Lived Experiences of Young Adults with Developmental Disability in Public National High Schools

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ABSTRACT:

This study employed a transcendental phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of young adults with developmental disabilities during remote learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Thirty-six participants aged 18-25, diagnosed with developmental disabilities, were purposively selected from Mandaue City SPED Center High School, Babag National High School, and Zapatera National High School. In-depth interviews revealed challenges in independent learning, limited social support, difficulties adapting to home environments, and communication barriers affecting well-being. Coping strategies like seeking assistance and managing emotions supported engagement. Remote modalities were insufficient without specialized aids. Individualized support addressing academic, socioemotional, and communication needs through flexible models was crucial for equitable participation. Recommendations included personalized learning plans, specialized instruction, technology support, social-emotional learning, enhanced communication, and program evaluation. Implementation through a matrix framework is proposed to support learners holistically and guide best practices. Further research is needed to enhance inclusive support for diverse student needs in evolving learning environments.

INTRODUCTION:

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the education of young adults with developmental disabilities, with school closures and remote learning leading to disrupted routines, reduced support, and increased mental health challenges (Dianito et al., 2021). This study aims to understand the experiences of these young adults during the crisis by exploring their perspectives on education, services, mental well-being, family supports, and post-school outcomes.

Four theoretical frameworks guide this study: the Strengths-Based Approach, Social Model of Disability, Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, and Transcendental Phenomenology. These perspectives emphasize the strengths and capabilities of individuals,

the societal factors influencing disability, the environmental systems shaping human development, and the essence of lived experiences (Feng, 2022; Blackie & Moncrieff, 2022; Husserl, 1997; Weick et al., 1989).

In the United States and the Philippines, laws such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), Magna Carta for Disabled Persons (2016), and Batas Pambansa Blg. 344 (1983), shape the experiences of young adults with developmental disabilities in public high schools. These laws promote inclusivity, equal access to opportunities, and address societal barriers (Heffron, 2022; Imbong & Pielago, 2021).

Recent research highlights the challenges faced by students with developmental disabilities during the

pandemic, including limited access to technology and support (Dianito et al., 2021). However, students also demonstrated resilience with the help of families, peers, and a positive mindset (Dickinson et al., 2023). Promising strategies for inclusive education include individualized support, teacher and family involvement, and understanding students' aspirations and challenges (Anderson et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2022).

This study will amplify the voices of young adults with developmental disabilities to identify strategies that can better support their needs during disruptions. By understanding their experiences through the lenses of the chosen theories and legal bases, educators and policymakers can create more equitable, responsive, and inclusive education systems (Thomas, 2023; Husserl, 1997).

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

Participants

As shown in Table 1, the participants were 36 young adults with developmental disabilities who received modular or homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. They were selected from Zapatera National High School, Mandaue City Special Education High School, and Babag National High School based on the criteria of being aged 18-25, receiving modular/homeschooling during quarantines, residing with parents/guardians during the pandemic, and being enrolled in special education programs at the partner schools. A total of 36 participants were recruited from referral lists, with 10 (27.78%) from Zapatera National High School, 10 (27.78%) from Mandaue City SpEd Center High School, and 16 (44.44%) from Babag National High School.

Table 1
Distribution of the Research Participants

Schools	N	%
Zapatera National High School	10	27.78
Mandaue City SpEd Center High School	10	27.78
Babag National High School	16	44.44
Total	36	100.00

Instrument

A semi-structured interview guide was developed based on themes from literature to understand participants' lived experiences. It contained open-ended questions in three parts: experiences with modular/homeschooling during the pandemic, challenges related to disabilities and distance learning, and coping strategies. Probes elicited details as needed. Content validity was established through expert review evaluating questions for clarity, comprehensiveness, and objectives. Feedback led to guide finalization. Individual in-person interviews

were conducted across schools using audio-recorded guide. Responses were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Procedure

Approval was obtained from authorities before data collection. After obtaining approvals, 36 participants from three schools meeting the criteria were purposively sampled. Individual face-to-face interviews using the validated guide took place privately on school grounds. Informed consent and assent from participants and parents/guardians were acquired before audio-recording interviews for transcription. Transcripts removed identifiers to ensure confidentiality. Member checking involved sharing preliminary results with select participants to validate interpretations. Observational notes supplemented transcripts through triangulation, enhancing credibility. Rigorous procedures carefully implemented at each step authentically captured lived perspectives directly from participants.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS:

Verbatim transcripts were analyzed using thematic and transcendental phenomenological analysis. Researchers immersed themselves in the data by thoroughly reading transcripts. Textural analysis involved extracting significant statements to understand experiences. Initial coding identified patterns, impressions, and potential themes. Structural analysis described contextual influences. Themes were reviewed against coded extracts and the full dataset. Well-defined names and descriptions were developed for each theme. Textural-structural synthesis conveyed the essence of experiences by integrating textual and structural descriptions. Preliminary interpretations were validated through member checking. Observational notes were triangulated with transcripts. Cross-analysis compared individual descriptions across cases. Findings wove together final refined themes supported by data extracts and addressed research questions and theories. This rigorous application of analysis methods allowed for rich, meaningful insights directly from participants.

RESULTS:

The following section provides an overview of the key findings that emerged from the analysis of participants' experiences navigating distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. By synthesizing the main themes explored throughout interviews, the results concisely capture the most salient points regarding both the challenges faced and essential supports required for inclusive remote schooling. Universal barriers impacting the transition to virtual modalities are delineated alongside insights specific to interactions between learning environments, disability status, and individual circumstances. Implications drawn from the lived realities described have the potential to meaningfully inform the development of strengthened support systems

empowering continued equitable access to education through disruptive changes to instructional models.

Profile of the Participants

Figure 1 shows a total of 36 young adults with developmental disabilities participated across three schools. Zapatera National High School contributed the most with 16 students.
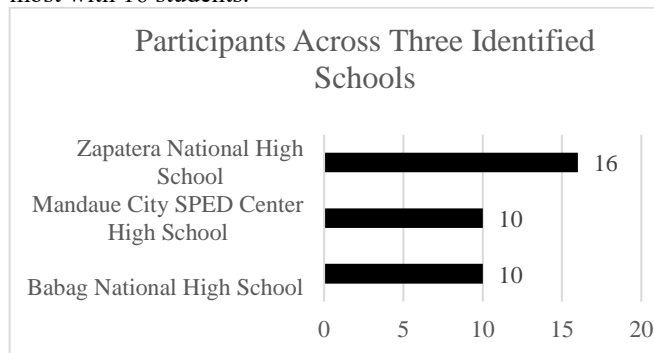

Figure 1. Participants Across Three Identified Schools

Figure 2 shows the Participants' disabilities varied across schools.
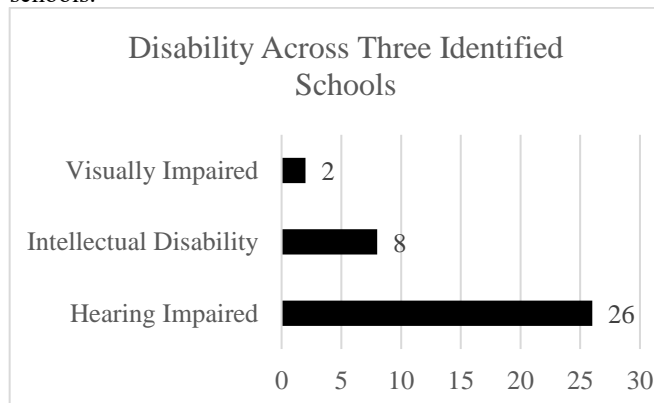

Figure 2. Disability of Participants Across Three Identified Schools

Hearing impairment affected 26 students overall, mostly at Zapatera National High School (16). Intellectual disability affected 8 students concentrated at Mandaue City SPED Center High School (8) and Babag National High School (7). Two students at Mandaue City SPED Center High School had visual impairments. Zapatera National High School served most students with hearing impairment. Mandaue City SPED Center High School and Babag National High School specialized in intellectual disabilities. Schools were best equipped to facilitate distance learning for common prior disabilities (Dickinson et al., 2023). Low-incidence disabilities like visual impairment required more support (Fanshawe et al., 2023).

Diversity allowed analysis of universal and disability-specific challenges (Allam & Martin, 2021). Barriers differed for accessible content and independent learners. Inclusive education continuity requires multi-tiered, disability-inclusive approaches reflecting divers student needs through remote collaboration. A one-size approach is insufficient.

