

Grace Under Pressure: Unmasking the Accounts of Consistency of President's Listers

Jonelson C. Escandallo^{1*} <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5808-6749>, Kristy Jane R. Muegna² <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-9910-0117>, Deveyvon L. Espinosa³ <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2896-5416>
^{1,2,3}Kapalong College of Agriculture, Sciences and Technology, Philippines
e-mail: ^{1}jeffhelescandallo@gmail.com, ²kristyjanereponte27@gmail.com,
³deveyvonlespinosa@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Being recognized as one of the President's Lister (PL) in an academic institution reflects one specific student's dedication, intelligence, and hard work. Therefore, this research investigated and revealed the real-life experiences of students who achieved President's List status as they endeavored to maintain consistency amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic. This phenomenological research comprised 10 participants, evenly distributed between in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD). These individuals were exclusively selected from Kapalong College of Agriculture, Sciences, and Technology, all of whom were consistent President's List (PL) students enrolled in the Institute of Teacher Education (ITEd), specifically third-year and fourth-year students. The collected data underwent analysis through coding and thematic analysis. The findings of the study delineated varied experiences, coping mechanisms, strategies, and perspectives of the chosen PL students regarding their pursuit of consistency amidst the pandemic. Lastly, the findings and results of the study are deemed essential and beneficial to the field of education, especially in all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), as this may serve as their basis for crafting guidelines and policies like special scholarships to these honour students in support to their consistency with their academic pursuit. The results could also provide valuable insights to the Commission on Higher Education for formulating a memorandum and updating the Program Standard and Guidelines, particularly in implementing a flexible learning approach while taking into account the preparedness of both students and educators.

INTRODUCTION

The worldwide spread of the pandemic has significantly impacted the education sector, leading to a widespread public health emergency affecting various facets of human life. In reaction to this ongoing crisis, educational institutions have transitioned from traditional face-to-face classroom instruction to remote learning. This shift has impacted all stakeholders, including teachers and students. Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to investigate and examine the diverse experiences of students, particularly those who have achieved President's List status, to gain valuable insights into this phenomenon.

In Malaysia, the study by [Escalera et al. \(2019\)](#) stated that amidst the pandemic, one should not overlook the pressure faced by honor students or President's Listers, as their approach to studies may surpass conventional boundaries in their pursuit of utmost educational achievement. In addition, the study of [Tasso et al. \(2021\)](#) mentioned that the COVID-19 pandemic has substantially impacted college students, among many other groups, due to the drastic transition, with unexpected cancellations of in-person classes affecting their educational and psychosocial aspects.

In the Philippines, research has shown that Filipino college students encounter difficulties in transitioning from traditional classroom-based learning to distance education. This challenge is compounded by their responsibilities in managing household tasks, as well as communication issues between faculty and students during the learning process ([Baticulon et al., 2020](#)). [Tijani et al. \(2017\)](#) further emphasized that the quality of teaching and student performance is closely linked to the availability of institutional and physical infrastructure, as well as learning resources. Lastly, educational systems are confronted with various challenges in delivering high-quality instruction and materials amidst the "new normal." This includes the implementation of remote and blended learning approaches, enhancing online learning platforms, and fostering research and development initiatives ([Tria, 2020](#)).

From the citation above, in light of the emergent problem brought by the pandemic, which greatly affects the performance of both teachers and specifically students, the researcher has chosen to conduct this study. They must shift from on-site learning to online and distance learning, which entails additional learning resources needed for their studies that call for another problem and burden among students, especially for the president's listers. Hence, there is a need to survey to add to the growing body of literature relating to the conundrums faced by these students and to add solutions to this problematic phenomenon.

The present study aims to address gaps in existing research by focusing on the challenges faced by Dean's Listers, particularly within a local college context, whereas previous research by [Cabello \(2022\)](#) primarily examined these challenges within a national university setting. This study will explore how President's Listers maintain their status amidst the pandemic, investigate their coping mechanisms for overcoming challenges, and gather valuable insights they can share with peers and other students navigating study during these unprecedented times. The findings will inform education authorities in designing educational programs and providing necessary student assistance to address the needs of high-achieving students during the pandemic.

