

Addressing the Needs of Distance Education Learners Based on their Perception of a Successful Student

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Abstract

The study aimed at determining possible teaching and assessment practices in a general education course to better address a range of distance education learners' needs based on a thematic analysis of their graded learning activity reports on students' perception of success submitted by 147 learners of a general education course offered in an open education institution in the Philippines.

Analysis of data revealed that a huge majority (70%) of the students perceive success as the ability to "combine academic and non-academic life well," while manifesting the following traits, "disciplined, great at time management, can apply what was learned in the classroom to real-life situations, an all-rounder, good character, and good social life." Almost half of the students (49%) assessed themselves as not successful. Based on the students' impression, majority (68%) of their parents define success as "excelling academically in a prestigious university and getting a high-paying job;" while most (68%) of their friends perceive success as the "ability to combine academic and non-academic initiatives well." Almost all (95%) of the students said they were challenged by the views of their parents on student success.

Based on the results, the following teaching and assessment practices are recommended: (1) FICs should provide more engagement avenues to encourage socialization or interaction, e.g., conducting F2F synchronous interaction even on a limited basis, and should respond to emails or portal chats as soon as possible to help students strike a good balance between academic and non-academic achievements, their most popular definition of students' success; (2) Learning assessments can be made more practical as these should prepare the learner to use classroom knowledge at work or can be applied in their daily lives; (3) Learning assessments can be made more doable and within a realistic time frame to help students fulfill course requirements; and (4) Module topics can be reexamined to assess if they can be streamlined for a more efficient and/or effective conduct of the course's learning outcomes.

Keywords: distance learners, student success, academic excellence, general education, tertiary education

Introduction

The researcher has been teaching General Education (GE) courses for undergraduate students at an institution of higher learning for many years now. She had that similar chance with an open education institution in the Philippines for a semester when she was assigned as a Faculty-in-Charge (FIC) of a general education course, COMM 10 (Critical Perspectives in Communication) in distance education mode.

In the syllabus, COMM 10 is described as a course that explores how communication takes place in various levels of human interaction: interpersonal or group, mass or public, intercultural and

workplace. It is in these spheres that students are able to forge individual and collective identities, and make sense of their interactions, not only with others but also with institutions that impact their thoughts, feelings, and actions. As students interact with individuals and institutions, they need to be armed with various lenses for them to have a more critical and meaningful engagement with issues and concerns of communication in local and global contexts.

One module in the course, where 175 enrolled students are most participative in, is Module 3 entitled, “Communication and Identity Construction.” The concept of identity construction was based on the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) as developed by the scholars Jung and Hecht (2004). According to them, CTI is a layered theory that conceptualizes identity as experienced at multiple levels or frames, multifaceted and dynamic, and communicated both verbally and behaviorally in diverse ways evolving over time.

In the current study, the focus was on the first level of identity, that is, the personal identity, defined as an individual's self-concepts or self-images, existing at the individual level of analysis. More specifically, the focus was on the learners' images of a “successful student” as an important input in trying to understand the complexity of distance learners who are working students, among other characteristics. Since students are the main clients in the instruction component of any university, it is important that their concept of student success be given importance as this can lead to adjustments on teaching and assessment practices to better serve their (academic) needs.

It is in this light that the current study tackled the following research questions:

1. What are the students' and their family and friends' perceptions of academic success? Do students consider themselves successful based on their own definition of success?
2. What are the possible teaching and assessment practices in general education courses to better address the range of needs of distance education learners, based on their perception of academic success?

Objectives of the Study

The study aimed at determining teaching and assessment practices in a general education course to better address a range of distance education learners' needs based on a thematic analysis of their graded learning activity reports on students' perception of success submitted by 147 learners of a general education course offered by an open education institution.

More specifically, the study aimed to determine the following:

1. Distance education learners' image of a successful student and their assessment if they are successful;
2. Distance education learners' perception of their parents' and friends' definition of a successful student success, and on whether they are affected by such definition; and
3. Teaching and assessment practices to better address distance education learners' needs based on their perception of student success.