Experiences of the Participants

The interviews found that independent learning from printed modules or online videos without teacher explanations

was very difficult for participants due to their reliance on visual teaching methods like sign language (Barcenas et al., 2021; Guiamalon, 2021). Face-to-face classroom instruction was reported as the most effective learning modality as it allowed for visual aids and real-time teacher guidance and clarification (Weirick, 2021).

Major barriers to independent learning included lack of access to explanations due to deafness, distractions in the home environment, reliance on inconsistent family assistance, and technology issues (Alford et al., 2023). Communication barriers from limited family sign language skills also caused feelings of isolation, sadness and frustration among participants (Bianchini, 2021).

Difficulties understanding printed modules alone without further guidance or support highlighted the need for synchronous teacher/peer interaction and asynchronous supporting resources (Parojenog & Eyo, 2022; Karasavvidis, 2021). The experience of distractions at home pointed to the value of structured guidance on creating suitable learning spaces (Hagenaars et al., 2022). Challenges communicating needs due to language barriers and reliance on indirect communication methods like writing inhibited full participation (Birnbaum, 2022; Wapling, 2023). Prolonged lack of accessibility and isolation negatively impacted emotional well-being, while family support and independent coping strategies helped with resilience (Mouratidis, 2021; Maluleke et al., 2021).

Ensuring inclusive distance education requires customized academic and socio-emotional support through technologies, flexible approaches, caregiver training and collaboration to consider students' diverse abilities and living circumstances (Lee & Heo, 2021; Creech, 2021; Velasco et al., 2021). This allows continued learning engagement for all.

Challenges of the Participants

Interviews with young adults with developmental disabilities provided insights into the challenges they faced with distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Abdel-Malek, 2021). Learning barriers were widely reported, including difficulties comprehending lessons without teacher support (Hirsch et al., 2021), distractions at home (DeMatthews et al., 2021), delays completing schoolwork, and overreliance on family assistance (Creech, 2021). Communication challenges also emerged, such as difficulties with spoken language (Aljedaani et al., 2023) and lack of understanding from others (Birnbaum, 2022). Several students faced sensory and hearing impairments that inhibited communication (Wapling, 2023).

Family problems negatively impacted some students' learning, including parental conflict, lack of support, and increased responsibilities (Mouratidis, 2021; Maluleke et al., 2021). Emotional difficulties emerged too, like feelings of sadness, isolation (Silvestri & Hartman, 2022), and challenges with focus (Munir, 2021). Living circumstances introduced interruptions such as noise disruptions at home (Hurwitz et al., 2022).

Students relied on different sources of support (Sjølie et al., 2022; Crecelius & Neild, 2022). Some depended on family assistance but this risked overburdening caregivers. Others found community/peer interaction helpful (Pan, 2023). One preferred independent learning. The experiences highlighted diverse needs that could not be met through a uniform virtual learning approach. Flexible, customized support was needed to accommodate students' communication preferences, living situations, and sources of assistance (Heras et al., 2021; Lassig et al., 2022). Proactive well-being initiatives and assistive technologies were also important to consider students' multi-dimensional access requirements (Akhunova & Okhunova, 2023).

Educators required training to understand the impacts of disabilities and adjust remote delivery models inclusively based on individual feedback. With intentional collaboration between education, health and social sectors to consider each learner's experiences holistically, virtual learning showed potential for equitable participation (Rice & Dunn, 2023). However, ongoing evaluation was important to ensure the evolving system continued meeting diverse circumstances equitably.

Coping Mechanisms of the Participants

The interviews provided insight into various coping mechanisms used by young adults with developmental disabilities to overcome challenges of remote learning (Arbour et al., 2023). Seeking assistance from capable peers and using technology for support addressed barriers to independent work (Archambault et al., 2022). Many students sought help from teachers, classmates, and family members, highlighting the value of social support networks (Smith et al., 2023). Informal peer interactions aided knowledge acquisition for those accustomed to visual learning styles. Proactively incorporating opportunities for collaborative learning and accessible teacher contact into virtual models would better accommodate diverse needs (Buxton, 2023).

Self-study practices like researching concepts and repetition strengthened comprehension for students embracing independent work (Behzadnia et al., 2022). Structures ensuring check-ins and differentiated instruction foster self-paced exploration (Mahardika & Wicaksono, 2023).

Managing stress and maintaining hope promoted perseverance despite setbacks (Barry, 2022). Outlets for releasing negative emotions prevented rumination.

Initiatives cultivating coping strategies and self-care safeguard participation and well-being (Sardalla, 2022). Some relied on assistive technologies as cognitive prosthetics, augmenting skills through tools that link instruction to real-world applications (Alqeeq, 2022). Guidance helps optimize benefits while addressing accessibility. Avoiding overwhelming triggers utilized limited resources adaptively, though not preferable to engagement (Porter et al., 2021). Proactive mental health support and accommodated content facilitate continued learning regardless of struggles (Yorke et al., 2021).

Flexible opportunities permitting preferred social interaction, self-directed learning, technology integration, and well-being prioritization establish an equitable system optimizing student agency. Formalizing naturally supportive networks through customized, trauma-informed inclusion better realizes potential (Tokatly Latzer et al., 2021). With holistic consideration of varied circumstances and communication preferences, remote modalities could benefit all through cultivated strengths.

Transcendental Phenomenological Analysis

This study employed a transcendental phenomenological approach to describe the lived experiences of young adults with developmental disabilities in remote learning (Venkatesan, 202). Textual analysis identified key challenges in their accounts, such as missing social-instructional support and comprehending content independently (Warren, 2023). Structural analysis revealed contextual elements like lacking home accommodations and additional family stresses exacerbating difficulties (Efthymiou, 2023; Persaud, 2023).

A synthesis showed individual needs could not be optimally met without tailored school supports, as pre-existing challenges were amplified without specialized aids (Venkatesan, 202). Isolation, family issues, and struggles negatively impacted well-being (Warren, 2023). Coping efforts faced barriers like focusing in distracting homes and decreased customized linguistic assistance (Schembri-Mutch et al., 2023).

Remote learning uniformly created very significant obstacles for all due to highlighted issues. Benefits of specialized in-person classrooms were unreplicated virtually (Zdravkova et al., 2022). Independent barriers proved disproportionately detrimental without targeted assistance addressing specific disability profiles related to visual/hearing/cognitive functioning (Schembri-Mutch et al., 2023).

Cross-analysis reinforced remote education presented challenges irrespective of student characteristics (Schembri-Mutch et al., 2023). While workarounds were utilized, specialized services were most effective at meeting diverse learning needs (Mitra et al., 2023). Inability to foster similar autonomy and understanding underscores need for flexible, trauma-informed

programming through ongoing evaluation (Ebenfield, 2022).

To optimize equitable access, remote learning requires comprehensive individualization incorporating specialized aids customized to individual profiles (Mitra et al., 2023). Innovations mitigate communication/sensory barriers (Crawford, 2022). Accommodations must compensate environmental deficits while promoting independence (Petretto et al., 2021). Robust socioemotional networks are warranted (Zdravkova et al., 2022). Customized assistance and technologies mitigating barriers to independent understanding are clearly needed (Vander Els & Stack, 2022). A holistic framework attentive to individual profiles is implied to align supports with participants' expressed requirements (Crawford, 2022).

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION:

Discussion

Experiences of the Participants. The section presents several important experiences faced by young adults with developmental disabilities regarding distance learning during the pandemic.

1. Learning Modalities. Different modalities were adopted for distance learning during lockdown such as modular/print-based, online classes, and face-to-face interactions. However, Participants found that face-to-face classroom instruction was most effective for deaf students' learning compared to other remote learning modalities (Parojenog & Eyo, 2022). Without visual aids and teachers to clarify concepts through signing, self-study from printed modules or participation in online classes posed difficulties (Aljedaani et al., 2023).

