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Coping mechanisms of international nursing students - A Study on adapting to distance learning while working

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this thesis is to gather information of the coping mechanisms that international nursing students use on adapting to distance learning while working. The goal is to improve the understanding of the coping mechanisms of the international nursing students to improve their studying and well-being. In addition, this thesis further aims to allow international nursing students to learn about various coping mechanisms that they can implement in their daily lives to be able to alleviate stress and improve their daily lives. The method of collecting data and analysis was achieved through qualitative research, sending out a qualitative questionnaire to qualified respondents, and applying content analysis to the responses received. A total of 18 questionnaires were sent to various qualified respondents. The researchers received 14 responses, which can be interpreted as a 77.78% response rate. The data analysis method was based on inductive content analysis.

The findings of this thesis indicate that it is important to note there are various approaches to coping mechanisms, and that some may require less effort or may require more effort from each individual. Trying out various strategies and maintaining the ones that suit each person is the key to effectiveness in coping mechanism activities.

The overall theme that was consistent throughout the responses was that social support is an integral part of coping mechanism activities. Having open communication with family, friends and peers and doing activities together with them has helped create a supportive environment for international students to improve their well-being in general.

¹ Keywords: coping mechanisms, coping strategies, international nurses, international students, distance learning, distance learning while working.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Global demographic changes have led to a systematic increase in the elderly population and a decreasing number of births, which have impacted health policy and healthcare systems in various countries. Both processes necessitate transitions in global health care. Nursing shortages have reached a critical point for healthcare services on both the local and global levels (Marc et al., 2019).

In Finland, there are 73,688 nurses in the workforce, where foreign-born nurses account for 3.3% of working nurses. Of these, 69% are from outside the EU. The number of primary applicants for nursing education has steadily declined between 2016 and 2020 (“Health and Social Services Personnel and Those Working with Professional Titles in the Field”, 2024).

In recent years, distance learning has been on the rise due to multiple factors like the global COVID-19 pandemic, and the evolution of new technologies that facilitate distance learning to be easier and more accessible to both learners and teachers. Al-Arimi (2014) defines distance learning as learning that is being done off-campus, which is similar to online learning, e-learning, and virtual learning. An advantage of distance learning includes flexibility and convenience for the learner. Distance learning can also be used in conjunction with face-to-face teaching, in which blended learning is commonly used.

Together with the increased need for nurses in Finland, along with the rise and ease of distance learning, the number of international nursing students have increased. The researchers are focusing on a group of international students that have come to Finland to complete their Finnish nursing degree. These students do not speak Finnish fluently yet, but they have been offered employment, which is why they will be completing their studies through a mixed learning model. This includes in-campus lessons at school, together with distance learning. There is an increase in stress across the members of the group brought about by the difficulties in time-management, language barrier, increase in financial requirements, and adapting to a new environment.

The goal of the thesis is to improve the knowledge and understanding of the coping mechanisms and adaptation of the international nursing students to improve their studying and well-being. The purpose of the study is to gather information of the coping mechanisms that international nursing students use on adapting to distance learning while working.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Coping mechanism

Challenges are defined as any difficulties experienced by the students. Coping responses/mechanisms referred to any strategies that are used by the students to help overcome, minimize, or tolerate challenges (Merry & Verville-Provencher, 2021).

Coping is one of the most extensively studied concepts in psychology. It encompasses two concepts. The first is that of stable coping styles which characterizes an individual's interaction with his or her stressful environment, and the second involves coping skills or techniques that people use to manage specific stressful situations. Coping styles refers to the cognitive and behavioral styles used by individuals in the face of frustration and pressure. Assessing an individual's coping style and understanding its relationship with mental health is an important content of psychological research. From the perspectives of different researchers, there are many types of coping styles. However, further analysis found that the coping styles proposed by different researchers have common characteristics, that is, some coping styles have more positive components, such as seeking support and trying to change, while others are dominated by negative components, such as avoidance and venting (Liu et al., 2021).

A nursing theory called Adaptation Theory developed by Sister Callista Roy was also used as a reference in this study. This model viewed every individual as a holistic biopsychosocial being who interacted constantly with an environment that was constantly changing. An individual relies on both intrinsic and acquired coping mechanisms, such as those having biological, psychological, and social origins, to adapt to a changing environment. Roy explained that adaptation is the process and result of individuals and communities using conscious awareness, self-reflection, and choice to build human and environmental integration. Adaptation happens when people react favorably to environmental changes. One of the essential components of mental health is coping skills. Stress reduces tension if coping mechanisms used by the individual are efficient and appropriate (Roy, 2011).

Labrague (2024) has noted that being a student nurse can be an incredibly challenging experience. Not only are student nurses required to balance a heavy course load and clinical rotations, but they are also exposed to intense emotional and physical demands on a daily basis. In order to succeed in such a demanding field, student nurses must develop effective coping mechanisms to help them navigate the stresses and challenges they face.

Coping mechanisms are essential tools that student nurses can use to help them navigate the challenges and stresses of their education and clinical practice. By seeking social support, engaging in self-care activities, exercising regularly, and developing effective time management and organizational skills, student nurses can strengthen their resilience, improve their well-being, and enhance their ability to cope with the demands of their chosen profession. By prioritizing their own health and well-being, student nurses can ensure that they are well-equipped to succeed in their education and make a positive impact in the lives of their patients (Labrague, 2024).

2.2 International students

International students are defined as individuals with student visas and completing their degree abroad (Merry & Verville-Provencher, 2021). These individuals are allowed to obtain part time jobs while studying. Rosa et al., (2023) have identified that students that face specific challenges may impact their mental health who experiences stress.

Stress can have an adverse effect on a student's mental health if they are facing certain problems. Students who exhibit high levels of stress can better manage their stress by learning to recognize and identify it, which improves their psychological flexibility and has a favorable impact on their mental health outcomes (Brandolin et al., 2023).

Norman & Perry (2024) has pointed out that international students face unique challenges when learning during placement. These challenges are often related to cultural differences, language barriers, and adjustment to a new education system.

Despite these obstacles, international students can benefit greatly from their placement experience by gaining practical skills, cultural competence, and a deeper understanding of

their field of study. However, these challenges can be overcome through practice, patience, and open communication with supervisors and colleagues (Gerrish & Lathlean, 2015).

Experiencing a different education system can be a valuable learning opportunity for international students, as it can broaden their perspective and help them develop adaptable and transferable skills. Despite these challenges, international students can benefit greatly from their placement experience. One of the main benefits of completing a placement is the opportunity to gain practical skills in a real-world setting. This hands-on experience allows students to apply the theoretical knowledge they have gained in the classroom to real-world situations, helping them develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. In addition, students can learn valuable technical skills that are specific to their field of study, making them more competitive in the job market (Eden et al., 2021).

Placement also provides international students with the opportunity to develop cultural competence. By working in a multicultural environment, students can learn to adapt to different cultural norms and practices, improving their ability to work effectively with people from diverse backgrounds. This cultural awareness is a valuable skill in today's globalized world, where cross-cultural communication and collaboration are essential for success (Parahoo, 2014).

2.3 Distance learning

Although distance learning can increase stress, Al-Arimi (2014) has noted that the advantages of distance learning include flexibility and convenience for the learner. It can adapt to the learner's needs and presents more variety in the learner's experience because distance learning uses various teaching materials.

Regardless of the advantages of this new teaching method, it can still affect the students in psychological and logical thinking. It presents the challenges of coping and adapting to the distance learning method and how they can benefit from it (Ruslan et al., 2023).

Youngman & Veale (2020) has noted that distance learning has become a popular option for students around the world, allowing them to study and earn their degrees without having to physically attend a traditional classroom. This method of learning offers a flexible and

convenient alternative to traditional on-campus education, as students can complete their coursework from anywhere with an internet connection.

One of the key advantages of distance learning is its flexibility. With the ability to access course materials and lectures online, students can study at their own pace and on their own schedule. This is particularly beneficial for students who have other commitments such as work or family responsibilities. Distance learning allows them to balance their studies with their other obligations, making higher education more accessible to a wider range of individuals (Tonbuloglu & Gurol, 2016).

Additionally, distance learning allows students to communicate with their instructors and classmates through online forums and discussion boards, providing a sense of community and support. However, distance learning also comes with its own set of challenges. One of the main challenges is the lack of face-to-face interaction with instructors and classmates. This can make it difficult for students to ask questions and seek clarification on course material, leading to potential misunderstandings and confusion (Youngman & Veale, 2020).

Moreover, the lack of in-person interaction can make it challenging for students to build relationships with their peers and form study groups, which can impact their learning experience (Morrison & Camargo-Borges, 2015).

3 THE GOAL AND THE PURPOSE OF THE THESIS

The goal of the thesis is to improve understanding of coping mechanisms used by international nursing students to improve their studying and well-being.

