Research Article

Vacant Time Transformed: Exploring Student Activities Before and During Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Time is valuable, and vacant is essential for students' relaxation and productivity. Before the pandemic, students spent their free time on social and extracurricular activities. However, COVID-19 disrupted education and altered how they used their vacant hours. This study explored students' activities during their school vacant time before and during the pandemic. It specifically aimed to (1) identify students' activities before the pandemic, (2) identify their activities during the pandemic, and (3) determine whether there was a significant difference between these activities. A descriptive quantitative analysis was used to interpret data from 257 senior high school students at Saint Francis of Assisi College – Las Piñas Campus. Weighted Mean and the Paired-Samples T-test were employed for data analysis. Findings revealed that before the pandemic, students primarily spent their vacant time listening to music, conversing with friends, and surfing the internet. During the pandemic, listening to music and surfing the internet remained the most common activities. However, restrictions prevented students from playing adult games, attending sports events, and participating in scientific and cultural activities. A significant difference was found between students' activities before and during the pandemic. The study suggests that parents ensure stable internet access for their children, while teachers incorporate engaging activities involving social media. Future research should explore the impact of students' personal activities on mental health during the pandemic.

Keywords: *Before Pandemic Activities, During Pandemic Activities, Vacant Time, Paired-Samples T-Test, Senior High School Students, Social Media, Online Engagement*

Introduction

Time is precious, and committing to key learning goals is essential. However, long to-do lists can cause stress for students who are under pressure to perform well in class. This is why having free time allows them to relax and

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temporarily relieve the burden of schoolwork. According to Terada (2018), regular school breaks—ranging from brief brain breaks in the classroom to longer recess breaks—are more than just downtime for students. These breaks enhance productivity while also fostering imagination and social skills. O'Donnell (2020) supports this, stating that, just like adults who recognize the importance of unwinding after a long workweek, students also need time to relax. Free time enables them to unwind, do nothing, or engage in activities they have been looking forward to all week. Thus, students ensure they make the most of their free time by engaging in various activities.

Each student is unique, and their interests vary. Many enjoy activities such as shopping, attending parties, socializing with friends, gaming, using social media, chatting, watching movies, reading, or visiting the beach or park. Others dedicate their free time to formal extracurricular activities, such as arts and athletics (Raising Children Network, 2021). Additionally, students may use their free time to review previous lessons or interact with classmates. Some choose to reinforce their learning by applying classroom concepts to real-life situations, often through creative activities. This allows them to express themselves artistically and take a break before resuming academic tasks (Morgan, 2018).

However, everything changed drastically with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since face-to-face classes posed a health risk, the Department of Education introduced online and modular distance learning as alternative modalities. As a result, students remained at home while completing assigned tasks, and even their activities during free time were affected.

According to Li and Lalani (2020), COVID-19 led to school closures worldwide, affecting approximately 1.2 billion children. This forced a significant transformation in education, shifting to e-learning and remote instruction via digital platforms. Consequently, many school activities were canceled, prompting educators to reimagine extracurricular programs—such as baking clubs and school newspapers—either in virtual settings or in compliance with health protocols (Minero, 2020). These adjustments have provided students and educators with a sense of belonging and normalcy during a time of widespread loneliness and anxiety. The pandemic has undeniably altered the education system, leading to the suspension or modification of traditional school events. Similarly, students' personal activities have also changed.

Several researchers have explored the shift in students' activities before and during the pandemic. Noviyanti et al. (2020) examined changes in student engagement and learning patterns, finding a decline in participation during the pandemic. Barkley et al. (2020) analyzed the impact of school closures on physical activity, revealing an increase in sedentary behavior among students, especially those who had been highly active before the pandemic. Meanwhile, Khattar et al. (2020) investigated students' daily routines, reporting that while students spent more time with their families, they also missed in-person social interactions, as virtual meetings failed to fully substitute for face-to-face engagement. These studies highlight the significant impact of the pandemic on student life, yet they primarily focus on structured school activities rather than personal use of vacant time.