1.1. Face-to-face learning. The reported face-to-face learning experiences, as shown in Figure 3, provide valuable perspectives, such as the following quote illustrating how live instruction can benefit deaf learners.
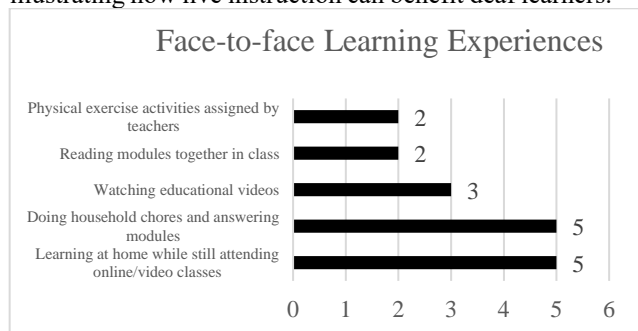

Figure 3. Face-to-Face Learning Experiences
"Printed modules and Google Meet for class is helpful but unlike in face-to-face class deaf student learn more." (ZNP9)

As continuity of education became critical yet challenging during lockdowns, a range of distance learning adaptations emerged. Schools and teachers should continue offering blended/hybrid models that combine online, offline and independent activities. This flexibility accommodates diverse student situations and supports self-directed learning. Educators need guidance on developing accessible asynchronous content and structured yet flexible distance learning plans (George et al., 2021). Lessons that integrate with daily routines are ideal. Support for incorporating physical activities is important for well-being. Schools could provide example exercise routines or encourage outdoor activities. Limited in-person sessions, if safety allows, provide value for tasks requiring guidance/collaboration like module reviews (Beard & Thomson, 2021, Di Mitri et al., 2022). Hybrid approaches warrant exploration. Multi-modal experiences point to individualized solutions being most suitable (Beard & Thomson, 2021, Di Mitri et al., 2022). Schools must work with families to understand students' abilities and constraints. Monitoring engagement in various modalities helps identify preferred/effective methods for each learner. Adaptations may be needed over time. Technology and connectivity remain a barrier. Offline content and communication alternatives help inclusion (Radanliev et al., 2023). Distance learning plans need review to ensure they consider responsibilities outside schoolwork. Flexibility supports marginalized groups.

1.2. Modular/print-based learning. To understand challenges faced utilizing primarily printed self-study materials during school closures, the study also examined qualitative reports of students' modular and print-based learning experiences, as seen in Figure 4.
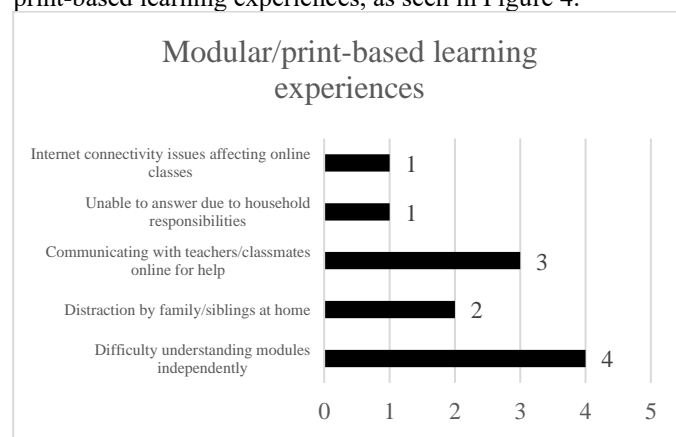

Figure 4. Modular/print-based Learning Experience
"Printed module hard to understand. No one explain to me further." (ZNP4)

The findings regarding students' modular and print-based learning experiences highlight several important implications for facilitating remote instruction reliant on independent study. A significant portion of Participants reported difficulties understanding learning modules independently, suggesting that asynchronous models using only printed materials may not adequately support all learners without additional guidance or resources (Parojenog & Eyo). Real-time interaction with teachers and classmates emerged as an important component

missing from independent study. This implies that synchronous check-ins, tutoring sessions, or question/answer forums need to be incorporated to assist students in navigating content on their own (Karasavvidis, 2021). The reports of distraction at home also point to the need for schools to provide structured guidance on establishing conducive learning environments within the home context. Potential strategies could include instructing families on setting up dedicated workspaces or study schedules (Hagenaars et al., 2022). The challenges stemming from household responsibilities further emphasize ensuring distance education plans are flexible enough to accommodate students' lives outside of schoolwork (Goegan et al., 2023).

1.3. Online learning. To evaluate the suitability and accessibility of various distance learning for students with disabilities, the study also examined Participants' experiences with online learning models during school closures, as seen in Figure 5.
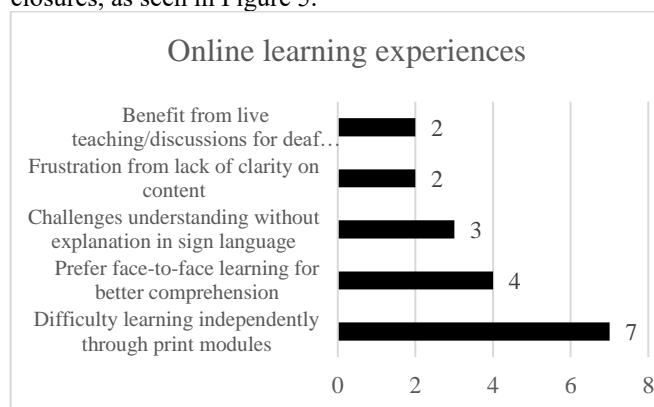

Figure 5. Online Learning Experiences

"We have a module, we also have classes online, In modules, we answer a workbook and online, we answer it on the computer." (ZNP11)

Lack of access to explanations due to deafness was cited by 4 Participants. This reiterates that hearing-reliant instruction leaves many deaf students unable to access core content independently without additional support (Alford et al., 2023). Reliance on others for assistance was mentioned by 3 Participants. This dependence on intermediaries can potentially slow down progress and limit self-directed study. Distractions at home were reported as a barrier by 2 Participants. As with others, the home environment presents challenges for focused work without suitable adaptations. Technology/internet issues affected 1 respondent. While a single report, access remains a hurdle that must be addressed to ensure inclusion.

The reports of barriers to learning faced by deaf Participants indicated both the accessibility and effectiveness of distance education models must have been improved to better serve these students (Aljedaani et al., 2023). A primary implication was the need to

ensure core content and explanations were delivered directly to d/Deaf learners through accommodations like sign language interpretation, instead of relying on indirect methods that were prone to delays, inconsistencies, or incomplete information transfer (Weirick, 2021). This emphasized the importance of incorporating accessibility supports and communication access into both synchronous and asynchronous online instruction. The distractions of learning at home also pointed to the value of structured guidance for d/Deaf students and families in establishing conducive learning environments (Aljedaani et al., 2023). More broadly, the dependence on others highlighted the importance of empowering deaf learners through self-directed access to knowledge and support systems. Addressing barriers pertaining to technology access and environmental factors could help reduce such dependency.

2. Barriers to Learning. A number of barriers as shown in Figure 6, hindered deaf students' ability to learn independently using remote modalities. These included lack of access to explanations and support due to deafness, reliance on assistance from others to navigate lessons, distractions in homes not conducive for studying, and unstable technology infrastructure like unreliable internet access. Learning alone from printed materials or online classes without guidance from teachers was reported as very challenging.
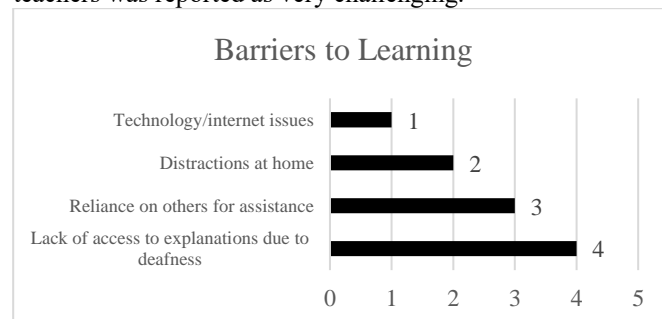

Figure 6. Barriers to Learning

Barriers to independent remote learning for deaf students included: lack of explanations due to deafness; reliance on others; home distractions; and technology issues. Learning alone from printed/online materials without teacher guidance was very challenging.

Lack of explanations due to deafness was cited by four participants, highlighting how hearing-reliant instruction limits independent content access (Alford et al., 2023). Three participants relied on others, which can slow progress and limit independent study. Two faced distractions from siblings/chores without adaptations (Aljedaani et al., 2023). One had technology issues affecting online meetings, though consistent access is essential for inclusion (Aljedaani et al., 2023).

The reports indicated models must be more accessible and effective for deaf students (Aljedaani et al., 2023). Ensuring direct access to content and explanations through accommodations like interpretation, instead of

indirect methods prone to delays/incompleteness, emphasizes incorporating supports/communication in instruction (Weirick, 2021). Guidance on conducive home learning and empowering independent access could address barriers (Aljedaani et al., 2023).

