poverty in all its forms, which is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. Similarly, the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 aims to raise the standard of living for its people and create a community that is peaceful, stable, and resilient, with an enhanced capacity for greater economic opportunities that support poverty eradication.

Consistent with these international declarations and leaving no one

behind, the AmBisyon Natin 2040 of the Philippines represents the collective long-term vision and aspirations of the Filipino people for themselves with "AmBisyon of matatag (strongly rooted), maginhawa (comfortable), and panatag na buhay (secure life)." Thus, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), in its commitment to breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty through human capital investments, developed the country's most extensive social protection program encompassing more than 4 million households. The Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) program, locally known as Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), was established as a government initiative that provides conditional cash grants to the poorest of the poor in the country. Since the program's inception in 2008, three impact evaluations have been conducted, producing considerable evidence that the 4Ps have demonstrably helped lift many families out of poverty and made gains in the domains of education and health, as well as socio-behavioral outcomes among program beneficiaries. These findings conform to two major theories, the Theory of Change and the Public Investment Theory of Edward Anderson et al. (2006), that both emphasize the impact of public capital and public investment on productivity, economic growth, inequality, and poverty, as a result of a desired change that is anticipated to occur in a specific setting. However, while the Philippines was on its way to becoming an upper-middle-income country, the COVID-19 pandemic struck and threatened the lives of the poor the hardest. ADB (2022) observed that at least 20% of people in developing Asia were either extremely or moderately impoverished in 2021.

Despite the government's long-standing support through the CCT, poverty persists in some communities. Existing studies reveal a strong contradiction between the program's intended goals and the experiences of its beneficiaries in the areas of social, health, and financial aspects. Thus, the study aimed to analyze the perceptions of beneficiaries regarding the 4Ps as a strategy for poverty reduction in the Municipality of Katipunan, Province of Zamboanga del Norte, Region IX. With some practical considerations, Katipunan, Zamboanga del Norte, was specifically chosen as the research environment for the study, as its local government identified it as a priority area due to its high poverty incidence. In 2018, Katipunan signed a memorandum of agreement in support of the Sustainable Development Goals, aiming to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all. However, poverty remains pervasive among its 30 barangays. With a local poverty incidence of 62.86% (PSA, 2021), 4Ps aims to improve the well-being of households. Thus, the study explores the participants' dimensions in social, health, and financial aspects in relation to the 4Ps.

The insufficiency of information on the analysis of the social, health, and financial perceptions of the 4Ps program among its beneficiaries draws the research gap. Official evaluations also focus primarily on quantitative data (attendance, compliance, poverty levels), but less is known about how beneficiaries themselves perceive the program in their lives. To keep our long-term strategies responsive to current realities, the researcher deemed it necessary to conduct a timely, quality, and context-specific perception analysis by rethinking the voices of the 4Ps beneficiaries to inform better public investment decisions.

Methodology

This qualitative research employed an In-depth Interview (IDI), which was utilized to gather data on the profile of 4Ps beneficiaries, as well as their perceptions of the different aspects of the 4Ps program regarding social, financial, and health factors. IDI, which requires meticulous attention to detail, was necessary to enable the researcher to gather rich, nuanced data about the participants' experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Unlike structured surveys, interviews offer the opportunity to delve deeper into how 4Ps beneficiaries perceive their social, health, and financial conditions, as well as the personal and contextual factors that may shape them. The IDI aims to uncover what is in and on the interviewee's mind, which enables its probing nature to explore and access the beneficiaries' experiences, opinions, feelings, values, background, and demographic data.

A researcher-designed open-ended questionnaire was utilized in the study. Before the actual data collection, the instrument was pilot-tested in Katipunan, Zamboanga del Norte, to evaluate its adequacy and feasibility, in accordance with established guidelines for field-testing research tools. During the interview process, the researcher used a camera and a voice recorder, subject to the participants' approval, for proper and reliable documentation of the information. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling were employed to generate a pool of ten (10) participants who are residents of Katipunan, Zamboanga del Norte. These sampling techniques were deemed appropriate because the study specifically targeted 4Ps beneficiaries who could provide rich and relevant insights into the social, health, and financial dimensions of the program. Purposive sampling ensured that only individuals who met the inclusion criteria were selected, while snowball sampling allowed access to additional participants through referrals. Together, these approaches facilitated the identification of information-rich cases, which were necessary for an in-depth exploration of beneficiary perceptions. In qualitative

research, the emphasis is not on the number of respondents but on the depth and richness of the data they provide. Ten participants were chosen because they allowed for an in-depth exploration of individual experiences while still ensuring the manageability of data during collection, transcription, and analysis. This number also aligns with recommendations from qualitative research. Furthermore, the principle of data saturation was observed, where interviews with ten participants were adequate to generate recurring themes, thereby fulfilling the study's objectives.

An informed consent form was given to the 4Ps beneficiaries. They were given the right to ask questions about the study to ensure they fully understood the content. All data generated was kept confidential. Electronic files on memory devices, laptops, and paper were permanently deleted and destroyed. Following the completion of the interviews, no new analytical information emerged, and the study has reached data saturation. In qualitative research, a guiding principle is to sample only until data saturation is reached (Braune & Clarke, 2021). To aid in the analysis, transcripts and translations of the interview recordings were created, capturing the exact verbatim of each participant as it underwent a rigorous examination. These transcriptions underwent a thematic classification using a phase-by-phase approach, which entails decontextualizing and recontextualizing the data. Thematic network analysis is a method for organizing a thematic analysis of qualitative data. It seeks to unearth the themes salient in a text at different levels, and thematic networks aim to facilitate the structuring and depiction of these themes (Braune & Clarke, 2017).

Maintaining objectivity in qualitative data analysis is crucial to ensure the credibility, reliability, and validity of research findings. The researcher started by clearly defining the research objectives, questions, and hypotheses to guide the data analysis process. Further, the researcher clearly documented the data collection procedures, coding schemes, and analytical techniques used to ensure consistency and rigor in the analysis process.

Results And Discussion

A field visit to various barangays in Katipunan, Zamboanga del Norte, was conducted to gather firsthand information about the social, health, and financial perceptions of beneficiaries towards the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps). The personal interaction with the beneficiaries was enriching for the researcher.

Table 1
Demographic Features of the Participants Interviewed, n=10.

Participant	Gender	Age	Barangay	Educational Attainment	Occupation
Participant 1	Female	28	Dicayo	College Level	House Keeper
Participant 2	Female	58	San Antonio	High School Graduate	House Keeper
Participant 3	Female	49	Dos	High School Graduate	Fisherfolk
Participant 4	Female	48	Uno	High School Level	Sari-sari Store Owner
Participant 5	Female	39	Dicayo	College Level	Housekeeper
Participant 6	Female	52	San Vicente	High School Graduate	Sari-sari Store Owner
Participant 7	Female	56	Basagan	High School Graduate	Laundry Worker
Participant 8	Female	55	Mias	High School Level	Barangay Employee
Participant 9	Female	40	Tambo	High School Graduate	Housekeeper
Participant 10	Female	46	Tuburan	College Graduate	Barangay Employee

Ten participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling to participate in an in-depth interview to analyze their perceptions of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) as a poverty reduction strategy in the Municipality of Katipunan, Province of Zamboanga del Norte. The aggregated demographic profile, as shown in the table, indicates that the selected participants were all females, predominantly middle-aged and older adults. Generally, women are considered the heads of households, as they are typically seen as the primary caregivers (Rubio-Sanchez et al., 2021). Women, as household beneficiaries in the 4Ps, contribute to their empowerment by providing them with direct access to resources and decision-making power within their households. This can help challenge traditional gender roles and norms, promote women's rights, and enhance their socio-economic status.

Participants were middle and older adults. Parents who have reached this stage must have provided their homes with the physiological needs of their family. Age can be an indicator of progress, as the person ages, growth and development are also expected to be visible. Erikson (1994) claimed that cultivating generativity—the desire to increase one's impact and

commitment to family, society, and future generations—is the main psychosocial goal of middle adulthood. Older adults, including parents of 4Ps, often reflect on their lives, achievements, and relationships. This introspection can lead to feelings of contentment and fulfillment if they see their lives as meaningful.

Similarly, they reside in different barangays of the municipality of Katipunan and generally have not reached the college level, thus, possessing a minimal degree of education. This implies a low level of education among the household beneficiaries. Consequently, they face barriers to education, which can perpetuate cycles of poverty and limit opportunities for socio-economic advancement (Basas III, 2021). Most participants followed daily routines as housewives and mothers, while others were centered on low-income and informal jobs (Cabegin & Gaddi, 2019).

All participants had positive social and health perceptions about the 4Ps, but had limited financial perceptions. From the interview data of 10 household beneficiaries, the following subthemes were formulated: better access to education, improved health profile, interrelationship of social and health perceptions, ability of parents to discern family problems and arrive at solutions, involvement of family members in community activities, family awareness of relevant social issues, management issues of SLPs resulting in limited access to income and wages, insufficiency of entrepreneurial and sustenance skills, retraction from saving habits, possible dependency effects of 4Ps and possible mental mendicancy effects of 4Ps. These subordinate themes were then identified and placed within the applicable theme. Four themes emerged from the data analysis. These include positive educational and health perceptions, as well as favorable social perceptions resulting from role performance. However, issues of economic sufficiency can lead to problems with financial perceptions, and there are indications of dependency and mental mendicancy among other beneficiaries. Verbatim excerpts from the ten interviews were utilized to illustrate the perceptions and experiences of each participant.

In the past, many parents were concerned about starting a family and earning enough money to support their children. What parents earned from odd jobs was only sufficient for their daily expenses. Due to insufficient food and inadequate vitamin intake, their children frequently fell ill and missed school. However, all the burden and worries were alleviated with the implementation of the 4Ps. This transpired during the conduct of the In-depth Interview (IDI), as explicated below:

Theme 1: Positive Educational and Health Perceptions

The participants were asked, "*How has the 4Ps impacted your social perceptions in life*?" It revealed that all participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, and P10) had positive perceptions and experiences about the program. From the contextualized theme, three subthemes were identified, namely 1) better access to education; 2) improved health profile; and 3) the interrelationship of social and health perceptions.

Subtheme 1: Better access to education

Many beneficiaries now view education as a critical path out of poverty. By requiring children to stay in school, the *4Ps* program promotes a deeper appreciation for the value of education among both parents and children. Education has long been recognized as a key solution to poverty (Brown & James, 2020). With the program, household parents are now motivated to encourage their children to attend school, purchase their school needs, push them to excel in academic activities, assist them in completing all their school responsibilities, and provide financial support to meet their needs.

One participant lauded the program for being instrumental in helping their children attend school. Participant 8 explained that the program has fostered a sense of dignity and confidence in providing for their family. They shared:

"The cash grants for education have helped us ensure that our children can stay in school, covering costs like uniforms, school supplies, transportation, and sometimes even meals." Semanero's (2025) study in Sta. Maria, Bulacan, found that the 4Ps program greatly enhanced learners' school attendance, with 88% of beneficiaries receiving perfect attendance awards, although this was partly due to policy requirements.

Participant 1, a 28-year-old mother, expressed joy in seeing their children's academic progress: "My children, who are in elementary school, can now read and write. They can solve problems in Math." Another participant added that the program helps cover school-related expenses, ensuring regular attendance and access to necessary materials. Similarly, Velasquez (2025) found that mothers in Pangasinan who participated in the 4Ps program were most responsive to the program's educational component, prioritizing their children's schooling. Education, along with nutrition, was seen as the greatest benefit of the program, with younger mothers showing higher responsiveness toward ensuring their children's school participation.

This trend is also reflected in international studies; for example, the Tayssir Cash Transfer Program in Sidi Bouabdelli, Morocco, that resulted in increased school attendance—especially among girls—and promoted greater parental involvement (Ben Haman, 2025).

This shift in educational mindset has led to long-term changes, with families prioritizing schooling as a pathway to better opportunities. Similarly, Brendo (2024) found that the implementation of 4Ps was perceived as highly effective in enhancing students' academic performance. Together, these findings underscore the importance of 4Ps in enhancing access to education, one of the program's key objectives.

Subtheme 2: Improved health profile

Similarly, by consensus, the majority of the research participants viewed that the 4Ps have made a significant impact on the health profile of the beneficiaries. The 4Ps, as a poverty reduction and social development strategy of the national government, aim to help improve not only the beneficiaries' social outcomes, specifically in education, but also in health. Both factors, health and education, have tremendous potential to produce wide-ranging effects and long-term benefits for adult human capital. Health services, including general consultations, health education, basic oral healthcare, treatment of minor illnesses, nutrition and food safety information, and family planning, can now be accessed by 4Ps beneficiaries. One participant shared that her spouse now enjoys primary care benefits. The spouse often visits the Health Center for regular blood pressure monitoring and counseling on lifestyle modification, a practice that was not previously implemented.

Participant 1 mentioned, "*The 4Ps requires families to ensure regular health check-ups for children and pregnant women, improving maternal and child health. Many who previously could not afford care can now access medical attention, vaccinations, and health monitoring." A participant disclosed, "The 4Ps encourages us to maintain cleanliness and prioritize our children's health. Even for minor illnesses, we make sure to seek medicine, and the program also promotes breastfeeding to support their nutritional needs." Another participant disclosed, "Children now eat vegetables and fruits because the DSWD (officials) are regularly monitoring this practice. We, the parents, also recognize that staying healthy is crucial not only for compliance but also for supporting our children's development*." 4Ps aims to improve the overall health and well-being of both parents and children. This can lead to better health outcomes and reduced healthcare costs in the

long term.

Beneficiaries are now responsible for protecting the environment through proper waste disposal. They are also encouraged to grow vegetables organically, ensuring the production of healthier vegetables than those often found in markets. Participant 8, a volunteer worker who delivers basic nutrition and related health services in Barangay Mias, conveyed, "*We are now encouraged to do gardening. In our FDS, we were taught to grow our fruits and vegetables, which improves our access to nutritious food. Our surroundings are now clean. Of course, we were encouraged to do so because keeping the environment clean contributes to good health and reduces the risk of disease transmission.*" Further, as shared by another participant, there are now few cases of malnutrition because municipal health officials regularly check the children's nutritional status. Generally, the research participants agree that the 4Ps has significantly improved their health profile since its implementation. The study by Roque (2025) found that the 4Ps program in Sultan Kudarat Province had a positive impact on the health of its beneficiaries, with PhilHealth benefits being viewed favorably. While cash grants had moderate effectiveness, the program contributed to improved access to healthcare services, supporting overall family well-being. Araos et al. (2022) stated that the program's health conditionalities and support have resulted in better access to healthcare, enhanced nutrition, and improved health education, leading to a stronger health profile for families participating in the program. Similarly, international studies, such as Brazil's Bolsa Família Program, demonstrate that conditional cash transfer programs have a significant impact on reducing morbidity and mortality, preventing hospitalizations, and improving overall family health (Cavalcanti, 2025).

Subtheme 3: Interrelationship of social and health perceptions

Responses from the research participants unanimously affirmed that the 4Ps was able to generate considerable gains in its goal outcomes of education and health. They improved the well-being perceptions of the household beneficiaries through the provision of cash grants. Analyzing the participants' general statements, a connection between health and education was highlighted, underscoring how these two areas support and complement each other.

Participant 6 said she felt fortunate when she was informed that she was a beneficiary of the program. Years ago, she received her first cash grant, amounting to P5,200.00, which she used to purchase new school supplies and food for the children. She shared, "*4Ps is of great help! This helps us*

us purchase items for the children, among other necessities. Because of this, children are now motivated to go to school and be active physically. Schools offer students opportunities to learn and engage in physical activity through extracurricular activities. This is very evident here in our barangay." Given the idea that social and health aspects are significantly related, Participant 10 viewed that children of household beneficiaries have a higher likelihood of receiving the vitamins and nutrients they need to grow and thrive at school. They also have a lower likelihood of dropping out of school, which is followed by a larger improvement in their literacy and numeracy skills. She discussed, *"4Ps helps a lot with the children's school needs. My children now know how to read, write, and talk. Through the grants, we can buy them vitamins so they can learn more and try to get good grades. I firmly believe that they get good marks because they have the right vitamins."*

Most participants now realize that beneficiaries and their children consistently maintain cleanliness by taking baths regularly, washing their hands, brushing their teeth, and wearing clean clothing, which they learned in the FDS. Mothers are usually the ones who prepare the household meals, which often consist of vegetables grown in the backyard. Participant 1 disclosed the relevance of having nutritious meals to her children and its effect on education and health, *"Yes, we were taught to feed our children nutritious food so they stay active and perform better in class. Now, they eat vegetables instead of snacks, and drink water instead of soft drinks."* Likewise, another participant ensured that they were meeting all the educational and nutritional needs of the children through the cash grants. Participant 7 motivated her children to attend classes regularly, reach the desired attendance number, and complete their schoolwork on time. She is a strong believer that a good education can provide children access to jobs, resources, and skills that will allow them to thrive rather than survive. She concluded, *"That is why I really encourage them (children) to go to school and get healthy so that they will be able to finish college and get a good job."* However, Participant 4 articulated that breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty requires addressing not only social and health perceptions, but also financial perceptions, as a critical aspect of human development and well-being. She emphasized that educated children must be healthy and utilize their acquired skills to earn higher wages and lead more fulfilling lives in the future. She thankfully shared, *"The 4Ps is one of the reasons why children go to school. This aid will encourage them to succeed in completing their education and lead a healthy life. This, in turn, boosts their chances of having better job opportunities in the future."* Coupled with sheer determination to attend school, children of some 4Ps beneficiaries are now realizing their dreams

of getting employed, despite the odds. Participant 7 was joyful and proud. She shared, *"My children, whose health and educational needs were addressed by the 4Ps, are now helping us with our needs. I have a son who is a tailor, he sews uniforms for the military [men]. My other son was an Agricultural Engineering graduate."* All participants have concluded, based on their similar comments and verdicts, that a greater number of beneficiaries now have improved social and health perspectives concerning the implementation of the 4Ps. People are more likely to make good decisions and experience better mental and physical health outcomes when they are literate, socially connected, and possess supportive relationships. Thus, good health and effective social relationships are essential for the smooth functioning of society.

Numerous pieces of research have played a central role in establishing the link between social perceptions and health perceptions, identifying explanations for the outcome, and discovering social variation at the population level. People with higher levels of education are more likely to learn about health issues and health risks, which helps them become more literate and better understand complex issues crucial to their social well-being (Goldman & Smith, 2002). Olaboye et al. (2024) emphasized that advancing health and educational equity necessitates close collaboration between the health and education sectors. Key strategies include early childhood interventions focusing on nutrition, healthcare access, and early learning, as well as school-based health programs that provide wellness and mental health services. These approaches aim to address socio-economic disparities, improve student well-being, and support academic success.

Family Development Sessions (FDS) are a valuable resource for information on social and health perspectives. 4Ps partner beneficiaries attend the monthly Family Development Session (FDS) which covers a variety of social and health topics and encourages interactive discussion to improve roles and functions within the family in terms of relationships between parents and children, spouse relationships, proper home financial management, health management, parenting-related issues, livelihood program development, environmental protection, disaster management, among other things (Baylon, 2019). Araos et al. (2020) revealed that the FDS raised social and health awareness among the 4Ps. For example, the sessions provide a venue for pregnant women to be aware of the best health practices to follow to protect both their own and their unborn child's health. These include maintaining a healthy diet, exercising regularly, abstaining from vices, and attending regular prenatal check-ups.