Literature Review

A review was undertaken to assess what the literature relevant to the study has covered regarding the distance learners' concept of success, role of family and friends in students' success, needs

of distance of learners' profile of an open education institution's student, their perception of academic success, and current teaching and assessment practices for distance learners.

Perceptions of Student Success

According to the Academic Senate of the California State University or ASCSU (2019), "student success" has become synonymous with acquiring a degree, especially a degree achieved in four years, but should not be the sole standard for student success. The ASCSU believes that the term "student success" should also include the experiences and learnings of the student with their mentors and with other students. Some measures they have are emotional development, ability to collaborate with people other than yourself, critical and creative thinking skills, self-discipline, organizational capacity, mastery of skills, career success or admission to further degree programs, among other things.

York and others (2015) conducted a review of the definition and measurement of the term "academic success" and concluded that the theoretically grounded definition of academic success constitutes six components, namely: academic achievement, satisfaction, acquisition of skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of learning objectives, and career success. The same researchers argue that they found incongruence in the literature between how academic success was defined and how it was measured. These findings suggest that despite reports that have advocated for more detailed views of the term (Kuh et al., 2006), the bulk of published research continues to measure academic success as academic achievement narrowly; more specifically, operationalized as grades and/or grade point average (GPA).

Meanwhile, a study conducted by Burger and Naude (2020) among South African students revealed that perceived academically successful students were associated with strong academic self-concepts, motivation, balance, and effective study behaviors. In contrast to the notion that adversity hampers academic success, the participants in the study emphasized resilience when faced with challenges and difficulties. The study highlighted the complexity of students' academic success and the importance of recognizing the nuanced nature of individuals' reactions to academic challenges.

Cuseo (2012) theorizes that the holistic aspect of student success is consistent with recent research and interest in such concepts as multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1999), emotional intelligence or EQ (1995), and spiritual intelligence (Zohar & Marshall, 2000). It is also consistent with the vast majority of college mission statements and institutional goals, which include many outcomes that are not strictly academic or cognitive in nature (Astin, 1991; Kuh et al., 1987).

The implications of this holistic definition of student success for one very desirable student outcome—student retention—are underscored by research that repeatedly demonstrates that the vast majority (75-85%) of students who withdraw from college do so for reasons other than poor academic performance. In fact, most departing students are in good academic standing at the time of their departure (Noel, 1985; Tinto, 1993). More recently, these findings were reinforced by institutional research conducted at Indiana University, Bloomington, which launched a broad range of initiatives to enhance the quality of the first-year experience and improve student retention. One conclusion drawn after implementing these initiatives was that strict concentration on academic matters does not significantly impact student retention without equal concentration on non-academic elements of student life (Smith, 2003). Thus, student success may be best defined as a holistic phenomenon that embraces the multiple dimensions of personal development and the multiple goals of higher education.

Alfaifi and colleagues (2020) have found that most students they interviewed defined success in college as— achieving their study goals, passing all of their courses, graduating on time, and having diligence and persistence.

Gammon-Pitman and Ding (2021) interviewed two students (Kate and Dan) from their pool of engineering student participants and mentioned that achieving success is a continuous process wherein people learn from their failures and that success gets redefined as one achieves their goals and makes new goals. It was also noted that success varies in each individual, but society plays a big role on how people define success. It is recommended that a student-centered approach be implemented in the classroom highlighting the students' experiences, so that success would not just be limited to good grades.

Rea (1991) found that the top seven responses to the question, "What outcomes in this course would you accept as 'success'?" were "Receive a grade that represents my best effort," "Learn something new which I was not familiar with before," "Try my best even if I don't get the best grade," "Better understand the subject matter," "Gain practical knowledge I can apply in everyday life," "Find the subject interesting," and "Better understand other people." According to Rea (1991), the top response showed that students wanted more than a high grade; they wanted a high grade best representing their effort. It was recommended that teachers should adopt an intrinsic teaching method that would stimulate curiosity and present intellectual challenges for the students to ensure mastery of the subject matter.