Addressing this gap, the present study aims to compare students' activities during their school vacant time before and during the pandemic. Specifically, it seeks to determine what activities students engaged in before and during the pandemic and whether there is a significant difference between these two periods. By focusing on personal activities during students' free time, rather than structured academic engagements, this research offers a unique perspective on how external factors, such as the pandemic, reshape daily routines and well-being.

This study is anchored in the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that individuals' behaviors are influenced by their attitudes, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms. In the context of students' vacant time, this framework helps explain how their choices before and during the pandemic were shaped not just by personal preferences (attitudes) but also by the degree to which they felt capable of engaging in certain activities (perceived control), and by the expectations of peers, family, and society (norms).

For instance, during the pandemic, students who previously enjoyed outdoor social gatherings may have shifted to social media use or online gaming due to limited physical mobility and reinforced societal norms encouraging isolation. Their behavioral intentions—to stay connected, feel entertained, or remain productive—were adjusted based on what they perceived as acceptable and achievable within the new constraints.

Furthermore, the increase in screen-based activities such as social media engagement and video streaming can be seen as a response to changing attitudes toward technology use (now viewed more positively), heightened control over digital access at home, and shifting norms that normalized virtual leisure. On the other hand, activities requiring social proximity or shared spaces, like attending parties or playing team sports, declined due to limited control and social disapproval under health protocols.

Understanding these behavioral changes can provide insights into how students adapted to new learning environments and social conditions, especially as they navigated constraints and adjusted their intentions accordingly.

The findings of this study may benefit various stakeholders. Students may gain awareness of how their vacant time activities have changed, helping them manage their time more effectively. Educators and school administrators may use the results to design support programs that encourage meaningful and productive use of free time, whether in physical or online learning settings. Parents and guardians may better understand how their children's routines have shifted, enabling them to provide appropriate guidance and support. Future researchers may also use this study as a foundation for further investigations into student behavior, time management, and well-being during educational disruptions.

Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of vacant time in students' daily routines and highlights how external disruptions, such as a pandemic, can reshape their habits and overall well-being. By identifying these changes, the research aims to contribute to improving students' educational experiences and daily lives both inside and outside the classroom.

Methodology
Research Design
This study used a descriptive quantitative analysis in a comparative approach to determine students' activities before and during the pandemic during their school vacant time. The goal of descriptive research is to describe a population and its characteristics. This research is more concerned with what rather than how or why something has happened (McCombes, 2019). Additionally, the researcher employed inferential statistics to identify the significant difference between students' activities before and during the pandemic. Furthermore, data for this study were collected using a survey questionnaire administered through Google Forms.

Sources of Data
This research was conducted at Saint Francis of Assisi College – Las Piñas and focused on identifying students' activities before and during the pandemic.

To determine the appropriate sample size, the researcher utilized G*Power, a statistical tool for sample size calculation. Based on the computed results, data were gathered from 257 respondents aged 16–18, comprising 167 females and 90 males. The respondents were selected using random sampling to ensure fair representation and minimize bias.

The researcher maintained an unbiased connection with the respondents, having no direct personal or professional relationship with them. Furthermore, no financial or external support was received from any entity that could influence the study's outcomes, ensuring the integrity of the research.

To protect participants' confidentiality, the researcher strictly adhered to the Data Privacy Act of 2012. All personal information provided by respondents was kept strictly confidential, with access limited to the researcher and the research adviser. Any necessary personal details were collected only with the participants' informed consent.

This study was solely focused on analyzing students' activities before and during the

pandemic, ensuring that all collected data remained relevant to the research objectives.