Theme 2: Positive Social Perceptions Through Role Performance

Officials from the MSWD are regularly monitoring the performance of 4Ps beneficiaries. Their participation in the family and community is much needed to change their mindset. Along this light, a question was raised, "*Ang 4Ps ba nakapalambo o nagpasiugda og positibong relasyon tali kanimo ug sa ubang mga miyembro sa imong komunidad? Sa unsang paagi? (Did the 4Ps enhance or promote a positive relationship between you and other members of your community? In what way?*" It was revealed that all participants have had positive social perceptions and experiences about the program. P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, and P10 believe that parents are now gaining the ability to recognize and address family issues more effectively. Another significant social perception is the increased involvement of family members in community activities, which is viewed by P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, and P10, suggesting that the program has encouraged or facilitated stronger community ties. The program also seems to have contributed to greater family awareness of relevant social issues, as stressed by P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, and P10, which is a crucial component of fostering informed and proactive communities.

From the contextualized theme, three subthemes were identified, namely 1) the ability of the parents to discern family problems and arrive at solutions; 2) the involvement of family members in community activities; and 3) the family awareness of relevant social issues. The reason for these positive social role performances may be the Family Development Session (FDS), one of the conditionalities of 4Ps, which gathers grantees once a month to discuss various development topics. Effective parenting, spouse relationships, child development, laws influencing the Filipino family's gender and development, and home management are among the topics discussed during the FDS.

Subtheme 1: Ability of parents to discern family problems and arrive at solutions

One participant reported that the FDS greatly helped her in caring for her children. This child-rearing activity has the potential to impact the social and health perspectives of the children. She shared, "The program helped us have a good relationship in the family. We now know how to solve family problems. We become more resilient." With her spouse, they raised their four children together, instilling values, providing proper nutrition, and fostering a family atmosphere of love and attention to their needs.

Thanks to FDS, parents are now taught to identify and find solutions to family disputes. The beneficiaries are now discussing their problems and jointly making decisions related to their children and daily lives. Household beneficiaries who fail to attend the FDS without a valid reason will have P500 deducted from their monthly subsidy. Another participant shared, *"In FDS, we were taught to be patient at home. Should there be a problem, we strive to understand and forgive one another. We display positive relationships with the children so that, when they will have a family in the future, they will do the same."*

The marriage of Participant 5 is stable. As a parent and a spouse, they discuss and find solutions to their problems and, if needed, seek advice from their parents who live nearby in Barangay Daanglungsod. When troubles arise, particularly concerning the discipline of the children, she listens and often follows her spouse's decision. One participant also thanked the cash grants for improved role performance. Receiving cash grants would contribute to happiness since they help meet the family's basic needs. After receiving the money, they can eat together with all the family members.

Subtheme 2: Involvement of family members in community activities

4Ps requires its beneficiaries to participate in community initiatives. These activities may include volunteering, attending community meetings, or participating in local development projects. The program also strengthens social ties and builds trust among community members, laying the foundation for positive relationships with neighbors.

"*We have a good relationship with our neighbors. We have FDS in 4Ps, which can help and guide other people on what to do if there is a problem in our barangay. We now know how to promote good relationships, protect children's rights, advocate for women's rights, and that women should not be abused anymore... In our barangay, the absence of domestic violence reflects the positive changes brought about by these sessions.* Another participant disclosed, "*It's great to see how 4Ps has encouraged active community participation and care for the environment! With the IP members, we lead efforts in caring for our barangay as we clean our coastal areas.*" The monthly FDS promotes empowerment and community outreach. Children's rights, abuse prevention, children's protection from all sorts of violence, and exploitation are only a few of the topics that are discussed. FDS also brought peace and order to the community. It developed their skills in understanding community roles and responsibilities related to issues such as statutory laws affecting children, women, human rights, and

disaster risk reduction.

"*Here in our area, women are respected, considering the existence of human rights laws. We now have greater knowledge of disaster risk. FDS prepares us families to respond effectively to emergencies and protect our children,*" one shared. The families are now better equipped in disaster risk preparedness following their regular attendance at the FDS, which aims to impart knowledge and skills. Hence, they know what to do before, during, and after the occurrence of natural and man-made disasters.

"*We have e-balde, which serves as an essential tool for our families to respond effectively during emergencies. Having a designated safe place, such as the Kalahi Building in our barangay, provides clear guidance for evacuation and helps reduce panic during emergencies. This approach protects our families from disasters, such as flooding or big waves*." The e-balde is part of the FDS module, which requires a household beneficiary to maintain a ready-to-bring kit that includes essential documents, first-aid supplies, medications, clothing, and non-perishable food items, such as canned foods and biscuits, as part of the disaster preparedness module (DSWD, 2021).

Cash transfers, including UBI trials in rural Uganda, positively influenced collective outcomes such as social capital and community action, beyond individual and household benefits. The programs also showed sustainable effects on citizenship, labor, and climate resilience, highlighting their potential for long-term social transformation and support for universal social protection goals (Grisolia, 2024). In relation to this, the importance of close family relationships in improving their well-being cannot be overemphasized. Effective role performance by family members in social activities contributes to a functional family that promotes its well-being. In the long run, with continuous participation, the social and cultural values displayed would give value to everyone's role in different socio-cultural activities, not as a requirement, but with them voluntarily taking their place to contribute to social and economic development.

Theme 3: Issues of Economic Sufficiency Leading to Problems of Financial Perceptions

Economic sufficiency places sustainability at the very core of advancing a different approach to economic development. The basic rationale is to invest in human capital accumulation, making people more skilled and able to secure better positions in labor markets, thereby supporting themselves and improving their quality of life. On the question,

"Ang 4Ps ba nakapauswag pag-ayo sa pinansyal nga seguridad nga aspeto sa imong pamilya? Ngano man? (Did the 4Ps greatly improve the financial security aspect of your family? Why?" The majority of research participants disclosed that the 4Ps did not significantly improve the financial security aspect of their lives. P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, and P10 observed some management issues that affected other beneficiaries' access to income and wages. P2, P3, P5, P7, P9, and P10 identify particular skills they felt other beneficiaries were lacking. It was also unanimously observed that there was a retraction from saving habits, which highlighted a possible area where beneficiaries may be struggling to build or sustain financial resilience.

From the contextualized theme, three subthemes were identified, namely 1) management issues of SLPs resulting in limited access to income and wages; 2) insufficiency of entrepreneurial and sustenance skills; and 3) retraction from saving habits.

Subtheme 1: Management issues of SLPs resulting in limited access to income and wages

The 4Ps' Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) aims to improve the financial perception among beneficiaries. This community-driven enterprise development method aims to provide 4Ps beneficiaries with livelihood assistance, allowing them to choose between microenterprise development and employment facilitation. It was envisaged during implementation that beneficiaries would develop their businesses and increase their households' involvement in government operations (Magno-Ballesteros et al., 2018). Indeed, one key to achieving massive poverty reduction is investing in the employment of beneficiaries to promote inclusive economic growth.

Participant 10, who is also a part-time worker in Barangay Tuburan, noted,

"It sounds like there are significant challenges faced by some families in the program. I have been seeing parents with debt issues and reliance on the grant. What others receive from the government is enough to pay off their debt. At some point, this cycle of debt can hinder their ability to invest in education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. Others are also gamblers who are always playing tong-it…"

Participant 8 shared her experience with group projects under the SLP in her barangay, which revealed some important challenges. She manifested, *"Here in the barangay, our groupings in SLP failed. In group settings, members often lacked individual initiative and became overly dependent on one another. My neighbors, who were tasked to raise piglets, experienced mismanagement leading to wasted resources and disappointment."*

The experiences described by another participant illustrate several critical issues that can hinder the success of livelihood initiatives. "*We had a seminar with the DSWD about money management and sustainable projects. It is just saddening because the project did not prosper. The failure to sustain projects like the livelihood store selling feeds and groceries suggests a need for better planning and training in business management,"* one shared. She added, "Implementing routine checks from the MSWD officers can help prevent mismanagement."

The conversations in the interview revealed recurring issues with financial management challenges, unsuccessful marketing initiatives, and a lack of member involvement in managing the group's business. Research emphasizes the importance of integrating financial literacy programs within CCT initiatives. In Munar's (2024) study, participants showed a "great extent" of progress in financial planning, budgeting, and savings, based on the results of financial literacy training sessions. The absence of positive financial perceptions indicates a lack of the skills necessary for the operation of the SLP. Although the program's goals of reducing poverty and expanding access to healthcare and education have been effectively achieved, beneficiaries still face challenges in financial literacy (Once et al., 2019). Beneficiaries who lack the knowledge and skills to manage finances effectively could perpetuate cycles of poverty and limit the program's overall impact on their financial behaviors and perceptions.

Subtheme 2: Insufficiency of entrepreneurial and sustenance skills

The findings from the in-depth interviews suggest that, although the 4Ps program has had some positive effects, it may not have had a significant impact on the income levels of household beneficiaries. The uneven economic recovery in the Philippines, particularly for 4Ps beneficiaries during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlights the vulnerabilities faced by low-income families in times of crisis. Many families adjusted to the rising cost of goods and services by lowering their consumption. The health and nutrition of children in these impoverished households may have suffered significantly as a result. Their income and jobs remained the same. One shared, "Our job is still the same - farming. We are still in debt because we lack finances, and we rely on borrowings from our friends to cover our essential expenses on the farm." There are significant gaps in effectively targeting beneficiaries for skill development in entrepreneurship and sustenance. In the study, participants generally attribute the downfall of their businesses to a lack of knowledge in generating income and a lack of skills in managing money,

among other factors. One shared, *"The officers provided a livelihood program on pig farming, but funds were sometimes mismanaged. The training was also insufficient, lacking lessons on financial management, budgeting, and marketing. I did not participate because I feared the money would be squandered or the program mismanaged."*

Participant 5, although their livelihood program thrived, was persuaded by the idea that most SLPs in the municipality of Katipunan had failed and did not prosper due to a lack of entrepreneurial skills. In her barangay, she observed, "A group was selling fertilizer but failed as it was not sustained. There was no transparency as to the expenditures and income of the project, as it was kept secret." She added, "Some families were scared to accept SLP grants, thinking they might get in jail if they couldn't sustain them, so many ended up with negative views and chose not to join." The fear of legal consequences, misconceptions, and insufficiency of entrepreneurial and sustenance skills among 4Ps beneficiaries pose a significant challenge to their long-term economic empowerment and sustainability. The beneficiaries may lack access to formal training programs, mentorship, and resources needed to develop entrepreneurial skills and start sustainable businesses. Without adequate support, they may struggle to identify viable business opportunities and navigate the complexities of entrepreneurship. They are also hesitant to take risks or pursue entrepreneurial ventures due to a lack of confidence and fear of failure. In a study by Rodriguez (2025), beneficiaries of the 4Ps program in Canaman, Camarines Sur, reported challenges in savings and credit practices. The study emphasized that the misuse of funds, delayed transfers, and stringent compliance requirements further hinder financial resilience. Similarly, Necor and Turpias (2024) found that while cash transfers provide essential support, low financial literacy, unexpected expenses, and cultural influences hinder effective financial planning. Their study focused on providing financial education, improving access to services, and offering sustainable livelihood support to the beneficiaries.

Subtheme 3: Retraction from saving habits

The DSWD is supporting a financial inclusion strategy among beneficiaries, aiming to create a more financially inclusive and empowered society nationwide. The delivery of financial literacy lessons through the FDS is another aspect of this transformation. One of the lessons in the FDS is savings from cash grants, which gives a household beneficiary the ability to live a life of greater security. If one has saved up money for emergencies, one will always have something to fall back on. When asked whether

beneficiaries are saving money, most participants responded negatively. One laughingly shared, "*...I don't have any savings because I spend it on the construction of my house. I prioritize spending the grants on essential needs such as education, food, and housing improvements. Consequently, I can't save anything at all."* Another shared, "*Some families may utilize their grants to pay off their borrowings or other debts, which further limits their capacity to save.* Other beneficiaries share the same thoughts. They retract from their saving habits because they have irregular income streams, which can make it challenging to establish and maintain consistent saving habits. They also have limited financial literacy and awareness of the importance of saving for the future, which can lead to a short-term mindset focused on meeting immediate needs, such as food, shelter, and healthcare expenses.

Given the issues of economic sufficiency, the participants call for an improved Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) to contribute to a sustainable, long-term shift toward financial independence. One shared, *"The beneficiaries here in our barangay should be taught the skills to manage and save their cash grants more effectively."* Balasbas (2021) posited that SLP beneficiaries must operate with entrepreneurial competence, which encompasses entrepreneurial skills such as goal setting, information seeking, and persistence, all of which were significant predictors of business success for 4Ps beneficiaries. Another participant called for a diversification of livelihood opportunities available in Katipunan, Zamboanga del Norte. She shared, *"For me, there is a need to expand livelihood programs beyond what we have now. The program should aim to include training that matches the resources available in Barangay Dos. Since we are in a coastal barangay, opportunities should align with our local resources and the market demand in Barangay Dos."* By localizing and expanding the range of income-generating activities available, beneficiaries can improve their financial perceptions. Findings from Lalawigan et al. (2024) indicate that education influences financial knowledge, while income affects financial behavior. This highlights the need for targeted financial programs, training, and seminars to strengthen beneficiaries' financial literacy.

Theme 4: Indications of Dependency and Mental Mendicancy among Other Beneficiaries

Follow-up questions were raised to gain in-depth knowledge about the economic sufficiency issues in the lives of the beneficiaries. P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, and P10 revealed indications of dependency and mendicancy that persisted. The persistence of dependency and mendicancy among the

other beneficiaries suggests that the program may not have fully equipped them for sustainable self-reliance.

Subtheme 1: Possible dependency effects of 4Ps

Any financial help is a blessing for the beneficiaries. The help will enable the family to finally stand on its own feet and lift itself and its children out of abject poverty. This is not true, however, for other families as observed by Participant 4. She said, *"I believe that the 4Ps make some people lazy. It is true, especially for those who live in the mountainous part of the town."* In remote areas in Katipunan, there are often fewer employment opportunities. This scarcity can make the grant feel like a primary and reliable source of income, which potentially reduces the incentive to seek work. One also disclosed, *"While 4Ps has helped many families improve their lives, others just rely on it. Because of too much dependency, others seem less engaged in activities like gardening or labor work."*

"Others feel less motivated to engage in productive tasks like planting vegetables in their backyards. They also think too highly of themselves when they receive money. They buy whatever they wish. The Parent Leader and ML knew about this…" It was also discovered that some beneficiaries do not treat the money like a lifetime pension, but rather engage in activities such as borrowing from loan sharks to pay off their cash cards. *"There are others who made their cash cards as collateral to a bank. They borrow and are often left with little to cover their essential needs after paying off debts. There is nothing to use for their family."* Some beneficiaries might prioritize immediate gratification over long-term financial stability—the tendency to purchase non-essential items despite not having stable employment. One affirmed, *"For me, others are becoming dependent on it; they are no longer looking for a job. They buy things that are not needed- like buying a cellphone, even if they don't have jobs."*

The 4Ps, which is the Philippines' primary social protection plan, is still being questioned as to whether it can achieve its long-term objective of ending intergenerational poverty cycles. The study of Dodd et al. (2022) combines the concepts of entitlement and agency to examine how various players connected to the 4Ps perceive the program. 4Ps, while effective in alleviating poverty and improving social outcomes, can potentially lead to dependency effects if not carefully managed. The continuous reliance on cash transfers without corresponding investments in economic empowerment may create a cycle of dependency on government assistance. Without opportunities for skill development, education, or entrepreneurship,

beneficiaries may become reliant on cash transfers as their primary source of income. Studies also show that offering financial literacy and business training to CCT beneficiaries can enable them to "graduate" from the program, thereby reducing their reliance on aid and promoting economic independence (Delgado et al., 2024).

Subtheme 2: Possible mental mendicancy effects of 4Ps

The concept of "mental poverty," as opposed to "financial poverty," suggests that even in situations where financial resources are available, certain beneficiaries may encounter obstacles related to their perceptions that prevent them from improving their situation. Another participant suggested that there could be mental poverty, rather than financial poverty, among the beneficiaries. *"Most of the parents of the children do not seek jobs with better earnings because they are just satisfied with their lives."* A complex interaction between goals, perceived obstacles to advancement, and pleasure is illustrated in the notion that many parents are content with their situation, even if they are not actively seeking better employment opportunities. Parental mental orientations may also impact a family's economic circumstances. Participant 6 emphasized that parent beneficiaries should strive to motivate their children to act on their beliefs. They ought to be able to have bigger dreams, the bravery to take risks, and the willingness to try out new things for the betterment of their family. She emphasized: *"If one is lazy, he is lazy. No matter how much the government allocates to the program, it remains the same. I pity the government for it always provides money; however, the beneficiaries are not helping themselves."* This statement highlights a belief that providing financial support without addressing deeper issues—such as motivation, work ethic, or personal responsibility—may not lead to meaningful change for all beneficiaries.

"Others are just too dependent on the Php 3,400 now. They do not try to persevere because they are contented with their current lives. If one has a goal for the children, of course, they wish for a good place to live, like a decent home. Sad, there are just a few," one responded. While the cash grants from the 4Ps program provide essential relief, they may inadvertently contribute to a sense of contentment that discourages beneficiaries from pursuing more significant changes in their circumstances.

To some, 4Ps has created a culture of mendicancy. Despite billions of pesos invested in the program, for some, it has not generated sustainable and inclusive job creation, which has been missed by many poor families. On this note, participants further exposed their views on mendicancy values:

"They are just lazy. All I can say is that they are lazy. It is them." Like any other government program, the 4Ps also has its disadvantages that may hinder its beneficial effects. One of the most crucial characteristics of the 4Ps is its being a 'demand-side' intervention instead of a 'supply-side' intervention. To be considered a beneficiary of the program, one must consent to the government's demands and conditionalities (Araos et al., 2020). Gibbs' reflective model was employed in Pedroso and Tagabi's (2022) study to collect data, which was then examined, contrasted, and classified using a data analysis matrix created by the researchers. The 4Ps was described as a work in progress, a faulty structure, and a bridge to progress by informants. The recipients saw opportunities in financial aid, education, healthcare, and family development, but also pointed out the program's drawbacks, including greed and unsustainable practices. Generally, the research participants asserted that some, although not all, had grown reliant on financial aid. The strongest evidence of dependency is the reduction in work effort, which somehow affected the beneficiaries' financial perceptions.

Dependency and mental mendicancy are complex issues that can manifest as effects of the program. Beneficiaries who exhibit a lack of motivation to improve their circumstances beyond the assistance provided by the program may be showing signs of dependency. They may become accustomed to relying on cash transfers as their primary source of income without actively seeking opportunities for personal growth or economic advancement. Dependency and mental mendicancy may be perpetuated by cyclical patterns of intergenerational poverty and reliance on government assistance. Children growing up in households where dependency is normalized may internalize these behaviors and attitudes, perpetuating the cycle of dependency across generations.

According to some research, CCT programs may unintentionally make recipients feel more dependent even if they can offer instant financial assistance. This is especially true for households that rely heavily on cash transfers to cover everyday expenses, which may deter people from seeking employment or improving their standard of living. According to Fiszbein and Schady (2009), CCTs, like 4Ps, increased access to healthcare and education. Still, they also ran the risk of instilling a reliance mindset in recipients if they did not participate in supplementary programs that support job and skill development. Similarly, Kidd and Athias (2019) stated that although financial transfers might offer crucial assistance, they may cause recipients to be stigmatized as "dependent" in their communities. Perceptions of dependency within communities can significantly impact the effectiveness of 4Ps. These perceptions can shape both the behavior of beneficiaries and

the support they receive from their peers and local institutions. Panda and Sahoo (2020) also noted that recipients may view cash transfers as a steady stream of income, discouraging them from seeking further education or career training that could increase their earning potential. Fostering a more supportive environment for beneficiaries requires addressing these attitudes through community participation and education about the advantages of 4Ps.