Saltürk (2021) aimed to determine students' perception of academic achievement and how they perceive themselves in terms of academic achievement. He found that the students do not measure their achievement with grades alone but also address social, psychological, cognitive, and professional aspects. There was a need for social approval, meeting expectations, achieving goals, and doing their job well. Around 75.9% of the students were reported by Saltürk (2021) as not finding themselves academically successful. One of the reasons he presented was "grades obtained in certain courses or tests." For the participants in the study who were already above a certain success ranking in the national high school entrance exam, the competitive environment was said to be a factor affecting students' perception of achievement.

Role of Parents in Children's Academic Success

Meanwhile, the role of parental expectations in affecting children's academic progress has also received substantial attention from psychologists and sociologists over the past half-century.

Yamamoto and Holloway (2010) reported that, in general, parental expectations had been found to play a critical role in children's academic success. The same researchers state that students whose parents hold high expectations receive higher grades, achieve higher scores on standardized tests, and persist longer in school than those whose parents have relatively low expectations (Davis-Kean, 2005; Pearce, 2006; Vartanian et al., 2007). High parental expectations are also linked to student motivation to achieve in school, scholastic and social resilience, and aspirations to attend college (Hossler & Stage, 1992; Peng & Wright, 1994; Reynolds, 1998).

A study by Dechant (2011) on the influence of friendship on motivation and academic achievement at Fort Hays State University in the US has shown that friendship, along with motivation, can impact the cognitive development and academic achievement of students in varying ways. As a result of the increase in attention on student achievement and the positive outcomes that

result from academic success, knowing the influences of age, friendship quality, various aspects of friendship, and motivation on academic achievement can only serve to enhance student achievement outcomes, and therefore success in adulthood.

The literature cited above suggests different lenses of student success, from the learners themselves and the various concepts from their relations, that is, family and friends. Parents' role remains to be critical; thus, their involvement seems to be a factor in students' academic success because learners seem motivated to study harder; hence, it can be surmised that parents' perception of student success is important for the learner. The above studies also showed that various aspects of friendship could enhance student achievement.

Needs of Distance Education Learners

In a 2003 study by Sampson, he reported that seemingly, students were, on the whole, satisfied with the course materials, the choice of modules, assignment feedback, and the length of time given to complete assignments. Thus, according to the researcher, it seems fair that most students' needs were largely met. An area of significant concern, however, was that of student support. Although this is an issue that inherently involves a high degree of subjectivity, this would appear to be an area worthy of further investigation since it relates directly to students' needs, and it would appear that students' needs are not being met in this aspect. Furthermore, as Robinson (1995) states in her review of research literature regarding learner support, "multiple interacting factors (personal, environmental and course variables) are at work in determining learner success," although some "institutional interventions can assist if appropriately targeted."

A more recent study by Martin (2020) listed the top five reasons why distance learning did not meet the needs of learners, namely: (1) inequitable access to devices or the Internet, (2) lack of authenticity or purpose (3) too many platforms and tools, (4) focus on the completion of tasks and assignments over learning; and (5) lack of connection and collaboration. These findings suggest the need to reach out to students to ask about their concerns continuously and educators may need to act accordingly or address expressed concerns of students.

Open and Distance e-Learning

ODEL consists of three concepts or domains— open, distance and e-learning, each of which has its definition and origin.

Distance education is any form of organized teaching and learning where student and teacher are physically separated, and technology is used to bridge this physical and instructional gap.

On the other hand, open learning is a vision of an educational system accessible to every individual with minimal restrictions. It emphasizes the flexibility of the system to eradicate problems caused by barriers like age, geographical location, time constraints, and economic situation.

E-learning is commonly referred to as the intentional use of networked information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching and learning (Naidu, 2006).

ODEL draws from the features and affordances provided by open learning, DE, and e-learning— access and equity, resource sharing, learner-centeredness, flexibility, active learning, interactivity, ubiquity, and connectivity. Some of these features— like access and equity — are more in tune with open learning— others, like learner-centeredness, flexibility, and active learning— are shared

by the three domains. Ubiquity, interactivity, and connectivity are more e-learning contributions (Alfonso, 2014).