Research Instrument

The research instrument used in this study was a survey questionnaire designed to identify students' activities before and during the pandemic. The questionnaire included several statements about possible activities, which respondents rated based on their level of engagement.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument, the questionnaire was adapted and modified from the study by Kadir and Ibrahim (2017), titled "The Study of the Duration of College Students' Free Time and the Way They Observe and Evaluate Their Free Time and Activities." The modified questionnaire was subsequently reviewed by Dr. Madonna Amora and Dr. Jennie Perez.

The researcher upheld ethical research standards by maintaining an unbiased relationship with the respondents. No financial or external support was received from any entity that could influence the research findings, ensuring the integrity of the study.

Data Gathering Procedure

This study involved 257 respondents to identify students' activities before and during the pandemic. The activities examined were limited to their school vacant time. To ensure the accuracy and integrity of the study, the researcher followed a systematic data collection process.

The first step in data collection involved submitting a letter of request to the administrators of Saint Francis of Assisi College – Las Piñas Campus. This letter outlined the purpose of the research and formally requested permission to survey the students.

Upon receiving approval, the researcher notified the selected respondents and explained the purpose, process, and significance of the study. Respondents were instructed to sign an informed consent form, ensuring that they fully understood why their data was being collected and how it would be used. The researcher also reassured them of the confidentiality of their responses and took measures to prevent any potential conflicts of interest.

Given the accessibility and efficiency required in the new normal, the researcher conducted the survey using Google Forms. This method was chosen because it allowed for faster, safer, and more convenient data collection. The responses were automatically stored in a secured online worksheet, accessible only through an authorized Google account login. The survey questionnaire was designed to be concise, requiring only 3 to 5 minutes to complete.

After collecting the responses, the researcher tallied the data by generating a frequency distribution table. The gathered information was then processed, analyzed, interpreted, and presented using appropriate statistical tools. To ensure proper data disposal, all records—including printed and electronic copies—would be securely deleted or burned within six months to a year after the study's completion.

Participation in this study was strictly voluntary, with no monetary or in-kind compensation provided. The researcher expressed gratitude to all respondents for their valuable participation and maintained an unbiased relationship with them throughout the research process.

Analysis of Data

In this study, the captured data from the quantitative research were presented, analyzed, described, and interpreted systematically as part of the research process. The statistical tools applied were chosen to ensure an accurate and structured analysis of the gathered primary data, leading to valid numerical findings. The following statistical techniques were used:

1. Weighted Mean - This was used to determine the students' activities before and during the pandemic during their school vacant time. The formula used for computing the weighted mean is:

$$\bar{x} = (\sum f t)/(\sum f)$$

Where:
$\bar{x}$ = is the weighted mean
$\sum f t$ = sum of the product's weights multiplied by their respected frequency
$\sum f$ = sum of all respondents

2. Paired-Samples T-test – This statistical test was applied to determine whether there was a significant difference in the students' activities before and during the pandemic. The formula used is:

$$t = \frac{\sum d}{\sqrt{\frac{n(\sum d^2) - (\sum d)^2}{n-1}}}$$

Where:
d = difference per paired value
n = number of samples

These statistical tools allowed for an objective assessment of the changes in student activities over time, ensuring the reliability and validity of the study's findings.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher ensured that ethical guidelines and practices were strictly followed throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, the respondents were fully informed about the purpose and procedures of the study. A consent form was provided to each participant, ensuring that they voluntarily agreed to take part in the research.

To uphold confidentiality and privacy, the researcher did not disclose any personal or sensitive information about the respondents. All collected data were handled with the utmost care to prevent any harm, bias, or ethical violations. Additionally, the study adhered to the Data Privacy Act of 2012, ensuring that all information was used solely for research purposes and securely stored to prevent unauthorized access.

Result
1. What activities did students engage in during their school vacant time before the pandemic?

Table 1 shows the distribution of students' activities during their free time at school before the pandemic.