Key Findings

The participants in the study were middle-aged and older adult women from various barangays in Katipunan, Zamboanga del Norte. Most had minimal formal education and were engaged in housework or low-income informal jobs.

Participants reported highly positive perceptions of the 4Ps in terms of education and health, as well as favorable social outcomes through enhanced role performance. Nevertheless, they noted limited financial empowerment, with some indications of dependency and mental mendicancy. Overall, the program effectively improved educational, health, and social well-being among beneficiaries, but achieving financial self-sufficiency remains a key challenge.

Conclusions

The CCT program has made a positive contribution to improving the social and health perceptions of beneficiaries in Katipunan, Zamboanga del Norte. While participants benefited from enhanced knowledge, improved health practices, and increased community engagement, the program's impact on financial perceptions remains limited. Addressing challenges such as dependency, lack of entrepreneurial skills, and insufficient financial literacy is essential to promote long-term self-sufficiency and sustainable socio-economic development among beneficiaries.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Enhance the Sustainable Livelihood Program's (SLP) effectiveness in the areas of skills training, entrepreneurship development, livelihood diversification, financial literacy, and savings culture among the 4Ps

beneficiaries. The Municipal Social and Welfare Development Office (MSWDO) should also establish robust monitoring, evaluation, and feedback mechanisms on SLP's implementation in response to beneficiary needs.

2. Enhance the MSWDO's efforts to conduct discussions and implement initiatives that recognize the interrelationship between social, health, and financial aspects in household well-being perceptions through the SLP, Family Development Sessions (FDS), and other *4Ps* initiatives. It shall integrate strategies to enhance economic opportunities and skills training, and shift the mindset through values formation and empowerment programs, leading a change from dependency to self-reliance.

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The Use of Online Cheating Tools during Online Assessment in Philippine Private Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

The transition to online learning has introduced significant challenges regarding academic integrity, as students utilize various online tools to circumvent traditional monitoring mechanisms. This study investigates the prevalence and types of online cheating tools used by Computer Studies education students during assessments in private higher education institutions in the Philippines. The primary purpose is to determine the relationship between online cheating tools and the respondents' demographic, academic, and technological profiles. Utilizing a descriptive-correlational design, data were collected from third and fourth-year students via a self-administered survey questionnaire distributed online. The questionnaire included sections on demographic information, technological profile, and online tool usage during assessments. The results revealed that students admitted to engaging in various forms of online cheating, with the most common tools being search engines, digital calculators, AI tools, and other software to access unauthorized online resources. The analysis revealed that students with higher technological proficiency were more likely to cheat, indicating a significant correlation between familiarity with online tools and the tendency to engage in dishonest practices. Additionally, students who perceived online assessments as less engaging and challenging reported higher instances of cheating. The implications of these findings suggest a critical need for institutions to reassess and redesign their online assessment policies to combat academic dishonesty. Enhancing monitoring mechanisms, revising academic policies, and increasing student engagement through interactive and meaningful online activities are essential. Furthermore, promoting a culture of academic integrity by clearly communicating policies and consequences and providing support systems for students facing challenges in online learning is crucial. These measures could significantly mitigate the

prevalence of cheating and enhance the overall quality and credibility of the online education system.

Keywords: Academic Honesty, Online Cheating, Online Tools, Computer Studies Education, Technological Proficiency

Introduction

Online cheating in higher education institutions is a growing concern, particularly in the digital era of online distance learning. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) in the Philippines has acknowledged that online distance learning presents several challenges for students. One of the most significant impediments is a lack of access to technology and a dependable internet connection, especially for individuals from poor families. This can complicate taking online classes, submitting homework, and engaging in online discussions. The shift to online learning has raised concerns about academic integrity, with some students resorting to plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration (Commission on Higher Education, 2020).

According to a study by Bain (2015), online cheating is defined by college students as "using technology to gain access to unauthorized information," a form of academic dishonesty. Liu and Ma (Liu & Ma, 2020) emphasize that one possible reason students cheat online is the increased pressure to perform well and achieve high grades, especially in highly competitive academic environments. Online distance learning (ODL) has enabled students to engage and collaborate with others from different places and backgrounds. Colleges can ensure academic integrity and prevent cheating by implementing proctoring software, plagiarism detection software, secure online testing platforms, and innovative methods of online learning, such as gamification and adaptive learning (Moten et al., 2013).

This study was conducted among selected private higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines that offered online distance learning during the pandemic. This study examines and identifies the various tools used for online cheating among third-year and fourth-year Computer Studies students during the school years 2020-2022 at selected private universities or institutions.

The Problem Statement

Online assessments have become a component of modern education, particularly with the rise of digital learning platforms. However, this

transition has introduced significant challenges regarding academic integrity. The ease of access to online resources and communication tools has provided students with numerous ways to engage in academic dishonesty. This study addresses the critical issue of online cheating during assessments, focusing on the tools students use to bypass traditional monitoring mechanisms. The results indicate that using the internet to download files, AI tools, digital tools, and software such as calculators that accept input for replies, search engines like Google, and browser extensions are the most utilized tools for online cheating among third-year and fourth-year IT students.

The Research Goal

The primary goal of this research is to identify and analyze the online cheating tools used by Computer Studies education students during assessments in private higher education institutions in the Philippines. By gaining insights into the prevalence and types of these tools, the study aims to propose effective measures to combat academic dishonesty and enhance the credibility of online assessments. The study's ability to provide insight into the tools used for online cheating behaviors among third-year and fourth-year Computer Studies students in higher education institutions during the pandemic of online distance learning is particularly interesting. This study can provide insights into the factors contributing to online cheating activities in online learning settings by examining the demographic, academic, and technological profiles of the respondents. This research can also help improve online education by identifying the elements that contribute to online cheating and providing actions to decrease such activities. Finally, this study has the potential to enhance the legitimacy and integrity of online education while also promoting ethical behavior among third-year and fourth-year Computer Studies students in higher education institutions.

Challenges of Online Distance Learning

The transition to ODL has introduced significant challenges, particularly in the Philippine context. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) (2020) notes that limited access to technology and reliable internet connectivity is a major barrier, especially for students from low-income households, hindering participation in online classes, assignment submission, and virtual discussions. Armstrong-Mensah et al. (2020) highlight that the abrupt shift to ODL during the pandemic has logistical challenges, such as

adapting to new learning platforms and maintaining motivation. Hargittai and Shafer (2006) emphasize that disparities in access to technology, such as computers and the internet, create inequities in digital skills and engagement, potentially leading students to engage in dishonest practices to cope with academic demands. Coman et al. (2020) further note that the lack of effective integration of Learning Management Systems (LMS) in some institutions can limit student engagement, compounding ODL challenges.

Definition and Nature of Online Cheating

Online cheating is defined as the use of technology to access unauthorized information during assessments, constituting a form of academic dishonesty (Bain, 2015). Liu and Ma (2020) explain that online cheating leverages the ease of accessing digital resources and the anonymity of virtual environments, making it more covert than traditional cheating. Clarke and Lancaster (2013) highlight that online cheating ranges from simple acts, such as copying and pasting from websites, to more sophisticated methods, including real-time collaboration. Curran et al. (2011) note that technological advancements have made cheating more complex and more challenging to detect, as students exploit digital tools to bypass monitoring mechanisms. Understanding the scope and nature of online cheating is critical for addressing its prevalence in ODL settings.

Technological Tools Used for Cheating

Advancements in technology have enabled a variety of tools for online cheating. Noorbehbahani et al. (2022) categorize these tools, including search engines (e.g., Google), virtual private networks (VPNs), AI tools, digital calculators, and browser extensions. Subin (2021) highlights advanced methods, such as AI-driven answer generation and browser extensions, for real-time assistance. Smartphones and secondary devices are commonly used during exams (Nyamawe & Mtonyole, 2014; Topîrceanu, 2017), while remote desktop control allows external access to a student's computer (Korman, 2010). Kasliwal (2015) describes the use of virtual machines to hide activities from proctoring software. Devices such as smartwatches, smart glasses, and tiny earpieces enable discreet cheating (Wong et al., 2017; Bawarith et al., 2017; Armstrong-Mensah et al., 2020). Boot et al. (2013) note that proficiency in using search engines facilitates access to unauthorized resources, while group chats on social platforms are used to share answers (Noorbehbahani et al., 2022). These tools exploit the

accessibility of digital resources, posing significant challenges to academic integrity.

Factors Contributing to Cheating Behavior

Several factors drive online cheating. Liu and Ma (2020) identify academic pressure to achieve high grades in competitive environments as a primary motivator. Janke et al. (2021) find that low engagement in online assessments, perceived as uninteresting or unchallenging, correlates with increased cheating. Parks et al. (2018) highlight the role of peer norms, where students may view cheating as acceptable if it is prevalent among their classmates. Link and Day (1992) suggest that dissatisfaction with assessment policies or lack of interest in learning can push students toward dishonest practices. Clarke and Lancaster (2013) note that the ease of accessing cheating tools and low perceived risks of detection exacerbate these behaviors. Yaokumah et al. (2018) add that gender differences in tool preferences may influence cheating patterns, with females showing a higher tendency to use online services. Jonnatan et al. (2022) emphasize that students with higher software proficiency are more likely to use online tools, potentially for cheating, due to their familiarity with technology.

Preventive Strategies and Academic Integrity Measures

Institutions have implemented various strategies to combat online cheating. Moten et al. (2013) advocate for the use of proctoring software, plagiarism detection tools, and secure online testing platforms to ensure academic integrity. Creative approaches, such as gamification and adaptive learning, can enhance engagement and reduce cheating incentives (Moten et al., 2013). Sabbah (2017) suggests technical solutions, such as securing webcams to prevent manipulation, while Asmatulu (2014) emphasizes the importance of robust exam system designs to deter post-exam tampering. The Commission on Higher Education (2020) emphasizes the importance of clear policies, honor codes, and disciplinary consequences in fostering a culture of academic integrity. Adeyemi and Samuel (2011) highlight the role of deterrent measures in reducing cheating behaviors among undergraduates. Raturi et al. (2011) suggest that improving students' access to technology and training in digital tools can promote ethical use. Mukoyama (2003) supports this by noting that technology diffusion, when guided by proper training, can enhance learning outcomes. The ICT-TPACK framework (Angeli & Valanides, 2009) emphasizes the integration of technology,

content, and pedagogy to design engaging, cheat-resistant assessments.

Theoretical Backgrounds

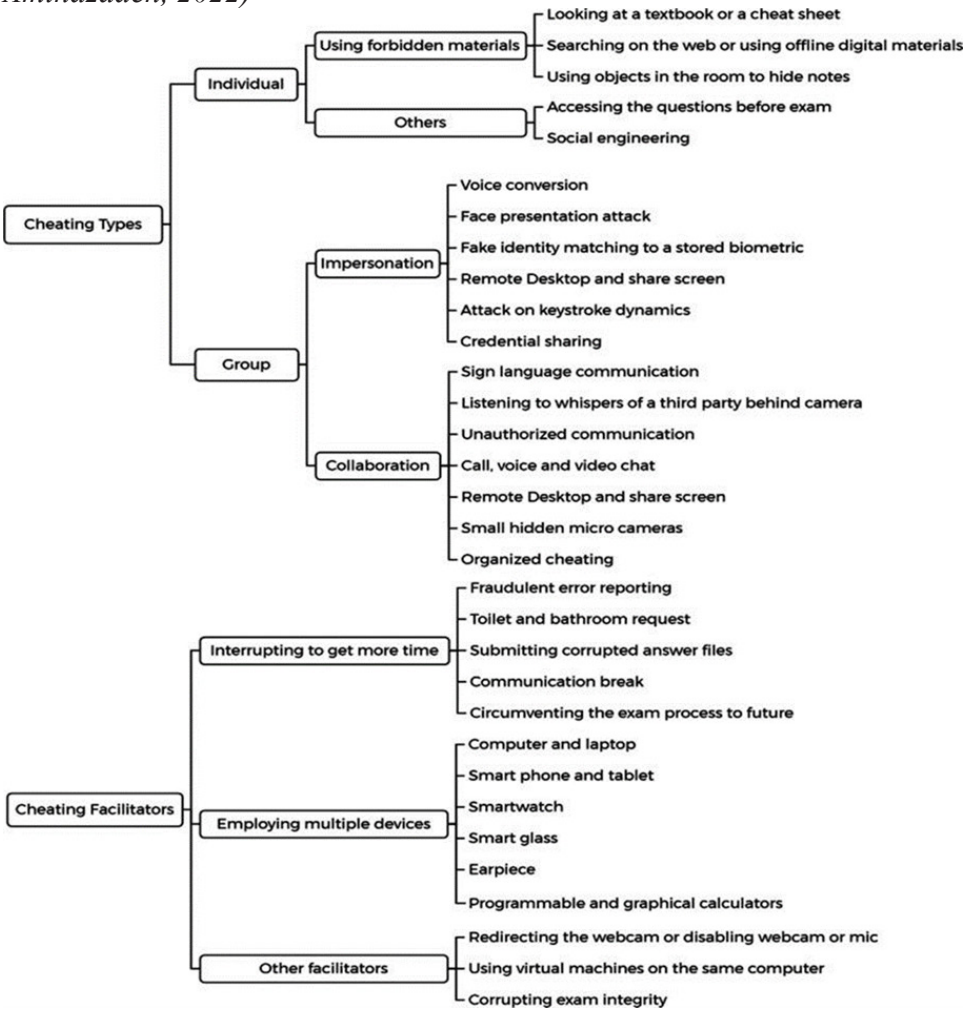
ICT integration in learning is a crucial component of a high-quality education system. The technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) is described as the ways knowledge about tools and their affordances, pedagogy, content, learners, and context are synthesized into an understanding of how particular topics that are difficult to understand by learners or difficult to be represented by teachers can be transformed and taught more effectively with technology in ways that signify its added value. The basic framework to utilize and understand is the TPACK framework where there is an interplay of the three primary knowledge forms, namely content, pedagogy, and technology (www.tpack.org), and then the ICT-TPACK, where "tools and their pedagogical affordances, pedagogy, content, learners, and context are synthesized into an understanding of how particular topics that are difficult to be understood by learners, can be transformed and taught more effectively with ICT, in ways that signify an added value of technology" (Angeli & Valanides, 2009).

The study is grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Theory of Motivated Cheating. The Theory of Planned Behavior suggests that individuals' behavior is driven by their intentions, which are influenced by their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen , 1991). In the context of cheating, this theory helps explain how students' attitudes towards cheating, the perceived norms among peers, and their perceived ability to cheat without getting caught drive their cheating behavior. The Theory of Motivated Cheating posits that students cheat when they believe the benefits outweigh the risks, often influenced by low interest in learning, pressure to achieve high grades, and dissatisfaction with assessment policies (Link & Day, 1992).

To mitigate cheating behaviors effectively and efficiently, various types of cheating and their facilitators were identified (Noorbehbahani, Mohammadi, & Aminazadeh, 2022). The whole classification of cheating types is displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Cheating Types and Facilitators (Noorbehbahani, Mohammadi, & Aminazadeh, 2022)



Several types of devices could be employed as the second device, such as computers and laptops (Moten et al., 2013), smartwatches (Wong et al., 2017), smart glasses such as Google glasses (Armstrong-Mensah et al., 2020), smartphones and tablets (Korman, 2010), and tiny earpieces for remote voice support during the exam (Bawarith et al., 2017). Other facilitators accessing online tools for cheating during assessment include redirecting the webcam to hide something from its field of view (Sabbah, 2017) or disabling the webcam or microphone completely, which are other tricks used to facilitate cheating (Asmatulu, 2014). By using virtual machines on a computer, users can run a virtual operating system on top of

the primary one. This technique would hide the activities done on the second operating system from the software or the human proctoring the primary operating system (Kasliwal, 2015). Corrupting the exam system's integrity to alter exam results after they have been administered (e.g., changing scores or answers after the examination) is another notable case (Korman, 2010). Lastly, Parks et al. (2018) state that social media and channels operating on them can act as facilitation environments for cheating.

Research Methods

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-correlational design to investigate the prevalence and types of online cheating tools used by third- and fourth-year Computer Studies students in private higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines, during the school years 2020–2022, when online distance learning (ODL) was widely implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Setting

The research was conducted in seven private HEIs in the Philippines, known for their educational institutions. These HEIs offered ODL during the pandemic, making them suitable for studying online cheating behaviors.

Research Participants

The study focused exclusively on Computer Studies students (third- and fourth-year) due to their high digital fluency and experience attending online classes, which likely increases opportunities for using sophisticated online tools for cheating, given their familiarity with technology (Boot et al., 2013). This focus includes other disciplines, such as Education, where digital proficiency and online resource usage may differ. Future research could include diverse academic programs to enhance the applicability of findings across fields. A total of 150 students, actively enrolled juniors and seniors who began their college journey in the 2020–2021 school year, participated. A complete enumeration was used to ensure a representative sample from the target population.

Research Instrument

The research instrument for this study was a self-administered survey questionnaire that was distributed to the selected respondents. Data were collected using a self-administered online survey distributed via Google Forms, designed to capture students' online cheating practices, technological profiles, and demographic information.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved the use of percentage, weighted mean, standard deviation, and chi-square tests of independence to identify significant relationships. Questions for the Technological Profile were derived from "Learners' Access to Tools and Experience with Technology" by Raturi et al. (2011) and reformulated to suit the current technological setting. The questionnaire follows a five-point Likert scale for evaluating students' proficiency in using digital applications and software: 1 – least, 2 – fair, 3 – good, 4 – very good, and 5 – excellent. Items on Ownership and Software Proficiency and the Usage of Software Applications were adapted from the questionnaires by Raturi, Thaman, and Hogan (2011). Another part of the survey uses a five-point Likert scale to assess how often students used tools for online cheating: 4 – always, 3 – often, 2 – sometimes, 1 – rarely, and 0 – never. The statements in the questionnaire were modified from Adeyemi and Samuel (2011).

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical research standards, with approval obtained from the University Research Ethics Committee. Informed consent was provided through a digital form embedded in the Google Forms survey, which explained the study's purpose, procedures, and participants' right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Participation was voluntary, and no incentives were offered to avoid coercion. Data confidentiality was ensured by anonymizing responses, storing data on secure servers, and restricting access to the research team. Personal identifiers (e.g., names, student IDs) were not collected to protect participants' privacy. The survey was anonymous, with no identifying information collected, to encourage honest responses. Questions were phrased neutrally to reduce judgment. The survey introduction emphasized that responses would be used for research purposes only and would not affect academic standing, fostering a safe

environment for truthful reporting.

Results and Discussions

Table 1 below presents the demographic profile of the respondents. The study had 150 student respondents from the selected Private Colleges and Universities in the Philippines. Notably, most respondents, comprising nearly 67% of the total population, fall within the 20- to 25-year age range. Additionally, approximately 30% of participants fall within the 12- to 19-year-old age group, indicating a diverse age distribution. The sex distribution reveals a notable imbalance, with approximately 69% identifying as male and 31% identifying as female.

Regarding academic courses, a significant 61.33% are enrolled in the BS Information Technology program, suggesting a predominant presence from this course; 27.33% are Computer Science students, while 8.67% of the respondents are taking Information Systems, and 2.67% are enrolled in Library Science, making it the lowest percentage among other computer programs. The sex distribution reveals a higher proportion of male respondents compared to females, which could impact the diversity of perspectives represented in the study. Furthermore, the dominance of students enrolled in technology-related courses, particularly those in BS Information Technology, indicates a specialized focus within the study population, which likely influences the applicability and relevance of the research findings to the field of technology.