Bandalaria (2016) expounded on ODeL as a framework for lifelong learning stressing the 21st century skills: creativity and innovation, communication and collaboration, digital literacy, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

The needs of distance learners in the 90s seem to be generally the same over time. As Sampson (2003) reports, all learning requires a degree of motivation, self-discipline, and independence on behalf of the learner, but these aspects are arguably more pertinent in the case of distance learning, where the student is mainly self-directed and unsupervised, and expected to be more autonomous.

Profile of the students of the open education institution

A review of some studies published from 2014 to 2018 on the profile of the open education institution learners coming from different academic programs reveals that majority are single, female, belonging to the 16-35 age range, and with almost an equal ratio of full-time to part-time students. Details on the said surveys are shown below.

Among 2410 Associate in Arts Program students, Reyes (2018) reported that 53% of the enrolled students were full-time and unemployed, while 44% are employed in their respective fields. A vast majority (89%) are single, a few (10%) are married, and the rest are widowed or legally separated. Students of the AA programs are located in 65 areas in the Philippines, and five areas outside the Philippines (offshore).

Meanwhile, among nursing students, Roxas-Ridulme (2017) found that the majority (76%) of the students are single, while 24% are married. In addition, 61% of the students are located overseas (offshore), while 39% are in the Philippines.

In 2016, Suarez and Quimbo found that among 58 Bachelor of Arts and Media Studies students, a huge majority (88%) belonged to the 16-35 age bracket, with 58 years old as the age of the oldest student. In addition, majority (60%) are female and 40% male with more than half (58%) classified from freshman to sophomore.

Cruz et al. (2014) found that out of the 144 students from the Organic Agriculture course, most are second-degree seekers and are working in their professions. Half of the students are married, around half (45.1%) are single, and the rest are widowed or separated. According to the same research, they do not have enough time to go to school as they have families to raise and are living in faraway places.

Methodology

Research Design

The research focused on the participants' (students) viewpoint on student success and how they think their parents and friends perceive it. Data were obtained from the COMM10 (Critical Perspectives of Communication) student report, which were part of the course's Module 3 (Communication and Identity Construction) graded learning activity on frames of students' success.

Thematic Analysis (TA) was the chosen methodology to identify emerging themes on the students' concept of student success. TA is a widely known research method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting data patterns known as "themes" (Clarke & Braun, 2006). Given its flexible nature, it can also serve as a tool to surface an intricate amount of data. Based on the participants' images of a successful student, the researcher's experience as a distance learner teacher, and what the literature suggests, a list of teaching and assessment strategies were arrived at.

The source of the generated themes was based on the following specific questions provided to students:

Using the notion of student success, reflect on how you perceive this idea (of student success) and how you think others (family members and friends) perceive the same concept by responding to the following question prompts:

1. *What is your image of a successful student?*
2. *Do you consider yourself a successful student? Why or why not?*
3. *By observing and/or inferring, how do you think your parents and friends perceive student success?*
4. *How have their views affected or influenced yours?*

Participants' Background

The profile of students, namely: age, gender/sex, civil status, employment (on whether they are full-time or part-time students), and academic classification, were obtained from the profile Google survey form provided at the beginning of the semester.

Teaching and Assessment Practices

The relevant teaching and assessment practices included in the study were from the literature review, including the researcher's own experience as a faculty of an institution of higher learning for three decades already for general education and major courses on communication (undergraduate and graduate).

Data Analysis

Based on the themes generated, which were taken from the students' graded learning activity reports, means and percentages were computed. The same analysis was done on the profile of students to serve as a background on the participants of the study. There was no intention, however, to do statistical analysis on the participants' characteristics against the themes generated.

Ethical Considerations

The students' consent to use their responses on Module 3 graded learning activity was obtained through a Google survey. All data are stored in Google Drive hosted by the university email. The sharing settings of Google documents and sheets were restricted and only accessible to the researcher and her online student assistant. All data obtained from participation in the study were treated with the utmost confidentiality.

Results and Discussion

Participants' Background

Analysis of their profile reveals the following: The majority are aged 24 years and below (63%), female (63%), full-time students (56%), but 44% are part-time or are employed, and freshmen to sophomore classification (58%).