The purpose of the study is to gather information of the coping mechanisms that international nursing students use on adapting to distance learning while working.

The thesis question: What kind of coping mechanisms do international nursing students use while doing distance learning and working at the same time?

4 DATA COLLECTION METHOD AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research is interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences and what meaning they attribute towards these experiences that they have gone through. The most basic definition of qualitative research uses words as data, and these words are collected and analyzed in all sorts of ways. To understand peoples' experience, a qualitative design is needed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Qualitative methods include interviews with open-ended questions, observations described in words, and literature reviews that explore the concept and theories. Good data collection requires excellent interpersonal skills for research to be excellent. The greatest value of qualitative research is its ability to address questions of relevance to public health knowledge and practice which are difficult to answer satisfactorily using quantitative methods (Lavee & Itzchakov, 2023).

4.2 Qualitative questionnaire

Patten (2017) states that questionnaires provide an efficient way to collect information, and yield responses that are usually easy to gather. To ensure the use of an effective qualitative questionnaire in this study, according to Patten (2017) it is important that the researchers follow an appropriate method:

- Prepare written objectives for the research.
- Ensure that written objectives are peer-reviewed.
- Review literature that are related to the written objectives.
- Determine the feasibility of administering the questionnaire to the population of interest.

- Prepare and follow a timeline.

In this study, qualitative open questionnaires are sent to a total of eighteen (18) international students, and they are all working while doing distance learning. The questionnaire will contain five (5) open-ended questions, which the participants can answer within a duration of 30 minutes to 1 hour. The open questionnaire will be sent through Webropol software (Appendix 10.1).

4.3 Data collection

According to Moser & Korstjens (2018), one of the most commonly used data collection methods is doing qualitative interviews. This aims to explain the definition of central themes that are being experienced by the participants. The goal of the qualitative interview is to understand the various themes of the participants' answers.

4.4 Inductive content analysis

Kyngäs et al. (2020) explains that inductive content analysis is most commonly used when a qualitative study has an inductive starting point. This means that the data collection approach is open, and the themes are loosely defined. A challenge that researchers may face is that there can be no systematic or accurate rules for how to analyze qualitative data. This is why content analysis should be considered as a discussion between the researchers and the data collected. The main goal of content analysis is to produce abstracts of the raw data that summarize the main categories and themes and provide indications of possible theoretical relationships.

5 FINDINGS

5.1 The biggest challenge experienced by international nursing students when doing distance learning while working

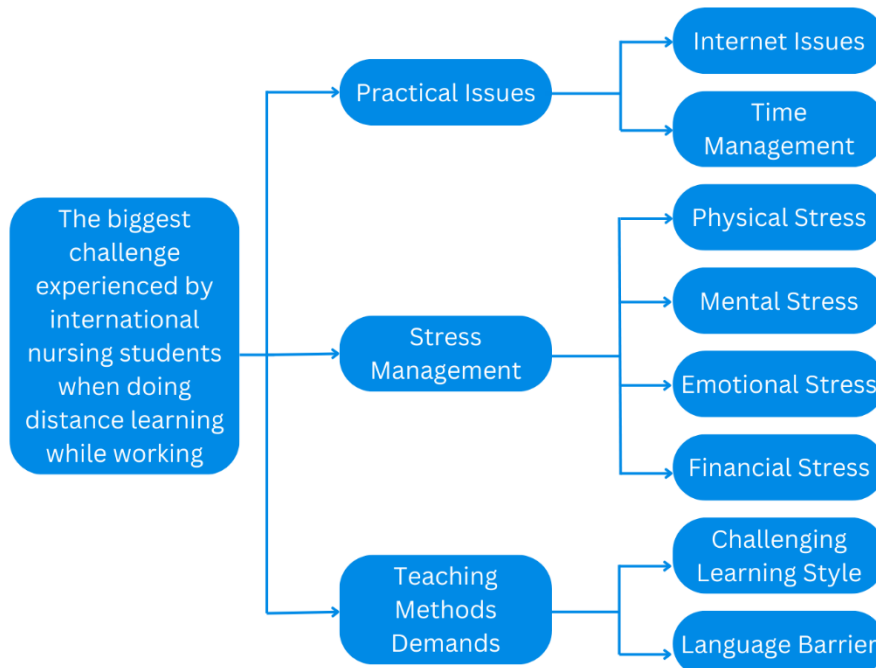


Figure 1 Biggest Challenge Experienced by International Nursing Students

5.1.1 Practical issues

Practical issues are a common challenge that the respondents have had to face while doing distance learning while working. These can be classified as common issues that happen in an individual's daily life, that can produce stressful situations and consequences. The respondents' responses have pointed out that their productivity has decreased significantly because of various factors, and that this has made their current situation more difficult.

Internet issues

The internet is one of the major tools that students utilize for them to attend online classes while working. The school is utilizing multiple online platforms for distance learning such as

Teams, Moodle, Zoom, and Whatsapp, and these can only be accessed through the internet. When the respondents face internet connection issues, this can be a major problem because they will miss out on online lectures, not be able to submit assignments on time, and miss out on important information and instructions, which in turn decreases their productivity.

Time management

Time management has been identified by multiple respondents as a challenge to distance learning while working because schedules can be quite difficult to iron out. One respondent has pointed out that “not having enough time to accomplish some tasks in school” is very challenging. Finding a good balance between studies, work, and leisure time is a recurring sentiment that has been pointed out. Another layer to time management that is unique to the respondents’ situation is that they must factor in travel time to and from school, which is approximately 4 hours by train per way. This has also added more complexities to managing their time well because they must plan train routes to and from classes effectively.

5.1.2 Stress management

A lot of respondents have conveyed that stress is a major challenge when doing distance learning while working. The respondents have identified that their stress levels have increased and that it has been difficult for them to cope with the various stressors that they have experienced. Furthermore, they have identified specific kinds of stresses that they have gone through because of doing distance learning while working.

Physical stress

Physical stress has been noted by the respondents as one of the challenges that they experienced. A respondent has shared that “sometimes you don’t get much rest because you spend your day off from work to do school activities”. This was manifested by having less time to rest, experiencing exhaustion, difficulties in their bodily functions, and feelings that their health and well-being is compromised. They have had to adapt to have less time for rest because of the multiple demands of doing distance learning while also working.

Mental stress

“I feel like my brain can’t absorb anything”, is a challenge that one respondent has pointed out. The respondents have also stated that they have experienced varying levels of mental stress. They have seen effects of mental exhaustion such as decrease in focus, having too many distractions, and not being able to focus and retain the information that they have studied. Because of these, the respondents have noted that their attention has been divided between work and school.

Emotional stress

A respondent has shared to us that “loneliness, because of being away from my family”. Feelings of loneliness has also been a factor that the respondents have noted as one of the challenges to distance learning while working. Being a type of emotional stress, loneliness often leads to more negative feelings and may even often lead to more serious mental health problems like depression.

Financial stress

Because of doing distance learning while working, financial stress has also been pointed out by the respondents. Because the respondents need to frequently travel back and forth between cities in Finland, they need to spend more money than the average student to purchase train tickets to attend classes.

5.1.3 Teaching methods demands

There are various teaching methods that universities of higher education utilize to provide students with a meaningful and effective learning experience. In the current situation of the respondents who are doing distance learning, they are currently going through a mixed method using online tools, while also attending in-classroom lectures and activities. This has been identified as a challenge because of the added factor of also working while doing distance learning.

Challenging learning style

One challenge that the respondents face is about the challenge of learning through different learning styles. The VARK model, that was developed by Neil Fleming in 1987, describes that an individual has four major styles of how they learn or receive information: Visual, Auditory, Reading and Writing, and Kinesthetic. Keeping this model in mind, the respondents have noted that it is difficult to learn when there are fewer contact exercises and less face-to-face interaction with teachers and their co-students. One respondent has shared that “for me, it is still effective when learning inside a classroom”.

Language barrier

Since the respondents are all international students, it is important to note that all of them are not native Finnish speakers. They have expressed that learning the Finnish language has been one of the challenges that they experienced. The respondents are used to using English as the main language in their previous universities, which is why the language barrier of learning in Finnish is difficult for them to adjust to.