Table 1
Profile of the Respondents in Terms of Demographics

Age	f	%
12 to 19	44	29.33
20 to 25	100	66.67
26 to 64	6	4.00
Total	150	100.00
Sex	f	%
Male	103	68.67
Female	47	31.33
Total	150	100.00
Course	f	%
BS Computer Science	41	27.33

BS Information System	13	8.67
BS Information Technology	92	61.33
BS Library Science	4	2.67
Total	150	100.00

Table 2 presents information about the technology use by the participants. The data shows that 70.67% of the participants had computers at home, which means many of them can access digital content and online resources from their own computers. Almost all respondents, around 99%, have a mobile phone, indicating that mobile phones are widely used for communication and accessing information. Moreover, 91% have internet access at home, indicating a strong connection to online resources. Another interesting point is that 83% mentioned the presence of Learning Management Systems in their schools, which are digital platforms for learning. The widespread adoption of technology among respondents (as shown in Table 2) aligns with the principles of the Theory of Technology Diffusion, which emphasizes the process by which technology is adopted and accepted by individuals or groups, showcasing that the respondents in the study are evident and actively engaged with technological tools (Mukoyama, 2003). These findings suggest that our participants are well-connected digitally, and this could impact how they engage with digital content and learn online.

Table 2

Technological Profile of the Respondents in Terms of Ownership

I have computer at home.	f	%
Yes	106	70.67
No	44	29.33
Total	150	100.00
I have a mobile phone.	f	%
Yes	148	98.67
No	2	1.33
Total	150	100.00
I have internet access at home.	f	%
Yes	137	91.33
No	13	8.67
Total	150	100.00
Is there any Learning Management System such us (Moodle, Edmodo, Blackboard, Canvas, etc) used in your institution?	f	%

Yes	124	82.67
No	26	17.33
Total	150	100.00

Table 3 presents the participants' proficiency in various software applications measured on a scale where higher values indicate greater proficiency. Participants rated their skills in various tasks, including word processing, spreadsheets, email, social networking platforms, and others. Respondents reported a relatively high level of proficiency (3.72) in word processing, indicating a good understanding and usage of this fundamental skill. Similarly, they demonstrated proficiency in email usage, with a score of 3.93. The use of search engines, such as Google, received the highest rating (4.06), indicating very good proficiency. The study by Boot et al. (2013) reveals that respondents' use of search engines (e.g., Google) indicates advanced experience in assessing basic computer proficiency. Social networking platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, were at a high of 4.03. The findings suggest that the surveyed population was adept at using highly acclaimed software applications for communication, information retrieval, and collaboration. Their high proficiency levels across these multiple software applications reflect preparedness for digital engagement in a diverse array of social contexts. The average proficiency score of 3.59 across all the software applications combined suggests that the surveyed population has above-average technology-related skills. However, lower proficiency levels in software applications, such as blogs (mean of 3.21) and Learning Management Systems (mean of 3.27), signal opportunities for improvement in those areas of technology or indicate a need for additional training in those specific areas.

Table 3

Technological Profile of the Respondents in Terms of Software Proficiency

Statements	WX	s	VD
Word Processing	3.72	0.96	Very Good
Spreadsheets	3.38	1.03	Good
Paint, Publisher, etc	3.31	1.12	Good
Email	3.93	0.90	Very Good
Class shares	3.37	1.05	Good
Moodle, Nicenet, WebCT or other LMS	3.27	1.18	Good
Online Library Searches	3.33	1.08	Good

Search Engine e.g., Google, Yahoo, online dictionary, etc.	4.06	0.93	Very Good
Online Services e.g., registration, pay fees, etc.	3.56	1.12	Very Good
Social Networking Platforms e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram	4.03	0.90	Very Good
Video Conferencing Platform e.g., Zoom, Gmeet, WebEx, Lark, Skype	3.85	0.98	Very Good
Blogs	3.21	1.16	Good
Composite	3.59	0.82	Very Good

**1.00-1.79: Least (L); 1.80-2.59: Fair (F); 2.60-3.39: Good (G); 3.40-4.19: Very Good (VG); 4.20-5.00: Excellent (E)

It was noted that cheating tools commonly in use, such as smartphones, search engines, and collaborative tools, scored mostly as "Never" (1.00). The findings support the study by Topîrceanu (2017), which suggests that students cheat in higher education by using social network analysis, specifically smartphones and other digital tools to facilitate cheating. Thus, the study by Nyamawe and Mtonyole (2014) also discusses the use of smartphones as one of the tools students employ to cheat on exams. Similarly, practices like downloading files from the internet or utilizing AI tools for answers are reported as extremely rare, with mean scores below 2.00. However, it is crucial to note that these findings are based on self-reported practices of the respondents, which may introduce biases or underreporting of actual cheating instances. The results indicate a strong commitment to academic integrity among the surveyed respondents, with cheating practices perceived as highly uncommon or nonexistent within their academic environments.

The aggregate mean score of 1.11, which shows the rarity of cheating practices during assessments in higher education institutions, reinforces the positive trend towards upholding academic honesty and integrity. On the contrary, participating students reported cheating more frequently in online exams than in on-site exams. When cheating occurs, it may not be pervasive across all assessment types (Janke et al., 2021). This suggests that while online exams might experience higher rates of cheating compared to on-site exams, the extent of cheating varies across different types of assessments. It implies that certain assessment formats or conditions may be more conducive to cheating behavior, leading to higher reported incidents of cheating in online exams. However, it also suggests that not all online assessments are affected by pervasive cheating; some types of online

assessments may still maintain academic integrity despite the overall trend of increased cheating in online settings.

Table 4
Tools for Online Cheating during Assessment

Statement	WX	s	VD
Using a smartphone while taking exam.	1.06	1.24	Never
Using search engine such as Google during exam.	1.16	1.25	Never
Using virtual private networks.	1.00	1.16	Never
Utilizing internet to download a file.	1.59	1.44	Never
Utilizing digital tools and software, such as calculators that accept input for replies.	1.29	1.35	Never
Work with a second monitor.	1.00	1.24	Never
Using the class group chat to spread answers	1.06	1.24	Never
Using remote desktop control to allow someone to access computer.	1.00	1.10	Never
Using collaborative tools for group assignments.	1.19	1.27	Never
Using transcription software to transcribe audio and video content.	1.00	1.26	Never
Using AI Tools	1.58	1.44	Never
Using browsers extensions	1.10	1.33	Never
Aggregate	1.11	1.04	Never

**1.00-1.79: Never (N); 1.80-2.59: Rarely (R); 2.60-3.39: Sometimes (S); 3.40-4.19: Often (O); 4.20-5.00: Always (A)

Table 5 displays the results of the analysis conducted to determine whether a significant relationship exists between each pair of variables included in the respondents' demographic profile and technological profile, which were subjected to correlational analysis. Thus, this examines the connection between the frequency of participants' online tool use and their demographics. The results show that there is no significant relationship between tool usage and age ($\chi^2 = 9.55$, $p = 0.30$), suggesting that people of different ages use online tools similarly. While this result supports the study by Hooyman (2021) on tool usage, it finds that older adults took longer to complete a timed upper extremity task due to changes in the duration and quality of the fine motor phase, rather than the gross motor phase. The

relationship between tool usage and sex is also not significant ($\chi^2 = 2.37$, $p = 0.67$), indicating that both males and females use online tools at comparable rates. Likewise, the association between tool usage and academic course is not significant ($\chi^2 = 8.15$, $p = 0.77$), suggesting participants from different academic courses have similar patterns of tool usage. The preferences for ICT Tools and devices among females are supported by the claim of Yaokumah et al. (2018), which aligns with findings that show significant differences in the use of online tools. Conversely, females used and preferred online services and tools than males. The study also finds that smartphones and laptops are the most frequently used ICT tools, and social networking platforms are the most preferred online services. Gender studies in ICT help understand sex differences and proclivities, informing policy direction towards efforts to bridge the gender gap. The frequency of online tool usage appears to be consistent across various demographic and academic profiles among the participants. This means that regardless of age, sex, or academic course, participants tend to use online tools at similar rates. It is worth noting that students have valued the equitable access to technology and emphasize the importance of utilizing online tools effectively for academic purposes, irrespective of individual profiles.

Table 5

Relationship between the Frequency of Use of Online Tools and Demographic and Technological Profiles of the Respondents

Variables	χ^2	P	Remarks
Frequency of Use and Age	9.55	0.30	not significant
Frequency of Use and Sex	2.37	0.67	not significant
Frequency of Use and Course	8.15	0.77	not significant

Table 6 examines the relationship between the frequency of using online tools and the respondents' technological profiles. The results show that having a computer at home is not significantly related to the frequency of tool usage ($\chi^2 = 4.74$, $p = 0.32$). Similarly, owning a mobile phone ($\chi^2 = 2.20$, $p = 0.70$) and having internet access at home ($\chi^2 = 1.10$, $p = 0.89$) had no significant correlation with the frequency of tool usage. In contrast, this result supports the study by Hargittai and Shafer (2006) on the importance of access to technology, such as owning a computer at home or having internet connectivity, which did not necessarily correlate with increased usage of online tools. The existence of a Learning Management System in the institution did not reveal a significant relationship with the tool usage

frequency ($\chi^2 = 3.87$, $p = 0.42$) and is congruent with the study of Coman et al. (2020), emphasizing that learning management systems in the context of educational institutions did not significantly impact their use during learning by learners. The data reveals a software indeed that has a Spearman's rho value of 0.10 with a statistical significance below 0.000001. This implies that participants demonstrating greater expertise in software are more inclined to use online instruments on a regular basis, which is similar to the study of Jonnatan et al. (2022), where there is emphasis on a positive correlation between online tool usage frequency and software proficiency, stating that individuals with higher software proficiency tend to utilize online tools more frequently.

While the findings indicate that students with higher technological proficiency have greater opportunities to engage in online cheating tools, the low levels of self-reported cheating may reflect social desirability bias or fear of judgment when disclosing dishonest practices. This contradiction suggests that technological skill alone does not directly translate to academic misconduct; instead, it interacts with individual attitudes, perceived behavioral control, and institutional policies. Thus, students may underreport actual cheating behaviors even as their digital competence increases the likelihood of access to such tools.

Table 6

Relationship between Frequency of Use of Online Tools and Technological Profile of the Respondents

Variables	χ^2	P	Remarks
I have computer at home.	4.74	0.32	not significant
I have a mobile phone.	2.20	0.70	not significant
I have internet access at home.	1.10	0.89	not significant
Is there any Learning Management System such us (Moodle, Edmodo, Blackboard, Canvas, etc) used in your institution?	3.87	0.42	not significant
Variables	rs	P	
Frequency of Use of Online Tools and Software Proficiency	0.10	<.000001	significant

Conclusions and Prospects for Further Research

The shift to online learning has opened new avenues for academic dishonesty, particularly online cheating. The study provides valuable insights into the dual role of online tools in the academic environment. While students primarily view these tools as valuable supplements that enhance their learning experiences and facilitate the production of high-quality work, the research also emphasizes the importance of academic integrity. The results indicate that students generally demonstrate a strong commitment to ethical conduct during online assessments. This reflects students' dedication to upholding the principles of honesty and fairness in their academic pursuits. However, it is also acknowledged that some students may resort to limited online cheating, such as using smartphones, search engines, virtual private networks, and AI tools during online assessments as a coping mechanism in response to overwhelming stress or feelings of inadequacy. The findings show the importance of addressing inconsistencies in online learning experiences and ensuring equitable access to resources for all demographics. By improving access to technology and enhancing digital literacy, educational institutions can help mitigate gaps in the online learning environment. Students who have better access to digital tools and resources tend to attend classes regularly and use these tools diligently, demonstrating a constructive approach to online assessments.

The findings are grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior, which posits that students' engagement with cheating tools is shaped by three interrelated determinants: attitudes toward academic dishonesty, perceived behavioral control over technological tools, and subjective norms reinforced by peers and institutional enforcement. This framework supports why even students with high awareness of academic integrity may still resort to misconduct when they perceive lenient policies or observe peers normalizing such practices. This study's reliance on self-reported data and focus on Computer Studies students limits its findings. Self-reports may underestimate cheating due to social desirability bias, and the IT-focused sample may not apply to disciplines such as Business or Education (Janke et al., 2021). Future studies should employ mixed-methods approaches, such as interviews, to explore motivations and include diverse academic programs for broader applicability (Liu & Ma, 2020). Grounded in TPB, the study underscores that online cheating is not a random occurrence but a predictable outcome of intentions shaped by psychological, social, and institutional influences. Therefore, interventions must go beyond surveillance and punishment. Strengthening integrity education, redesigning assessments to emphasize

authentic learning, and reinforcing consistent institutional policies are essential strategies to counteract misconduct. The study reveals that, despite occasional use of online tools for unethical purposes, students overall present a positive outlook concerning their reasons for using these tools, prioritizing constructive perspectives over potential challenges. This positive stance encompasses diverse demographic backgrounds, underscoring the need for supportive interventions to ensure equitable and effective online learning experiences. Online digital tools and ways can support and enhance students' academic endeavors; institutions must foster an environment that upholds academic integrity and addresses the underlying causes of academic dishonesty. It is recommended that a further qualitative study be conducted to explore why students cheat, their perceptions of fairness, motivation, and pressure. By doing so, educators can support students in their pursuit of honest and meaningful learning experiences, ultimately benefiting the broader educational landscape.

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Ako (I)-Ikaw (You) Voices as Counternarrative Structure in Negrense Queer Panalaysayon

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Abstract

This paper explores panalaysayon—a Hiligaynon word meaning "account" or "narrative"—as an evolving oral form that attempts to queerize panaysayon, the more established term for storytelling in the Western Visayas Region of the Philippines. In this study, panalaysayon specifically refers to the oral autobiographical narratives of five self-identified queer individuals from the province of Negros Occidental (formerly part of Western Visayas and now under the newly established Negros Island Region). These stories were collected using the life story approach and analyzed through the lens of queer formalism. As a potential literary text, the Negrense queer panalaysayon centers the narrator's voice and the way their stories are told. A defining feature is the alternating use of ako (I) and ikaw (you) voices, allowing storytellers to express both their internal reflections and how others perceive them. This structure enables them to reclaim agency within narratives where they are often rendered passive or backgrounded. Instead of following conventional narrative arcs with fixed beginning, middle, and end, the panalaysayon reflects an emergent structure. It aligns with the Self-Narrative Model, where narrators select life events and frame them in ways that capture both personal affirmation and struggle. What emerges is a hybrid form—oral, autobiographical, and potentially counternarrative—that demonstrates how queer stories can be told outside dominant, mainstream frameworks. This study does not oppose conventional narrative models but offers panalaysayon as an alternative path within queer storytelling.

Keywords: life story approach, panalaysayon, queer formalism, narrative voice, Negros Occidental, Hiligaynon

Introduction

The power of the oral narrative lies in the storyteller's ability to verbalize the past experiences that comprise their own story vividly. Personal narrative, a commonly used mode in oral storytelling, positions the "self" as

both narrator and subject in the articulation of lived experience. This suggests that the self as narrator is part of the "overarching themes that an individual uses to make sense of [their] experiences" (Hawkins & Saleem, 2012, p. 9). Since the "emergence of life stories" is tied to the "construction of notions of selfhood," the stories of our life are therefore "intimately connected to cultural locations, to social position and even social privilege as well as to historical periods, which provide different opportunities for the construction and expression of selfhood" (Goodson, 2012, p. 25). The idea of the construction of selfhood in oral personal narratives, therefore, may be juxtaposed to how Yudice views a narrator as a witness who represents their personal experience as part of "collective memory and identity" (cited in Walker, 2011). For example, in testimonial literature, the narrators as witness recounts the plot and characters of their own story, and in bearing witness to their life, the narrator's voice becomes central because, as Torchin suggests, testimony through this voice can spark collective "witnessing,' which emerges from personal testimonies of social struggle and may become a revolutionary collective that can bring about change in the face of social adversities (cited in Whitlock, 2015, p. 8). This resonates with Labov's view that narrative arises when a person is "impelled to tell" their story, often by internal or external stimuli, thereby grounding the narrative in lived, reportable experience. According to Labov, effective storytelling requires not only the tellability of events but also the narrator's ability to recursively structure these events based on access to biographical memory (1-13). In this way, personal narratives—as with other forms of self-narration—emerge from the convergence of urgency, memory, and voice. As Menary (2008) explains, "we become fully fledged narrative selves" because of the narrative point of view that we employ in telling our "embodied experiences" (p. 63).

In this paper, I situate oral personal narratives within the context of panalaysayon, a term in Hiligaynon—a language spoken primarily in the Western Visayas Region of the Philippines, including Capiz, Iloilo, and Guimaras, as well as Negros Occidental (formerly part of Western Visayas but now under the newly established Negros Island Region), and certain areas in Mindanao—which means narrative or story. While some may argue that the more familiar term "panaysayon" is more appropriate, the term "panalaysayon" has evolved over the years in the context of popular culture. Thus, the use of the term panalaysayon in this paper does not mean to question its significant place in the regional literary tradition, but rather to allow new perspectives on panalaysayon as a nuanced term (and as a queerized term, which I will discuss further in the next section). The

rootedness of panalaysayon is integral to the Hiligaynon oral tradition of self-witnessing, capturing events from an individual's life, the lives of others, or the experiences of a community. These narratives contribute to shaping both personal stories and the collective narrative of the nation. Specifically, I examine panalaysayon as an oral autobiographical form or life story that presents the experiences of Negrense LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) individuals (henceforth referred to as queer individuals) as acts of self-witnessing within their community and the broader world. As such, panalaysayon functions as a means of witnessing the self (or oral autobiographical narrative). To shed light on how queer storytelling unfolds in these panalaysayon, this study addresses two questions: (1) What is the emergent narrative voice in the collected panalaysayon? Moreover, (2) How does this narrative voice contribute to the storytelling form of the panalaysayon?

To contextualize the worldview of life-story-as-text among the Negrense queer community stems from two salient reasons. First, while queer narratives have gained visibility in national literary publications, their representation remains limited in the provincial context, especially in Negros Occidental. Though there are local efforts—such as independent literary journals and community initiatives—these remain few and unsustained, prompting the need for mainstream platforms dedicated to queer storytelling. Second, the collection of panalaysayon, which encompasses the oral autobiographical narrative of queer individuals, provides a more inclusive approach to producing provincial queer texts. As a marginalized group, queer individuals carry vibrant life experiences and rich narratives that extend beyond themes of coming-out and hardship, encompassing resilience, triumph, and authenticity (Watson & Johnson, 2013). However, without sustainable avenues for sharing queer experiences, these stories risk being overlooked.

It is in this context that the study seeks to contribute to the appreciation and understanding of provincial queer texts by collecting and analyzing the panalaysayon of the queer individuals in Negros Occidental, as these narratives embody their lived experiences. Specifically, the collection and analysis of the panalaysayon of Negrense queer individuals through the lens of queer formalism and the life story approach as the methodological framework seeks to examine how these oral autobiographical narratives (also referred to here as autobionarratives) are structured through the voices of narrators who have directly experienced the socio-cultural and religio-political conditions of their time. In turn, it examines how these oral autobionarratives contribute to shaping the Negrense queer self, both as

individuals and as members of a broader Negrense queer community.