Table 1

Student Profile

Student Characteristics	N=147	%
Age		
Youngest	18	-
Eldest	47	-
Average	24.2	-
Students aged 24 years and below	93	63
Gender		
Male	54	37
Female	93	63
Civil status		
Married	11	7
Single	136	93
Employment		
None (full-time student)	83	56
Employed (part-time or full time)	64	44
Academic classification		
Freshman (Student No. 2020-xxxxx)	37	25
Sophomore (SN 2019-xxxxx)	48	33
Junior (SN 2018-xxxxx)	8	5
Senior (SN 2017-xxxxx)	8	5
Super seniors (SN 2016-xxxxx and older)	46	31

Distance Learners' Images of a Successful Student

A huge majority of the distance learners (70%) visualize a successful student as someone who can “combine academic and non-academic life well while manifesting the following traits: disciplined, great at time management, can apply what was learned in the classroom to real-life situations, an all-rounder, good character, and good social life.” (Table 2)

To the learners, success is not limited to academic excellence but more focused on non-academic aspects interestingly described as “book and street smart,” “all-rounder,” “good character,” “good social life,” and “jack-of-all- trades.” One’s ability to apply what was learned in the classroom to real-life situations as an indicator of student success was also mentioned.

Table 2

Response to Survey Question: *What is your image of a successful student?*

Student responses	No. of responses	% of responses
1. Can balance or manage academics and non-academics/life, is disciplined and great at time management	38	26
2. Can apply what they've in the classroom into real life situations; is book and street smart	33	22
3. Is an all-rounder; a jack-of-all-trades (excels in academics, non-academic commitments, is of good character and has good social life, etc.)	31	21
4. Is self-motivated; is content with life; has their own purpose and drive	14	10
5. Is focused on and values growth, learning, and development	13	9
6. Excels academically (with Latin honors, graduated on time, has good grades etc.) in a prestigious university	9	6
7. Has good grades and good character	9	6
Total	147	100

Based on our synchronous discussion, while many of the students, especially the already working professionals, wish to do academically well in the class, they are not at all disappointed if they do not excel in consideration of the fact that either they are married, a solo parent, or straddling between work and school. Hence, to them, their ability to balance school and work is by itself a “success.”

Only a few students equated a successful student to someone who is academically excellent, “*excels academically – has good grades, graduated on time, graduated with Latin honors.*”

The results of the current study confirm what Saltürk (2021) had reported: students do not really measure their achievement with grades alone but also address social, psychological, cognitive, and professional aspects. There was a need for gaining social approval, meeting expectations, achieving goals, and doing their job well.

In view of the above, there may be a need to review the assessment tools given to students for them to earn a passing mark – aligned more with their application of the classroom concepts to real-life situations or in synch with life after the university; and the guidelines governing the submission of these requirements be more receptive of their status as students (full-time or part-time; with children or solo parents). On this, I would like to stress the importance of giving immediate feedback on students’ work. Some of my former students in the open education institution have shared that some of their professors seldom return their reports with comments or areas for improvement. They receive their final grades at the end of the semester (sometimes delayed by a semester or two).

As early as 2007, Hattie and Timperley have already reported that giving feedback is an essential skill for lecturers in higher education, and it has a major influence on the quality of the students’ learning process. Consistent with this finding, Bashir and others (2016) similarly found that

“feedback is important in improving learning experience for the students and has a significant effect in professionalizing teaching in the higher education level.”

In the context of distance learners and with the advent of digital technology, the literature suggests many ways such feedback can be had. Bashir and others (2016) mentioned two e-feedback mechanisms: (1) email: a simple but effective way of providing students the feedback; and (2) audio feedback. Recently, that has been exploited in providing feedback to students. It is widely known as a podcast in the academic arena.

For my classes, I used private chat messages through Google Classroom or MyPortal and/or group site postings of summarized general feedback. If I do not still receive feedback from the students, I search them on social media, e.g., Facebook messenger chats, although the use of social media has been strongly discouraged by the institution of higher learning that I am a part of.

Self-assessment on Being a Successful Student

Almost half (49%) of the students said they do not consider themselves successful students, while 41% said they feel they are successful as students.