5.2 The effects of learning in Finnish language compared to English or own mother tongue

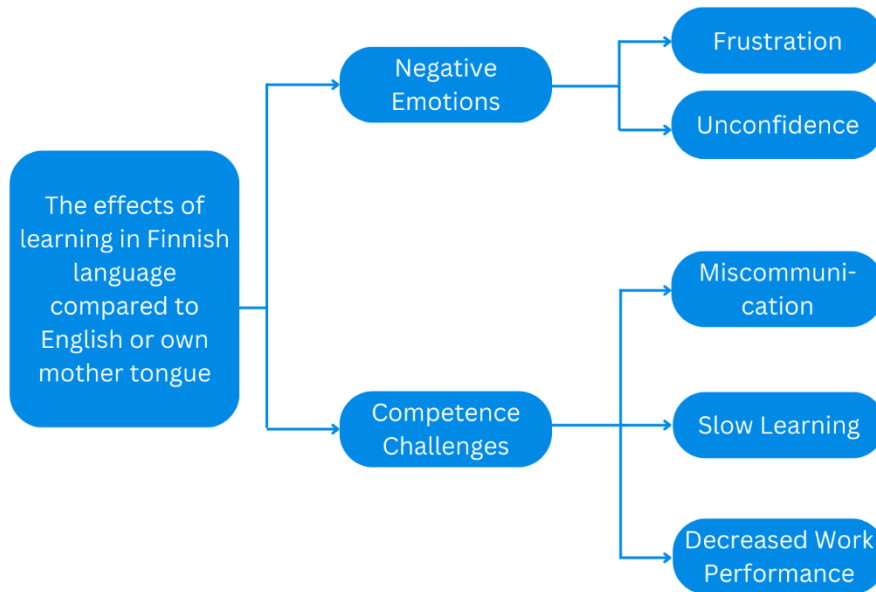


Figure 2 Effects of Learning in Finnish Language

5.2.1 Negative emotions

Negative emotions have been pointed out by the respondents because of learning using the Finnish language as compared to learning in English. There are varying feelings of frustration, stress, and unconfidence which they have pointed out when learning using the Finnish language.

Frustration

“Very difficult and sometimes frustrating” was a sentiment shared by one of the respondents. They have noted that they feel frustrated when learning in the Finnish language because it is difficult. They are used to learning in English and have gone through most of their education from childhood to university utilizing English as their main language. Starting higher education studies in a country where English is not the first language has caused them stress and created more pressure in their studies.

Unconfidence

Learning utilizing the Finnish language has made the respondents feel unconfident within themselves. One respondent has noted that “it made me even more cautious to act”. They have conveyed these feelings around their peers and colleagues both in school and at work because of the language barrier. They are unsure of their actions, especially at work, and they are requiring more guidance than usual because of this.

5.2.2 Competence challenges

Competence is the ability to do something successfully or efficiently, as defined by the Oxford dictionary. By learning in Finnish, the respondents have identified that their competence has been significantly impacted. They are experiencing varied levels of miscommunication in both school and work settings, and they have cited that learning is slower than their usual pace.

Miscommunication

Because learning in Finnish is a new experience for the respondents, they have gone through moments of miscommunication with conveying information. It is a very difficult thing, especially at work, because the job of being a nurse involves many important and possibly life-threatening decisions, wherein miscommunication can lead to serious negative impacts to both patients and the medical team.

Slow learning

The pace of learning in Finnish has been identified by the respondents as “learning is slower”. Learning information in a new language gets absorbed slowly as compared to learning information in a language that the respondents are already fluent in. They have pointed out that it is not easy to grasp concepts because of the language barrier. They feel that they need to exert double the effort to be able to learn the information that is required.

Decreased work performance

A decrease in work performance has been noted by the respondents because of learning in Finnish. One respondent has pointed out that “it affects my performance in my clinical practice” because even if they already know the concepts and information that is required for the work to be done, they are not confident to implement the work in the Finnish language. This decrease in work performance due to the language barrier has affected the respondents’ job prospects as well.

5.3 Coping mechanisms used to alleviate stress

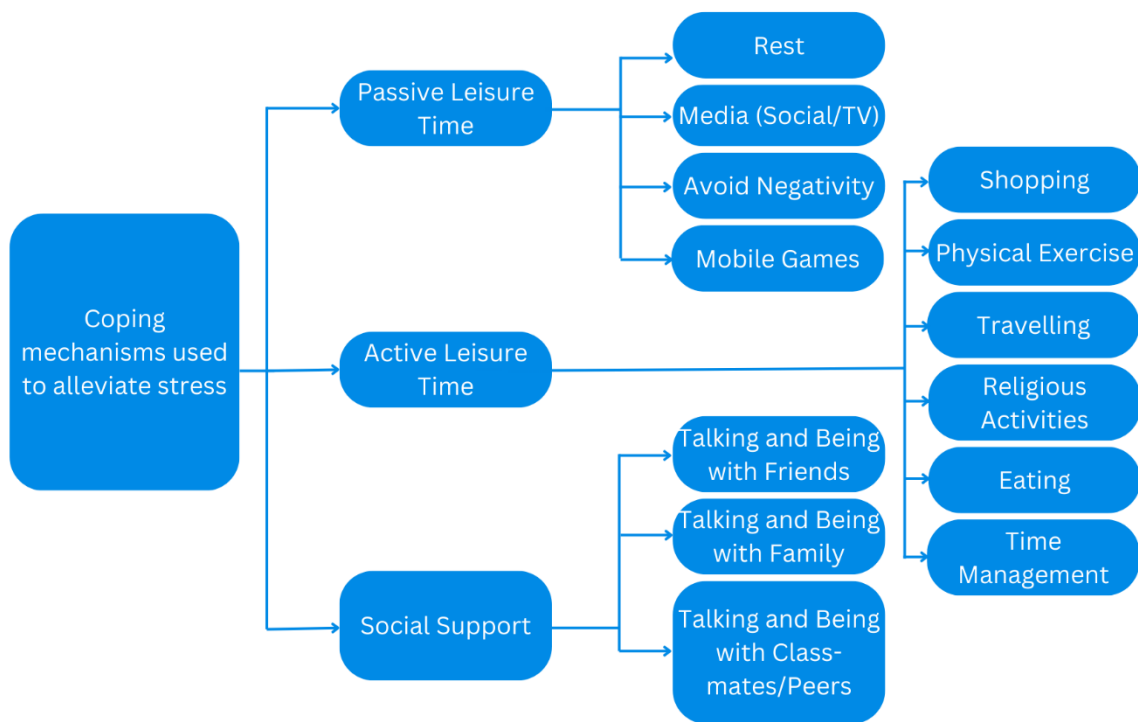


Figure 3 Coping Mechanisms Used to Alleviate Stress

5.3.1 Passive leisure time

Passive leisure is one of the main categories that the respondents have cited as one of the coping mechanisms that they utilize to alleviate stress. Passive leisure activities are often sedentary in nature, and do not involve any physical exertion. These activities can be done alone, and in the comfort of your own home.

Rest

Resting is one of the main coping mechanisms that the respondents have pointed out. They take time to rest when they have days off from both school and work.

Media (Social/TV)

Currently, there are various ways to consume different types of media. Examples of coping mechanisms that the respondents use are watching TV and movies and going online on social media platforms. One respondent has shared that "I always make sure that I get to watch funny videos in the social media platforms".

Avoid negativity

Avoiding negativity has also been a coping mechanism that the respondents utilize in their lives. They have explained that avoiding negative people has led to a more relaxing outcome for them.

Mobile games

Computer and mobile games are on the rise as one of the newer coping mechanisms that people use these days. The respondents have stated that by playing mobile and computer games, it takes their mind off the stress that they are currently facing.

5.3.2 Active leisure time

Active leisure activities are usually characterized by doing things that require some sort of physical exertion. It does not necessarily require much effort, but it does denote that a person is being physically involved with the activity that they are doing. These active leisure activities have also been identified by the respondents as the coping mechanism that they do to alleviate the stresses in their current situation.

Shopping

May it be window shopping or actual shopping in stores, this is one of the coping mechanism activities that the respondents have noted that they enjoy doing.

Physical exercise

Physical exercise as a coping mechanism does not necessarily have to involve going to the gym or doing strenuous sports, as one respondent shared “I also do long walks outside when the weather is good”. The respondents have pointed out that going on a hike and doing simple at-home exercises have helped them cope with the stress in their current situation.

Travelling

Another common coping mechanism that the respondents utilize is travelling. Because they are a group of international students, they are surrounded by new places. Travelling to neighboring cities and even neighboring countries is a common activity that the respondents enjoy that decreases their stress levels.

Religious activities

The respondents have conveyed a strong belief in religious and/or spiritual activities, centered on various faiths, as one of the common coping mechanisms that they do to improve their well-being. Prayer and meditation have been pointed out as effective ways to cope with stressful situations, and thus can lead to enhanced positive feelings. A respondent has shared that their stress is alleviated “with the help of constant prayer”.

Eating

Eating good and healthy food has been proven to enhance one’s state of mind. This is why it comes as no surprise that the respondents have noted that eating some of their favorite food has been a coping mechanism that they utilize to make themselves feel better in their current situation.