METHODS

Design

This study is qualitative, specifically using the phenomenological approach. It is qualitative since the study used and utilized interviews for the data collection and data gathering and included thematic analysis for the gathered data. In addition, it utilized a phenomenological approach since it studied one phenomenon about the condition and situation of the president's listers on consistently staying on the list amidst the pandemic. Phenomenology, by definition, explores human experiences, examining the structures of consciousness as perceived from an individual's subjective perspective ([Gallagher and Francesconi, 2012](#)). Hence, this approach and design suited the study's purpose and goal: to capture and explore the untold stories of the president's listers amidst the pandemic.

Participants

Mainly, the research subjects consisted of ten (10) consistently high-achieving students who earned the President's List status at a local college in Kapalong, Davao del Norte. They were selected using purposive sampling method. The inclusion criteria formed the basis for this criterion: (1) they must be formally registered for the first semester of the academic year 2022-2023 at Kapalong College of Agriculture, Sciences, and Technology; (2) must be a regular student under the third year and fourth-year level; (3) must have enrolled at least 18 units; and (4) must be one of the president's listers posted from the Office of the Registrar. Also, this study included ten (10) participants divided into two: 5 individuals for the In-Depth Interview (IDI) and 5 individuals for the Focus-Group Discussion were chosen.

Data Collection Procedure

Prior to commencing data collection, the researcher validated the research instrument, namely the interview guide. A pool of experts validated this instrument, all of whom were doctors in their respective fields of expertise. Consequently, after the validation of the instrument, the data collection started as a result of this cascade: (1) sent a permission letter to the college president of the college requesting authorization to carry out the investigation; (2) inquired with the registrar's office for the official list of PLs in the first semester, SY 2021-2022; (3) identified possible and prospect participants; (4) organized an orientation session with the participants, providing them with information regarding the objectives and intentions of the study; (5) completed the informed consent from the participant by informing them that recorded some of the data in attaining the goal of the study; (6) start the interview process with the participants; (7) transcription of the raw recorded interview or data; and (8) analysis of the gathered data.

Data Analysis

We analyzed the data collected during the study to arrive at conclusions to resolve the study's problem. Subsequently, we proceeded to analyze the data following the transcription of both the interview transcripts and the focus group discussion. The researcher employed coding and thematic analysis techniques to scrutinize the data collected in this study. In order to present the data effectively, we categorized it into various groups based on the recurring themes identified among participants' responses, a process known as thematic analysis. Additionally, to become acquainted with the data, I listened to and transcribed the recorded interviews conducted with the participants. Following data familiarization, the coding process commenced, where similar segments of text were assigned code labels for subsequent retrieval and comparison to generate themes, ideas, and categories.

Following the clustering of codes, the process of labeling the clusters commenced, guided by the shared meanings or relationships observed among the codes. Subsequently, the next step involved naming the codes, utilizing the labels generated for each theme and assigning a descriptive name that encapsulates the relationship or meaning conveyed within that particular theme. Finally, the findings were presented and the data interpreted through the use of tabular formats, aiming to enhance comprehension and provide a detailed explanation of the results in response to the research questions posed in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Experiences of President's Listers (PL) in consistently being on the president's list amidst the pandemic

The initial research inquiry delved into the firsthand experiences of individuals who consistently achieved President's List status, even amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic. After the analysis of data, the researcher identified the following themes: conundrum with synchronous learning, efficient time management, fostering independent learning, losing sight of motivation, having anxiety and self-pressure, and lack of content knowledge and proficiency. These themes resembled the different experiences of the president's list as they continue to strive for excellence in their academic journey even during the pandemic.

Table 1. Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Experiences of President's Listers (PL) on being on the President's List amidst the Pandemic.

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Conundrum with Synchronous Learning	I have a poor internet connection and cannot attend and join online classes. We are challenging ourselves to find a place free from background noise. I am having difficulty submitting course outputs online through the LMs used. I have few learning resources and low-storage mobile phones. She was getting pressured with the vague discussion of teachers due to intermittent data connection.