This position draws from the observation that narratives not only "bring order and meaning" to life, but also help us establish a "sense of selfhood" as manifested in the life stories that we narrate to "ourselves and to others" (Murray, 2003). In other words, narratives and stories are personal, social, and cultural experiences that contribute to the formation of identity. Bearing witness to our own individual life experience through oral narratives, it is important to examine how the "emergence of life stories" is tied to the "construction of notions of selfhood" or how our life stories are "intimately connected" to the larger social historical, and cultural narratives that shape the "construction and expression of selfhood" (Goodsoon, 2012, p. 25). This connection between individual life stories and larger narrative can be extended into the discussion on the question of belonging and ownership in our own stories. Robyn Fivush explains that "we are the stories we tell ourselves [and as] we narrate experienced events to ourselves, we simultaneously create structure and meaning in our lives" (cited in Shuman, 2015, p. 49). This means that our identities are shaped by narratives that emerge from our experiences. By sharing our stories, we become our own stories, creating meaning and a sense of belonging. Our personal stories and our sense of self are closely connected because our narratives come from our experiences and help us understand them (Ochs & Capps, 1996). Telling our stories is a way to find order and meaning in life, creating a sense of who we are as we share these stories with ourselves and others (Murray, 2003). Oral narratives, therefore, function as a medium through which we gain a better understanding of our lives. They allow us (the storyteller/narrator) to construct our sense of 'self,' making narratives or stories a potential space where our identities can be shaped and formed. This is so because "our experiences belong to us [and] storytelling can be a tool to articulate this belonging" (Shuman, 2015, p. 49).

Specifically, this paper attempts to view the Negrense queer individuals' panalaysayon as a potential literary text, as well as to explore the emergent structure of such panalaysayon as shaped through the narrator's voice. The study participants were five Negrense who self-identified as being part of the LGBTQ+ spectrum and were willing to share their panalaysayon with me, a queer insider-researcher. Their narratives were collected through Orteza's pakikipagkuwentuhan, a researcher-participant interview/conversation method. Given the limited number of participants, the study does not aim to generalize findings to the entire LGBTQ+ community of Negros Occidental or beyond. As a delimitation, it does not seek to define a collective Negrense LGBTQ+ identity. Instead, it focuses on the emergent narrative voice within

panalaysayon and examines how this voice shapes queer storytelling through the lens of queer formalism.

Queer Formalism, Life Story Approach, and Negrense Queer Panalaysayon

Queer formalism is deployed to underpin this study's queries on how the narrative voice of the narrator/s could shape the narrative structure (form) of the panalaysayon as a potential oral literary text. As the focus of formalist approaches, form in its aesthetic sense is defined by Pettersson as "those non-presentational properties of a text's sign sequence and of its communicative content which are significant from a literary point of view." Meanwhile, form as structure can be dissected based on the distinction made by Pettersson between "communicative content and sign sequence: (1) 'form(s) of content' includes 'characters, locations and themes or ideas,' and (2) 'form(s) of expression or of language,' which is present in the styles and utterances occurring in a work and in their interrelations" (cited in Herman et al., 2010, p. 181).

However, this strict formalist approach of studying form has been challenged by queer formalism. In the article entitled Queer Formalism: Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy in Conversation, Doyle and Getsy (2023) talk about their interest in the "valence of sexuality in artworks and performance," specifically "how desire, the sexual, and the gendered operate beyond their straightforward depictions." This means that artistic forms are not intrinsically queer. However, there is a possibility of queerizing formalism by "reading into" or "activating the relationships between and among forms, which potentially activate 'queer capacities" (p. 59).

In other words, form can be an immediate site where unconventional and unnatural "forms of living as queer […] take relationality as the matrix in which difference and defiance become manifest." He calls this as the "intercourse of forms" (Getsy, 2017, p. 254), an engendering of queer formalism, which aims "not to abjure or ignore ostensible 'content' [but] allows us to investigate how form can be mobilized in relation to content as a way of fostering such queer tactics as subversion, infiltration, refusal, or the declaration of unethical allegiance" (Getsy, 2017, p. 255). When queer formalism is applied to the analysis of literary texts, it offers an alternative lens for engaging with form—not only as an aesthetic element but also as a site where experiences, perspectives, and social dynamics can unfold subtly. This way, Getsy (2017) asserts that formalism does not depart from "content and context" but becomes co-present with queer materiality. Therefore,

queer formalism "attends to how insubordinate relations can be proposed through form's dynamics, and it strives to identify those configurations from which queer defiance can be cultivated" (p. 257). A similar impulse can be seen in Cruz's (2022) "Lesbian-Essaying through Textual In(ter)ventions in Memoir," where she explores how her use of textual strategies, or "textual in(ter)ventions," in memoir writing surfaces and asserts her lesbian identity (p. 27). Cruz (2022) demonstrates how formal experimentation becomes a tool for narrating queer subjectivity, further reinforcing how form can operate as both an expressive and resistive strategy within queer life writing.

To support the queer formalist reading of the panalaysayon, the life story approach is employed to collect oral autobionarratives and to foreground the lived experiences that inform their narrative voice and form. Atkinson (2007) explains that by listening to human life stories, we are also stepping into the core of the "personal world of the storyteller and discover larger worlds" (p. 224). Here, the panalaysayon is viewed as both personal to the individual narrator and as a collective or social experience that binds the storytellers of the panalaysayon. The "inquiry in the life story approach," then, as Atkinson (2022) explains, allows the researcher to read into the meanings expressed in the narrated story of the narrators through a potential theoretical lens as deemed by the researcher. This means that the life story approach brings out the subjective meaning of the story and identifies themes, issues, or connections within it objectively. Moreover, the "inquiry in the life story approach" does two salient things: helps the storyteller to construct the subjective meaning of their own story through open-ended or reflective questions, and guide the researcher to identify objectively the "themes, issues, or connections across the story that may be inherent to the lived experiences of the story itself or based on an existing or preferred theory of inquiry, interpretation, or analysis that may also be based on the research questions used, if any" (Atkinson, 2022, pp. 234-235).

The theoretical and methodological lenses discussed above underpin this study on the Negrense queer panalaysayon, which is approached as "text" and analyzed for its literary qualities, particularly its narrative structure. To clarify the central concept of this study, it is important to define panalaysayon. The term is derived from panaysayon, meaning "narrative" or, more specifically, "oral narrative." Related Hiligaynon terms include isaysay (to narrate), pagsaysay (narration), and igasaysay (to be narrated). The use of panalaysayon instead of panaysayon in this paper—the latter already established in the literary oral tradition of the Hiligaynon region—is an attempt to queerize this tradition by contextualizing it within contemporary

queer oral storytelling. In Acevedo's (2019) Panaysayon: Tales from Panay Island, the term refers to the folk narratives and oral storytelling traditions indigenous to Panay Island (Western Visayas Region)—comprising the provinces of Aklan, Capiz, and Iloilo. As Acevedo notes, these narratives, often passed down orally across generations, are not fixed but are "recreated with each telling," shaped by the individual storyteller and negotiated with the community (Acevedo, Introduction). Rooted in both communal memory and personal voice, panaysayon encompasses a range of prose forms—myths, legends, folktales—that reflect cultural values, historical consciousness, and contemporary concerns.

In this study, panalaysayon is used as a conceptual extension that evolves from the rich oral tradition of panaysayon, expanding its scope to refer to the oral autobionarratives of queer individuals in Negros Occidental. As a local oral storytelling practice, it retains its roots in everyday recollection and community-based witnessing. This is evident, for example, in local news reporting—where panalaysayon (a becoming commonly used term) appears in phrases such as "Suno sa panalaysayon sang biktima" [according to the victim's account] or "Suno sa panalaysayon sang nakakita" [according to the witness's account]. These expressions illustrate how panalaysayon serves as a culturally recognized way of recounting lived experience within the community.

When situated in the life stories of Negrense LGBTQ+ individuals, panalaysayon functions as an act of self-witnessing—giving voice to both significant and everyday events in their queer lives. Thus, it is used here both as a mode of oral autobiographical storytelling and as a form of testimonial narrative. To place the term more precisely within the framework of this study, panalaysayon becomes a localized expression of "oral autobionarratives" rooted in queer lived experience. In the succeeding sections, the terms life story, life narrative, life history, oral autobionarrative, and queer narrative are also used interchangeably with panalaysayon, depending on context.

Another important term used in this study that needs clarification is Negrense. Sa-onoy (2003), a local historian of Negros Occidental, notes that the people of Negros Island were originally called Negrosanon, especially in relation to the province's strong sense of place and historical identity. Over time, however, the term "Negrense" has become increasingly commonplace in popular culture and media, reflecting its widespread use in both everyday discourse and local reporting. Pacete (2020) further argues that whether one uses Negrosanon, taga-Negros (literally, from Negros), or Negrense depends on personal perception and choice. He emphasizes that these labels are all culturally valid and continue to evolve in tandem with shifting social

consciousness. While the use of the term Negrense may have initially gained traction among the elite in the 1980s, Pacete explains that it has since been gradually embraced by a broader segment of the population, including both popular culture and the general public.

While Negrosanon remains interwoven into the island's historical and cultural fabric, Negrense signals an emergent cultural subjectivity shaped by the influence of popular culture and changing modes of identification. This study adopts Negrense as a deliberate move to reinterpret the term through a queer lens—creating space for queer texts and alternative expressions within provincial discourse. In this study, Negrense queers specifically refers to LGBTQ+ individuals from Negros Occidental, where Hiligaynon is predominantly spoken (though some areas speak Cebuano) and where the tradition of panalaysayon is culturally embedded. This linguistic and cultural context is shaped by the province's historical inclusion in the Western Visayas Region (though it is now part of the newly established Negros Island Region).

Lastly, the term LGBTQ+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. According to the definitions provided by the Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression (SOGIE), a lesbian is a woman attracted to women, while a gay man is attracted to men. A bisexual person is someone who is attracted to both their own gender and other genders. The term transgender, or trans, is an umbrella term used to refer to individuals who challenge traditional notions of gender, including those who identify as such. Queer is also an umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of sexual preferences, gender expressions, and identities that do not conform to the heterosexual, heteronormative, or gender-binary majority. In this context, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer refer to sexual orientations, while transgender and/or trans relate to gender identity and expression.

Panalaysayon through Life Story Approach: Method, Analysis, and Discussion

The oral autobionarratives of the participants (hereafter referred to as narrators or storytellers) were collected through participant interviews or Orteza's concept of pakikipagkuwentuhan, which is a spontaneous conversational act where both the researcher and the participants engage in storytelling about life (cited in Evangelista et al., 2016), using open-ended questions as prompts. The duration of each participant interview ranged from one to two hours, including pre-interview and post-interview conversations, as I followed Giorgi's suggestion that "interviews can take

one to two hours with each participant" (cited in Englander, 2012, p. 19). In conducting a life story approach interview, I adapted the following recommendations from Creswell: conduct non-structured, open-ended interviews; take detailed notes; record the interview on audiotape; and transcribe the interview. Throughout the process of recording and handling the data, Creswell's (2019) suggestion on using a protocol or a predesigned form to record information gathered during the interview was helpful. I also recorded my interviews using an audio recorder, with the participants' consent, to capture the entire observation and interview process. I made field notes and journal entries to record my initial impressions and reflections on each individual interview. The collected data were kept with utmost confidentiality and anonymity.

Textual analysis through thematization was employed to analyze the transcribed oral autobionarratives of the participants and to answer the research question on the typical narrative structure of the panalaysayon as revealed through the narrator's voice. Helpful in the coding process were the assignment of names to the meaningful motifs deduced from the data and the combination of these codes/names into broader motifs using a matrix to display and facilitate comparisons with the data (Creswell, 2019).

Choosing not to establish thematic reliability and validity through a second reader or inter-rater intervention is a delimitation of this study, given that it is not a necessary process in a literary-humanistic study. Although this study appears interdisciplinary because it partly explores the politics of queers, as well as their relation to and position in society, it, however, remains loyal to the typical literary-humanistic methodologies in its approach to the narrative as a subject of interpretation. In other words, the analyzed and interpreted narratives were no longer attached to the corporeality of their narrators but instead treated as literary texts. By orientation, the humanistic approach to literary studies "establishes the' validity of its claims in ways quite different from those of a scientific approach" (Jackson, 2003, p. 191). However, scientific validity is not necessarily antithetical to literary studies. This study, therefore, employs the literary-humanistic approach to interpreting text (particularly textual analysis based on literary elements of voice) wherein validity resides in the written interpretation, which "must be the strongest realization of literary meaningfulness" (Jackson, 2003, p. 200). In this case, my interpretation of the panalaysayon's emergent structure is not meant "to carry the kind of truth value that a scientific explanation expects" (Jackson, 2003, p. 201); instead, it is plainly suggestive based on the panalaysayon's own temporality and subjectivity as a potential literary text.

Negrense Queer Panalaysayon's Ako - Ikaw Narrative Voices

The interspersing of two or more narrative voices in a single text is not a rare occurrence in literature, whether in fiction, nonfiction, or poetry. In fact, the deployment of multiple pronouns signifying the narrative voice(s) has evolved as a radical storytelling technique among some writers, challenging the notions and conventions of traditional forms. For example, Koss (2009) examined a corpus of contemporary Young Adult (YA) novels and found that most of them are told through multiple narrative voices that "often present information from a variety of narrators and perspectives" (p. 79).

The presence of the "we" voice as a 'collective narrator' along with other pronouns has also been evident in fiction. Maxey (2015) reflects on the power of the first-person plural "we" as a collective narrator, a radical literary technique considered by some critics to be a significant literary device. Maxey (2015) suggests that the "rise of the we voice" could be the result of writers' experimentation, reinvention, and reimagination of forms, and their continued search for "fresh voice." Thus, in a fast-changing era where "moral questions are raised by both individualism and public memory," writing in the collective voice has become a tool for some American novelists to "communicate hidden and forgotten histories."

The use of multiple narrative voices may likewise signify a 'hybrid style.' In a close stylistic analysis of the narrative voice in Burgundian Chivalric Biography known as Livre des faits de messire Jacques de Lalaing, Brown-Grant (2011) discussed the function of the "relative frequencies of the first-person singular and plural voice and of second-person plural voice" in the construction of the biographer's voice as author and at the same time a "trustworthy informant."

For Sinclair, 'textual voices' is a continuum where the 'voice' is in constant interplay with the speaking subject that may take up the role of the author, narrator, and protagonist, as in the case of Jean Froissart's dits amoureux (Sinclair, 2011). The idea of multiple narrative voices as a continuum resembles what Buchholz (2009) calls "morphing metaphor," a term she borrowed from Ryan's essay "Cyberage Narratology," which proposes "morphing" as a metaphor that allows for flexibility. Buchholz extends Ryan's morphing metaphor further in her work by using it as a method to explain the "process of shifting textual voices within third-person narratives" (Buchholz, 2009, p. 200). Reflecting on 'voice within a morphing metaphor,' Buchholz explains how morphing allows "narrators an infinite fluidity, whether it is to become the voice of their character, to appear as

the authors endowed with creative authority, to maintain distance and invisibility, or any combination in between" (Buchholz, 2009, p. 217).

Although these observations emerge from the analysis of Western-based perspectives, they offer a useful framework for examining voice in Negrense queer panalaysayon. While panalaysayon is an oral and localized form, it similarly demonstrates layered and shifting voices. A close reading of the narratives, following structural cues (Riessman, 2005, p. 3) of the panalaysayon, reveals the presence of more than one voice, shifting from time to time throughout the text – most notably in the narrators' use of "ako (I)" and "ikaw (you)" voices. However, my analysis focuses only on the narrators' authorial self, or what Genette (1988) calls 'narrative person,' examining how the use of ako-ikaw narration contributes to shin building up the narrative structure of the queer panalaysayon as its own dominant narrative identity. Here, 'authorial self' is understood as 'narrator-as-author,' whose narrative presence is contained within the panalaysayon itself. Both the ako and ikaw voices are direct and indirect references to the 'authorial self' or 'narrative person.' Viewed from the perspective of queer formalism, the ako-ikaw voice suggests "queer capacities" which do not necessarily "abjure or ignore" (Getsy, 2017, p. 254) form and content in the tradition of formalism and structuralism, but rather redirect the interest in looking at the Negrense queer panalaysayon toward discovering new dynamics in structure that might help examine ways in which the ako-ikaw narrative voice might take queer forms. In short, these queer capacities are alternative pathways of interpretation; thus, challenging the formal reading of text by "locat[ing] the suspensions and incoherences of gender-and sexual-identities in the problematics of formal elements […]" (Savoy, 2003, p. 9).

Specifically, when examining the ako-ikaw narration as a potential rendition of the queer structure of the panalaysayon, I focus my analysis of the ako-ikaw voice in two parts: the "ako" voice, which represents the visible self, and the "ikaw" voice, which represents the alter ego. This dual voice—interpreted here as a form of 'queer capacity'—is not positioned in opposition to other frameworks of multiple-voice narratives, such as the collective narrator, hybrid style, continuum, or morphing metaphor, which are often framed outside queer paradigms. Instead, the study offers an alternative, suggestive (but not prescriptive) reading of the ako-ikaw voice through the lens of queer formalism. As Rohy and Garrett (2018) argue, "queerness is excluded from or denigrated by conventional narrative forms" (p. 169). In this context, the Negrense queer panalaysayon is approached as a narrative text that asserts space for queer storytelling. The ako-ikaw voice is thus explored, how it embodies queer capacities—those that refuse conformity, blur boundaries,

subvert narrative intention, and disrupt the supposed meaning of form (Getsy, 2017).

Ako (I) as the Visible Self

In locating these queer capacities in the ako-ikaw narration, the study first closely examined the ako voice and the meanings it generated when framed within queer formalism. After going through all the panalaysayon as shared by the participants, I noticed that all the autobionarratives seemed to fit a common pattern: these followed a chronological narration, which often began with the account of the narrators' earliest life experiences (childhood/teenage years) then moved on chronologically to the most recent pertinent memory of their lived realities that they could retrieve and include in the spontaneous telling of their respective life stories. Moreover, the pattern includes the participant narrators recounting their panalaysayon using the first-person point of view, which is an essential and conventional element of 'oral narratives of personal experiences' (Riessman, 2005, p. 2). Such centering on the ako voice emphasizes the 'self' as the narrators who account for events in their lives, thereby making the ako an 'embodied' voice that echoes the lived experiences available for narration and narrative themselves (Menary, 2008).

At the introductory portion of all the panalaysayon presented in this study, I also noted that each narrator's use of the ako voice compellingly illustrates authorial ownership of one's lived experiences. The panalaysayon being a narrative of ownership or "belonging" then demonstrates this ako voice as an act of direct self-presenting to establish a sense of 'selfhood' through which the narrators can better see themselves as participants in and bearers of their own story. Here, each narrator directly presents themselves in the narrative as the first-person voice, acting as the visible self. In the following excerpts from the shared panalaysayon, it is easily observable how the narrators open their stories with the ako (or its shortened variant 'ko) voice as a tool to "articulate [and] demonstrate this belonging" (Shuman, 2015) or ownership of the narrative.