Table 1. Students' Activities Before the Pandemic

STATEMENTS	$\overline{X}$	VERBAL INTERPRETATION
I go to cinema.	2.18	Rarely
I read books, magazines, and newspaper.	2.61	Often
I actively do sports. (for example soccer, baseball, basketball, tennis, ping-pong, etc.)	2.68	Often
I participate in social and societal activities.	2.70	Often
I participate in scientific and cultural activities.	2.18	Rarely
I attend sports events.	2.41	Rarely
I surf the internet.	3.44	Always
I listen to music.	3.78	Always
I walk around for pleasure.	3.05	Often
I go to malls.	3.03	Often
I play a musical instrument.	2.13	Rarely
I watch sports competitions.	2.60	Often
I watch various television shows.	2.88	Often
I go to cafes.	2.27	Rarely
I have a conversation with my friends.	3.52	Always
I play adult games (for example cards, mahjong, etc.)	1.78	Rarely
I do cycling.	2.14	Rarely
Categorical Mean	2.67	Often

Legend: 3.26- 4.0 (Always), 2.51- 3.25 (Often), 1.76 – 2.50 (Rarely), 1.00 – 1.75 (Never)

The table above presents the results of students' pre-pandemic activities during their free time at school, with a categorical mean of 2.67, interpreted as "Often."

The highest-rated activities were "I listen to music" (X̄ = 3.78), "I have a conversation with my friends" (X̄ = 3.52), and "I surf the internet" (X̄ = 3.44), all interpreted as "Always."

Other activities frequently engaged in by students included "I walk around for leisure" (X̄ = 3.05), "I go to malls" (X̄ = 3.03), "I watch various television shows" (X̄ = 2.88), "I participate in social and community activities" (X̄ = 2.70), "I actively participate in sports" (X̄ = 2.68), "I read books, magazines, and newspapers" (X̄ = 2.61), and "I watch sports competitions" (X̄ = 2.60), all interpreted as "Often."

Conversely, the least common activities were "I attend sports events" (X̄ = 2.41), "I go to cafés" (X̄ = 2.27), "I engage in scientific and cultural activities" (X̄ = 2.18), "I go to the cinema" (X̄ = 2.18), "I go cycling" (X̄ = 2.14), "I play a

musical instrument" (X̄ = 2.13), and "I play board or card games" (X̄ = 1.78), all interpreted as "Rarely."

Notably, all activities fell within the "Rarely" to "Always" categories, with no activity rated as "Never." The overall mean score of 2.67 suggests that students engaged in various activities during their pre-pandemic free time without restrictions on movement or health risks. However, they most frequently participated in the activities listed above

2. What activities did students engage in during their school vacant time during the pandemic?

Table 2 shows the distribution of students' activities during their free time at school during the pandemic.

Table 2. Students' Activities During the Pandemic

STATEMENTS	$\bar{X}$	VERBAL INTERPRETATION
I go to cinema.	1.62	Never
I read books, magazines, and newspaper.	2.54	Often
I actively do sports. (for example soccer, baseball, basketball, tennis, ping-pong, etc.)	2.05	Rarely
I participate in social and societal activities.	2.03	Rarely
I participate in scientific and cultural activities.	1.65	Never
I attend sports events.	1.72	Never
I surf the internet.	3.59	Always
I listen to music.	3.85	Always
I walk around for pleasure.	2.56	Often
I go to malls.	2.46	Rarely
I play a musical instrument.	2.05	Rarely
I watch sports competitions.	2.24	Rarely
I watch various television shows.	2.81	Often
I go to cafes.	1.85	Rarely
I have a conversation with my friends.	3.20	Often
I play adult games (for example cards, mahjong, etc.)	1.58	Never
I do cycling.	1.93	Rarely
Categorical Mean	2.34	Rarely

Legend: 3.26- 4.0 (Always), 2.51- 3.25 (Often), 1.76 – 2.50 (Rarely), 1.00 – 1.75 (Never)

Table 2 presents the distribution of students' activities during their school vacant time amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The categorical mean score of 2.34, interpreted as "Rarely," suggests that students engaged in fewer activities during this period due to restrictions and safety protocols.