3. Communication Challenges. Key communication challenges, as shown in Figure 7, included language barriers and limited signing skills of others. Two participants struggled expressing needs to non-signers (Birnbaum, 2022). One faced dependency on others' signing abilities. Three relied on writing, typing, lip reading (Bianchini, 2021), but these remain inadequate substitutes for sign language prohibiting natural exchanges essential for inclusion.
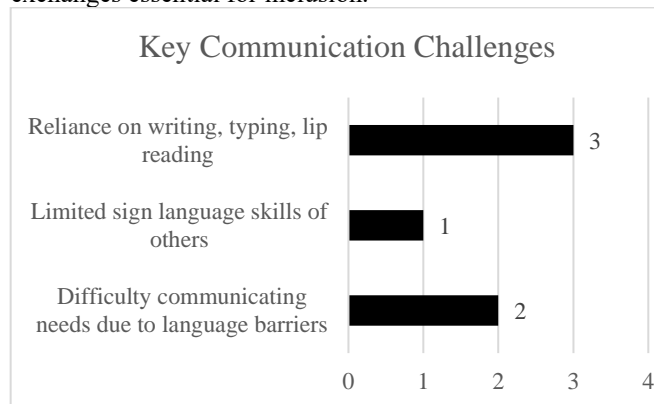

Figure 7. Key Communication Challenges

Participants faced obstacles communicating with family/friends/communities due to language barriers and others' signing (Scherer et al., 2023). Expressing needs generally required written forms without shared sign language (Bianchini, 2021). Insufficient signing restricted social connection/participation (Scherer et al., 2023).

These experiences highlight communication accessibility as an obstacle to remote learning without proper support/consideration of preferences. Language barriers inhibit need/feedback expression and relationship building (De Meulder, 2021). Ad hoc accommodations like writing are insufficient, disadvantageous (Wapling, 2023). Direct access through sign language interpretation is needed in distance education to create an inclusive experience (Alshawabkeh et al., 2021). Communication access/preferences must be prioritized in planning to holistically serve deaf learners (Alshawabkeh et al., 2021).

4. Emotional Impact. Figure 8 shows the emotional impact of remote learning which included sadness, hurt, and frustration from lack of understanding and communication barriers (Zidlicky, 2022; Jesus et al., 2021). One participant experienced loneliness due to isolation (Lee et al., 2022). However, one had positive feelings from support systems (Smith, 2022). Finding

alternate activities and patience helped cope (Tong et al., 2022; Sornson, 2022).
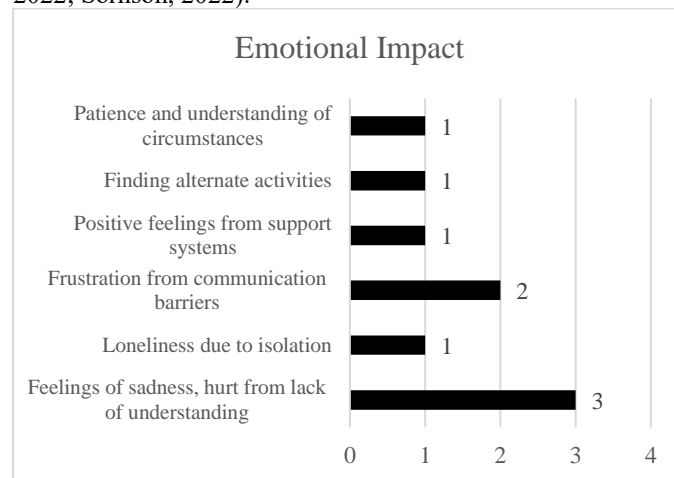

Figure 8. Emotional Impact

Inaccessibility, misunderstanding and isolation bred negative emotions (Zidlicky, 2022; Jesus et al., 2021). Communication struggles fostered frustration (Zidlicky, 2022; Jesus et al., 2021). Support boosted self-worth and countered these (Smith, 2022).

This emphasizes accommodation is key to well-being while exclusion stresses students (Sornson, 2022). Remote learning requires multifaceted, trauma-informed approaches facilitating connection and resources (Smith, 2022). Educators require training to support welfare (Kelly et al., 2022). Activities and flexibility also benefit students (Tong et al., 2022; Sornson, 2022). Overlooking psycho-social dimensions risks marginalizing development (Sornson, 2022).

Distractions and technology/space issues further compounded experiences, especially for disadvantaged students (Kiebler & Stewart, 2022; Diciano et al., 2021).

5. Family Support. Figure 9 provides insight into Participants' reports regarding family support during their transition to remote learning. Two participants received family assistance, reducing challenges (Maluleke et al., 2021). However, two faced distractions and disruption from family issues inhibiting independent learning (Burns, 2023). One felt dependency on others (O'Hagan et al., 2021).
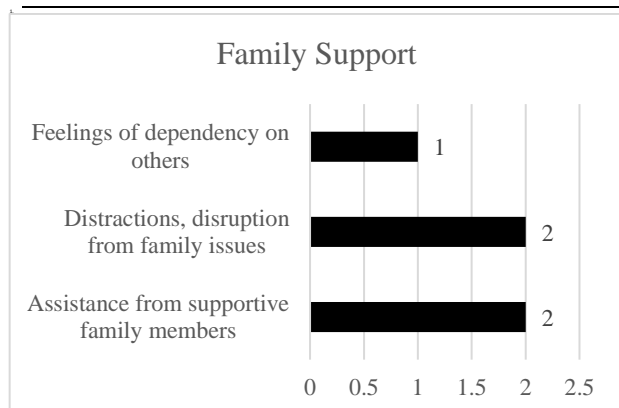
Figure 9. Family Support

Supportive families cooperated with deaf children through encouragement, yet unstable home environments undermined learning (Maluleke et al., 2021; Burns, 2023). While family involvement benefited some, overreliance inhibited autonomy development for one student (O'Hagan et al., 2021). Guidance on conducive home learning is needed in addition to family support.

Diverse family dynamics require flexibility to navigate complicated systems. Having alternatives prevents falling behind due to obstacles (Sornson, 2022). Educator check-ins help identify vulnerable learner issues early (Santos, 2022).

Recognizing enabling and limiting family effects facilitates inclusive support of student holistic needs through distance learning (Santos, 2022).

Prolonged isolation further affected engagement and well-being, though online connections and activities helped mitigate impacts (Mouratidis, 2021).

6. Well-being. The reports shown in Figure 10 regarding impacts on well-being provide insights into how remote learning affected deaf students' engagement and mental health. One participant noted negative impacts on learning/engagement (Rice & Dunn, 202), while two adopted strategies like activities and self-care, demonstrating resilience (Borja, 2021).
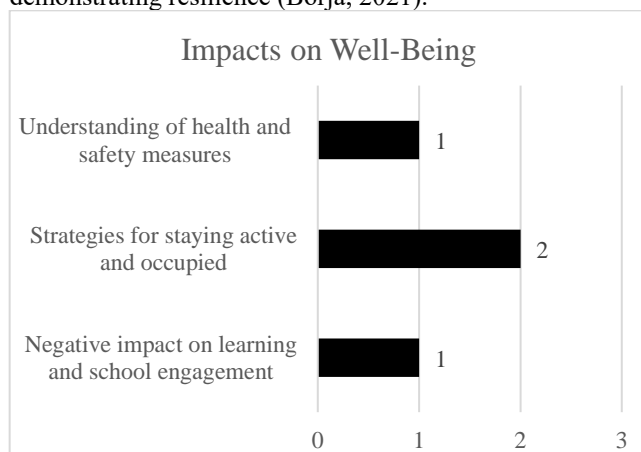

Figure 10. Impacts on Well-Being

Another expressed understanding of safety measures (Toquero, 2021). Accessible support empowers independent coping (Cordero Jr., 2022). Schools should ensure access, facilitate wellness resources, and support diverse circumstances to promote resilience (Rice & Dunn, 2023).

The varied experiences indicate multi-tiered, trauma-informed support is needed for different circumstances and outcomes (Rice & Dunn, 2023). Open communication aids understanding of disruptions like measures (Toquero, 2021). Flexible, holistic support maintains engagement through challenges (Rice & Dunn, 2023; Toquero, 2021).

Prolonged isolation negatively impacted progress/interests, but strategies aided health/reduced loneliness (Borja, 2021). An informed perspective safely guided wellness (Toquero, 2021).

7. Ensuring Participation for All. Inclusive distance learning requires customized support for varied disabilities (Lee & Heo, 2021). For deaf students, incorporating sign language and visual aids provides accessibility. Captioning aids deaf/hard of hearing users. Interactive programs engage multiple disabilities. Screen readers and tactile materials aid the visually impaired in independent study. Text-to-speech helps navigate content. Those with intellectual disabilities may use simple signed/spoken instructions and shorter picture/video lessons with routines fostering comprehension (Lee & Heo, 2021). Peer volunteers explain concepts through one-on-one virtual study groups with positive reinforcement.