Table 3

Response to Survey Question: Have you fulfilled your own definition of a successful student? Why or why not?

Student responses	No. of responses	% of responses
1. Yes, I have fulfilled my definition of a successful student.	60	41
2. No, I have not fulfilled my definition of a successful student.	39	27
3. Not yet, but I could be better.	33	22
4. Yes and no (I have fulfilled some of my mentioned characteristics of a successful student, but there are some I still do not)	15	10
Total	147	100

Based on the above results, the majority (59%) of the students do not consider themselves as successful in the context of the majority of learners’ image of a successful student as “can balance or manage academics and non-academics/life, is disciplined and great at time management; can apply what they have learned in the classroom into real -life situations” among other characteristics.” The rest of the students were confident they were successful.

Based on Zoom/synchronous interaction/discussion, most students would consider themselves really successful after they are done with college or have graduated already. I noticed that while their concepts of a successful student are less on academic performance, even at the non-academic parameters they listed, they seem to be wary in categorically stating they are successful students.

Students’ Perception of their Parents’ View of Student Success

Based on the students’ observation, the majority (68%) of their parents express that success is when a student excels academically (with Latin honors, graduated on time in a prestigious university, has good grades) in a “prestigious” university and gets a high paying job while the rest

observed that their parents define student success as one's ability to excel in both academic and non-academic commitments with the following manifested characteristics at the same time: *an all-rounder; a jack-of-all-trades, is of good character and has good social life; can apply what they've learned in the classroom into real-life situations; is disciplined and great at time management.*

Table 4

Response to Survey Question: *By observing and inferring, how do you think your parents perceive student success?*

Student responses	No. of responses	% of responses
1. Excels academically (with Latin honors, graduated on time in a prestigious university, has good grades, has a job)	82	56
2. Has a degree	17	12
3. Is an all-rounder; a jack-of-all-trades (excels in academics, non-academic commitments, is of good character and has good social life)	16	11
4. Has good personality, consistent character	11	7
5. Can apply what he/she has learned in the classroom into real life situations; is book and street smart	11	7
6. Focused on and values growth, learning, and development	6	4
7. Can balance or manage academics and non-academics/life, is disciplined and great at time management	4	3
Total	147	100

Meanwhile, only 11% of the students observed that their parents think a student is successful if they have a good personality, "consistent" character and are focused on growth, learning, and development values.

These results are consistent with the literature appearing elsewhere in this report. It is common knowledge that parents are usually focused on their children's academic performance and take great pride and joy when their children graduate with Latin honors.

Thus, in view of the above, it may be necessary for teachers to provide moral support to students and go the extra mile to help distance learners cope with the requirements as pressure from parents may cause them to be mentally unwell. This is in the context that it would be impossible for teachers in higher education to change the mindset of parents.

Students' Perception of their Friends' View of Student Success

Based on the learner's impression, the majority (68%) of their friends perceive student success as someone who is *"an all-rounder, jack-of-all-trades, can combine well academic and non-academic initiatives, and can apply what was learned in the classroom in real life situation while enjoying good social life, disciplined, and self-motivated"* while only 22% view student success as excelling solely in academics. These results seem similar to the participants' concept of student success.

Table 5

Response to Survey Question: By observing and inferring, how do you think your friends perceive a successful student?

Student responses	No. of responses	% of responses
1. Excels academically (with Latin honors, graduated on time, has good grades etc.), in a prestigious university	33	22
2. Is an all-rounder; a jack-of-all-trades (excels in academics, non-academic commitments, is of good character and has good social life, etc.)	28	18
3. Can apply what he/she has learned in the classroom into real life situations; is book and street smart	24	16
4. Can balance or manage academics and non-academics/life, is disciplined and great at time management	22	15
5. Is self-motivated; is content with life; has their own purpose and drive; can take care of self	14	10
6. Has good personality, consistent character	13	9
7. Has a degree	7	5
8. No answer	7	5
Total	147	100

Studies have generally shown that friends' perceptions and peer pressure are real, and those learners are influenced heavily by their friends in many aspects of their lives. Comparing the learners' self-concept (70%) and their friends' concept (68%) of student success, one would say that the learners seem to be friends with individuals with whom they have similar perceptions in life.