Among the activities listed, the highest mean scores were recorded for "I listen to music" (X̄ = 3.85) and "I surf the internet" (X̄ = 3.59), both interpreted as "Always." These results indicate that listening to music and browsing the internet became primary leisure activities for students during the pandemic.

The next most frequent activities, interpreted as "Often," included "I have conversations with my friends" ($\bar{X}$ = 3.20), "I watch various television shows" ($\bar{X}$ = 2.81), "I walk around for pleasure" ($\bar{X}$ = 2.56), and "I read books, magazines, and newspapers" ($\bar{X}$ = 2.54). This suggests that while students had limited mobility, they still found ways to stay socially and intellectually engaged through media consumption and light physical activities.

Meanwhile, activities such as "I go to malls" ($\bar{X}$ = 2.46), "I watch sports competitions" ($\bar{X}$ = 2.24), "I play a musical instrument" ($\bar{X}$ = 2.05), "I actively do sports" ($\bar{X}$ = 2.05), "I do cycling" ($\bar{X}$ = 1.93), and "I go to cafes" ($\bar{X}$ = 1.85) were rated as "Rarely." These findings highlight the restrictions on social gatherings and outdoor recreational activities during the pandemic.

Lastly, activities with the lowest participation, interpreted as "Never," included "I attend sports events" ($\bar{X}$ = 1.72), "I play adult games (e.g., cards, mahjong, etc.)" ($\bar{X}$ = 1.58), "I participate in scientific and cultural activities" ($\bar{X}$ = 1.65), and "I go to the cinema" ($\bar{X}$ = 1.62). These results reflect the impact of lockdowns and the closure of entertainment, cultural, and sports venues during the pandemic.

Overall, with a mean score of 2.34 ("Rarely"), the data suggest that students' activities were significantly constrained during the pandemic. Many recreational and social engagements were limited, leading to an increased reliance on digital entertainment, personal conversations, and passive leisure activities. These findings underscore the extent to which public health measures influenced students' daily routines and leisure preferences.
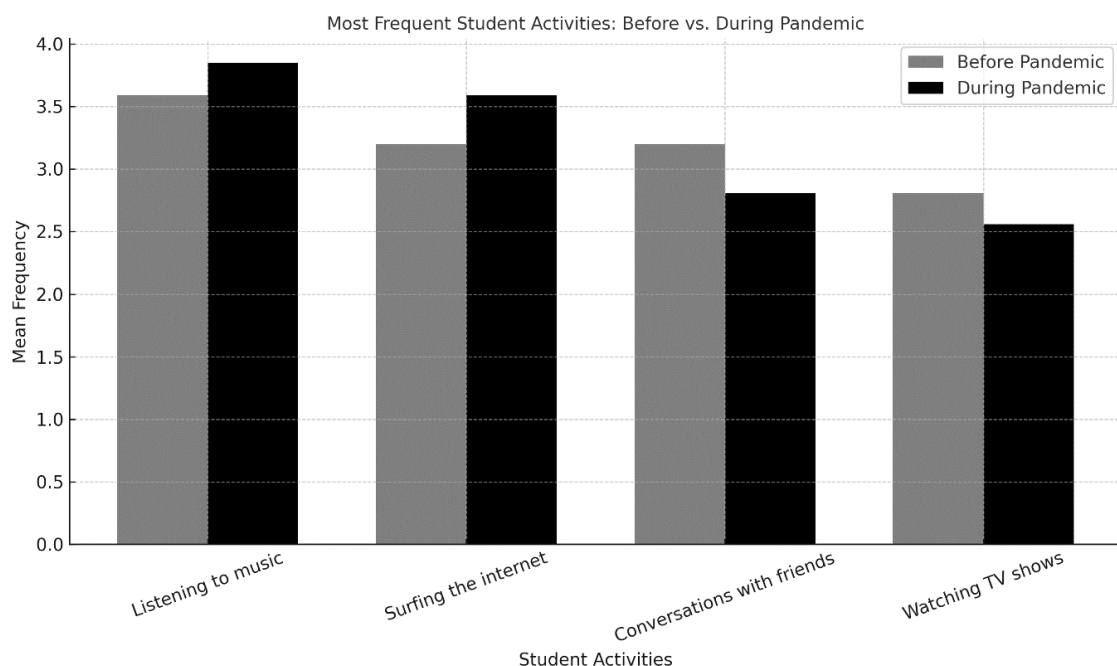