Major Themes	Core Ideas
	We are bombarding ourselves with the learning tasks of all the subjects per week.
Time Management Constraints	We are studying the whole day to complete all assigned tasks. I am having no late submissions of all the activities and learning tasks. Sparing time online for watching video tutorials for the lessons/topics can significantly enhance understanding and retention of the material. The deadlines of task submissions were pressuring them. I am practising procrastination and being lazy at times of immense pressure.
Fostering Independent Learning	You are watching online tutorials and discussions to aid your understanding of the subject matter. We are utilizing online learning resources to answer learning tasks and activities. We are establishing cooperation with classmates and peers to discuss lessons/topics. I am practising self-study with the learning contents from the modules. I am being independent in completing and answering the course modules by exhausting all the available learning resources.
Losing Sight with Motivation	I am having self-doubt with one's competence and intelligence. I was not motivated and was unhappy learning due to unsupported teacher feedback. I am getting easily distracted by external factors like peers and social media. I am showing no joy in learning. I am more engaged with Facebook and TikTok than modules or learning tasks. I am losing the will to participate in online discussions and assignments and complete tasks.
Having Anxiety and Self-pressure	It is being afraid of failing the subject since it is modular. They are being doubted oneself, especially with their answers to their self-learning modules. You are overthinking with the judgment of others in case of having a lower grade. I am mentally exhausted from completing all the learning tasks in all subjects. Lifting the expectation of others, especially the expectation of their family.
Lack of Content Knowledge and Proficiency	I am having a few feedback and critiques from the teacher with the learning tasks/activities. I have few learning resources to support learning. They are showing little language proficiency in Filipino and English because of modular learning. I am having a few teacher interactions. Hence, respondents rarely answer clarifications and questions.

The different themes that emerged in the first research question agree with the study of [Davis et al. \(2019\)](#), which found that challenges faced by students in remote learning environments during the emergence of COVID-19 included misinterpretation of expectations, especially regarding their desired learning goals, time management, and interpersonal communication. Alternatively, the research also suggested that students might encounter challenges in discerning expectations, receiving teacher feedback, and interpersonal relations with their peers, classmates, and teachers. In addition to this, the

findings also relate to the study of [Apriyanti \(2020\)](#), which emphasized that students have experienced psychological impacts amid the pandemic due to school closures, inadequate access to online learning tools, difficulties in accessing educational materials remotely, and prolonged periods of confinement at home. Another study also posited that many distractions hamper students from studying at home, resulting in their lack of or diminished learning motivation. Such distractions include television, social media, and chores. Further, some students find online learning more stressful compared to traditional classroom settings. They express difficulties in social interaction with peers and feelings of isolation when faced with only academic tasks ([Angdhiri, 2020](#)).

In addition, the present study also found that students, especially the president's listers, are having problems and conundrums with implementing synchronous learning through online learning as they have issues with cellphones, laptops, and internet connection. A research study corroborated this observation by suggesting that the insufficient technological resources within educational institutions can hinder the effective implementation of online learning, posing a challenge to the educational process. Consequently, this circumstance impacts the lives and circumstances of students, necessitating adjustments to new schedules and modes of communication with peers, friends, and professors at the university ([Demuyakor, 2020](#)).

Further, the results align with those of [Bedenlier et al. \(2021\)](#), who asserted that students perceive less connectedness with their peers and experience reduced social support in online learning environments compared to traditional settings. Moreover, many students also indicated a heightened workload ([Aristovnik et al., 2020](#)). Collectively, these findings underscore the significance of attentively addressing students' learning experiences when addressing their continued education amidst the challenges posed by COVID-19.

Coping Mechanisms of the President's Listers (PL) Consistently Being on the President's List Amidst the Pandemic.

The second research question discovers and unveils the different techniques, strategies, and coping mechanisms of the president listers on the different struggles and hardships they faced on consistently being on the president's list amid the implementation of the new educational set-up. After the data analysis, the researcher found the following themes: utilizing all learning resources, emulating personal time management, seeking assistance from others, self-pampering and relaxation, being motivated with one's goal, making reading a habit, and asking for divine providence.

Table 2. Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Coping Mechanisms of President's Listers (PL) on Being on the President's List Amidst the Pandemic.

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Utilizing All Learning Resources	Reading books and articles online related to the subject content. You are watching video tutorials on YouTube and TikTok to aid learning. I was searching the topic on Google and other academic websites. I was borrowing books in the library. I have a laptop, cellphone, and internet connection.
Emulating Personal Time Management	Doing the tasks and modules on time before the deadline. Preparing checklist and to-do list. Sorting softcopies of modules in folders on personal computers. Setting tasks and activities to achieve within a day. Having the perception of first thing first.
Seeking Assistance from Others	Having interpersonal communication with peers and classmates. Asking for clarification and additional discussion from the teachers. We are having group study and online discussions with classmates. I am seeking assistance and guidance from family members.