In Blue's panalaysayon, the use of the 'ko voice implies the narrator's embrace of his own childhood experiences. His prevailing use of 'ko transports Blue back to that point in his life where he clearly relives a personal and shared experience of economic struggle. The use of first-person plural nominative kami (we) and of possessive namon (our) further suggests these 'experiences of belonging,' indicating that Blue himself was a participant in such experiences that are both his own alone and those of his family, as

could be gleaned from an excerpt in his own recollection:

> Well, nang syempre ginbata ko sa typical nga pigado nga pamilya ang struggle ara gid na ya. Ang challenge dira kon paano ko mabuhi halin sa isa ka adlaw nga ma-survive ko subong, tomorrow lain naman nga challenge. So, amo na sya ang cycle sang life namon. The time nga naga-eskwela kami high school kag naga… naga-start kami mag-dream nga tani makalab-ot kami sa handom nga malab-ot sa ulihi […] [Well, of course, I was born and raised in a typical Filipino family that struggled to cope with life financially. The challenge was to figure out how I could survive on a daily basis. This was our reality as a family. We mostly experienced this kind of life when we reached high school, around the time when we started to build our dreams.] (Blue)

This sense of 'belonging' is also evident in Green's panalaysayon, wherein a strong connection between the narrator and his own early life experiences is indicated by the sole use of the 'ako' voice, suggesting that the story is truly his and he, in turn, belongs to that window of experience. Green's meaningful use of ako evokes a relatively positive teenage experience in a familial space where his sexual identity was acknowledged, despite him not coming out to his family:

> Masiling ko nga indi gid ako out gid sa akon family, before, kay wala gid siling nga naghambal ko sa ila nga amo ko ni, nga amo ni akon nga identity, nga amo ni gusto ko. Wala. Pero sila ya kabalo na kon ano ko … daw ka balo na kon sin-o ko […] [I can say that I never came out to my family because I cannot recall a time that I directly told them I was gay or that it was my sexual identity, or that it was what I really wanted for myself. There was never really an instance. But I know that my family already had an idea about my sexuality.] (Green)

Similarly, in Indigo's panalaysayon, the narrator's use of ako, 'ko, akon (possessive my/mine) in his introduction reveals the presence of the embodied self as a lived experience. The use of first-person narrative further reinforces Indigo's light-hearted but significant telling of her childhood experience, a part of her upbringing wherein she had already clearly recognized her identity:

> "Ako gamay palang gid ko ya kabalo na gid ko ya, siguro indi ko maintyendihan nga amo na kona pero sa parents ko nakita na nila…

> elementary pa lang […]" (Indigo) [I already knew my sexual preference while I was still young. Perhaps being young then, I couldn't think of a word to describe who I was, but my parents already had an inkling of my [sexual] identity. My own discovery started as early as when I was still in the elementary grades.] (Indigo)

In Roy's panalaysayon, the narrator's use of the 'ko, ako, akon (mine) voice as first-person narration at the start verbalizes his authentic presence in that particular segment of his life story being recounted. The 'ko/akon voice in the introduction expresses Roy's unforgettable childhood experience in which his sexual identity was suppressed by his parents, especially his father, who redirected his attention away from his personal interests in their attempt to "repair" his identity:

> Elementary to high school nag sakristan ko kay syempre ang gina-inculcate sang parents ko sa mind ko nga sala ang amo ni, sala ang amo na. So dapat ma-serve ko sa church para maluwas ko kuno sa kasal-anan… Then sang gaamat-amat na tubo akon panimuot […] sang nakapaminsar na ko bala nga daw gina kuha sa akon ang akon gusto sang nag-decide ko nga maghalin sa church […]" (Roy) [I served as an acolyte in the church from elementary to high school because my parents inculcated in me that it's wrong to be gay. So, to correct myself, I heeded their advice to serve in the church to gain salvation. But as I grew mature and realized that what I wanted for myself was being taken away, I decided to quit serving the church as an altar boy.] (Roy)

On the other hand, the 'ko voice in Violet's panalaysayon demonstrates the narrator's experience of belonging in her own childhood, which she vividly describes as a defining moment in her life and her identity:

> Feel ko babaye na gid ko ya kay sang time nga bata pa lang ko ara ko sa balay daw mga gamit bala sang utod ko nga babaye gina gamit-gamit ko like mga dress, mga lipstick, amo na bala para nga mangin babaye lang. Tapos nga amo ng nag eskwela ko sang elementary tapos inang may na amo na may na ano ko […] (Violet) [I knew I was a girl while still at a very young age. As a child I wore my sisters' dresses and used their lipsticks so I would look like them. This started when I was in the elementary grades.] (Violet)

Each of the textual segments presented above seems to suggest that

the ako voice does more than comply with the conventional element of oral autobiographical narratives, where the "I" assumes the role of the witness. The possibility of the ako voice taking on another role – that of being a "visible self" – alongside being a self-witness is compelled by the narrators' sense of 'belonging' in their own story, which is palpable in each of the illustrative excerpts. Atkins suggests that being visible means the narrator, as the protagonist/central character in the panalaysayon, "should be understood in terms of embodied consciousness and selfhood" (cited in Menary, 2008, p. 76). The idea here is that when the narrators become visible in their own lived experiences, the storytelling likewise becomes a spontaneous "act of freedom," which cannot be said when one is simply self-witnessing. Such personal liberation manifests itself as the narrators recount their life story unrehearsed or in an event called the "phenomenon of extempore storytelling" (Domecka et al., 2012, p. 23). In conveying their respective life narratives without preparation, narrators rely heavily on the self as a compass that directs the ako voice where to begin or to end the narratives and how to tell them. In short, the ako voice needs to be "visible" in order to give the 'narrator as central figure' (Menary, 2008) the authority to "access freely to a store of event representation in his or her biographical memory" (Labov, 2006, p. 3). This implies that by being visible in their lived experiences, the narrators skew the common notion of the narrative voice as a mere self-witness. Instead, they present a fresh take on the narrative voice as an embodied visible self.

My stance regarding the ako voice as a visible self is grounded on the notion that queer protagonists should not only be self-witnesses but also be visible in their own stories. There is a plethora of literary narratives featuring queer characters, but just because these queer characters adopt a particular narrative voice in those stories does not mean they are already visible in the narratives themselves. They might assume the voice of a self-witness, but not automatically that of a visible self. For example, in their queer reading of Will & Grace, a popular U.S. sitcom, Battles and Hilton-Morrow (2002) examine a particular coming-out episode in which Grace discovers Will's sexuality. This creates tension between the two protagonists, resulting in Grace's breakdown and estrangement from Will.' For Battles and Hilton-Morrow, the episode places too much emphasis on Grace's dilemma in dealing with the situation, stealing Will's moment to confront his own sexuality. This is a totally sensible reading given that queerness is a subject that "is excluded from or denigrated by conventional narrative forms," or in other words, queer people "struggle to appropriate narrative for their own ends" (Rohy & Garett, 2018, p. 169) in their own who are not only present

narrative. Such problematization of queer presence in queer narratives allows for the exteriorization of the unseen "forms of hostile narrativization" of queer characters, where they are stereotypically relegated to demoralizing and unfair portrayals (p. 171). This unfair treatment of the queer subject necessitates the production of more queer texts featuring queer characters observers but also present and visible in their own stories.

To further illustrate the distinction between "I" as self-witness (present-observer) and "I" as visible-self (present-participant), I will discuss narrative voice in relation to queer portrayals. Most queer narratives tend to portray queer protagonists or characters through the normative heterosexual gaze; thus, they are mostly confined to gendered stereotypes and sexual depiction (Seif, 2017) or characterizations that do not speak of their own truths due to the influence of "old, harmful tropes" that fail to reflect "the diversity of the community" (Cook,2008, p. 38). Despite the "I" narration that should have given queer protagonists/characters a voice of their own, these narratives have instead narrowed their role to that of mere observers/witnesses in their own story, subtly stripping them of their visibility in a narrative space that is supposedly theirs. The "I" as witness/observer therefore blurs its self-referentiality because, although it implies " presence' in the narrative, it does not embody a closer-to-life rendition of the narrated queer subject. This is so because, as a witness/observer, a narrator only "recounts what [she] or he observes, believes, or knows" (Marsen, 2004, p. 226). In other words, the "I" as observer, then, lacks "active subjectivity" and "intentionalities" (Martinez, 2011, p. 228) which are necessary "in narrating the muted sociality of queerness or in making visible the shared quality of queer experience [and] convey[ing] an intimate sense of interiority of [queer] characters" (p. 229).

Meanwhile, the "I" as the visible-self (present-participant), as Butler explains, "acts precisely to the extent that the [queer narrator] is constituted as an actor" (cited in Magnus, 2006, p. 87). The "I' as present-participant becomes the performative representation of queer lived experience in their own narrative, turning their experience to be more tangible as they, as Foucault puts it, "step forward and speak, [and] make the difficult confession of what they were" (cited in Stephenson, 2000, p. 5). As participant in their own narrative, an actor narrator must be self-aware of who is "personally accountable for the [narrative's] truth value (Marsen, 2004, p. 226). In this context, the queer narrators as present-participants not only narrate their life, but also become the embodied narrative themselves, which "makes more sense of the [queerselves] as complex biological, historical, and social beings whose experiences and actions are ready for narration" (Menary,

2008, pp. 63-64).

The fact that the Negrense queer participants "spoke their own truths" regarding their individual sexual orientations in the excerpts quoted above and chose to share with honesty and conviction private details connected to their moments of realization indicated their ownership of that experience. For instance:

> *Feel ko babaye na gid ko ya kay sang time nga bata pa lang ko ara ko sa balay daw mga gamit bala sang utod ko nga babaye gina gamit-gamit ko like mga dress, mga lipstick, amo na bala para nga mangin babaye lang.* [I knew I was a girl while still at a very young age. As a child I wore my sisters' dresses and used their lipsticks so I would look like them.] (Violet)

> *Then sang gaamat-amat na tubo akon panimuot* […] sang nakapaminsar na ko bala nga daw gina kuha sa akon ang akon gusto sang nag-decide ko nga maghalin sa church […] [But as I grew more mature and realized that what I wanted for myself was being taken away, I decided to quit serving the church as an altar boy.] (Roy)

It can not be discounted, however, that the narrators' awareness of my shared identity as a member of the queer community may have influenced the way their stories were told. This shared positionality likely encouraged them to be more than self-witnesses or present observers of their own narratives; instead, they became present-visible or present-participants—speaking not only for themselves but also to me—as someone who could carry their stories forward.

Ikaw (You) as the Alter Self

The noticeable shift in the narrative voice from ako to ikaw point of view cannot be ignored in the shared panalaysayon. Its recurring presence in the texts invites new ways of looking at the function(s) of the you voice in the Negrense queer panalaysayon, in addition to its traditional narrative role.

The use of the 'you' voice in the narratives manifests shifts that occur in random fragments throughout the panalaysayon, disrupting the spontaneous flow of the 'ako' voice. Scholarship on narrative studies reveals that the use of you mainly suggests an invitation to the reader/listener "to place [herself or] himself in the position of the writer [or narrator]" implying that "anyone who who places [herself or] himself [in such position] will

witness the identical scene or perform the same action" (Morrissette, 1965, p. 2). Likewise, the multiple-role perspective proposed by Koven (2002) involves the speaker in narratives of personal experience as someone who can tell their story spontaneously, and in doing so, they tend to simultaneously shift between or among multiple perspectives. One of these perspectives is Labov's (2006) idea of the "self" as a generalized other, which is typically narrated using the "you" point of view.

In the Negrense queer panalaysayon, however, the presence of the ikaw voice seems to suggest an alter self that might be interpreted as the 'gaze' the narrators direct upon the 'self' but only through an alternative medium. As established from the gathered texts, the enunciatory manifestation of this shift from the ako voice typically occurs when narrators recount a negative experience in their lives. The narrative shift recurrences in the panalaysayon, therefore, further seemingly indicate that the use of the ikaw voice as an alter self reinforces the ako voice as the visible self to express points in the narrators' past that were deeply emotional or life circumstances that rendered them vulnerable, confused, or suppressed. In this sense, by invoking the ikaw voice, the narrators become 'active agents who recall those events that others have suppressed. 'The following textual segments from the participants' panalaysayon articulate these experiences of vulnerability, confusion, or suppression through the intermittent occurrences of the ikaw voice as an alternative subject-narrator.

In a segment of Blue's panel discussion, the narrator resorted to a noticeable shift in the narrative voice as he recalled a negative experience from his past. He seemed to rely on his alter self through the 'ka/'mo voice to tell this experience. Being independent from his family for the first time, Blue navigated his sexuality via virtual spaces afforded by different gay dating applications (apps) that provided him the opportunity to hook up with various men. However, his fear of contracting HIV and worry that his family might discover his identity made him cautious about going out on dates with just anyone. His desire to explore his sexuality, contending with his fear of social stigma, apparently suppressed his sexual freedom. Blue articulated this distressing experience by deploying the 'ka/'mo/imo voice in his narration:

> *Nang, may mga preference ka na, may mga standard ka na nga okay lang ko makipag-mingle sa iya pero indi gid ko magkwan especially kon makita mo nga indi sya bala kaaya-aya, nga indi sya pasok sa imo nga criteria.* [You tend to stick to a certain preference or standard when dating a guy. I'm okay to socialize with a guy, but I won't go out with him especially when you don't feel safe with him; that he is someone who doesn't meet your criteria.] (Blue)

This shift in the 'ka/'mo/imo voice is also evident in Roy's panalaysayon when he shared a particular moment in his past involving his father forcing him to join in male stereotypical activities in his attempt to 'repair' Roy's identity. Such an act robbed Roy of his sexual freedom. The verbalization of this negative experience causes the shift of the personal narrative voice to an alter self:

> *Galing kay daw ginakontrol pa sang parents ko kay syempre paintrahon ka nila sa mga panglalaki nga hampang, like paintrahon ka nila sa taekwondo para mag straight ka. Kag sa amo man nga rason kon ngaa ginpasakristan man ko nila kay basi palang ma ano, madula ang pagkaagi ko* […] [The controlling home environment created by my parents, especially my father, like making you join in taekwondo [typical male sports] to make you straight. That was also their reason why they forced me to become an altar boy.] (Roy)

This alter self-narrative voice can also be heard in Green's panalaysayon, particularly when the narrator brings a previous affective experience back to the present. The apparent shift in the narrative voice portrays a vulnerable image of a person veiled in self-denial as he stood face-to-face with HIV. In here, the 'ka/'mo voice shows the presence of an alternative subject-narrator's voice:

> *Tapos duman ko okay lang. Kay damo man ga support sa akon, pero ti syempre deep inside may ara gid ya eh. May gina batyag gid ka ya. Syempre indi KA pagid maka-ako sa self mo nga amo na* […] [Then I thought I was okay because many were showing me their concern. But deep inside there was still sadness because you were ill (have HIV). You still couldn't totally accept the fact that you're going through all this.] (Green)

The alternative subject-narrator is likewise present in Indigo's panalaysaon as she recalls her struggle in trying to reconcile the contradictory perceptions between those of her accepting parents and those of other people toward her as a lesbian. Indigo's tendency to take an alter self when reliving this experience is shown through her use of the 'ka voice:

> *Gusto ko maghibi sa ila ni mama. Daw gapraning ka bala haw nga basi bala ginamayumayuhan lang ka nila. Kay nagtatak ang hambal sang mama sang miga ko mo. Kay halin sang una wala gid ka kabatyag nga naghambal sila nga lain na, nga gin-stop ko nila, nga matadlong ko. Wala ko na na-experience. Pero sa to nga time nag-doubt ka sa ila. Sakit, sakit gid ya.* (Indigo) [I wanted to cry to them, especially to my mother. As if [you're] getting paranoid, thinking that what my girlfriend's mother said might be

true. But, at the same time, I was fighting against such emotion because there never was an instance in my life when my family said anything against my sexuality. However, at that time you doubted your family. It was really a painful experience.] (Indigo)

In Violet's panalaysayon, the narrator invoked the alter self to give voice to her feeling of utter vulnerability at the time when her body was undergoing physiological changes due to her hormonal therapy. Through the imo/'mo voice, Violet expresses this feeling of vulnerability:

Pero sang ga hormones ko wala na ko ya gakagwaan. Wala na ko gaka-utgan. Syempre guro kay ang imo nga hormones ginahimo na nga iya ka babaye... Wala na erection, wala na gakagwaan. Syempre ang lalaki mo nga hormones, ginahimo nya pa nga babaye mo…Bi mag lantaw ko sang mga scandal-scandal, wala na ko na ya gaka-utgan. [When I started taking hormonal pills, I was no longer ejaculating, neither did I get an erection. Perhaps your male hormones were reacting to the pills. There's no more erection because your maleness was blocked by the hormonal pill. Even when I watched porn, I no longer had an erection/arousal.] (Violet)

To exteriorize the negative experiences that caused friction in their relationship with the world, the five narrators of the Negrense queer panalaysayon resorted to a (re)imagined self or the alter ego through the "ikaw" voice. In the process of divulging 'affective experiences,' including what Campbell describes as "all ascriptions of pain" (cited in Menary, 2008, p. 169), into the narrative surface, the narrators invoked the presence of the ikaw voice not to detach the self from such experience, but to stand as the ako voice's reimagined stronger alter self that is more able to verbalize painful experiences. Affective experiences such as 'emotional pains' afflict queer individuals, especially the queer youths, when they are 'silenced or denied' (Asakura, 2017, p. 6) a chance to express themselves. Their use of the ikaw voice, thus, enables the Negrense queer to relive their negative or painful experiences in their own terms. How the 'ikaw' voice emerges as an alter ego could be better explained in the context of queer formalism. Consistent with the ako voice's opening up a space for 'queer capacities,' the ikaw voice should neither be viewed as "generalized other," nor simply an invitation for "empathic response." Instead, it should also be understood from queer formalist view as the indirect self-presentation triggered by what Sedgwick describes as the "suspensions and incoherencies" that tilt the ako voice "from its possible definitional role,"

thus shifting the said voice's intended function (cited in Anderson, 2000). The visible self, being the possible definitional role of the ako voice, feels the tension every time there is an urge, opportunity, or reason to bring painful experiences to the surface of the narrative. The second-person 'ikaw' voice, then, becomes helpful in verbalizing such affective experiences, offering an alternative space for self-expression, since the 'ako-ikaw' voice emanates from a singular self, albeit with dual roles—visible and alter. This is so because the visible self as the "personal identity" (Hongladarom, 2011) cannot be taken as a separate subject from its alter self.