Time management

Learning to manage one's time wisely can be a challenge, but it does have many benefits that come along with it. This is why the respondents have identified that managing their time effectively between school and work has been a good coping mechanism for them. Not only does it make their situation easier, but it relieves them of the anxiety of having to do all their tasks all in one go. They can plan their time adequately, thus leading to the alleviation of their stresses.

5.3.3 Social support

Leaning on their social circles, may it be family or friends, has been the most common coping mechanism that the respondents have identified. This can manifest in various activities, like having conversations, doing different activities, making calls and/or video calls, and generally spending time with other people.

Talking and being with friends

The respondents have conveyed that staying connected with friends and having some time to go out and be with them while doing various activities is an important factor that has a lasting impact on their general feelings of positivity. This has led to feelings of less stress for the respondents.

Talking and being with family

Having support from their family, may they be here with them in Finland or back in their home countries, has been an important coping mechanism that has been pointed out by the respondents. "I call my family everyday" is a response that was shared by a respondent. When they are able to have conversations with their families, may it be face to face or through video calls, their moods are improved, and they feel a lot better.

Talking and being with classmates/peers

Being able to communicate and spend time with classmates and peers is also pointed out by the respondents as one coping mechanism activity that they do. Because their classmates and peers understand what they are going through and are going through the same situation as them, they relate more to each other. This creates a feeling of camaraderie and unity within the group, which they can lean on and receive support from.

5.4 Feelings after coping mechanism activities have been done

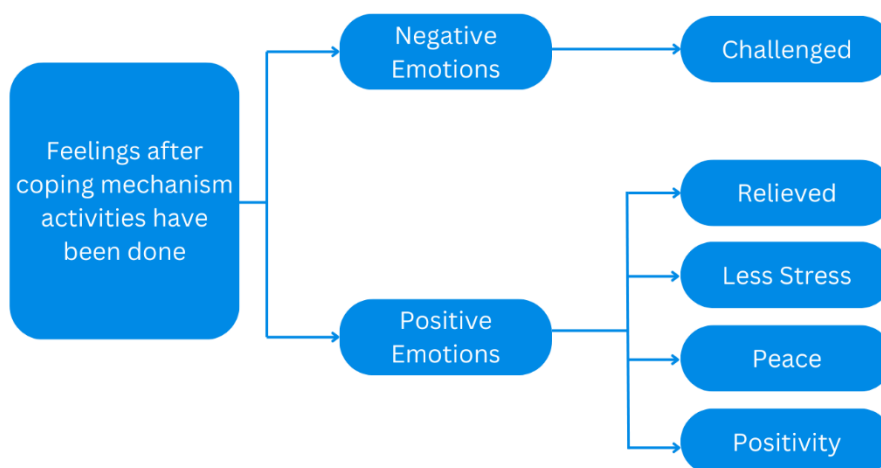


Figure 4 Feelings After Coping Mechanism Activities Have Been Done

5.4.1 Negative emotions

A negative emotion can be defined as unpleasant and/or a disruptive emotional reaction. These stem from any situation that an individual goes through, may it be a happy or sad event. It is even known that positive experiences can sometimes lead to negative emotions as well. The respondents have pointed out a negative emotion that was a result of doing coping mechanism activities, which should also be considered.

Challenged

The feeling of being challenged is a negative emotion that the respondents have had to deal with following the implementation of coping mechanisms. It is not common to have a negative reaction after coping mechanism activities, however, is it not impossible to have that reaction. They have expressed that although the coping mechanism activities have made them feel a bit better, overall, they still feel that their situation is still challenging and difficult for them to manage.

5.4.2 Positive emotions

The general goal of coping mechanism activities is to alleviate an individual's stress levels, therefore enhancing their overall health and well-being. Which is why the researchers have found that the respondents of this study have had an overwhelming positive response to the various coping mechanisms that they implement in their daily lives. They are generally feeling better, and their stress levels are alleviated after doing the coping mechanism/s that suit them the most.

Relieved

The respondents have reported a general sense of being relieved after doing the coping mechanism activities according to what they prefer the most. One respondent has shared that they bare "feeling refreshed and relieved". They noted that they felt energized, recharged, and are ready to take on new challenges. They have identified their understanding that the coping mechanism activities do not completely erase all their challenges and stresses, but that it makes them feel better. This enhanced feeling makes them optimistic about their current situation.

Less stress

As the researchers have identified the respondents' response about the various types of stress that they are experiencing due to distance learning while working, they have noted that the respondents' stress levels drastically decreased after doing coping mechanism

activities. It is noted that the respondents have said that they have learned to overpower the feelings of stress, and that they feel significantly less stressed.

Peace

The respondents have conveyed through their responses that they have felt a sense of peace after doing coping mechanism activities. They feel internally peaceful and that this has helped them cope.

Positivity

Being positive despite the challenges has been a recurring response that the respondents have said is an effect of doing the coping mechanism activities. This has brought them a sense of comfort and courage and has made them conditioned to face more obstacles that may come their way.

5.5 Top recommendations of coping mechanisms that are most helpful

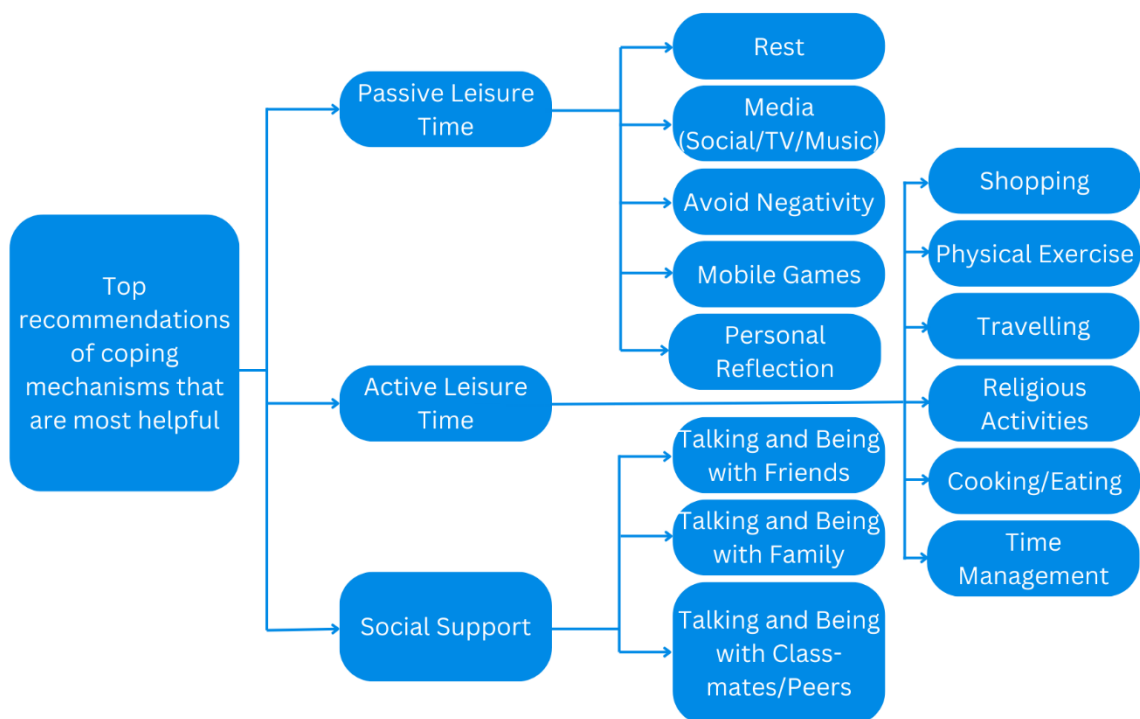


Figure 5 Top Recommendations of Coping Mechanisms

In this part of the questionnaire, it is important to note that although the responses of the respondents may seem similar to their responses in Question 3, there is a significant difference that can be identified. The difference is that these responses are with regards to the coping mechanism activities that they suggest for other people to do and may not necessarily be the activities that they themselves do. There are some factors that differ from what the respondents do themselves versus the activities that they suggest for other people to do, which have to do with personal preferences or economic capabilities. Although these factors are not specifically included as the topic of this research, it is of value, nonetheless.

5.5.1 Passive leisure time

Passive leisure is one of the main categories that the respondents have cited as one of the coping mechanisms that they utilize to alleviate stress. Passive leisure activities are often sedentary in nature, and do not involve any physical exertion. These activities can be done alone, and in the comfort of your own home.

Rest/sleep

Rest, more specifically sleeping, is one of the suggested coping mechanism activities that the respondents have suggested as an effective strategy to use. They have pointed out that resting and sleeping gives a sense of relaxation that is very beneficial to all individuals.

Media (Social/TV/Music)

Watching TV shows, movies, and even listening to music is another coping mechanism activity that the respondents have suggested. They have stated that these activities help individuals to zone out and focus on non-stressful things.