Caregiver training on signing and gentle communication nurtures conducive home environments (Creech, 2021). Workshops demonstrate multisensory teaching methods for diverse needs. Connecting support circles through video calls provides continuity of cognitive, social, emotional services.

Addressing accessibility gaps requires assistive technologies, flexible timelines and assessment (Kocdar & Bozkurt, 2023). Initiatives aid families overcoming virtual class impediments. Well-being helplines provide guidance tailored to disability profiles through visual/tactile communication.

Building understanding among communities and policymakers recognizes the right to inclusive learning for all, especially vulnerable groups, even in emergencies (Velasco et al., 2021). Long-term support ensures uninterrupted development and participation.

Challenges of the Participants. This section presents the experiences of young adults with developmental disabilities regarding the challenges they encountered in distance learning and daily life due to their conditions.

1. Family Problems. Figure 11 focuses on family problems that emerged as a theme affecting some participants' experiences.
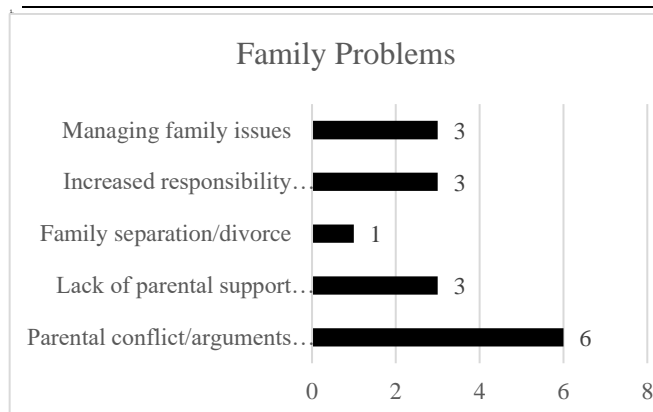
Figure 11. Family Problems

Figure 12. Learning Barriers

The most commonly reported family problem was parental conflict/arguments, reported by 6 participants, which disrupted home learning environments (DeMatthews et al., 2021). Lack of parental support burdened 3 participants with limited engagement (DeMatthews et al., 2021). Family separation affected 1 respondent, and increased responsibility burdened 3 (DeMatthews et al., 2021). Managing family issues distracted 3 participants from learning (DeMatthews et al., 2021).

For many participants, domestic problems posed immense learning obstacles, underscoring the need for school support structures regardless of circumstances (DeMatthews et al., 2021). Varied family problems highlighted the profound impact of disruptive homes and need for flexible supports not reliant on home settings alone (DeMatthews et al., 2021). Reports emphasized accommodation of complex living situations presenting obstacles to prevent vulnerable learner disadvantage (Abdel-Malek, 2021).

Truly inclusive remote models must recognize family challenges and partner to problem-solve alternative learning supports. Educators require training to monitor well-being and adjust accordingly. A multi-faceted, trauma-informed approach optimizes access for all navigating troublesome circumstances (Abdel-Malek, 2021).

Certain circumstances led to loneliness, increased responsibility burdens, and reliance on others for support. Unstable parental situations negatively impacted structures for some (DeMatthews et al., 2021).

2. Learning Barriers. Figure 12 represents the theme of learning barriers that young adults with developmental disabilities faced.
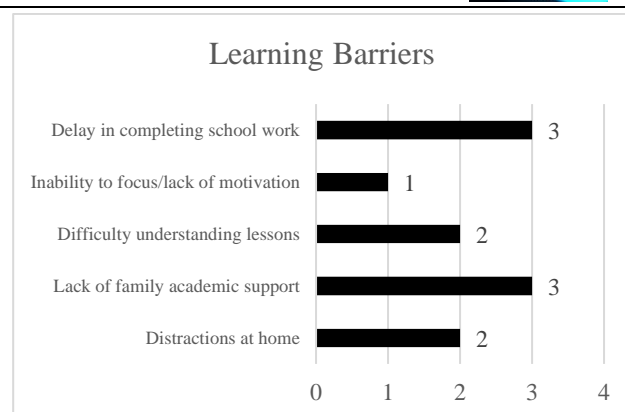
Learning barriers included home distractions cited by 2 participants and lack of family academic support affecting 3 (Efthymiou, 2023). Difficulty understanding lessons challenged 2 participants, and inability to focus/lack motivation inhibited 1, highlighting individual factors (Hirsch et al., 2021). Delay in completing work affected 3 participants (Hirsch et al., 2021).

Difficulties included inability to fully understand lessons, home distraction, and overdependence on others, hindering independent learning and comprehension for several (Efthymiou, 2023).

Barriers were multidimensional from limitations of external support systems/models and internal/personal factors, underscoring need for personalized, flexible supports optimizing independence and engagement (Efthymiou, 2023).

Varied barriers demonstrated critical need for alternatives guaranteeing access when home environments do not enable independent learning (Hirsch et al., 2021). Accommodating communication preferences and circumstances prevents falling behind (Hirsch et al., 2021). Ongoing support through technologies, tutoring, and educator check-ins is vital (Hirsch et al., 2021).

3. Communication challenges. Figure 13 focuses on communication challenges encountered. Difficulty with spoken communication was reported by three participants, underscoring ongoing barriers in conversing without accommodations.
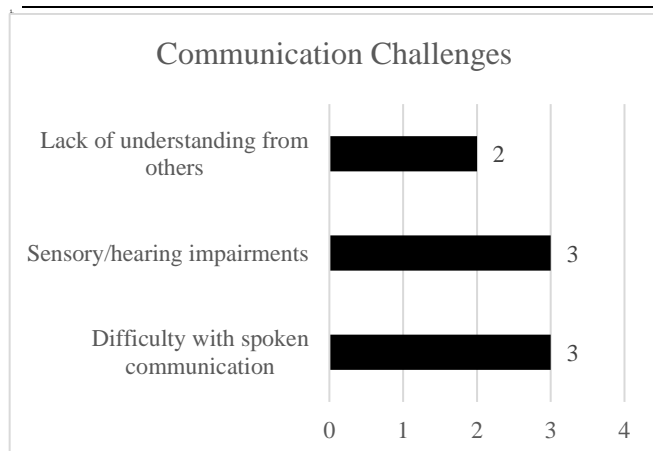
Figure 13. Communication Challenges

Figure 14. Emotional Impacts

Communication challenges included difficulty with spoken communication for 3 participants (Rice & Dunn, 2023). Sensory/hearing impairments affected 3, and lack of understanding from others inhibited 2 (Aljedaani et al., 2023).

Issues with proper communication due to disability isolated some from non-signers and limited social interactions (Rice & Dunn, 2023). Simply translating in-person to online is not straightforward for many deaf students reliant on visual/signed communication disproportionately impacting instruction/engagement (Rice & Dunn, 2023).

Proactive embedding of individualized accommodations like sign language, captioning, communication preferences is needed in virtual delivery to empower barrier-free participation (Rice & Dunn, 2023; Aljedaani et al., 2023).

Educator training on implications of hearing loss and supporting preferred interaction modes is also important (Aljedaani et al., 2023). Accessibility must be built into virtual schooling from the start through ongoing evaluation to guarantee access as models evolve (Rice & Dunn, 2023).

4. Emotional Impacts. Figure 14 captures the theme of emotional impacts. Feelings of sadness or depression negatively affected four participants' mental health during remote learning without accommodations.
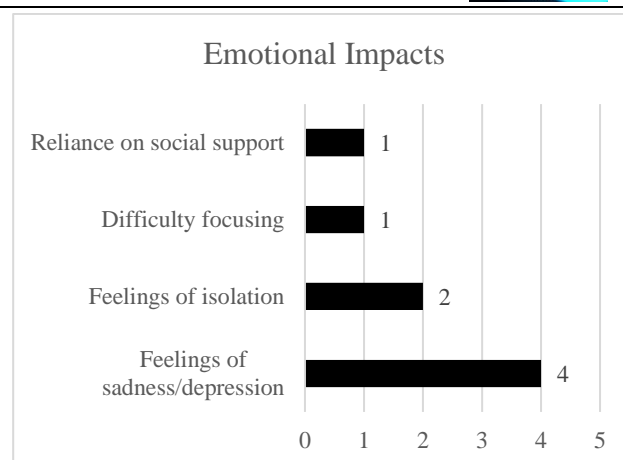
Emotional impacts included feelings of sadness/depression negatively affecting 4 participants and feelings of isolation inhibiting 2, indicating risks to mental health without support (Munir, 2021). Difficulty focusing affected 1 respondent (Rice & Dunn, 2023). Reliance on social support benefited 1, implying connection promoted resilience (Silvestri & Hartman, 2022).