Ako–Ikaw Voice Shaping the Panalaysayon's Queer Counternarrative Structure

The narrators' nonconventional use of the ako-ikaw voice, which enabled them to foreground their visible self and alter self alternately as they recounted their queer experiences, could be considered as "queer counternarrative," providing the Negrense queer panalaysayon its structure in the process. The narrative structure in this study refers to how the panalaysayon is told, given that it is an oral autobiography or self-narrative. The employment of the ako-ikaw voice is a "queer counternarrative," according to Getsy (2017), as it is "relational, particular, and contingent" (p. 255) in relation to the Negrense queer panalaysayon. Thus, the panalaysayon's counternarrative structure has emerged from the intercourse of voices: ako, which stays loyal to the traditional narrative norm, and ikaw, which is seen as a queerization of such tradition. This means that the panalaysayon conforms to the traditional narrative at first, with all five narrators choosing to recall their growing awareness of their sexual identity as the starting point (Exposition) of their narrative. Using the ako voice, they all claimed to have become aware of their sexual orientation/identity (identity-affirming experience) during their elementary grade years, and the few events they recounted afterwards were how they navigated their awareness of such identity. At this point, their narrative conforms to Aristotle's and Freytag's plot frameworks, as could be gleaned in the following excerpts:

> *Ako gamay palang gid ko ya kabalo na gid ko ya, siguro indi ko maintyendihan nga amo na ko na pero sa parents ko nakita na nila… elementary pa lang* […] [I knew my sexual preference while I was still young. Perhaps being young, I couldn't think of a word to describe who I was, but my parents already had an inkling of my sexual identity. My own discovery started as early as when I was

still in the elementary grades.] (Indigo)

Feel ko babaye na gid ko ya kay sang time nga bata pa lang ko ara ko sa balay daw mga gamit bala sang utod ko nga babaye gina gamit-gamit ko like mga dress, mga lipstick, amo na bala para nga mangin babaye lang. Tapos nga amo ng nag eskwela ko sang elementary tapos ng may na amo na may na ano ko […]. [I knew I was a girld while still at a very young age. As a child I wore my sisters' dresses and used their lipsticks so I would look like them. This started when I was in the elementary grades.] (Violet)

Elementary to high school nag sakristan ko kay syempre ang gina-inculcate sang parents ko sa mind ko nga sala ang amo ni, sala ang amo na. So dapat ma-serve ko sa church para maluwas ko kuno sa kasal-anan… Then sang gaamat-amat na tubo akon panimuot […] *sang nakapaminsar na ko bala nga daw gina kuha sa akon ang akon gusto sang nag-decide ko nga maghalin sa church* […]. [I served as an acolyte in the church from elementary to high school because my parents inculcated in me that it's wrong to be gay. So, to correct myself, I heeded their advice to serve in the church to gain salvation. But as I grew more mature and realized that what I wanted for myself was being taken away, I decided to quit serving the church as an altar boy.] (Roy)

It is, however, worth noting that the Exposition for the participants' narratives is already the introduction of the main Complication in their life stories, as well, since their awareness of their sexual orientation would prove to be the main issue they needed to grapple with in their daily realities, constantly. This merging of the Exposition and the Complication diverges from the traditional plot structure, which stipulates that the Rising Action that follows the Exposition should be the point where the story's complication emerges. This means that the panalaysayon narrative conflates the beginning and the middle parts of the narrative, going against Aristotle's requirement that the two parts should be separate from each other. It is instead the shift in the narrators' voice (initial employment of the ikaw/ka voice) that signals the intensification of the complication as the narrators recounted distressing or identity-negating experiences related to their queerness (non-acceptance by family members, discrimination by others):

Galing kay daw ginakontrol pa sang parents ko kay syempre paintrahon ka nila sa mga panglalaki nga hampang, like paintrahon

> ko nila sa taekwondo para mag straight ka. Kag sa amo man nga rason kon ngaa ginpasakristan man ko nila kay basi palang ma ano, madula ang pagkaagi ko […]. [The controlling home environment created by my parents, especially my father, like making you join in taekwondo (typical male sports) to make you straight. That was also their reason they forced me to become an altar boy.] (Roy)

> *Gusto ko maghibi sa ila ni mama. Daw gapraning ka bala haw nga basi bala ginamayumayuhan lang ka nila. Kay nagtatak ang hambal sang mama sang miga ko mo. Kay halin sang una wala gid ko kabatyag nga naghambal sila nga lain na, nga gin-stop ko nila, nga matadlong ko. Wala ko na na-experience. Pero sa to nga time nag-doubt ka sa ila. Sakit, sakit gid ya*. [I wanted to cry to them, especially to my mother. As if you're getting paranoid, thinking that what my girlfriend's mother said might be true. But, at the same time, I was fighting against such emotion because there never was an instance in my life when my family said anything against my sexuality. However, at that time you doubted your family. It was really a painful experience.] (Indigo)

Throughout each participant's panalaysayon, the shifting of the narrative voice from the ako voice to the ikaw voice is, thus, a distinguishable pattern indicating the type of event being recalled: the ako voice for identity-affirming experiences, and the ikaw voice for identity-negating situations. Like the excerpts from Roy's and Indigo's narrations above, the following excerpt from Green's narration further illustrates this pattern shift in the narrative voice, juxtaposing the positive and negative life events:

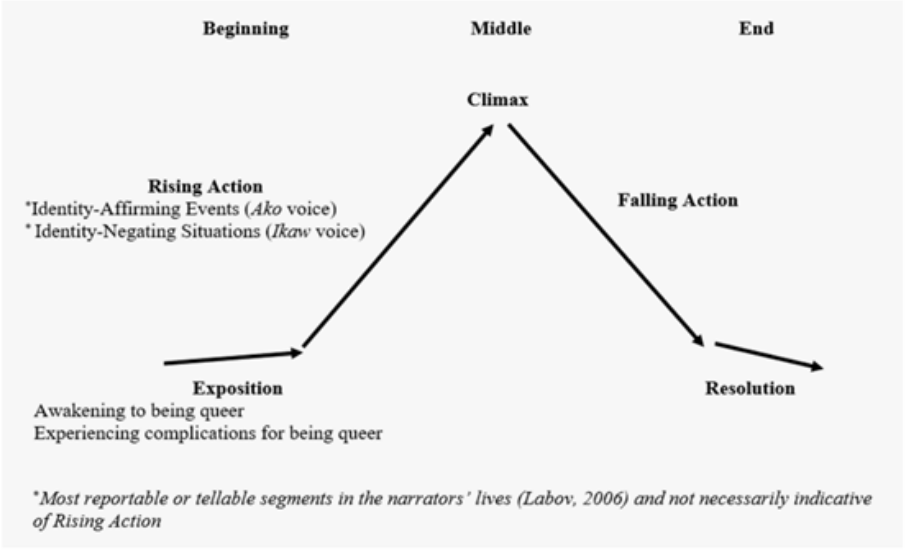
> *Tapos duman ko okay lang. Kay damo man ga support sa akon, pero ti syempre deep inside may ara gid ya eh. May gina batyag gid ka ya. Syempre indi ka pagid maka-ako sa self mo nga amo na* […]. [Then I thought I was okay because many were showing me their concern. But deep inside there was still sadness because you were ill (have HIV). You still couldn't totally accept the fact that you're going through all this.] (Green)

The tendency to resort to nonconventional narrative voice(s) by the narrators in their individual panalaysayon seems to suggest queering of form – the tendency to go beyond the "straightforward depictions" or the conventions of traditional forms (Doyle & Getsy, 2013), hence, becoming a queer counternarrative. This veering away from the norm, however, should not be viewed as a total departure from "content and context," (p. 255)

but rather as an "intercourse of forms" wherein the unconventional and unnatural "forms of living as queer […] take relationality as the matrix in which difference and defiance become manifest" (p. 254). Thus, the attempt to trace the queer panalaysayon's narrative structure at this juncture presents a plot that seems to be at a standstill, with no sign of the events moving on to the next stage (Climax; Middle) based on the traditional narrative structure. It is obvious then that the Negrense queer panalaysayon structure does not fit the traditional narrative framework. This is, however, understandable given that the narrators' life stories are still ongoing (hence the emergent structure), so the participants are unable to reflect whether they have already experienced their peak in terms of their queerness or are already nearing the end of their own life story (Resolution; End). For comparative purposes, below is an attempt to plot the Negrense queer narrative using the traditional narrative structure, which is obviously not the right model to employ.

Figure 1

Negrense Queer Panalaysayon Narrative Structure (Framework based on Aristotle's Basic Plot Structure and Freytag's Triangle



In explaining how the ako-ikaw voice shapes the panalaysayon's structure, Goodson's (2012) view proves useful: he explains that a narrative draws from the structural contexts of the narrator's life, which contributes to the "understanding of the social construction of each person's subjectivity" (p. 30).

The poetics of voice in the Negrense queer panalaysayon, therefore, manifests this subjectivity in relation to structure. The emergent narrative

structure of the panalaysayon is grounded on the narrative voice itself—shaped by the narrators' lived experience and at the same time embodying those experiences. In other words, it is through the narrators' life's contexts (e.g., struggles tied to being queer) that they come to experience what Lanser calls the "urgency of coming to voice," such as the use of the ikaw voice, which allows their once-silenced self to challenge the dominant narrative norms and transform the voice of the panalaysayon into an image of "identity and power" (Lanser, 1992, p. 3).

Lastly, the ako-ikaw voice as queer counternarrative might be seen as an action, an activity, or an event that is contingent upon the context in which the individual panalaysayon was built upon – fractions of lives of the Negrense queers. In this sense, the panalaysayon's voice, as an action or activity, attempts to capture the most 'reportable or tellable' (Labov, 2006) segments in the narrators' lives by sequencing them into a coherent whole. This narrative sequence, which contributes to the panalaysayon's structure, is glued together through the "voice of the speaker conveying the story" (Edwards, 2019, p. 270). In voicing events, Edwards (2019) mentioned that a narrative must contain at least "a sequence of events and a speaker or voice" (p. 269). In the panalaysayon, the dynamics of these narrative features are evident in the shifting of the ako-ikaw voices to contrast one narrative episode from another.

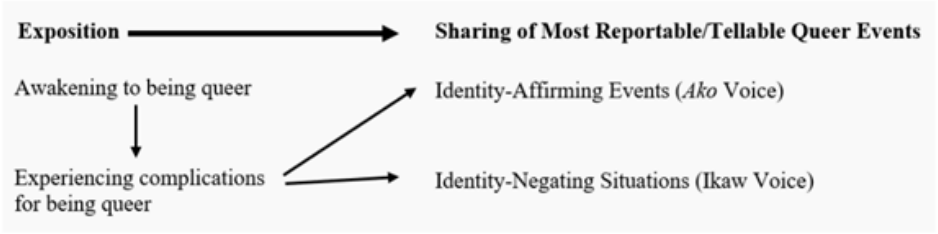
Despite the counternarrative structure of the Negrense queer panalaysayon, characterized by its layered use of the ako-ikaw voices within the narrative itself, it does not completely depart from the core elements of self-narrative. As Kind (cited in Heersmink, 2018) outlines, these include the chronological stream of life events, selective inclusion of relevant experiences at the time of narration, the consistent use of the first-person "I" voice, and the connection between events and the narrator's subjective experience. Although the counternarrative may be seen as queer form, the panalaysayon remains a "sustainable self-narrative" that echoes "relevant facts about the [narrators'] subjective experience, such as one's emotions, thoughts, or intentions" (Leuenberger, 2020, p. 5). Moreover, such counternarrative structure of the panalaysayon is a process of "sense making" which is crucial in the narrators' self-narrativization of "memories" that when narrated turn into "a vehicle to radically reimagine [queer narrators'] limited situations as a source of hope and possibilities, and [their] subjugation and marginalization as a path to freedom" (Rojas & Liou, 2023).

Considering the above discussion, the following is a more appropriate diagrammatic rendering – instead of the traditional narrative structure as shown in Figure 1 – of the emergent (still developing since the life stories are

not yet completed) Negrense queer panalaysayon structure based on the participants' self-narratives:

Figure 2

Negrense Queer Panalaysayon Counternarrative Structure (Based on Self-Narrative Model)



The Negrense queer panalaysayon is contextualized in this study to refer to an oral life narrative or lived experience shared by five self-identified queer individuals from different parts of Negros Occidental. These oral autobionarratives were gathered through a life story approach, employing pakikipagkuwentuhan (conversational storytelling), and were analyzed using queer theory—specifically queer formalism—to explore their emergent structure.

As a potential literary text, the Negrense queer panalaysayon foregrounds narrative voice as central to the construction of counternarrative structure—one that offers an alternative route to dominant, heteronormative storytelling. A defining feature of this counternarrative is its form, structured around the narrators' nonconventional use of the ako-ikaw voice to alternately foreground their visible self and alter self. Structuring their narrative this way allows the narrators to (re)claim visibility within their own stories. In this narrative space, they have often been rendered as passive observers rather than active participants. Such positioning typically results from "straightforward depictions" that follow conventional forms, in which queer lives are simplified, backgrounded, or framed through heteronormative lenses.

In contrast, the panalaysayon makes visible the narrative agency of queer narrators, particularly through its emergent structure. Given that these are unfinished life stories, the Negrense queer panalaysayon departs from traditional narrative arcs, which typically have a clear beginning, middle, and end. Instead, it presents only a beginning, with the rest of the story still unfolding. Rather than conforming to fixed plotlines, the panalaysayon aligns more closely with the Self-Narrative Model, which emphasizes the narrators' agency in selecting life events to be narrated and shaping how

those are conveyed through either the ako voice or the ikaw voice. It unfolds in two stages: first, an exposition revealing the narrator's awakening to being queer (ako voice) and, shortly afterwards, their experiencing complications for being queer (ikaw voice); second, the sharing of most tellable queer experiences, marked by both affirming (ako) and negating (ikaw) moments. What emerges, then, is not simply a collection of queer lived experiences, but a hybrid form—oral, autobiographical, and potentially counternarrative that gestures toward new ways of understanding queer storytelling within provincial and oral traditions. This study does not seek to challenge or oppose traditional narrative models; instead, it offers an alternative approach to queer narratives through the lens of panalaysayon. In this context, queer formalism proves especially useful, as it draws attention to how narrative form—particularly the shifting use of ako and ikaw voices—reveals the dynamic relationship between queer subjectivity and storytelling structure. The Negrense queer panalaysayon, then, suggests a form of narrative authorship where queer storytellers/narrators claim control over how their stories are structured, told, and made meaningful within their own terms.

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NOTES SECTION

Mobilizing Communities for Mangrove Reforestation in South Negros: Science- and Socio-cultural-based Approaches to Conservation and Management

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Abstract

Mangroves are vital ecosystems that play a crucial role in climate change mitigation by sequestering significant amounts of carbon and in climate change adaptation by safeguarding coastlines from erosion and extreme weather events. Mangrove forests in South Negros cover more than 1,000 ha, which constitutes less than 1% of the total land area of the 11 municipalities, and have very low regeneration potential. The Silliman University – GXI Reforestation Project aims to plant 500,000 seedlings of mangrove and beach forest species in 78 hectares located in five municipalities in Negros Oriental, and to monitor the rate of carbon sequestration in 1- to 5-year-old seedlings. The project uses integrated science and sociocultural-based approaches for mangrove conservation and management, including vulnerability assessments, baseline surveys to determine the community structure of mangrove forests in planting sites, determination of baseline blue carbon in the sites, and capacity building and training for participating People's Organizations (POs). Currently, the project is working with 16 PO partners, serving a total of 210 PO beneficiaries, with 74.76% of them being female community members. As of September 2024, a total of 141,296 seedlings of mangrove and beach forest species have been planted, with an overall survival rate of 67.28%.

Keywords: mangrove restoration, community mobilization, South Negros, science-based approach, and socio-cultural approach

Introduction

The Philippines, where population density and economic activities are concentrated along its coastlines, was ranked the 9th most affected country by extreme weather events in 2020 (World Risk Report, 2020). The impacts of climate change in the country are evident through the increasing frequency and intensity of storms, heightened flooding, seawater intrusion, coastal erosion, and episodes of severe drought (Mendoza et al. 2014). According to a study by Yusuf and Francisco (2010), the country is among the top three in Southeast Asia most likely to be impacted by climate hazards, including floods, droughts, cyclones, and landslides. The country's vulnerability is further compounded by the Philippine economy's heavy reliance on climate-sensitive sectors, including agriculture, fisheries, and forestry. These sectorsare particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and shifting weather patterns, which threaten food security and economic stability (IPCC, 2019; FAO, 2021). Furthermore, the Philippines' exposure to multiple climate hazards, combined with limited adaptive capacity in rural communities, heightens the risk of economic losses and livelihood disruptions (World Bank, 2020).

Mangroves are essential ecosystems that play a pivotal role in mitigating climate change, possessing a global carbon stock that is significantly higher than that of tidal salt marshes, seagrasses, evergreen forests, and peat swamps (Wu et al. 2020; Alongi 2014; McLeod et al. 2011). By sequestering substantial amounts of carbon dioxide, they help reduce greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Additionally, mangroves provide numerous services and benefits such as buffering against coastal erosion, protecting shorelines, and supporting the livelihoods of coastal communities by serving as fishing grounds and essential nurseries for fish stocks. Despite their importance, the area occupied by mangroves has been declining annually worldwide, with varying status by country and region (UN, 2021). In South-East Asia, for example, mangroves have been destroyed at rates of between 0.41% and 0.71% per year (UN, 2021). Notably, the total mangrove area in the Philippines decreased by 10.5% from 1990 to 2010 (Long et al., 2014). The rapid decline of mangrove forests in the country occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, driven by government policies that promoted the expansion of aquaculture, specifically that of milkfish and shrimp (Calumpong 1994; White & De Leon 2004). In addition, the loss of mangrove forests can also be attributed to human population growth and the development of coastal zones in the country. These threats negatively impact the climate resilience

and food security of coastal communities.

Mangrove reforestation efforts in the Philippines have a long history, dating back over 100 years. Early projects around Manila Bay focused on planting Rhizophora species and Nypa fruticans (Primavera and Esteban 2008). Since then, various efforts and initiatives have been undertaken by both government and non-government organizations to address the and degradation of mangrove forests in the country. Reducing emissions and enhancing environmental conditions have become global priorities for fostering sustainable development and mitigating the negative impacts of global warming and climate change (Raihan 2023). Recently, more mangrove restoration efforts have been conducted in the Philippines as part of its commitment to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2021, aiming to reduce and avoid 75% of carbon emissions from 2020 to 2030 (Yap 2021). While some of these projects have seen success, others have not. Two key factors contributing to the failure of certain initiatives were the selection of species—often limited to Rhizophora species and focused on single-species planting—and site selection for mangrove reforestation (Calumpong and Cadiz 2012; Primavera and Esteban 2008). The long-term survival rates of these projects are generally low, ranging from 10% to 20% (Garcia et al. 2013; PrimaveraEsteban 2008).

Another key factor in the success of mangrove reforestation projects is the crucial role that community involvement plays in these initiatives (Gevaña et al., 2019; Pulhin et al., 2017; Garcia et al., 2013; Camacho et al., 2011). In the Philippines, only certain coastal communities near mangrove areas are aware of the value of these resources. Promoting community-based mangrove management fosters a sense of stewardship among local communities towards mangrove resources (Pulhin et al. 2017). Apart from the ecosystem services provided by mangrove forests to these communities, this ecosystem also offers potential livelihood opportunities through the creation of policies and programs that provide incentives to locals who heavily rely on these resources (Garcia et al. 2013). To address the degradation of mangroves and beach forests, an integrated management approach involving baseline studies, establishing partnerships and community participation, capacity building, ecosystem rehabilitation, and policy enforcement is essential.

The SU-GXI Reforestation in South Negros Project

Silliman University, through the Institute of Environmental and Marine Sciences, has partnered with GCash (GXI) through their GForest

initiative to plant one million mangrove and beach forest trees in South Negros. This initiative is implemented in two phases. For Phase 1, 78 hectares across five municipalities in South Negros Oriental will be reforested with half a million trees over a five-year period, while the other half a million trees will be planted in 100 hectares covering three municipalities in Negros Occidental. Additionally, the Project will track carbon storage in both aboveground and belowground plant components, as well as soil carbon, while monitoring the rate of carbon storage over five years. This project employs a multidisciplinary approach to mangrove reforestation, which involves academia, municipal or barangay local government units (M/B LGUs), and People's Organizations (POs).

Establishment of Baseline Information

In 2019, a baseline study conducted across 11 municipalities under the BFAR-USAID Fish Right Program (SNFRP) revealed that mangrove forests covered slightly over 1,000 hectares, accounting for less than 1% of the total land area within the project site. These mangroves were concentrated primarily in the municipalities from Zamboanguita to Cauayan (Calumpong et al. 2019, unpub.). The study identified 28 true mangrove species, including the endangered Camptostemon philippinensis found in Danjugan Island, Cauayan, and Tambobo Bay, Siaton. The estimated average carbon storage values—both aboveground and belowground—varied significantly across municipalities, reflecting the diverse carbon sequestration potential of these ecosystems.