Avoid negativity

The respondents have also pointed out that avoiding negativity is one coping mechanism that they suggest for others to practice. Surrounding oneself with positivity also brings positivity, which helps a lot in alleviating stress.

Mobile games

Playing mobile and/or computer games is a coping mechanism activity that the respondents have suggested. They have noted that it can divert your attention to a less stressful situation.

Personal reflection

Based on the respondents' response they mentioned that "self-care and self-reflection" is a new coping mechanism activity has been identified as something they suggest for others but that they may not necessarily do themselves. Doing self-reflection and being alone is a recommendation that the respondents have for individuals to understand more about their inner selves which leads to less overthinking.

5.5.2 Active leisure time

Active leisure activities are usually characterized by doing things that require some sort of physical exertion. It doesn't necessarily require much effort, but it does denote that a person is being physically involved with the activity that they are doing. These active leisure activities have also been identified by the respondents as the coping mechanism that they suggest others do to alleviate the stresses in their current situation.

Shopping

Some respondents have suggested that shopping can be a good coping mechanism activity to do when an individual is stressed out. However, it has been mentioned that although it can be a fun activity, not everyone has the means and economic ability to do so, which is understandable.

Physical exercise

Physical exercise is a common coping mechanism strategy that the respondents have recommended that can be most helpful to other people. Simple exercise activities like going on walks, going to sauna, yoga, and connecting with nature have been suggested as activities that can be done to alleviate stress and make it easier to cope with challenges.

Travelling

Taking a vacation and travelling, may it be locally or internationally, has been a recurring suggestion based on the respondents' responses. They have suggested that going out and learning new cultures brings a different perspective and can alleviate a lot of stress that an individual is going through. They also have noted, however, that economic ability again plays a major role in this specific coping mechanism activity. It is understandable that not everyone has the luxury of being able to travel as often as they would like.

Religious activities

Another hallmark in the respondents' answers to the questionnaire is the suggestion of doing religious activities as a coping mechanism strategy. Faith plays a major role in the responses that the researchers have collected, and it is broken down into all activities that are centered around different versions of it. Prayer, meditation, attending services, and worship through song are just some of the recommendations that the respondents have suggested.

Cooking/eating

Not only is eating good and healthy food a commonly suggested coping mechanism strategy, but preparing and cooking the food too can be counted as such as well. The activity of preparing and cooking food can be a calming exercise which redirects your thoughts from stressors. When the cooking is done, the individual is rewarded with a good meal that they can enjoy, which makes this activity even better.

Time management

A respondent has shared to "set your goals and priorities so that you have the right guide to start and the purpose of accomplishing them". Not only will the individuals' stress levels be remediated, but there will be an even higher chance of achieving goals, which will ultimately lead to positive feelings and emotions.

5.5.3 Social support

Social support is again the most suggested coping mechanism that the respondents have mentioned in their responses to the questionnaire. They suggest expressing one's sentiments and feelings, may it be positive or negative, because it helps in staying connected and enhances the feeling of safety and belongingness in a community. One respondent has pointed out, "Always find time to talk to your loved ones, friends. They are good outlet of expressing your sentiments and frustrations".

Talking and being with friends

The respondents have recommended having conversations and spending quality time with friends to be able to alleviate stress. This coping mechanism is effective because an individual can let out their negative emotions, and at the same time will feel supported by the people that they are close with.

Talking and being with family

Another suggestion based on the respondents' answers to the questionnaire is to have meaningful conversations and spend much needed time with family. Although this may be a struggle because of the geographical distance, it can be doable by making virtual or video calls to family who are abroad.

Talking and being with classmates/peers

The respondents have recommended that socializing and seeking support from one's classmates and peers helps a lot in diverting problems and can even eventually assist in overcoming the actual problems an individual is going through. Because these people are also going through very similar situations, they can empathize and understand the current challenges.

6 DISCUSSIONS

6.1 Common challenges of international students to distance learning while working

One of the main challenges that international students face during placement is communication barriers. Language differences can make it difficult for students to effectively communicate with their supervisors and colleagues, hindering their ability to learn and perform well in their placement (Norman & Perry, 2024). Additionally, cultural differences in communication styles and workplace norms can further complicate communication for international students (Gerrish & Lathlean, 2015). Thus, the researchers have found that this is congruent to the results of the respondents' answers, because they have highlighted that “the biggest challenge is the language”.

Another challenge faced by international students during placement is adjusting to a new education system. The education system in a student's home country may be vastly different from the system in the country where they are completing their placement. This can lead to confusion and frustration as students try to navigate the new system and meet the expectations of their supervisors (Eden et al., 2021). In addition to that, one of the participants mentioned that “focusing on studies is not that really possible when your attention is divided between work and school”.

An additional challenge of distance learning is the need for self-discipline and time management. With the freedom to study on their own schedule, students must be proactive in setting aside time for their coursework and staying on track with their assignments. This requires strong time management skills and the ability to stay motivated without the structure of a traditional classroom setting (Bagley et al., 2015). Furthermore, one of the participants stated that “Managing time when it comes to balancing work, study, and rest” is challenging.

6.2 Common coping mechanisms used by international nursing students

One of the most common coping mechanisms used by student nurses is seeking social support from their peers and mentors. Nursing school can be a highly competitive and stressful environment, and having a strong support network can help students to feel less isolated and overwhelmed. By sharing their experiences with others who understand the unique demands of the nursing profession, students can feel validated and supported in their struggles (Labrague, 2024).

The aforementioned feelings are one of the stimuli from phenomena they saw in their surroundings, according to Sister Callista Roy's perspective (Roy, 2011). Coping mechanism that student nurses often employ is engaging in self-care activities. This can involve taking time to relax and decompress after a long day of clinical rotations, engaging in hobbies or activities that bring joy and fulfillment, or practicing mindfulness and meditation to help manage stress and anxiety. By prioritizing their own health and well-being, student nurses can recharge and rejuvenate themselves, allowing them to better cope with the demands of their education and clinical practice (Labrague, 2024).

In accordance to Erikson's Psychosocial Theory depression, loneliness, and a sense of isolation can arise from avoidance of intimacy or from failure to make suitable connections, whether due to circumstances beyond or within our control. Poor self-care practices are typically less committed to relationships and emotionally detached from other people (Samsanovich, 2021).

Physical exercise is another important coping mechanism that student nurses rely on to help them manage stress and maintain their overall health. Regular exercise has been shown to have numerous benefits for mental health, including reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression, improving mood and cognitive function, and enhancing overall well-being. By incorporating physical activity into their daily routine, student nurses can boost their energy levels, strengthen their resilience, and improve their ability to cope with the demands of their education and clinical practice. A sample of a response from one participant is "Exercise are just some of the many coping mechanism that I do".

In addition to seeking social support, engaging in self-care activities, and exercising regularly, student nurses can also benefit from developing effective time management and organizational skills to help them stay on top of their responsibilities. Nursing school requires students to juggle multiple deadlines, assignments, and clinical rotations, making it essential for students to prioritize tasks, set goals, and create a structured schedule to help them stay focused and motivated. By staying organized and managing their time effectively, student nurses can reduce feelings of overwhelm and anxiety, enabling them to perform at their best and achieve their academic and professional goals. Seeking and having social support has been found to be the top coping mechanism activity that is used by the respondents, and that this is also their top recommendation for individuals in similar situations.

Additionally, the current study discovered that the main coping mechanisms used by the study participants were optimism and productivity. Additionally, they can control their stress better by making the most of their time management. As an illustration, consider the statements made by one participant, "Managing my time wisely" and "Do tasks gradually and in smaller portions when possible". Thus, maintaining routines and attempting to be creative by taking on other tasks, such as production, are determined to be crucial coping mechanisms in this study.

7 CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RECOMMENDATION

The conclusion presented has come based on the findings. Any stressful event or situation probably involves a lot of variables, making it challenging to identify the precise coping strategy used. This is due to the fact that various coping mechanisms can be used to alleviate the situation and the results may differ from person to person. However, the researchers now have an improved understanding of these various coping mechanism techniques and have identified the most common and effective strategies through this research.

It can be concluded that international nursing students discovered that engaging in both passive and active leisure activities whilst also receiving social support from friends and family help them manage stress during studying while working. These can encompass a wide range of activities from those that can be done in solitary, or those that need active social interaction from family, friends and individuals. It can be noted that seeking social support has been the most consistent response from the respondents, and this can be identified as the most integral part to their well-being.

The researchers recommend that the international nursing students will have a seminar regarding time management and motivation to improve the quality of flexible education and should be taught how to recognize, analyze, and cope with their academics while working. This could be done by enhancing and encouraging them to participate in webinars and seminars related to their physical and mental health, which provides and discusses a positive coping mechanism. In addition, students ought to be educated about support group systems where they can seek assistance. This will also enhance more social activities within their peers, which they can gain support and camaraderie as they manage the challenges of distance learning while working.