However, teachers should take this as a challenge to encourage, inspire, and help their students to strike a good balance between school, work, and play.

Impact on Student of their Parents' and Friends' Views

Only 5% of the participants said they were unaffected by their parents' and friends' concept of student success. This means an overwhelming 95% of the students were either positively affected (65%): challenged/motivated/encouraged; or negatively affected (35%): crippled/pressured due to their parents' reliance on academic excellence as a measure of student success.

Table 6

Response to Survey Question: How have your (parents' and friends') views [of student success] affected or influenced your own view?

Student responses	No. of responses	% of responses
1. I was able to challenge, work for, and/or motivate myself.	60	41
2. I received encouragement from both parents and friends.	35	24
3. It induced crippling or overwhelming pressure.	32	22
4. I received pressure from parents and earned confidence and drive from friends.	12	8
5. Nothing; It did not affect or influence me.	6	5
Total	147	100

I think the descriptions of “crippled and overwhelmed” and how these would affect the students’ mental wellness, especially amidst the pandemic, are quite alarming. In view of the above, it is clear that parents have a continuing influence on the lives of university students. In fact, a study by Harper and others (2012) revealed that parental involvement’s effect on students is dependent on gender, race, class, and year in school.

Since the view of the participants and their friends on student success is almost similar, the former said that they were even more encouraged to strike a good balance between academic and non-academic accomplishments and/or focused more on “self-love.” Such a result is similarly manifested in a study by Stewart and Maisonville (2019), which revealed that some scholars say that from the outside looking in, it may seem that successful students are good students simply because they are naturally good at studying. However, if you look closer, you will see that despite the students’ differences, all successful students seem to share certain common traits. These characteristics include positive attitude, effective learning and thinking skills, time management skills, and personal well-being strategies.

Teaching and Assessment Practices for Distance Education Learners

In view of the analysis of the participants’ responses and the presented teaching and assessment strategies for distance learners both, from the literature review and from the researcher’s teaching experience, there really is a need to review the urgent expressions of distance learners on their current needs as manifested in their perception of student success. As York and others (2015) reported, they found incongruence in the literature between how academic success was defined and how it was measured, which may suggest the need for teachers to review the measuring tools or instruments used in gauging learning outcomes.

FICs may wish to reach out more to students, especially because the open education institution engages in distance learning; hence, minimal to no physical F2F engagement. Since asynchronous engagement can be had, FICs should provide more avenues of engagement, group work or peer evaluation to encourage socialization or interaction, respond to emails or portal chats as soon as possible – all these to help students strike a good balance between academic and non-academic achievements, their most popular definition of student success.

In my class, I conduct synchronous sessions to introduce every module's highlights for the following reasons: (1) to provide simplified discussions of the key concepts in the module, (2) to address or clarify whatever concerns the students have with respect to their understanding of the key concepts, (3) to present and discuss the graded learning and summative activities, (4) to respond to their clarifications regarding the graded activities, and (5) to conduct online breakout group activities to afford students some level of interaction. However, to be able to conduct one synchronous (via Zoom or Google Meet) session requires a lot of preparation on the part of the teacher.

Learning assessments can be made more authentic and practical as these should prepare the learner to use classroom knowledge at work or applied in daily life, especially because there are a good number of students in the open education institution who are working (either full-time or part-time) while studying. This would be consistent with the learners' concept of success as being able to practice theories learned in the classroom.

Saltürk (2021) found that the students do not measure their achievement with grades alone but also address social, psychological, cognitive, and professional aspects. There was a need for gaining social approval, meeting expectations, achieving goals, and doing their job well. This research data from Saltürk (2021) stress the need to consider using topics related to their daily, especially the GE course COMM 10 is on critical perspectives in communication; hence, the context of their graded activities can range from: what is their identity in social media compared to their identity at home; an analysis of pressing issues close to family, their immediate community or about the country and other relevant issues at hand.