Feelings of sadness and isolation emerged due to distractions, inability to study, and family impacts on mood (Munir, 2021).

This emphasizes the necessity of comprehensive, trauma-informed approaches encompassing academics, mental health, and communication (Rice & Dunn, 2023). Flexibility holds potential to safeguard well-being (Munir, 2021).

Varied experiences underscore customized wellness plans and flexible accommodations are essential based on individual circumstances. Educator training and accommodating preferred communication is important (Silvestri & Hartman, 2022). Resources promoting connection can help safeguard emotional resilience (Rice & Dunn, 2023).

Remote schooling must consider holistic well-being impact and problem-solve barriers through inclusive, equitable access (Rice & Dunn, 2023). With appropriate support embedded, virtual learning holds benefit potential (Munir, 2021).

5. Environmental Factors. Figure 15 examines the theme of environmental factors. Living conditions like heat affected one respondent's situation, demonstrating how such contextual elements posed issues.
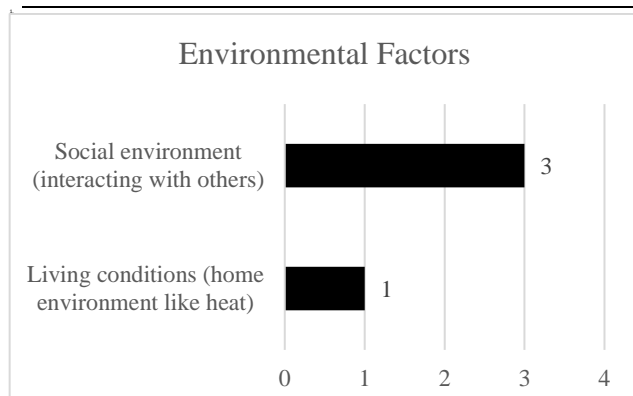
Figure 15. Environmental Factors

Environmental factors included living conditions like heat affecting 1 participant, indicating such contexts present challenges (Hurwitz et al., 2022). Social environment issues inhibited 3 participants, suggesting connection is important (Hurwitz et al., 2022).

Reports demonstrated how circumstances beyond control can compound barriers, and social aspect's significance to engagement/mental health (Hurwitz et al., 2022).

Flexibility is needed to accommodate diverse contexts and environments through preferred social supports, wellness initiatives, and accommodating limitations across settings (Hurwitz et al., 2022).

Considering each student's whole experience is vital for holistically facilitating supports promoting resilience across settings (Hurwitz et al., 2022).

With intentional planning centered on accessibility and well-being, remote learning holds promise if ongoing evaluation and flexible responsiveness to changing needs occurs (Hurwitz et al., 2022).

6. Access to Assistance. Figure 16 captures the theme of access to assistance. Three students reported relying on family support, indicating that remote learning disproportionately burdens caregivers without proper accommodations.
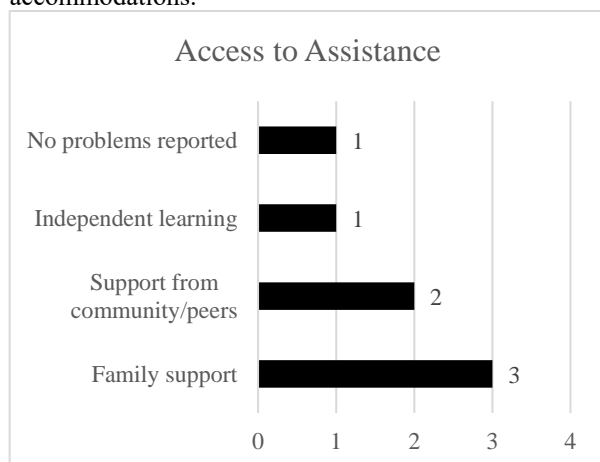

Figure 16. Access to Assistance

Three students relied on family support, indicating a burden on caregivers without accommodations (Pan,

2023). Two found community/peer support helpful, demonstrating how collaboration aids participation (Sjølie et al., 2022). One preferred independent learning. Mixed responses emphasized the diversity of experiences and needs—a one-size approach does not suffice (Crecelius & Neild, 2022; Neild et al., 2022). Findings reinforce accessible virtual schooling demands individualization and fostering preferred networks through accommodations like interpreter-facilitated groups (Pan, 2023). This empowers participation adjusted to changes (Sjølie et al., 2022).

Reported family reliance underscores the risk of disadvantage without suitable accommodations (Pan, 2023). Valuing alternative aids highlights collaboration also facilitates access (Sjølie et al., 2022).

Flexible, individualized solutions are needed rather than a one-size approach. Proactive prioritization of support networks through video conferencing and projects addresses barriers to changed environments (Crecelius & Neild, 2022).

Accommodating different independence/support levels makes access more equitable (Crecelius & Neild, 2022). Absence of issues implies potential when delivered inclusively (Pan, 2023). Considering supportive needs ensures models meet diverse experiences through continuous evaluation (Crecelius & Neild, 2022).

7. Cultivating Inclusive Environments Through Partnership. Several implications from this study could help address the challenges faced by young adults with developmental disabilities. Inclusive educational approaches need to be adopted by developing customized programs and resources for students with diverse disabilities (Heras et al., 2021). tailoring lesson plans, teaching methods, assistive technologies, and curriculums to meet varied needs is essential. Targeted teacher training on differentiated instruction, classroom accommodations, and using IEPs is also important. Establishing peer support systems through buddy programs can boost collaborative learning, foster social skills, and promote acceptance.

It is imperative to enhance family support through caregiver workshops teaching communication strategies, guiding home learning, and empowering self-advocacy skills in children (Akhunova & Okhunova, 2023). Accessible extra-curricular activities and community programs are needed to improve the social engagement of youth with disabilities. Disability sensitization programs in mainstream schools can help counter stigma and drive inclusion. Multisectoral partnerships between education, health, and welfare sectors ensure robust support systems.

Strengthening policy measures to resource inclusive pedagogy, qualify infrastructure, and funding is vital (Lassig et al., 2022). Developing guidelines for a disability-inclusive education framework is crucial. Promoting self-advocacy and independent living skills

training through role models and counseling empowers students. Considering socio-emotional well-being through mentorship, counseling, and stress management programs is important. Further research on supporting students with intersecting vulnerabilities aids planning. A sustainable, equitable, and multi-pronged approach that continually meets the changing needs of all learners must be prioritized.

Coping Mechanisms of the Participants. This section examines the various coping mechanisms utilized by young adults with developmental disabilities to overcome the challenges encountered in distance learning.

1. Seeking Assistance from Others. Accessing social support enhances self-efficacy and resilience when facing challenges. Figure 17 focuses on the theme of seeking assistance from others.
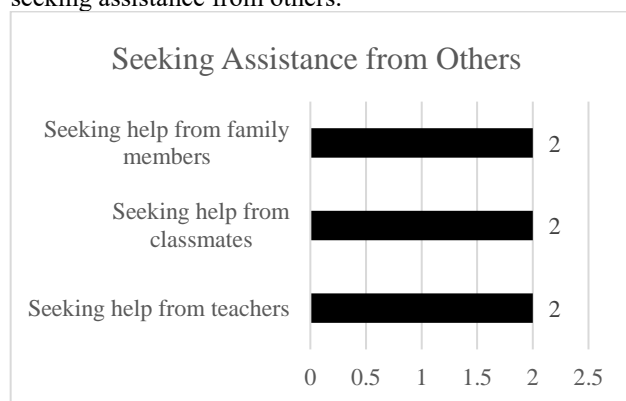

Figure 17. Seeking Assistance from Others

Two students reported seeking help from teachers, showing the importance of educator support for learning remotely. This underscores that teachers need to be accessible. Two students sought help from classmates, demonstrating that peer interaction facilitates the learning process for some. Collaborative learning opportunities are beneficial. Two students relied on help from family members. While family plays an important role, this reinforces that remote models should not solely depend on family involvement.

Seeking help was spread relatively evenly across teachers, classmates, and family, highlighting diverse sources of support are valuable (Smith et al., 2023). Proactively incorporating multiple avenues for assistance into remote programs better accommodates varying student needs and preferences. Flexible learning models that provide accessible teacher support as well as opportunities for peer collaboration can help address participation barriers. Reliance on family assistance underscores the need for accommodations to involve diverse types of support networks.

2. Dedicated Self-Study. Self-regulated learning strategies are important for independent academic success. Through self-motivated practices like researching concepts and rereading materials, students

can internalize information at their own pace. This allows for individualization important for multi-sensory learners. Overlearning via repetition strengthens memory and comprehension.

