

Sophia UN Weeks Symposium

**PROMOTING INCLUSION, EQUITY,
AND WELL-BEING IN HEIs:
PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS AFFECTED BY THE
COVID-19 PANDEMIC**



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BACKGROUND

- The COVID-19 pandemic produced three learning crises:
 - crisis of equity and inclusion
 - crisis of quality
 - crisis of relevance



- Higher education institutions have initiated policies and programs to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on students' learning capacity, competence, and well-being.
- Question: Are students aware of these policies and programs, particularly those that target equity, inclusion, and well-being?

BACKGROUND

- Outcome of the 2022 UNESCO Transforming Education Summit:
 - to have a global movement for transforming education, with the youth as central actors and agents of transformation.
- Given this context, this discussion tried to gather responses from students studying in HEIs from the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic up to present.



PARTICIPANTS




- **24 students**
- **International students**
 - Yes - 11
 - No - 13
- **Degree**
 - Ph.D. - 10
 - Master - 11
 - Law - 2
 - Undergraduate - 1
- **Nationality**
 - Filipino - 15
 - South African - 2
 - Thai - 2
 - Brazilian - 1
 - German - 1
 - Indonesian - 1
 - Japanese - 1
 - Luxembourgish - 1



PARTICIPANTS

Universities

- **Japan - 12**
 - **Sophia University, Tokyo Dental and Medical University, Tokyo Institute of Technology, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, University of Tokyo, Waseda University**
 - **Philippines - 11**
 - **Ateneo de Manila University, De La Salle University, University of the Philippines, University of Santo Tomas**
 - **Canada - 1**
 - **University of British Columbia**
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METHODOLOGY

- Online survey through Google Forms from October 9 to 12, 2023
- Analysis: Quantitative (frequency) and Qualitative (thematic)
- Disclaimer: Not a rigorous research



HOW DID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IMPACT YOUR LEARNING CAPACITY, COMPETENCE, AND WELL-BEING AS A STUDENT?

POSITIVE IMPACTS


- Developed personalized study habits
- Improved academic performance and maturity
- Maximized the use of technology
- Gave them a lot of freedom - time management, learning styles
- Online classes are convenient and accessible, especially for working people





HOW DID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IMPACT YOUR LEARNING CAPACITY, COMPETENCE, AND WELL-BEING AS A STUDENT?


NEGATIVE IMPACTS

- **Zoom fatigue - online classes more exhausting, difficult to focus**
 - **Lack in learning engagement - online discussions are not dynamic, professors were not well-equipped and well-trained, decreased motivation, feeling of learning less**
 - **Lack of social interaction - no chance to network and connect**
 - **Mental health toll - overwhelming and pressured feeling, constantly feeling the need to prove competence, imposter syndrome, isolation**
 - **Logistical issues - lack of resources, gadgets, space for learning, problems with Internet connectivity**
 - **Poor physical health – eyesight**
 - **Border closure issues – delay in going to Japan, stipend delay, time zone difference**
 - **Impact on research - unable to do fieldwork, change in research topic**
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AFTER THE PANDEMIC, WHAT CHALLENGES DID YOU FACE OR ARE CURRENTLY FACING?

- Transitioning to face-to-face classes – commuting, engaging with classmates, repercussions of learning less from online classes
- Anxiety - socializing, doing recitations and onsite exams
- Sudden increase in expenses due to return to school – transportation, finding house
- Continuation of remote learning – lack of physical interaction
- Attending classes while having part-time/full-time work
- Stricter policies from the administration
- Delays in the conduct of research
- Financial difficulties - personal and research expenses, extended study