Figure 1. Most Frequent Student Activities Before and During the Pandemic

As shown in Figure 1, students engaged in different activities with varying frequencies before and during the pandemic. Listening to music and surfing the internet emerged as the most frequent activities in both periods, with noticeable increases during the pandemic, indicating a shift toward solitary or digitally-mediated pastimes. In contrast, conversations with friends and watching TV shows showed a slight decline in frequency during the pandemic, possibly due to limited physical interaction and changes in routine. These patterns suggest that students adjusted their recreational habits in response to the restrictions and lifestyle changes brought by the pandemic.

3. Is there a significant difference between students' activities before and during the pandemic?

Table 3 presents the results of a paired-samples t-test comparing students' activities during their school vacant time before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 3. Significant Differences in Students' Activities Before and During the Pandemic

	n	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p-value	Cohen's d	Decision
Before pandemic	257	2.67	0.56	-5.14	256	0.00	-2.55	Reject
During pandemic	257	2.33	0.69					

The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between the two periods, as indicated by the t-test results: $t(256) = -5.14$, $p = 0.00$. The mean activity level before the pandemic (M = 2.67, SD = 0.56) was significantly higher than during the pandemic (M = 2.33, SD = 0.69). Since the p-value is below the standard significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected, confirming that the pandemic had a notable impact on students' activities.

Furthermore, Cohen's d value of -2.55 indicates a large effect size, suggesting that the shift in students' activities due to the pandemic was substantial. Such an exceptionally large effect size may be attributed to the consistency and magnitude of behavioral change across the sample. It implies that a majority of students reported significantly less engagement in activities during the pandemic compared to before, likely due to uniform restrictions on mobility and access to communal spaces. While large, the effect size reflects the strong homogeneity in how students' routines were impacted by the lockdown and should be interpreted with this context in mind.

Overall, these findings suggest that students were more engaged in various activities before the pandemic compared to during the pandemic, reinforcing the substantial influence of public health restrictions on their leisure and social interactions.

Discussion
Students' Activities Before the Pandemic

The findings indicate that the activities students engaged in before the pandemic included listening to music, conversing with friends, and surfing the internet, all of which were interpreted as "Always." Additionally, the results reveal that students rarely participated in activities such as attending sports events, going to cafés, engaging in scientific and cultural activities, watching movies in cinemas, cycling, playing musical instruments, and engaging in adult games, with a registered interpretation of "Rarely."

Based on the table, listening to music had the highest weighted mean of 3.78 ("Always"). According to Taylor (2017), music has a significant impact on both mental and physical health. Music lessons, for example, can enhance IQ and help individuals maintain mental sharpness as they age. Furthermore, students often utilized their free time productively by studying their notes. As reported by the Australian Christian College (2021), effective time management enables students to accomplish more in less time by maintaining focus and minimizing distractions, such as social media. Additionally, research by Kumar et al. (2016) suggests that listening to music while studying does not negatively affect concentration; instead, it may even enhance academic performance. Similarly, Dolegui (2013) found that students frequently listen to music for relaxation while working on challenging academic tasks to reduce stress and anxiety. These patterns suggest that students intuitively integrated music into their cognitive routines, hinting at its potential as a tool for enhancing focus and emotional regulation in both academic and non-academic settings.