Figure 18 focuses on the theme of dedicated self-study. Four students reported engaging in self-directed studying, indicating the need for guidance and structure while learning independently online. Autonomy requires support (Behzadnia et al., 2022). One student found subjects easy, suggesting personalized supports strengthen engagement for learners of all abilities. One student valued receiving peer support, emphasizing that social interaction aids collaboration and understanding for some.
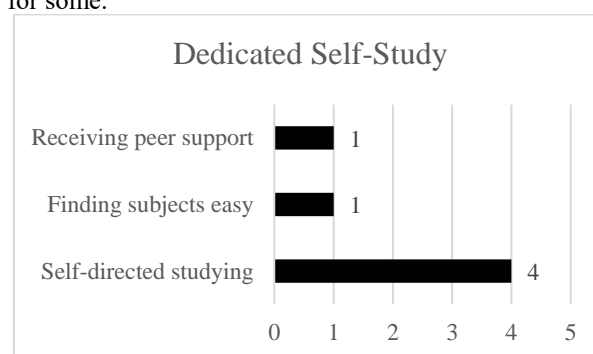

Figure 18. Dedicated Self-Study

Self-directed studying was the most common experience, reinforcing remote learning modality require resources to assist independent work. Flexible structures ensuring check-ins and differentiation foster self-paced learning. The diversity in reports underlines that no universal solution exists - individualization is paramount. Peer-facilitated learning promoted inclusion for one student, implying social elements merit inclusion. Accessibility considers each learner's strengths and needs through customized plans. Holistically supporting self-direction, collaboration and varied entry points optimizes remote inclusive education equity (Ali, 2023). Proactively facilitating preferred networks and resources

3. Utilizing Peer Support Systems. Peer collaboration has value, as learning is a social process. Sharing ideas with others experiencing similar communication barriers can foster community and validate experiences. Digital peer platforms also address isolation challenges through connection. This aligns with transactional perspectives emphasizing socially-shared cognition.

Figure 19 focuses on utilizing peer support systems. Two students sought help from classmates, indicating the value of peer interaction and collaboration. This reinforces social elements merit inclusion in remote models. One student relied on help from siblings. While family plays an important role, this underscores the need to avoid over-burdening families through sole dependence on them. Two students benefited from receiving explanations and guidance from peers. This

again demonstrates the facilitative role social learning and clarification from others can play.
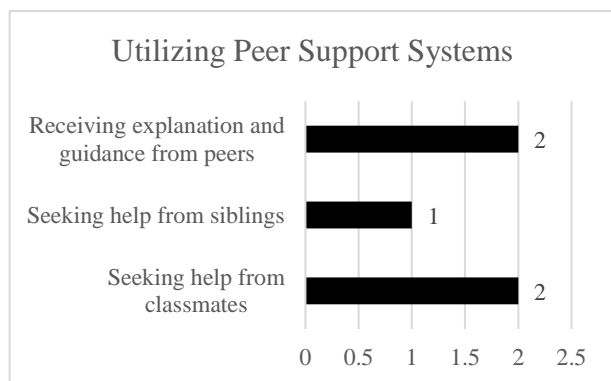

Figure 19. Utilizing Peer Support Systems

Peer assistance was referenced by over half of the Participants, highlighting its clear significance. Incorporating opportunities for collaborative work and social explanation proactively addresses barriers posed by online formats. Reliance on siblings still reinforces the importance of involving diverse support networks beyond the immediate family. Flexible options that do not solely depend on families are important to consider varying home contexts. Overall, these findings point to the value students found in social aspects of learning. Fostering collaborative learning and preferred networks through virtual means can optimize remote access and experience (Buxton, 2023).

4. Managing Emotions. Figure 20 examines the theme of managing emotions. Two students reported focusing on studying/learning, indicating academic engagement can promote resilience for some. However, this also underscores that remote learning risks disproportionately threatening participation without additional socio-emotional support. One student emphasized adopting a positive mindset and another focused on managing stress/emotions, highlighting the importance of proactive mental health support.
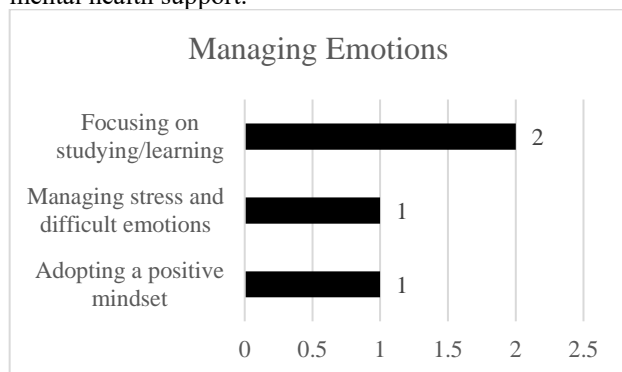

Figure 20. Managing Emotions

Effective coping requires regulation of affective states. Maintaining hopeful attitudes despite adversity promotes wellbeing and perseverance. Temporary release of negative emotions like crying can also prevent

rumination. Emotion-focused strategies affect cognitive appraisal of challenges.

Implementing multi-tiered well-being initiatives from the outset of remote learning is crucial to safeguard vulnerable students (Barry, 2022). Such initiatives aim to foster connection, develop coping strategies, and promote self-care in order to facilitate continued equitable access to education and personal growth. Providing flexible accommodations that permit breaks empowers students to take ownership of their mental wellness. While individual strengths aided some students, systemic support is needed to optimize equitable outcomes for all. A one-size-fits-all approach will not meet diverse circumstances - accommodations must be customized. Prioritizing holistic well-being through trauma-informed, culturally-responsive resources better positions remote learning to benefit all (Arbour et al., 2023). The responses emphasize the need for proactive, systemic socio-emotional support to complement academic engagement when facilitating remote schooling. Flexibility and individualization are also key to meet varied circumstances.

5. Relying on Technological Tools. Assistive technologies extend learning capacities of those with special needs by compensating for deficits. Calculators are cognitive prosthetics that augment math skills. Leveraging digital aids link instruction to real-world skill applications and multiple learning styles. Figure 21 focuses on relying on technological tools. One student used technology for communication, indicating tools that facilitate interaction are important.
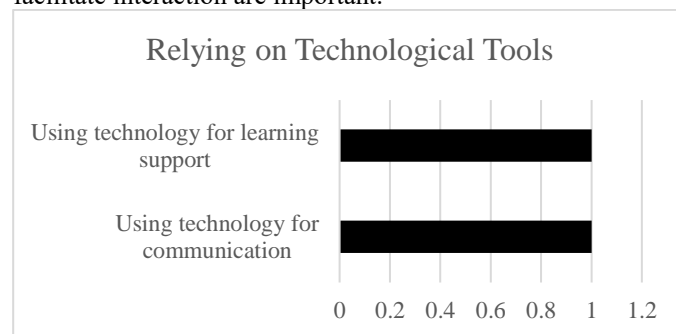

Figure 21. Relying on Technological Tools

This reinforces that remote learning requires accessible communication channels. Another student employed technology for learning support, suggesting digital resources can provide supplementary instructional aid. Avoiding triggers circumvented overwhelm given limitations, though risks exist with over-reliance on disengagement.

Technology allowed young adults with developmental disabilities to access some remote learning supports, highlighting its role in offsetting barriers posed by physical distance (Alqeeq, 2022). Schools should provide guidance and supports for using relevant digital tools effectively to all students. Leveraging technology

for communication and supplemental instruction optimizes accessibility by facilitating social interaction and accommodation of varied paces/needs. Individualizing technical support empowers independent navigation of resources for continued engagement. Proactively incorporating preferred virtual aids establishes equity of opportunity for remote participation. Overall, strategic and supported use of relevant technology can improve access and experience for deaf students when adaptable to student preferences and skill levels. Guidance is important to optimize benefits.

6. Avoiding Stressful Triggers. Disengaging attention from unmanageable stressors utilizes emotion-focused coping to circumvent distress. Though avoidance has risks if overused, temporary removal from stressors prevents becoming overwhelmed when facing limitations.

Figure 22 examines avoiding stressful triggers. One student reported avoiding problematic subjects/triggers, suggesting some content requires accommodation. Two students focused on managing stress and moving forward, indicating resilience despite challenges.