A review of the students' profile based on the Google Survey and/or the data on the discussion forum on Self-Introduction can be studied first before graded learning activities, or summative activities are given to students. This way, the FIC can ensure that assessment activities are in the context of the students' nature of work or major field, consistent with their concept of work-based assessments. This will also ensure that the context of the graded activities is within the sphere of experience of the learners.

Learning assessments can be made more doable and within a realistic time frame to help students fulfill course requirements. Thus, assessments, for example, should not ask learners to go out of the house to interview people because that would expose them to the virus amidst the pandemic; if they should be asked to do group work, working online should strongly be encouraged. These assessments should be made more accessible, especially to those with both long-term and short-term disabilities or mental health issues. While officially approved channels for interaction include email and MyPortal chat, it may be an opportune time to review, allowing faculty members and students to engage in more popular social media channels. These recommendations are in sync with their concept of student success: great at time management, all-rounder, and good social life.

FICs can also study the possibility of providing choice or alternative graded activities per module for students (single or married learners, full-time or part-time students; hence, in different circumstances with varied experiences) to choose from – not one activity for all students per module or topic. While it would be more convenient for the FIC to just require one topic for the graded activity to make marking of papers easier and faster (because you will have one topic for all, and after a while, you will have mastered the key or answers), in the OdeL framework, there is an emphasis on creativity and innovation, as well as communication and collaboration.

It would be interesting to observe different communication concepts and perspectives based on the distance learners' varied profiles.

Modules/Topics of courses can be reexamined to assess if they can be streamlined for a more efficient and/or effective conduct of the course's learning outcomes, e.g., some modules can be combined because they are logically related or take an integrative approach to lesson planning. This would lead to fewer requirements easing both the workload of students and teachers alike, increasing the likelihood for students to engage in extra-curricular activities.

Conclusions

A huge majority of learners (70%) visualize a successful student as someone who can “combine academic and non-academic life well,” while manifesting the following traits: “disciplined, great at time management, can apply what was learned in the classroom to real-life situations, an all-rounder, good character, and good social life.”

Thus, from the students' descriptions, it is evident that success is not limited to academic excellence but is more focused on non-academic aspects interestingly described as “book and street smart,” “all-rounder,” “good character,” “good social life,” and “jack-of-all trades.”

There may be a need to review the assessment tools given to students for them to earn a passing mark – aligned more with their application of the classroom concepts to real-life situations or in synch with life after the university; and the guidelines governing the submission of these requirements be more receptive of their status as students (full-time or part-time; with children or solo parents).

Based on the learners' image of a successful student, almost half (49%) consider themselves as not successful, while 41% consider themselves as successful.

Based on the students' observation, the majority (68%) of their parents expressed that success is when a student excels academically (with Latin honors, graduates on time) in a “prestigious” university and gets a high-paying job. Based on the learners' impression, the majority (68%) of their friends perceive student success as one's ability to combine academic and non-academic initiatives.

Almost all (95%) of the learners said that they were challenged or affected by the views of their parents and friends on student success and thus they decided to work harder.

This finding is consistent with the report of Yamamoto and Holloway (2010) when they said that, in general, parental expectations had been found to play a critical role in children's academic success.

In view of the analysis of the participants' responses and the presented teaching and assessment strategies for distance learners, both from the literature review and from the researcher's teaching experience, there really is a need to review the current and assessment tools used in the COMM 10 course by FICs to address the distance learners needs as implied in their perception of student success.

Recommendations

In view of the results of the study, the following are recommended:

1. FICs should provide more avenues of engagement to encourage socialization or interaction and should respond to emails or portal chats as soon as possible to help students strike a good balance between academic and non-academic achievements, their most popular definition of students' success;
2. Learning assessments can be made more practical as these should prepare the learner to use classroom knowledge at work or applied in their daily lives;
3. Learning assessments can be made more doable and within a realistic time frame to help students fulfill course requirements;
4. FICs can also study the possibility of providing more choices of graded activities per module for distance learners/students (single or married learners, full-time or part-time students, hence, in different circumstances with varied experiences) to choose from – not one activity for all students per module or topic; and
5. Module topics can be reexamined to assess if they can be streamlined for a more efficient and/or effective conduct of the course's learning outcomes.

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