Students' Level of Emotional Intelligence and Online Learning Competence in the New Normal

Christine C. Hormillada

Bohol Island State University, Calape Campus

San Isidro, Calape Bohol Philippines

E-mail: christine.hormillada@bisu.edu.ph

Abstract

The aim of this study was to assess the online learning competence and emotional intelligence levels of students during the new normal. To achieve this, researchers employed the Online Learning Competence assessment tool developed by Hung et al. (2010) and the Emotional Intelligence tool adapted by Davies (2010), based on Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Framework. These tools were modified using exploratory factor analysis, yielding reliable measures with Cronbach Alpha values ranging from 0.75 to 0.93.

Using a correlational research method, data was collected from a sample of 508 randomly selected students from different colleges across the six campuses of Bohol Island State University. Stratified random sampling ensured representation from each campus. The collected data were analyzed using mean and multiple regression analysis.

The study revealed a significant association between emotional intelligence and students' online learning competence. This suggests that students' ability to understand and manage their emotions, along with their social skills, significantly impact their effectiveness in online learning. Consequently, the study recommends that teachers incorporate strategies to enhance emotional intelligence during the teaching-learning process. Additionally, administrators should organize responsive and relevant webinars and training sessions to address the unique challenges of online learning.

In conclusion, this study underscores the influence of emotional intelligence on students' online learning competence. It highlights the importance of self-awareness, self-regulation, and social skills in shaping students' educational experiences, making them more relevant, resilient, and sustainable. Recognizing the impact of emotional intelligence on online learning, educators and administrators can proactively support students' emotional well-being and improve their learning outcomes in the new normal.

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Introduction

The ongoing pandemic has posed significant challenges for students, testing their resilience and emotional stability in order to continue their learning journeys. The ability to identify, regulate, and express emotions has become crucial, as it enables students to develop self-motivation and essential skills necessary to tackle challenges and make informed decisions.

In response to the pandemic's impact, governments worldwide have implemented lockdowns and school closures, forcing a rapid shift from physical classrooms to virtual learning environments. To ensure the continuity of education, the national government issued orders such as CMO No 4, s, 2020, promoting a flexible learning system that adapts to the diverse needs of students. This system aims to customize and deliver learning options based on students' readiness to use technology, connectivity status, digital literacy, and available devices. The effective utilization of technology is emphasized to support teaching and learning in these challenging times.

Bohol Island State University (BISU) has implemented an online blended learning modality, where teachers distribute printed or soft copies of learning materials/modules that can be delivered synchronously or asynchronously. This sudden shift has required significant adjustments from students, who must adapt to online learning.

Motivated by these circumstances, the researcher aims to conduct a study assessing students' competence in online learning and their levels of emotional intelligence, and how these factors affect their academic performance. The study intends to provide empirical data that can guide the university in preparing for educational changes that are responsive to the demands of 21st-century learners during the new normal.

By understanding the impact of online learning competence and emotional intelligence on academic performance, the study will contribute valuable insights to inform the university's strategies and approaches in navigating the evolving educational landscape. These insights will help ensure that the university meets the needs of students effectively in the digital era.

Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the readiness of both teachers and learners to adapt to the challenges of the teaching-learning process. Readiness, as defined by Bloom (1995), is a crucial factor in the education-instruction process and plays a vital role in the teaching-learning system. Changes in learner behavior are closely related to their readiness and affect their ability to achieve their goals.

The global spread of the virus has led to unprecedented consequences, threatening economies, education, health, and people's well-being. The resulting lockdowns and closure of educational institutions have disrupted traditional face-to-face classes, prompting students to stay home and engage in self-study. The duration of this crisis remains uncertain, and in response, Chua et al. (2020) proposed the use of online learning environments as a technical tool for promoting teaching and learning. They emphasized the need for teachers to be innovative in creating an analytical learning environment that meets the specific needs of today's students.