8 ETHICAL AND AUTHENTICITY ISSUES

The researchers will conduct a survey with international nursing students who are willing to participate in the study, which will follow the ethical recommendations of SeAMK and Arene. Before the survey, the participants will sign a consent form that details the information about the study and how confidentiality will be always maintained. The participants have the choice to withdraw their participation at any time.

As part of this thesis, the researchers will be using articles and other sources gathered from trustworthy resources. In this regard, the management of ethics from reviewed literature will not be an issue. However, the researchers must make sure that the information gathered is used in the right way, and that sources are cited correctly to avoid plagiarism. Hillard, et al. (2023) states that plagiarism is a common issue in academic and professional communities. To avoid plagiarism the researchers must identify valuable resources, such as appropriate paraphrasing, creative work organizing, and new technology.

The responses from the questionnaires will be handled with utmost privacy by ensuring that no personal data will be taken. Each respondent will be assigned a number code (from 01-20) which will be used to identify and represent each participant. All the information and materials gathered from the qualitative questionnaire will be saved in folders which are on a single local computer database that is only accessible to the researchers. This local computer database will be password protected. Once the final copy for the research has been approved, all raw data will be deleted permanently.

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10 APPENDICES

10.1 Questionnaire

Please feel free to answer the questions with as many information as you can.

1. What is the biggest challenge that you experienced now that you are doing distance learning while working?

2. How does learning in Finnish affect you compared to learning in English or learning in your mother tongue?

3. What do you use as a coping mechanism to alleviate stress in your current situation?

4. How do you feel after you have done these coping mechanism activities?

5. If you can recommend the top five coping mechanism activities that are most helpful to you, what are they and why?

10.2 Questionnaire Responses – Raw and Categorized Data

Question 1 - What is the biggest challenge that you experienced now that you are doing distance learning while working?

Responses (Raw Data)	Sub-category	Main Category
- Sometimes because of the internet connection	Internet Issues	Practical Issues
- Travel time - Time management, sometimes you don't get much rest because you spent your day off from work to school activities - Time management - The biggest challenge for me is time and energy to study - The challenge is the time schedule - Having not enough time to accomplish some tasks in school - Managing time when it comes to balancing work, study, and rest - Work schedule is hard to arrange at times - Juggling time between work and school	Time Management	
- Lesser time to rest because of the need to study - It was a challenge for me to have experienced how difficult it was for my body to adapt to frequent travels - Sometimes you don't get much rest because you spent your day off from work to school activities - I feel exhausted after work - Well being is also compromised at times	Physical Stress	Stress Management
- Stress because of exams and self-studies that need to be done - The challenge there was being able to avoid distractions - I feel like my brain couldn't absorb anything - And cannot focus that much on the topic due to double task done - Also, focusing on studies is not that really possible when your attention is divided between work and school	Mental Stress	
- Loneliness because of being away from my family	Emotional Stress	
- Money to buy the tickets	Financial Stress	
- When face to face schooling is required, in terms of online distance learning	Challenging Learning Style	

<ul style="list-style-type: none">- It's different from face to face. But it is more on advantages and disadvantages- To study more independently- Less contact exercises. For me, it's still effective when learning inside a classroom		Teaching Methods Demands
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The biggest challenge is the language	Language Barrier	

Question 2 - How does learning in Finnish affect you compared to learning in English or learning in your mother tongue?

Responses (Raw Data)	Sub-category	Main Category
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very difficult and sometimes frustrating - Learning a new language is a challenge but very frustrating - Of course I feel stressed - Affects me by being pressured - It is really difficult and stressful compared to English, because the school uses English as the method of teaching from kindergarten to college. - It is really stressful, because compared to English language - It is a challenge learning a new language which is very different from the rest. It is hard but challenging. 	Frustration	Negative Emotions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It made me even more cautious to act - Needed guidance from others who understand the language 	Unconfidence	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are some miscommunication 	Miscommunication	Competence Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning a new language like Finnish is much more a challenge especially at work - Learning is slower - Learning in English can be absorbed quickly compared to Finnish - Learning Finnish is really indescribable, it's like returning to childhood - It's not really easy to learn - Affects me by being pressured and stressed to learn fast - It's challenging to understand and grasp things quickly than usual 	Slow Learning	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Always find time to think of what the right words are before acting on it - It's also the reason why finding a job is hard - It affects my performance in my clinical practice 	Decreased Work Performance	

Question 3 - What do you use as a coping mechanism to alleviate stress in your current situation?

Responses (Raw Data)	Sub-category	Main Category
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resting - Rest - Resting during weekend 	Rest	Passive Leisure Time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Watch online TV shows and movies with my partner - I always make sure that I got to watch funny videos in the social media platforms - Watching TV is a good company as well 	Media (Social/TV)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Avoiding negative people 	Avoid Negativity	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I play mobile games, computer games 	Mobile Games	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shopping - Visit malls to window shop 	Shopping	Active Leisure Time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I also do long walks outside when the weather is good - Take a walk especially during spring - Exercise are just some of the many coping mechanism that I do 	Physical Exercise	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Going abroad - Travel - I also travel every month - Travel at times 	Travelling	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I always pray - Praying is the best way as coping mechanism - With the help of constant prayer - And I always pray 	Religious Activities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have some iced coffee and cake - A good conversation over coffee and food 	Eating	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managing my time wisely - Do tasks gradually and in smaller portions when possible 	Time Management	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Talking to friends and family - Spent time with my family and friends, talk to someone and vent out - Talking to friends and family - Stay connected with family and friends, and have their support - Being with friends, a good conversation over coffee and food are the things that comfort me a lot 	Talking and Being with Friends	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Talking to friends and family - Spent time with my family and friends, talk to someone and vent out 	Talking and Being with Family	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Talking to friends and family - Stay connected with family and friends, and have their support - Call my family everyday - By merely calling my family through video calls, it somewhat ease my stresses a bit - Regular conversation, phonecalls and videocalls with my family 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If there are long off and talking with classmates - Social Support - Peer support 	Talking and Being with Classmates/Peers	

Question 4 - How do you feel after you have done these coping mechanism activities?

Responses (Raw Data)	Sub-category	Main category
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Makes me think that everyday is a challenge on a non English speaking country 	Challenged	Negative Emotions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partially, not completely relieved - Energize - Recharged and rejuvenate - Feel better for a while - Feeling refreshed and relieved - Felt relieved and became positive. Ready to face new challenges. - I feel better and relieved. - It gives me comfort and give me courage to continue my studies while working - I feel better 	Relieved	Positive Emotions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I still feel stressed but not to the point of being depressed - Overpowering the stress through those activities 	Less Stress	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - My mind was at peace - Of course it gives me peace 	Peace	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It felt good - Conditioned to face another week of work and school ahead - It gives me comfort and give me courage to continue my studies while working - Able to face another challenge - Felt relieved and became positive 	Positivity	

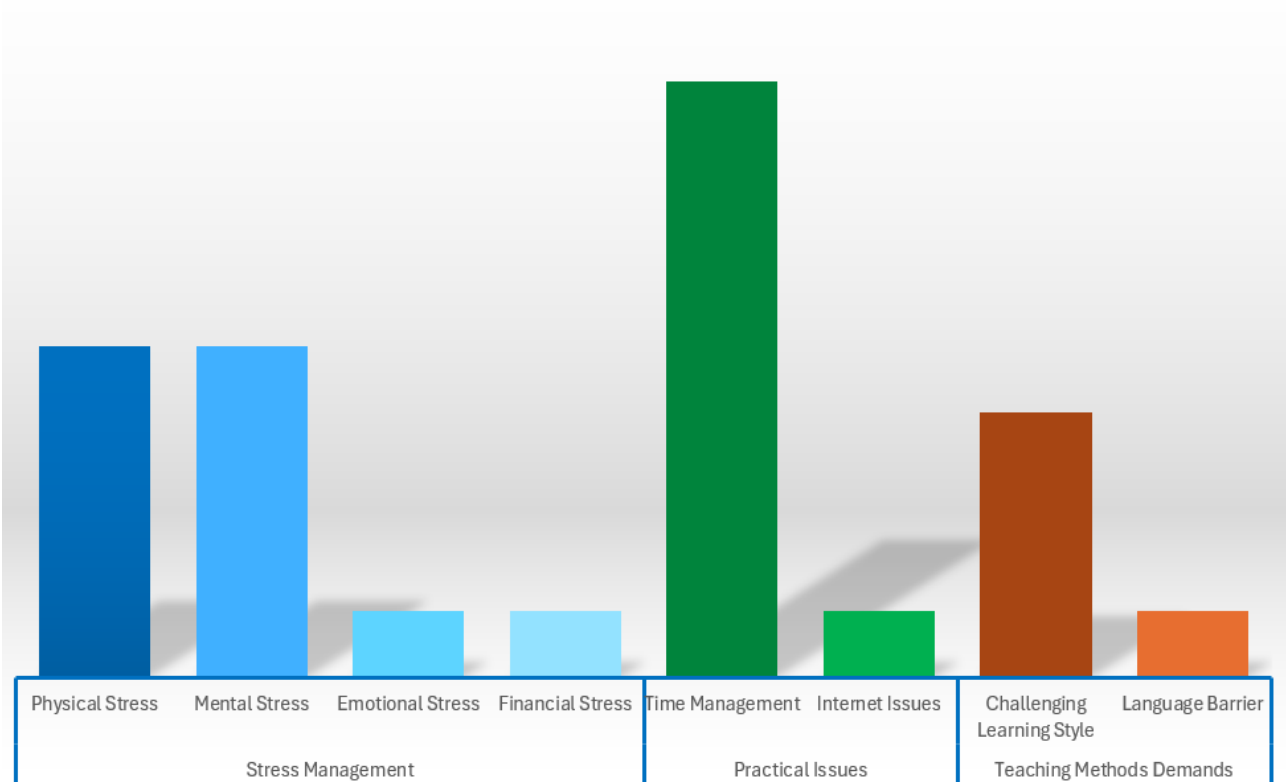
Question 5 - If you can recommend the top five coping mechanism activities that are most helpful to you, what are they and why?