Major Themes	Core Ideas
	Asking for help from friends, especially with performance and authentic assessments. We are asking for financial support from parents.
Self-pampering and Relaxation	I was having the time to eat outside and unwind. I am going out with friends and family. I play online games like Mobile Legend and Clash of Clans (COC). We watch movies online, like on Netflix and YouTube.
Being Motivated with One's Goal	We are mindful of one's personal goals and objectives. Re-thinking the reasons for starting the journey involves reflecting on personal motivations and goals. Facing all the trials and difficulties and never giving up. I am being optimistic and brave amid challenging moments.
Making Reading a Habit	I was reading all the contents stipulated in the learning modules. Note-taking of the important concepts. I am scanning and skimming the different learning materials. We highlight important concepts and read them every night.
Asking for Divine Providence	I am praying to God for health and wisdom. We are asking God for strength and perseverance. We are seeking guidance from God.

These insights gleaned from the coping strategies of President's Listers correspond to the research conducted by [Alianța Națională an Organizațiilor Studentești din Romania \(2022\)](#), which elucidated that online education during the pandemic proved advantageous as universities were able to reach students residing in distant areas or those with full-time employment, enabling them to balance work and learning simultaneously. Consequently, amidst online education, students employ numerous strategies and coping mechanisms to navigate the abrupt transition in the educational system. Furthermore, a study emphasized the pivotal role of technology in facilitating this sudden shift, offering a solution to learners unable to access traditional schooling due to the pandemic ([Soni, 2020](#)).

In addition, the study also found that the president's listers manage their time efficiently and effectively to overcome the different struggles and problems they faced in implementing blended learning during the pandemic. This discovery is connected to the research conducted by [Batbaatar and Amin \(2021\)](#) regarding students' time management in online classes, which revealed that online learning and self-regulation greatly impact undergraduate students' time management amid the pandemic. Similarly, [Rusyadi \(2013\)](#) elucidated the significance of time management in blended learning, emphasizing its role in helping individuals identify and prioritize their needs and desires. Time management is crucial in learning endeavors as it constitutes an internal factor influencing the learning process.

Lastly, the study found that teachers' assistance is essential in the blended learning approach as teachers help students understand their lessons. This research corresponds with the investigation conducted by [Lapada et al. \(2020\)](#), which underscored the pivotal role of teachers in ensuring the sustained provision of quality education during the pandemic. The study indicates that teachers were acutely cognizant of the challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, educators persist in creating Self-Learning Modules (SLMs) to support remote teaching and offer guidance and academic support to students facing difficulties in comprehending the lessons. Moreover, it depicted that teachers are now actively involved in fostering students' growth within the community and society ([Martineau et al., 2020](#)).

Insights of President's Listers (PL) in studying in times of the Pandemic

The study's third research question revealed the president's listers' insights and ideals on implementing blended learning during the pandemic. They have shared numerous suggestions and recommendations essential to the concerned authorities, like the Commission on Higher Education and even the Department of Education. After the analysis of the data, the researcher found the following themes:

Table 3. Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Insights of President's Listers (PL) on Being on the President's List Amidst the Pandemic

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Never Give Up and Be Positive	Considering one's personal goals and objectives. Being positive and having the hope to continue. I have always had the perseverance and determination to continue despite struggles. Have self-discipline and avoid procrastination. Being diligent and dedicated in doing learning tasks. Emulating effective time management to avoid stress. I am keeping the motivation to learn and pursue.
Having Continued Support from the Parents	They are supportive of their child's academic pursuits. They are always giving the assistance and help needed by their child. They are giving all the support the students need relative to their studies. We are supporting the emotional stability and condition of the child. We are encouraging the child to continue studying despite difficulties.
Providing Additional Resources for Teachers and Students	We are giving students free access to an internet connection. They provide students with the financial support needed for their studies and schooling. School administrators provide teachers with laptops or desktops for their online classes. Providing teachers and students with printed materials of the learning resources and references.
Conducting a Survey on the Preparedness of Students and Teachers	They are surveying the school's readiness for their teaching and learning resources. They are asking students about their level of preparedness in implementing blended learning. I am checking the available learning resources needed in the implementation. We are monitoring teachers' and students' readiness.
Giving Financial Support	We are providing academic scholarships to performing and qualified students. We have an academic scholarship which is open to all qualifying students. They provide additional assistance for students whom parents cannot provide. Giving fair and just scholarships to the students, especially those below the poverty line.
Being Considerate with Students	They are given minimal learning tasks in the module daily or weekly.