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The emergence of the pandemic has forced educational demands and trends to align with Education 4.0. This presents an opportunity for educators to engage with new technology tools and deepen their knowledge of technology. Education 4.0 necessitates the adoption of alternative delivery modes such as online learning, blended instruction, individualized learning, and problem-based teaching to maximize student engagement while leveraging technology. It also aligns with the demands of Industry 4.0, where education must prepare students for jobs that have yet to be created and equip them with the necessary competencies. In this context, learning spaces can be virtual, and learning occurs through teacher-to-student, student-to-student, and technology-to-student interactions. Assessing student readiness for online learning is crucial in developing and implementing an effective online learning system.

In response to government directives, educational institutions, including Bohol Island State University (BISU), have promptly addressed the demands of COVID-19 protocols and the requirements of the new normal. Efforts have been focused on improving IT infrastructure, restructuring physical environments, installing facilities related to COVID-19 response and prevention, establishing procedures and protocols for health compliance, facilitating online transactions, and providing faculty members with training on online learning management systems and pedagogy. BISU has adopted online blended learning to ensure the continuous delivery of instruction, providing students with online or offline modules. Teachers have adjusted by maintaining weekly online communication with students through platforms like messenger and Facebook.

Online learning has gained popularity in educational institutions, and in this process, it is essential for faculty and students to reassess students' readiness and develop a comprehensive measure of readiness to design better online courses and guide students toward successful online learning experiences. Previous research has indicated that technical skills related to computers and the internet are linked to learners' performance in web-based learning environments. Learners' perceptions of the internet also shape their attitudes and behaviors online. Hung et al. (2010) developed a scale for online learning readiness, which includes sub-dimensions such as self-directed learning, learner control, motivation, computer/internet self-efficacy, and online communications self-efficacy. These dimensions emphasize learners' behaviors, including self-confidence, self-knowledge, self-control, communication, and self-expression. Individuals need to be mentally prepared for online learning experiences and actions related to their personality traits.

Moreover, studies have explored the psychometric aspects of students' readiness for online learning, going beyond the traditional concept. They have found a significant association between students' emotional intelligence, their readiness for online education, and academic achievement. Emotional intelligence encompasses the management of emotions and refers to individual differences in perceiving, processing, regulating, and utilizing emotional information. Students with high emotional intelligence demonstrate better emotional stability, motivation, and self-confidence, resulting in improved task performance. Additionally, emotional intelligence helps individuals cope with difficult events and stressful situations, leading to better adaptation and decreased psychological and somatic complaints.

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Understanding the role of emotional intelligence in online learning is essential for developing effective online learning systems. Emotional intelligence is not only related to academic achievement but also influences students' behaviors, attitudes, and ability to manage negative emotions elicited by academic settings. Social demands also play a crucial role, as students with higher emotional intelligence may be better equipped to manage social relationships, which can directly or indirectly impact their academic performance.

Considering the importance of emotional intelligence in the online learning environment, educational institutions should take it seriously. Screening or diagnostic measures, such as administering Emotional Intelligence and Learning Strategy tests, can help identify and address students' emotional and learning needs. By integrating emotional intelligence development into education, institutions can foster emotionally healthy students who are happier, more cooperative, and more effective learners.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented significant challenges to the readiness of teachers and learners in adapting to the new normal of online learning. Assessing factors related to these challenges, particularly in the context of learners, will help educational institutions devise responsive solutions for effective implementation. Evaluating students' readiness for online learning, including dimensions such as technical skills, self-directed learning, motivation, and emotional intelligence, is crucial for designing and delivering successful online courses. By considering these factors, educational institutions can facilitate students' academic success and personal growth in the digital era.

Method

The researcher employed a correlational survey research design. The researcher gathered primary data from each of the respondents as the basis for determining their emotional intelligence levels, online competence, and academic performance.

Bohol Island State University is the locale of the study. It has one main campus and six satellite campuses located in different strategic sites in Bohol, namely: Main Campus – Carlos P. Garcia North Avenue, Tagbilaran City; Bilar Campus – Zamora, Bilar; Candijay Campus – Cogtong, Candijay; Clarin Campus – Poblacion, Clarin; Calape Campus – San Isidro, Calape; and Balilihan Campus – Magsija, Balilihan. The researcher conducted the study in this institution since it is the researchers' environment. The results would benefit her as an instructor to better understand the students during this pandemic and find better ways to address their needs and the institutions' online learning effective implementation. Thus, determining how ready the students are an essential factor for effective and sustainable delivery of instruction and effective implementation despite the challenges during the new normal.