In addition to listening to music, students also spent their free time socializing with friends, as reflected by a weighted mean of 3.78. Friendships play a crucial role in students' social and emotional well-being, particularly in secondary school. Positive friendships can significantly enhance mental health, protect against stress, and build resilience. By fostering

a sense of belonging and connectedness, friendships contribute to self-esteem, problem-solving skills, and social development (ReachOut Australia, 2021). A study by Amanda et al. (2010) found that daily text messaging among American teens increased significantly, from 38% of teens texting friends daily in February 2008 to 54% in September 2009. Additionally, half of the surveyed teens sent 50 or more text messages daily (1,500 texts per month), while one in three sent over 100 texts daily (more than 3,000 texts per month). This evidence indicates that digital communication had already become deeply embedded in adolescent social practices prior to the pandemic, which likely eased the transition into virtual modes of connection when face-to-face interactions became limited.

Lastly, students reported that surfing the internet was also one of their most common pre-pandemic activities during school breaks, with a weighted mean of 3.44. According to author Jean M. Twenge, "Compared with previous generations, teens in the 2010s spent more time online and less time with traditional media, such as books, magazines, and television" (Sliwa, 2018). A report by the London College of International (2021) highlights that social media provides students with access to valuable information, connects them with learning groups, and facilitates educational opportunities, making learning more accessible. Moreover, social networking tools offer students and academic institutions various opportunities to enhance learning methods. These insights imply that even before the pandemic, digital engagement had become a foundational aspect of student life, raising questions for educational policy regarding the balance between screen time and traditional learning methods.

Students' Activities During the Pandemic

The findings indicate that during the pandemic, students primarily engaged in listening to music and surfing the internet, both of which were interpreted as "Always." Conversely, activities such as playing adult games, attending sports events, and participating in scientific and cultural activities were restricted due to government protocols, leading to an interpretation of "Never."

Based on the results, students identified listening to music as their most frequent activity during online class breaks, with a weighted mean of 3.85. Research has shown that music is one of the most effective strategies for coping with stress among young people. It is as beneficial as exercise, sleep, and changes in environment for stress management. Additionally, music listening as a coping mechanism has been linked to better well-being, though not necessarily to a reduction in COVID-19-related stress (Vidas et al., 2021). A survey conducted in India with 2,000 participants found that one in every two adult Indians strongly believes that life is incomplete without music. Moreover, 90% of respondents reported that music helped them cope with self-isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similar results were observed in other parts of the world, with 75% of French and 65% of German respondents stating that listening to their favorite music positively impacted their productivity while performing tasks (EE News Desk, 2020). These findings support the idea that music functioned not just as entertainment but as a practical emotional coping mechanism during crises. For educators and mental health professionals, this underscores the importance of incorporating arts-based approaches into student wellness programs, particularly during times of disruption.

The results also indicate that students frequently spent their free time surfing the internet, with a weighted mean of 3.59. According to Wong et al. (2020), social media usage accelerated significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, becoming an integral part of modern communication. Jones (2020) reported that research from Carleton University revealed that university students increasingly turned to social media to cope with social isolation and stress. A study conducted between May and June found that 81% of participants had increased their social media usage as a coping mechanism since the pandemic began. Similarly, Fernandes et al. (2020) examined the impact of lockdown on internet use among adolescents and found a significant increase in social media engagement and streaming service consumption. Their study also revealed that individuals with high scores in gaming addiction,

compulsive internet use, and social media dependence were more likely to experience depression, loneliness, escapism, poor sleep quality, and anxiety related to the pandemic. These findings align with the study of Cauberghe et al. (2021), which found that individuals who felt lonely during the pandemic were more inclined to use social media to compensate for reduced social interactions. This pattern reveals a double-edged sword: while digital platforms provided emotional relief and continuity in social interaction, they also introduced potential mental health risks. These observations can inform future strategies in digital literacy and psychological interventions that help students build healthier online habits.