As part of the same project, a Participatory Coastal and Fisheries Vulnerability Assessment (PCVA) and Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) planning exercise was conducted in 97 barangays across the 11 municipalities of Southern Negros. Using the Tool for Understanding Resilience in Fisheries (TURF) (MERF, 2013), local stakeholders—including members of M/B LGUs and POs—validated and scored the vulnerability of their barangays based on predefined thresholds. The assessment revealed varying degrees of vulnerability, with 29.9% of the barangays classified as highly vulnerable and 26.8% classified as having very high vulnerability. Conversely, only 9.28% of barangays were categorized as having very low vulnerability (Calumpong et al. 2021, unpub.). To address these vulnerabilities, ecosystem-based actions were developed to guide LGUs in implementing climate-adaptive measures. One key action identified was the restoration of coastal protection through mangrove rehabilitation using appropriate technologies.

Using the baseline data, potential sites were identified for Phase 1 of

the SU-GXI Reforestation Project in South Negros. Five municipalities—Zamboanguita, Siaton, Sta. Catalina, Bayawan, and Basay were selected for rehabilitation efforts. Site inspections were conducted to assess potential rehabilitation areas, gathering information on species composition, substrate types, soil carbon storage, the current extent of mangrove forests, and the presence of POs recognized by the LGU in the area. As part of the is working site validation process, collaboration with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) ensured that the selected planting sites were located on government land, helping to prevent potential land-use conflicts. This information enabled the SU-GXI Reforestation in South Negros Project to finalize the selection of planting sites, determine their exact size, identify the appropriate species to be planted in each area, and identify the PO partners implementing the reforestation project. Currently, the project with 16 different POs in 13 barangays in Negros Oriental (Table 1).

Table 1

Overview of Planting Sites, Total Area (hectares), and Target species for the SU-GXI Reforestation in South Negros Project

Municipality	Barangay	Site	ha	PO Partner	Species
Zamboanguita	Mayabon	Sitio Latason	3	Latason-Cabcab Fishermen Association (LACABFA)	*Avicennia marina, Avicennia lanata, Heritiera littoralis, Dolichandrone spathacea, Xylocarpus granatum, Sonneratia caseolaris, and Lumnitzera racemosa*
	Mayabon	Sitio Dumandan	2	Triple M Fishermen Association	*Avicennia marina, Avicennia lanata, Heritiera littoralis, Dolichandrone spathacea, Xylocarpus granatum, Sonneratia caseolaris, and Lumnitzera racemosa*
	Lutoban	Pulo	1	Basac-Malatapay People's Association (BASMAPA)	*Avicennia marina, Rhizophora stylosa, Bruguiera cylindrica,*
	Lutoban	Pulo	3	Lutoban Fisherfolks' Multipurpose Association (LUFMULA)	*Xylocarpus granatum, Sonneratia alba, and Lumnitzera racemosa*

Siaton	Si-it	Si-it Bay	2	Si-it Bay Fisherfolk Association (SBFA)	*Avicennia marina, Rhizophora stylosa, Bruguiera cylindrica,*
	Poblacion 3	Poblacion	1	Poblacion 3 Fisherfolk Association	*Xylocarpus granatum, Sonneratia alba, and Lumnitzera racemosa*
	Bonawon	Purok 7	2	Bonawon Fishermen's Association (BFA)	*Avicennia marina, Rhizophora stylosa, Bruguiera cylindrica,*
Sta Catalina	Fatima	Fatima	3.5	Fatima Women's Association (FWA)	*Barringtonia asiatica, Bruguiera gymnorrhiza, Calophyllum inophyllum, Dolichandrone spathacea, Heritiera littoralis, Millettia pinnata, Lumnitzera racemosa, Rhizophora stylosa, and Hibiscus tiliaceus*
	San Francisco	San Francisco	2	San Francisco Women's Association (SAFRAWMA)	*Barringtonia asiatica, Dolichandrone spathacea, Calophyllum inophyllum, and Millettia pinnata Bruguiera gymnorrhiza, Heritiera littoralis, Lumnitzera racemosa, Intsia bijuga, Barringtonia asiatica, Dolichandrone spathacea, and Calophyllum inophyllum*
	Nagbalaye	Nagbalaye	4.5	Nagbalaye Women's Association (NAWA)	*Rhizophora stylosa, Ceriops decandra, Bruguiera gymnorrhiza, Xylocarpus granatum, Heritiera littoralis, Lumnitzera racemosa, Intsia bijuga, Barringtonia asiatica, Dolichandrone spathacea, and Calophyllum inophyllum*
	Poblacion	Pasil-Guba	20	Women's Guba-Pasil Association (WGPA)	*Rhizophora stylosa, Ceriops decandra, Bruguiera gymnorrhiza, Xylocarpus granatum, Heritiera littoralis, Lumnitzera racemosa, Intsia bijuga, Barringtonia asiatica, Dolichandrone spathacea, and Calophyllum inophyllum*

	Caranoche	Caranoche	16	Caranoche Mangrove Community Association (CMCA)	*Sonneratia caseolaris, Lumnitzera racemosa, Xylocarpus granatum, Heritiera littoralis, Avicennia lanata, Rhizophora stylosa, Bruguiera gymnorrhiza, Ceriops decandra, and Intsia bijuga*
Bayawan	Pagatban	Pagatban	7	Pagatban United Small Fishermen's Association (PUSFA)	*Milletia pinnata, Barringtonia asiatica, Hibiscus tiliaceus, Heritiera littoralis, Dolichandrone spathacea, Calophyllum inophyllum, Sonneratia alba, and Lumnitzera racemosa*
Basa	Actin	Actin	3	Barangay Actin Fishermen's Association (BAFA)	Millettia pinnata, Barringtonia asiatica, Dolichandrone spathacea, Sonneratia alba, Avicennia marina Bruguiera gymnorrhiza, and Lumnitzera racemosa
	Bongalonan	Sitio Cotcot	2.5	Cotcot Trawler's Fishermen's Association (CTFA)	Millettia pinnata, Barringtonia asiatica, Dolichandrone spathacea, Hibiscus tiliaceus, Avicennia marina, Bruguiera gymnorrhiza, Lumnitzera racemosa, Rhizophora apiculata, Rhizophora mucronata, Rhizophora stylosa, Sonneratia caseolaris, and Heritiera littoralis
	Bongalonan	Bongalonan	2.5	Bongalonan Small Fishermen's Association (BSFA)	Pemphis acidula, Barringtonia asiatica, Calophyllum inophyllum, Osbornia octodonta, Avicennia marina, and Sonneratia alba

Establishing Partnerships and Community Participation

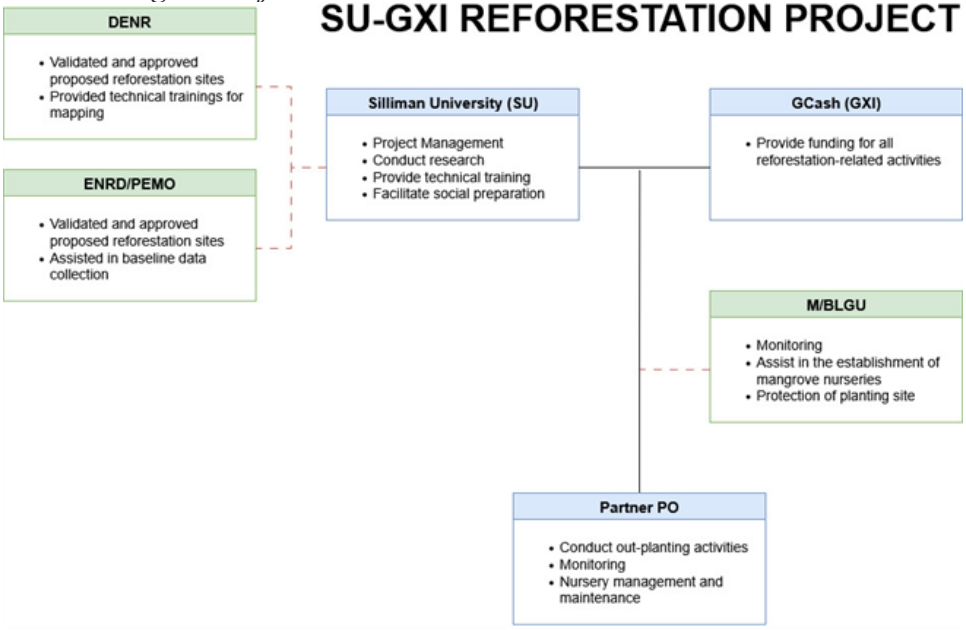
To effectively manage reforestation projects, it is essential to focus on collaborating with the LGU and local communities through partnerships. Partnerships in the SU-GXI Reforestation in South Negros Project were first established through the BFAR-USAID Fish Right Program (SNFRP), laying the groundwork for a seamless transition into the current project. This current initiative serves as a sustainability measure for the SNFRP, ensuring the continuation of key efforts, particularly in mangrove conservation and the management of mangrove forests and their associated faunal biodiversity, aimed at enhancing sustainable, resilient fisheries and safeguarding vital blue carbon sinks in the area.

The SU-GXI Reforestation in South Negros Project employs a multi-sectoral approach to mangrove rehabilitation and conservation. A key strategy involves building partnerships with M/B LGUs and People's Organizations (POs) to facilitate project implementation. This process included courtesy calls, meetings, and consultations with key stakeholders, such as Mayors, City/Municipal Agriculturists, City/Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Officers, City/Municipal Planning officials, barangay leaders, Environment and Natural Resource Division (ENRD) of Negros Oriental and Negros Occidental (PEMO), and representatives from DENR. To secure ongoing support and active participation from key stakeholders, Partnership Agreements were forged, outlining the roles and responsibilities of GCash (GXI), Silliman University (SU), POs, and M/B LGUs (Fig. 1). As part of its GForest initiative, GCash (GXI) provided funding for the reforestation project in South Negros. At the same time, SU oversees project management, offering technical support and training.

Silliman University also aims to assess the carbon storage of the planted species. The Project monitors changes in the annual carbon storage capacity of the reforestation sites, generating critical data to evaluate the project's contribution to climate change mitigation. The Project is carried out by the partnering PO, which is responsible for out-planting activities, nursery establishment and maintenance, as well as monitoring the planting sites and seedling growth rates. These efforts are supported and supervised by the M/B LGUs. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the Provincial Environment Management Office (PEMO) provided vital technical support to Silliman University in the capacity building, establishing baseline information, and selecting project sites. Their partnership and contributions were crucial to the successful initiation of the project.

Figure 1

Organizational Structure of Partnerships within the SU-GXI Reforestation in South Negros Project



Capacity Building

Another key strategy of the project is the capacity building of LGUs and partner POs, which is essential for the success of restoration and reforestation efforts like this. As part of the SNFRP, a series of Mangrove Management Workshops were held across eight municipalities—Zamboanguita, Siaton, Sta. Catalina, Bayawan, Basay, Hinoba-an, Sipalay, and Cauayan—to strengthen institutional capacity for developing and implementing mangrove restoration plans and policies. These workshops brought together participants from various sectors, including representatives from LGUs, Local Planning Officers, City/Municipal Agriculture Officers, City/Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Officers, barangay leaders, Fisheries and Aquatic Resource Management Council (FARMC) members, and POs. The workshops were designed to equip stakeholders with essential skills in mangrove assessment, drone-based aerial mapping and delineation, Blue Carbon data collection and analysis, as well as policies and effective rehabilitation techniques.

At the outset of the SU-GXI Reforestation in South Negros Project, a series of social preparation activities were conducted to orient potential

LGU and PO partners. These sessions provided an overview of the project, reviewed the Partnership Agreement, discussed proposed planting sites, and offered training on proper planting techniques, mangrove nursery establishment and maintenance, as well as site and growth rate monitoring. Cross-site visits to areas where local POs are engaged in mangrove reforestation were organized to enhance the knowledge of partner POs. These visits focused on mangrove conservation, species identification, propagule collection, and the preparation and potting of propagules for nursery establishment. Additionally, supplemental livelihood training sessions were conducted in Sta. Catalina, with the support of the LGU and SNFRP. These trainings aimed to provide women-led PO partners with expanded livelihood opportunities, fostering both social and economic improvements for their organizations.

Ecosystem Rehabilitation

The first step in ecosystem rehabilitation involved establishing mangrove nurseries across five municipalities. Nine mangrove nurseries have been established in the SU-GXI Reforestation in South Negros Project, which houses several mangrove and beach forest species. This was done to ensure the use of good planting materials, as the flowering, fruiting, and seed production of mangrove and beach forest species do not always coincide with the planting season; thus, raising seedlings in nurseries is a crucial part of the process. Suitable locations within the mangrove area were selected, and overhead netting was installed to reduce heat exposure. Fencing and additional netting were also installed to keep out predators. Propagules were potted in plastic bags using soil gathered from the mangrove area, and the seedlings and wildlings were watered with freshwater as necessary. Data, such as seedling diameter and height, were regularly recorded and monitored weekly to track growth rates. Seedlings are housed in the mangrove nursery for 3-5 months, ensuring that they are hardened and have a well-established root system, which allows for a higher survival rate.

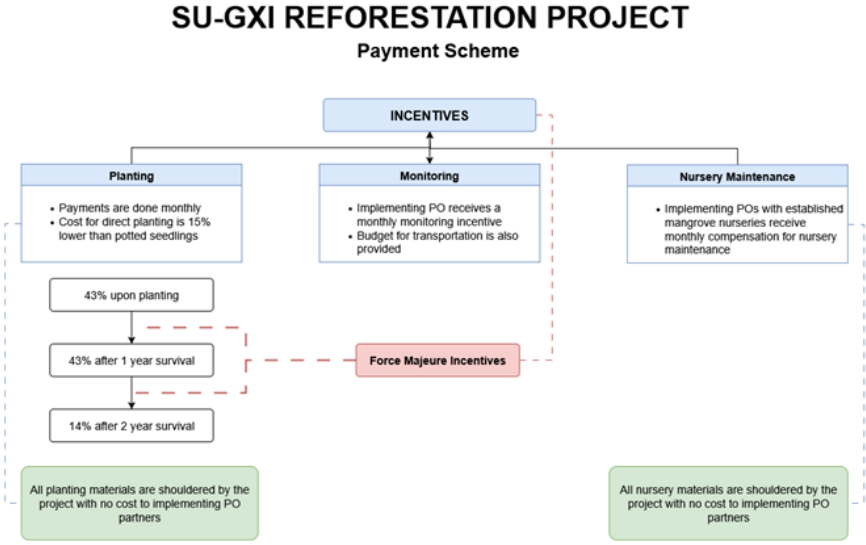
Once the seedlings were ready for out-planting, the implementing partner, PO, followed a 1m x 1m planting distance for mangroves and a 1.5m x 1.5m planting distance for beach forest species. The fifty seedlings initially tagged and monitored for growth rates in the nursery continued to be tracked for monthly growth rates after being planted at the site, together with the survival rates of all the seedlings planted. Baseline soil carbon samples were collected during the initial out-planting activity, with additional samples taken as new pure plots for different mangrove and

beach forest species are established. Partner POs were required to submit monthly out-planting forms to track the progress of their efforts. The SU-GXI Reforestation in South Negros team verified these reports each month to ensure the accuracy of the recorded data.

To encourage partner POs to plant, monitor seedlings, and maintain mangrove nurseries consistently, monthly incentives are provided (Fig. 2). These incentives include a fixed rate for all partner POs for monitoring and nursery maintenance. However, planting costs vary; seedlings that are directly planted are priced differently from those that are potted, with a 15% price difference between direct-planted and potted seedlings. This pricing strategy incentivizes POs to pot mangrove and beach forest seedlings for out-planting. Additionally, the planting cost is distributed to partner POs in tranches: 43% is given upon initial planting, another 43% after the seedlings have survived for one year, and the final 14% upon two-year survival. This payment scheme encourages POs to prioritize seedling survival and actively replant in cases of mortality with no additional cost to the project, except in circumstances beyond their control. Force majeure incentives are provided to partner POs when seedling mortality is caused by events such as typhoons, El Niño, or other acts of God. These incentives cover the full cost of the seedlings, contingent on a site inspection and damage assessment. The replanting efforts of the partner POs are also considered as part of the eligibility for these incentives.

Figure 2

Overview of the incentives and payment scheme for the SU-GXI Reforestation in South Negros Project



Policy Support

Ensuring the continued protection and management of existing natural mangrove areas and planting sites is crucial for the success of rehabilitation projects. The establishment of Mangrove Local Conservation Areas (LCAs) in eight municipalities in Negros Oriental, facilitated by the SNFRP, plays a key role in this effort. According to the ordinances, these LCAs are designated exclusively for conservation, research, education, tourism, and other special management purposes, including rehabilitation measures. Management Boards have been established to oversee these areas, comprising various stakeholders such as the Local Chief Executive, representatives from Local Planning Offices, City/Municipal Agriculture Offices, City/Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Offices, Sanguniang Bayan, academe, Bantay Dagat, the Philippine National Police (PNP), DENR sectoral groups, barangay leaders, FARMC members, and POs. The LCA organization has also implemented user fees, restrictions, and fines to ensure proper management and maintenance. Currently, out of the eight municipalities with proposed LCAs, four—Bayawan, Hinoba-an, Sipalay, and Cauayan—have already adopted these ordinances. The remaining proposed LCAs are still under review by the Municipal Councils. The current project regularly monitors the progress of the LCA ordinances in these municipalities, as they are crucial to the success of the mangrove restoration efforts.

Current Status of the SU-GXI Reforestation in South Negros Project

The SU-GXI Reforestation in South Negros Project is currently collaborating with 16 partner People's Organizations (POs) across 13 barangays in 5 municipalities within Negros Oriental. The project benefits 210 PO members, of whom 74.76% are women. In its first year, the project established nine mangrove nurseries, and by September 2024, a total of 141,296 mangrove and beach forest species had been planted. The project has planted 25 different species of mangroves and beach forest trees, with the majority being Rhizophora species, Millettia pinnata, Ceriops decandra, Avicennia marina, and Calophyllum inophyllum. Statistical analysis using Spearman’s Rho revealed that PO participation is a significant factor influencing higher survival rates at the planting sites ($p = 0.020$), which averaged around 80% in the previous months. However, as of September 2024, the rate has declined to 67.28%, primarily due to the impacts of typhoons Ferdie, Gener, and Helen, which severely affected most planting

sites. With continued monitoring and replanting activities to mitigate the loss due to force majeure, the survival rate remains relatively higher compared to the general survival rate in the Philippines.

Summary

The SU-GXI Reforestation in South Negros Project addresses the critical decline of mangrove ecosystems in the Philippines, which are vital for mitigating climate change and providing coastal protection. Despite covering less than 1% of the land area of South Negros, these mangroves play an essential role in sustaining coastal resilience. The project, a partnership between Silliman University and GCash (GXI), aims to plant 500,000 mangrove and beach forest seedlings across 78 hectares in five municipalities of Negros Oriental, integrating science-based approaches, including vulnerability assessments and blue carbon baseline surveys, alongside socio-cultural engagement through capacity building for People's Organizations (POs). Currently, 16 People's Organizations (POs) involving 210 beneficiaries, predominantly women (74.76%), are participating. As of September 2024, 141,296 seedlings have been planted with an overall survival rate of 67.28%. Three typhoons impacted this rate, though it remains relatively high compared to the general survival rate in the Philippines. Despite these challenges, participation in PO is a significant factor associated with higher survival rates. The project emphasizes community mobilization, establishing nurseries, and offering incentives for planting, monitoring, and nursery maintenance to ensure seedling survival and project success.

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