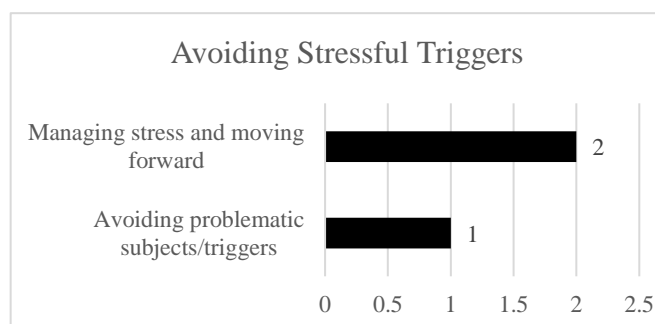## Avoiding Stressful Triggers

Figure 22. Avoiding Stressful Triggers

Remote learning may exacerbate issues for those with certain difficulties, necessitating individualized plans (Porter et al., 2021). Supports like wellness resources, flexible pacing, and content alternatives facilitate continued engagement despite hardships. Proactively addressing mental health needs through empathetic, trauma-informed approaches safeguards vulnerable learners. While resilience aided these students, all may require socio-emotional support to optimize participation. Holistic consideration of academic and socio-emotional development is vital for equitable access (Yorke et al., 2021). To meet diverse circumstances, remote models must accommodate challenges through customized content, well-being initiatives, and break options without stigma. Prioritizing student agency and care better positions learning to benefit every student. Flexibility and wellness are key.

7. Optimizing Coping Strategies to Promote Inclusive Education. The coping mechanisms adopted by young adults with developmental disabilities provide several implications. Leveraging social support networks highlights the need for fostering inclusive learning communities that help students assist one another (Archambault et al., 2022). Formalizing buddy systems and peer-teaching programs can strengthen these naturally occurring support systems. The use of dedicated self-study strategies implies catering educational resources to accommodate self-paced independent learning. This involves developing multi-format self-instructional materials with repetition built in (Mahardika & Wicaksono, 2023).

Coping through managing emotions signifies the importance of social-emotional learning support such as providing counseling services (Sardalla, 2022). The engagement with assistive technologies calls for evaluating and expanding access to cognitive prosthetics tailored to specific disabilities. While avoidance was utilized at times, developing engaging learning environments that minimize triggers for overwhelm is preferable to circumvention. The clear preferences for interactive modalities emphasize aligning instructional delivery with diverse communication needs through multiple accessible formats. A holistic framework is necessary that systematically develops inclusive learning communities, self-directed options, socio-emotional programs, assistive supports, accommodating environments and multi-modal delivery to fully realize students' potential through optimizing the coping strategies naturally adopted (Tokatly Latzer et al., 2021). Formalizing naturally occurring supports in an equitable system can boost independent learning and participation.

Transcendental phenomenological analysis. This study adopts a transcendental phenomenological analysis focused on describing young adults with developmental disabilities' lived experiences of remote learning through an unprejudiced lens.

By systematically reducing textual descriptions of the phenomenon to discern essential structures and meanings, the study sought to capture students' perceptions free from preconceptions. Textural examination identified key challenges that surfaced through participants' accounts. Structural analysis then uncovered contextual elements influencing the lived experience. Through transcendental-phenomenological reflection, a synthesis was achieved to discern the invariant essence of the experience. Cross-analysis revealed universal constituents common across individual transcripts. In adopting a reflective stance aimed at intuiting the true nature of the remote learning reality free from biases, this phenomenology offers critical insights into optimizing supports aligning with diverse needs informed by students' own voices.

The findings are visualized through a thematic diagram depicting the analytical themes that emerged regarding coping difficulties and implications for equitable service provision amid disruptions, as shown in Figure 23.
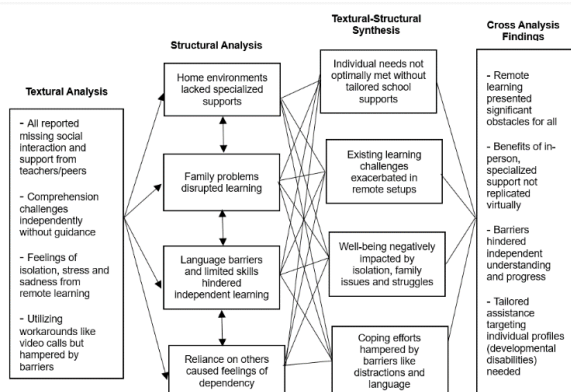
Figure 23. Thematic diagram depicting transcendental phenomenology analysis of the lived experience of young adults with disabilities in Three Identified Schools

1. Textural Analysis. Students reported missing social/instructional supports and independently struggling without guidance (Schembri-Mutch et al., 2023). Feeling isolated, stressed, sad due to remote disconnect (Zdravkova et al., 2022). Video calls utilized but hampered by barriers (Ebenfield, 2022).

2. Structural Analysis. Homes lacked specialized supports while family problems disrupted learning (Vander Els & Stack, 2022). Language/skill barriers hindered independent learning, fostering dependence (Schembri-Mutch et al., 2023).

3. Textural-Structural Synthesis. Needs of the Participants were not met without tailored supports; isolation, issues exacerbated barriers (Zdravkova et al., 2022). Well-being negatively impacted; efforts hampered by distractions, language (Ebenfield, 2022).

4. Cross-Analysis. All participants faced significant accessibility issues as independent barriers increased without targeted aids for diverse profiles (Schembri-Mutch et al., 2023). Customized services most effective at meeting varied needs; inability to foster similar understanding underscores flexible programming requirement (Vander Els & Stack, 2022; Ebenfield, 2022).

5. Informing Equitable Services through Lived Experience: Insights from young adults with developmental disabilities from Three Identified Schools. The phenomenological analysis uncovered several important implications for better supporting young adults with developmental disabilities through remote learning. It revealed that individual needs could not be optimized without the tailored educational environments and specialized services provided in school settings. This suggests remote learning as alternatives require comprehensive individualization incorporating specialized aids addressing diverse learning profiles (Mitra et al., 2023). The inability to replicate face-to-face instruction through virtual means

likewise calls for innovative workarounds attentive to communication and sensory requirements.

Additionally, the analysis showed existing challenges were exacerbated without targeted assistance for barriers such as limited language skills and distractions at home. This implies remote learning must provide accommodations to compensate for environmental deficits while also promoting autonomy (Petretto et al., 2021). The negative impacts on well-being further indicate a need for robust socioemotional support networks. Lastly, as barriers hampered independent understanding, customized assistance and technology supports customized to capabilities are clearly warranted. To optimize remote supports aligned with Participants' own needs and lived experiences, a holistic framework attentive to individualization, communication access, environmental optimization, socioemotional learning, and customized assistance based on personal profiles is implied (Crawford, 2022). Unmasking the essence of their reality through this phenomenology offers valuable insight toward more equitably meeting diverse learning demands.

Conclusion

Synthesizing the insights from the transcendental phenomenological analysis of this study revealed several important findings regarding young adults with developmental disabilities navigating remote learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of the participants expressed a clear preference for in-person instruction, which best supported their needs. Remote modalities introduced barriers to independent comprehension without classroom support, exacerbating learning difficulties and negatively impacting well-being due to individual needs not being fully met remotely without specialized aids.

Key challenges experienced included missing valued social networks that fostered motivation and understanding, leading to reported feelings of isolation, stress, and sadness. Deficits in accommodating home environments compared to tailored school supports manifested as additional obstacles. Family issues disrupted engagement for some participants. Communication barriers contributed to a sense of disconnection due to sensory impairments and limited accessible language support. Prolonged lack of accessibility and interaction threatened socioemotional well-being without appropriate mitigations.

Critical coping strategies identified were leveraging supportive networks through collaboration and seeking guidance, as well as dedicated self-study accommodating different learning styles. Managing emotions also proved beneficial for persevering through challenges. These strategies helped compensate for disadvantages faced learning remotely versus in supportive classroom settings. Both social and solitary coping mechanisms had

value, with flexibility important to foster inclusive communities.

A major finding was remote learning universally created issues due to lack of individualized services, assistive technology support, and benefits of in-person instruction, with independence posing a disadvantage without targeted aids addressing specific disability-related needs. While supportive environments fostered resilience, sustained absence of accessibility damaged engagement, comprehension and well-being over time without timely intervention.

For equitable participation, inclusive remote schooling demands holistic, personalized support optimizing learning through multi-tiered provisions flexibly addressing diverse academic, communication and socioemotional circumstances highlighted. Accommodations are imperative to ensure continued equal access and development opportunities through disruption.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS:

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

ETHICAL APPROVALS:

Approval for this study was granted by the Cebu Technological University-Main Campus Approving Committee before commencement. Informed consent was obtained from all participating young adults and their respective guardians/parents who were informed of study procedures, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw without penalty. Confidentiality and privacy were strictly maintained through de-identification of data for publication and presentation following ethical standards for human-subjects research.

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