Responses (Raw Data)	Sub-category	Main Category
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resting - Sleeping - Rest and relaxation - Sleep early 	Rest/Sleep	Passive Leisure Time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Watching shows/movies - Play your favourite songs - Singing out loud - Listening to music, watching movies, surfing the net 	Media (Social/TV/Music)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Avoid negative people because they will not help you or motivate you to become better person, be with positive and optimistic people, for sure they will make you grow as a person 	Avoid Negativity	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Play mobile/computer games 	Mobile Games	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self care and self reflection - Going out alone - Avoid overthinking. Prioritize self-care by doing things you enjoy - Being a couch potato 	Personal Reflection	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shopping 	Shopping	Active Leisure Time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Doing long walks - Going to sauna, connect with nature like hiking and doing outdoor activities - Do whatever relaxed your body, go to sauna - Exercise, if have the chance, do exercise. It helps to relieve stress and pressure - Walking, trekking 	Physical Exercise	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Travelling - Travel - Taking breaks or vacation - Travelling 	Travelling	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spiritual support because it strengthens and stay on your sanity - Going to church - Spiritual – pray always - Praying - Prayer and meditation should be the most top in your list. More than anything else, prayer does really work in so many ways. - Prayer can bring peace and comfort 	Religious Activities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eating, cooking - Eat well 	Cooking/Eating	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eating - Eating healthy - Comfort food 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Set your goals and priorities so that you have the right guide to start and the purpose of accomplishing them 	Time Management	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Socialize (with partner and friends) - Talk to friends and family - Social – always go to your support system! Could be your family, friends, pets, coworkers! - Always find time to talk to your loved ones, friends. They are good outlet of expressing your sentiments and frustrations - Talking with family and close friends - Calls to family, hang out with friends sometimes 	Talking and Being with Friends	Social Support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Talk to friends and family - Social – always go to your support system! Could be your family, friends, pets, coworkers! - Always find time to talk to your loved ones, friends. They are good outlet of expressing your sentiments and frustrations - Talking with family and close friends - Calls to family, hang out with friends sometimes - Stay connected with loved ones for support - A phone call and video call to family 	Talking and Being with Family	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social support because this helps you divert your problems and helps you also overcome the problem - Seeking out support from colleagues - Talk to someone and vent out your worries, it is good if you will hear encouragement or if you share something to someone with the same sentiment - Social - always go to your support system! Could be your family, friends, pets, coworkers! 	Talking and being with Classmates/Peers	

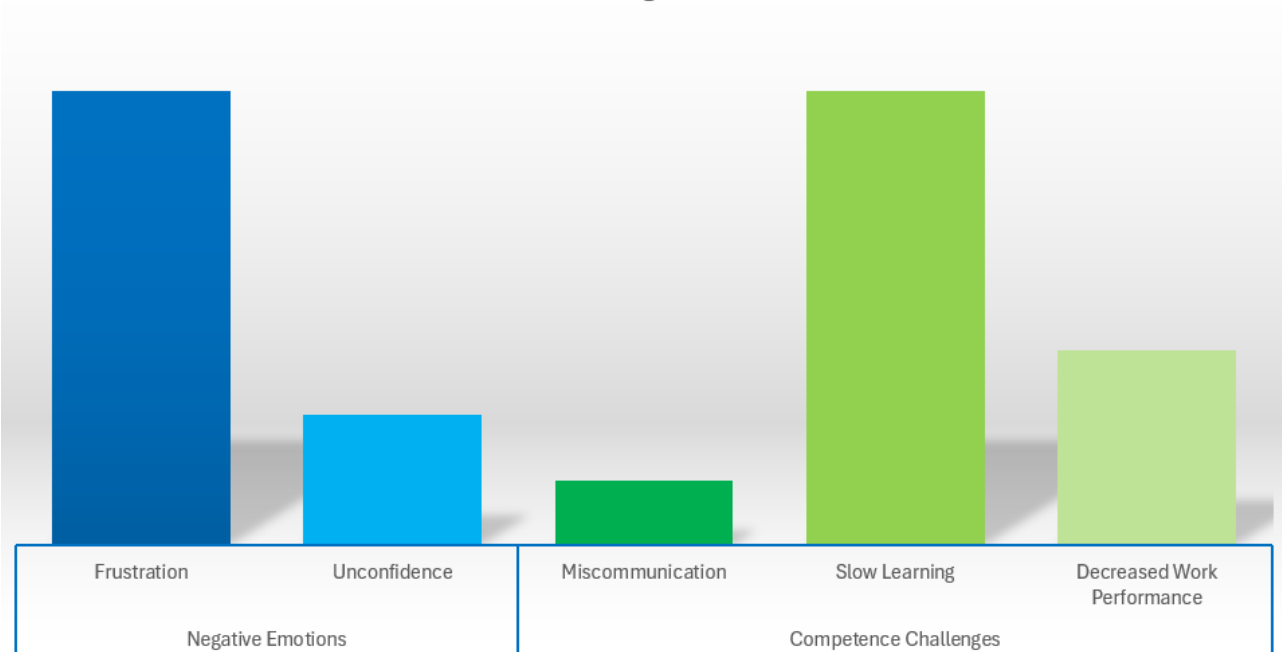
10.3 Graphs

The biggest challenge experienced by international nursing students while doing distance learning while working



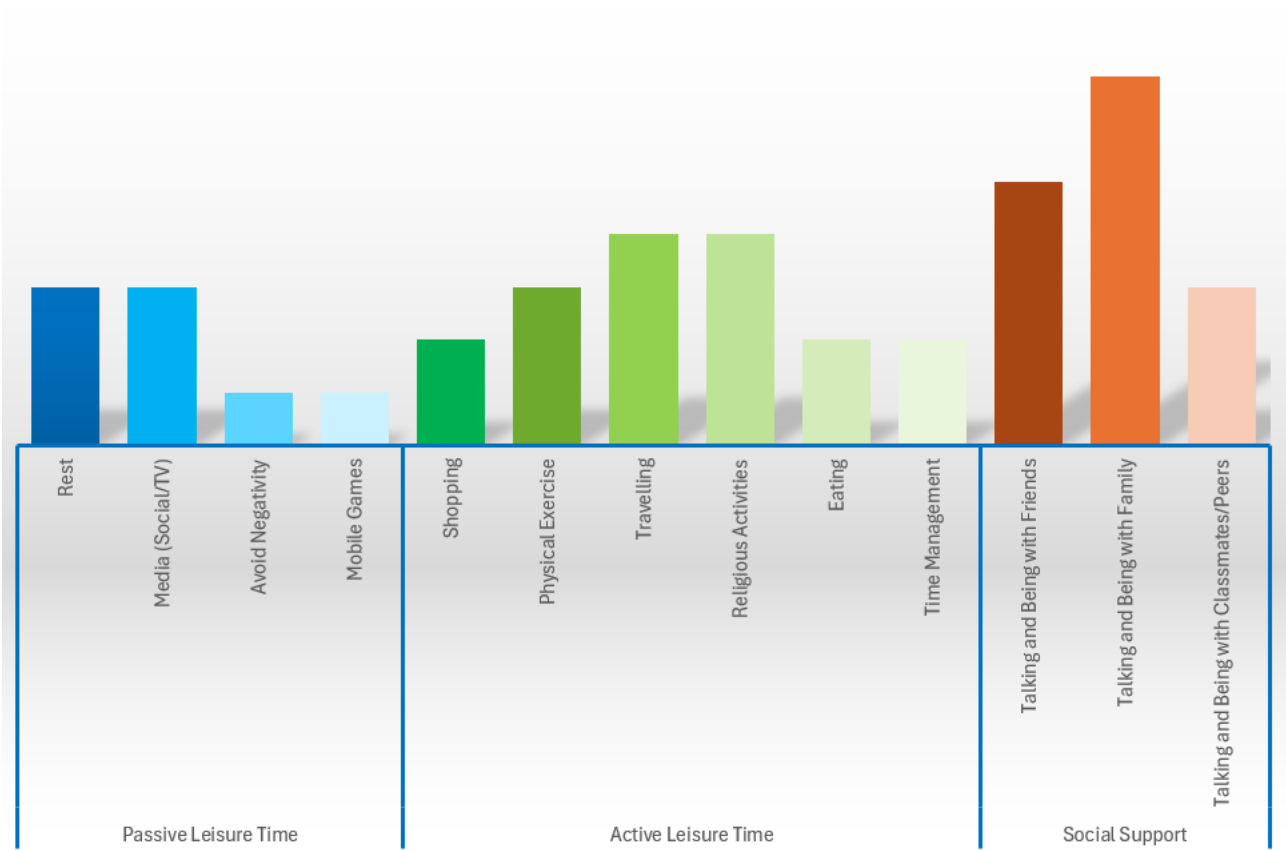
Graph 1 The Biggest Challenge Experienced by International Nursing Students