The study was participated by 508 sample in proportion to the number of students per program per college from the six campuses of Bohol Island State University. A stratified random sampling technique was employed using the R software. Table 1 below presents the frequencies of respondents from the different campuses.

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Table 1. Respondents of the Study

Campus	Total Students' Population	Sample Size	Percentage
Campus A	1046	35	6.89
Campus B	2782	92	18.11
Campus C	1383	46	9.05
Campus D	2033	67	13.19
Campus E	1289	43	8.46
Campus F	6793	225	44.29
TOTAL	**15326**	**508**	**100**

The researcher modified the questionnaires of Hung et. al (2010) and Belinda Davies, Emotional Intelligence Tool (2010) as the main instrument in gathering information for the study. The questionnaire has three parts with informed consent for the respondents.

Part 1 asks for the profile of the respondents in terms of the capability for online learning specifically their availability of gadgets and status of internet connectivity.

Part 2 is a modified Emotional Intelligence questionnaire adapted by Belinda Davies based on Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Framework. This constitutes the five domains of Goleman's EI theory: self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, social awareness, and social skills.

Part 3 is based on the Online Learning Readiness Scale developed by Hung et al. (2010). Yurdugül and Sarikaya (2013) conducted Turkish validity. They identified five dimensions of online learning readiness: computer/internet self-efficacy, self-directed learning, learner control, motivation to learn, and online communication self-efficacy.

Results

Based on the analysis of the data, the researcher derived the following findings:

1. Based on the profile, most students utilize smart/android phones over laptops, iPad, tablets, desktop computers, laptops, and netbooks. But, unfortunately, most of them also have limited internet connectivity. This implies that the status of internet connectivity is an existing problem for online learning.

2. Students are competent to perform in an online learning environment. This means that the students has the enough skills to perform efficiently for online learning, specifically learner control. It indicates that the students can direct their own learning progress and has an independent study experience in an online course. Correctly implemented, student self-assessment can promote intrinsic motivation, internally controlled effort, a mastery goal orientation, and more meaningful learning to the learners.

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3. It was revealed that the students have high emotional intelligence levels. Specifically, the students demonstrated greater self-assessment. This means that the students has developed distinct awareness on their strengths and weaknesses that promotes their resilience level to adapt online learning and developed practices for the success of online learning despite the changes brought during this new normal.

4. There is a significant relationship between student's online learning competence and emotional intelligence levels. It further revealed a positive relationship between emotional intelligence sub-dimensions, self-confidence, self-control, leadership and influence, and online learning competence. Thus, this implies that as self-confidence, self-control, leadership, and influence levels increase, the student's competence to demonstrate in online learning also increases.

 5. Furthermore, it was found out that emotional intelligence is the primary predictor of academic success among students in online environments. Self-assessment and self-control skills emotional intelligence sub-dimension had more prediction power on academic achievement in online learning compared to other EI sub-dimensions. Thus, it could be stated that students with high self-control and self-assessment could be more successful in an online environment.

This implies that the students become independent learners, self-motivated and more engaged despite the challenges they have encountered such as technical difficulties like unstable internet connection and availability of gadgets.

Discussion

Based on the findings, it is concluded that as the students' emotional intelligence influence online learning competence and academic performance, their self-awareness, self-regulation and social skills shape and propel them in making their education more relevant, resilient and sustainable.

In view of the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Teachers should integrate emotional intelligence enrichment strategies into the teaching and learning process to enhance students' performance in online learning.

2. The administration, specifically the students' affairs, and services office, should conduct more relevant and responsive emotional enhancement webinars on students through proper coordination with the guidance office.

3. The administration should ensure that the students have the resources necessary to perform and access online education, potentially through joint efforts with the external linkages, specifically the telecommunications sector, to improve connectivity status.

4. It is recommended that future researchers should conduct further studies to assess teachers' online learning competency and emotional intelligence since these plays a significant role in the online success of students.

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