Major Themes	Core Ideas
	They were giving ample time for students to complete their learning tasks. We have a considerate mind to understand the situation of the students. We are establishing a stress-free environment for students.

These findings regarding the ideals and insights of the president's listers students are in line with the proposition of [Garbe \(2020\)](#), which explained that the shutdown of educational institutions necessitated the adoption of blended learning approaches, prioritizing an educational system that fosters resilience with a focus on learner-centeredness. [Zainuddin and Keumala \(2018\)](#) added that the teacher took the students' classes online and in class under the blended learning mode. Through this, technology assists students in interacting, making the learning process more effective and efficient despite the emergence of COVID-19. Concerning this matter, concerning the particular encounters of students and educators with blended learning, [Lalima and Dangwal \(2017\)](#) explained that technology mediates teachers and students in blended-based instruction. Teachers and students use technology like cell phones and laptops to teach and learn. This suggests that both parties are involved in the online classroom setting, regardless of their physical location and absence of in-person interactions.

Furthermore, several studies have highlighted various challenges and difficulties encountered in implementing blended learning. One such study by [Aldosemani et al. \(2018\)](#), observed similar issues in developing nations like the Philippines. Likewise, the research conducted by [Dotong et al. \(2016\)](#) outlined certain limitations of blended learning, particularly concerning ICT integration. They pointed out shortages in ICT facilities, inadequate maintenance of existing ICT resources, and a lack of budget allocation for ICT. Particularly in rural areas of the Philippines, there are still regions where access to reliable electricity and internet connectivity is limited. This hampers and impacts the ability of both teachers and students to effectively utilize ICT in conjunction with teaching and learning activities.

Conversely, regarding the specific circumstances of students, the research discovered that students were ill-prepared for the implementation of blended learning due to a lack of necessary devices such as laptops or smartphones, as well as inadequate internet connectivity. Similarly, [Parker et al. \(2021\)](#) identified that students may resist blended learning as a viable educational approach because they lack familiarity with technology as a learning tool. Additionally, a separate study investigated the challenges and difficulties students encounter in their learning during the pandemic. This research revealed that students face significant issues related to internet accessibility, availability of learning materials, access to library resources, previous experience with online learning, and disruptions caused by rain and COVID-19 restrictions ([Gqokonqana et al., 2022](#)).

CONCLUSION

The study on the experiences of President's Listers (PL) during the pandemic reveals multifaceted challenges and adaptive strategies employed to maintain their academic excellence. Key themes identified include difficulties with synchronous learning, efficient time management, fostering independent learning, diminishing motivation, anxiety and self-imposed pressure, and lack of content knowledge and proficiency. These themes underscore the complex interplay of technological, psychological, and educational factors influencing students' learning experiences. The pandemic exacerbated existing challenges in online learning environments, such as poor internet connectivity, inadequate resources, and the need for self-directed learning approaches. Furthermore, the emotional toll, including anxiety and loss of motivation, highlights the need for comprehensive support systems to address both academic and mental health concerns.

Coping mechanisms adopted by President's Listers, such as utilizing available learning resources, personal time management, seeking external support, self-care practices, goal-oriented motivation, habitual reading, and spiritual reliance, illustrate a proactive and resourceful approach towards overcoming obstacles. These strategies not only facilitated academic success but also personal growth amidst unprecedented challenges. Insights from these top-performing students emphasize the importance of continued parental support, additional resources for teachers and students, surveys to assess readiness for blended learning, financial assistance, and considerate academic policies. These

findings align with broader educational research advocating for blended learning's potential benefits, the pivotal role of technology in facilitating learning, and the critical need to address digital divide issues. The study underscores the resilience and adaptability of students in navigating the challenges of pandemic-induced educational changes, pointing towards the necessity for institutional support, technological accessibility, and flexible learning environments to enhance academic achievement and well-being.

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