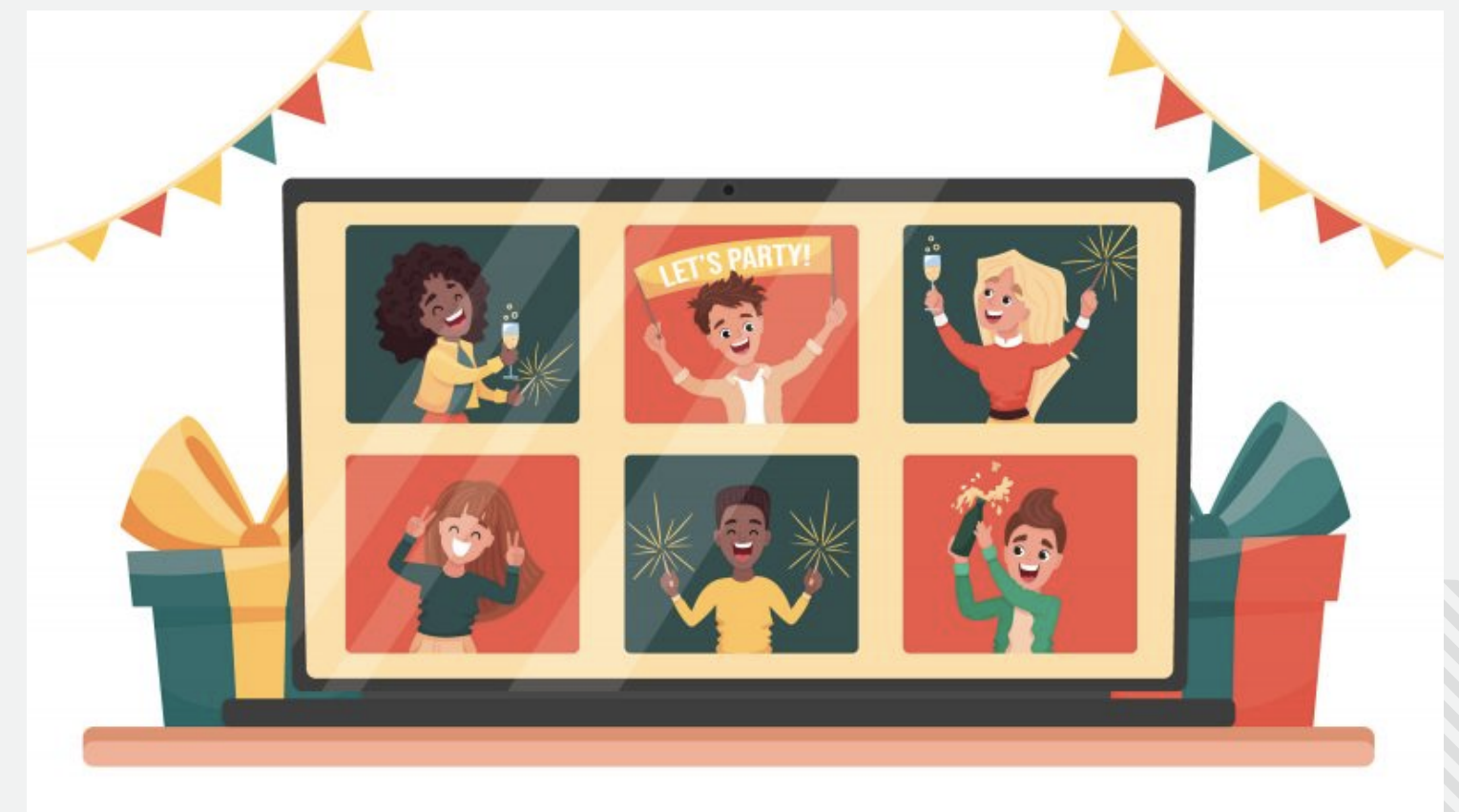


DURING/AFTER THE PANDEMIC, WHAT POLICIES/PROGRAMS DID YOUR HEI INITIATE THAT CATER TO INCLUSION, EQUITY, AND WELL-BEING?

- **Leniency in academic policies**
 - No failing
 - No attendance policies
 - Teachers asked to become more lenient in requirements and expectations
 - Maximum tolerance in deadlines
 - Leniency in tuition payments and leave of absence considerations
 - **Mental health**
 - Reading breaks/wellness breaks where students were not given any tasks,
 - Mental health programs, free psychiatry services
 - Surveys on mental health needs
 - **Aid for people with disabilities**
 - Programs for receiving help during exams
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DURING/AFTER THE PANDEMIC, WHAT POLICIES/PROGRAMS DID YOUR HEI INITIATE THAT CATER TO INCLUSION, EQUITY, AND WELL-BEING?

- **Social events**
 - Online gatherings to know other people, play games
 - Welcome party
 - Problem: very few events because the university only focused on programs such as symposium, lunch classes, academic gatherings, etc.
- **Financial relief**
 - Food packets
 - Special stipends, scholarship programs
 - WiFi allowance, free pocket WiFi
- **Learning Resources**
 - Asynchronous modules, course pack
 - Uploads of class recordings
 - Use of Learning Management Systems like Moodle or Canvas



DURING/AFTER THE PANDEMIC, WHAT POLICIES/PROGRAMS DID YOUR HEI INITIATE THAT CATER TO INCLUSION, EQUITY, AND WELL-BEING?

- Increased online accessibility
 - Use of online forms, webpages for contacting offices
 - Correspondence through email, Webpage that will guide students in contacting different offices
 - Online access to library
 - E-dialogues with the administrators
- Health
 - Free on-campus vaccination program for ALL stakeholders
- Some students emphasized absence or lack of policies/programs.
 - “I think there were some but they were for Japanese speaking people.”
 - “There was a definite lack of social support, with little effort by the university to encourage exchanges.”



RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Strict adherence to policies**
 - Some teachers are not following policies
- **Accommodations for international students**
 - Having documents with English translations
 - Employ people who can assist with foreigner integration
 - Events where international and Japanese students can interact
- **Venue for dialogues**
 - having forum or public discussion on issues
 - Conduct surveys
 - Student centers / focal persons who will address students' needs
 - Clear line of communication with students




RECOMMENDATIONS

- More publicity (e.g., mental health programs, scholarships)
- Take care of teachers more
- Changing attitudes
 - Sensitivity to mental health issues
 - Proper mental health support
 - Listening to the needs of students and not brushing them off
 - Reaching out on a personal level and not just email blasts
 - Maintain compassion and empathy
- Financial support
 - Expand the scope of grants and scholarships
 - Increase government support for public universities





RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Flexibility in the conduct of classes**
 - More learning breaks
 - Continuation of synchronous and asynchronous classes
 - Student-driven contents
 - Conduct of COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning)
 - **Giving the same treatment to everyone**
 - Include graduate students in discussions
 - Undergraduates have orientation camps for incoming students but no such program for graduate students
 - Some social events are promoted only in Japanese so bilingual events would be highly appreciated
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CONCLUSION

The youth/students are the central actors, the agents of transformation in the global movement for transforming education.



HEIs should ensure that their needs and concerns, especially on inclusion, equity, and well-being, are adequately addressed.

CONCLUSION

“I believe I am blessed to be working and studying in Jesuit institutions where the Ignatian value of ‘cura personalis’ is practiced. Everyone is extra caring and compassionate... and this really helped in overcoming hurdles or getting support. I could not imagine surviving working or studying in an institution with a different kind of community”
(Filipino student, 2023).