Significant Differences in Students' Activities Before and During the Pandemic

The findings highlight the significant differences in the activities of senior high school students at Saint Francis of Assisi College before and during the pandemic, particularly during their school vacant time. After performing a T-test, the results revealed a statistically significant difference in the activities students engaged in during these two periods. The data indicate that while some activities remained accessible despite the pandemic, others were no longer feasible due to government restrictions and health protocols.

The results emphasize that surfing the internet remained a dominant activity among students during their free time. The widespread availability of smartphones allowed students to easily access social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, which they perceived as the best way to utilize their vacant time. According to Goodyear (2014), this is the era of social media, characterized by millions of applications and websites facilitating communication. Teenagers are among the most active users of social networking platforms, frequently updating statuses, sharing photos, and engaging in online interactions. Similarly, Wade (n.d.) reported that 96% of students with internet access use at least one social networking site, underscoring the significant role of social media in students' daily lives. These findings suggest that digital con-

nectivity served as a crucial resilience mechanism during the pandemic, though it also raises considerations for policymakers about the long-term implications of digital dependency on student attention, productivity, and mental health.

The findings also indicate that listening to music was a consistent activity both before and during the pandemic. As Scott (2020) noted, one of the key benefits of music as a stress reliever is its ability to be integrated into daily routines. Music not only enhances enjoyment but also helps reduce stress. This was particularly relevant during the pandemic, as individuals sought effective coping mechanisms amidst uncertainty and isolation. The study of Vidas et al. (2021) further supports this, identifying music as one of the most effective stress-coping strategies for students. This continuity suggests that music may serve as a stable emotional anchor across varying contexts, and thus could be systematically leveraged in both traditional and digital classroom environments to promote student well-being.

Overall, the analysis illustrates that while students demonstrated adaptability by turning to individual and digital activities like music listening and internet use, the loss of in-person engagements may have longer-term implications for social development and experiential learning. Future educational policies should consider how to integrate flexible, hybrid opportunities that promote well-being, digital competency, and interpersonal connection—even in times of crisis.

Conclusions

This study examined the activities of senior high school students at Saint Francis of Assisi College before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the significant differences in their engagement in various activities during these two periods. The findings provide insight into how students allocated their free time and how their activities were influenced by the restrictions imposed due to the pandemic.

Before the pandemic, students primarily engaged in listening to music, socializing with friends, and surfing the internet during their free time. These activities provided relaxation,

entertainment, and opportunities for social interaction. While students often studied during their vacant periods, they rarely participated in sports events, cultural activities, or playing musical instruments. These findings suggest that students preferred activities that required minimal effort and could be done individually or in small groups.

During the pandemic, students continued to engage in listening to music and surfing the internet, but socializing with friends was significantly reduced due to movement restrictions. With limited access to in-person gatherings, students relied on digital platforms to stay connected. Additionally, strict health protocols prevented participation in sports and cultural events, further limiting students' engagement in physically interactive activities. Music and internet usage emerged as key coping mechanisms that helped students manage stress and isolation during this period.

The comparison of students' activities before and during the pandemic revealed statistically significant differences. While certain activities, such as music listening and internet use, remained consistent, others, such as attending sports events and participating in cultural activities, were no longer feasible due to restrictions. The reliance on digital platforms for communication and entertainment highlights the shift in student behavior brought about by the pandemic. These findings emphasize the importance of accessible coping mechanisms for students during times of crisis.

In light of these insights, it is recommended that educators and parents integrate music or media-based breaks into online and hybrid learning routines to support student engagement and emotional regulation. Encouraging offline recreational activities—such as physical exercise, arts and crafts, or reading—can help balance digital consumption and promote well-being. Moreover, schools may develop virtual social platforms or online clubs to replicate social interactions lost during isolation. Teachers should also consider incorporating discussions on digital wellness into the curriculum to help students become more aware of healthy screen habits and coping strategies.

By implementing these actionable steps, both educational institutions and families can play a critical role in fostering resilience and holistic development among students, particularly in the face of future disruptions.

Acknowledgement

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