The effects of learning in Finnish language compared to English or own mother tongue



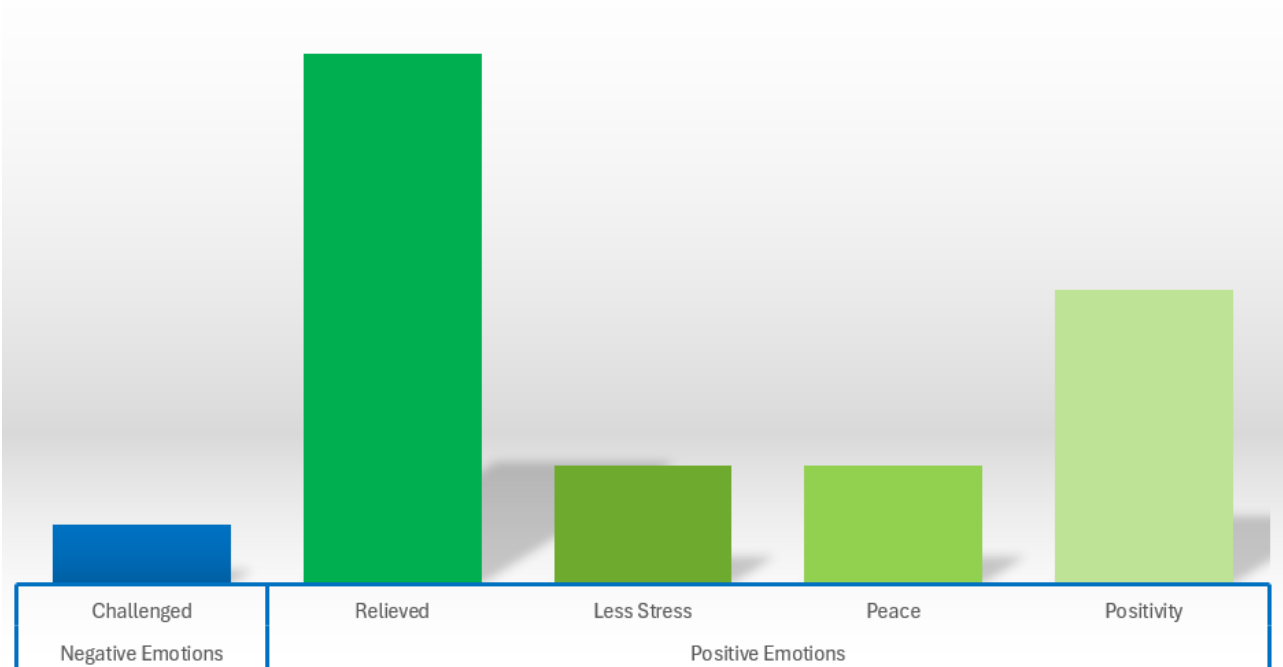
Graph 2 The Effects of Learning in Finnish Language

Coping mechanisms used to alleviate stress



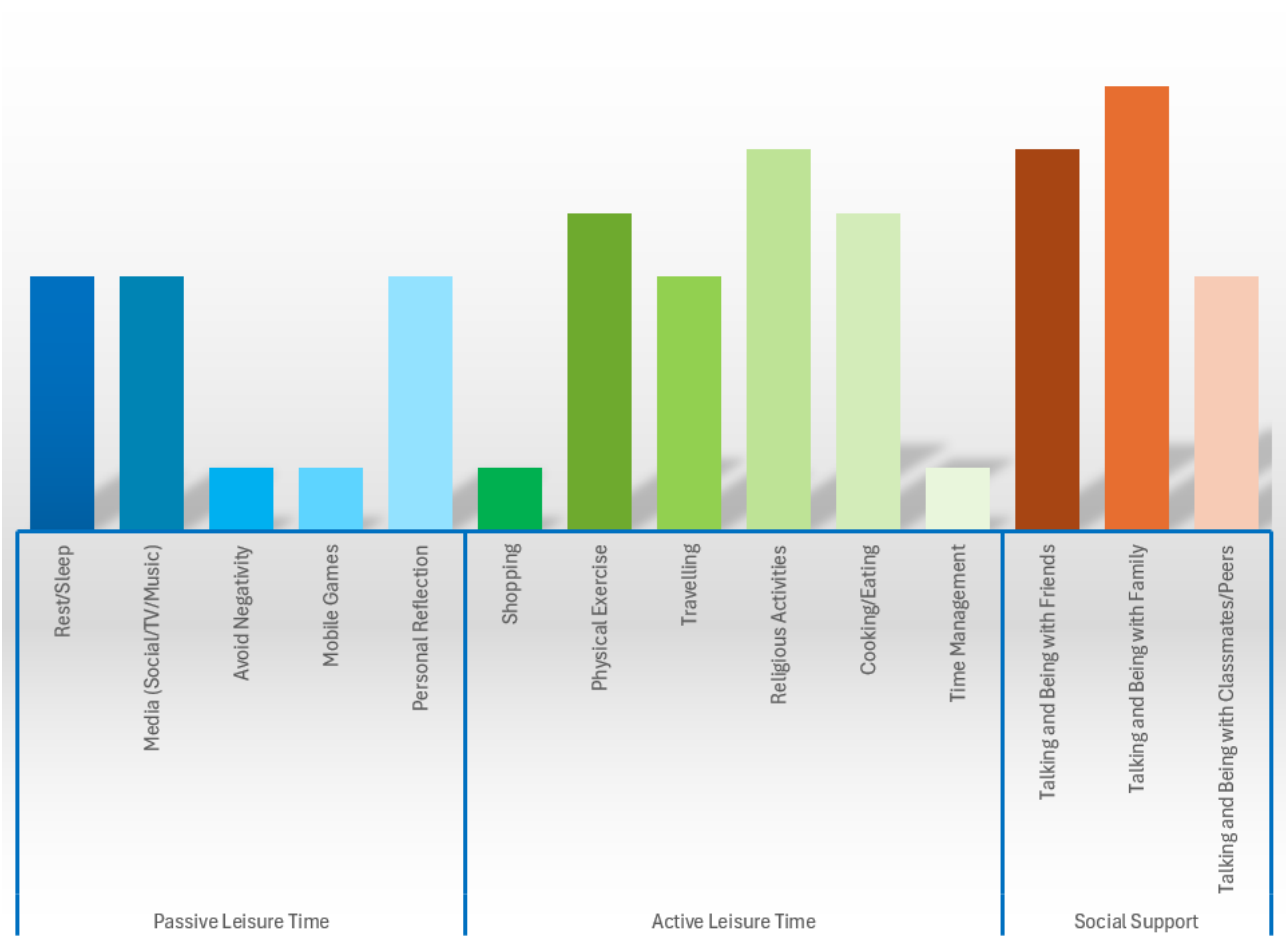
Graph 3 Coping Mechanisms Used to Alleviate Stress

Feelings after coping mechanism activities have been done



Graph 4 Feelings After Coping Mechanism Activities Have Been Done

Top recommendations of coping mechanisms that are most helpful



Graph 5 Top Recommendations of Coping Mechanisms