

DESCRIBING THE ACADEMIC FORMATION AT THE HOLY INFANT SEMINARY  
DURING THE PANDEMIC

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**Abstract**

As a result of the coronavirus, the Seminary in the Philippines has forced the transition of academic formation to be effective and suitable activities of the time from face-to-face learning to blended learning. Seminary formators, college, and academic instructors work together in fostering the seminarian's academic formation. The recent research primarily focuses on seminarians' academic performance and engagement in activities in the formation. This qualitative study intended to describe the seminarians' educational experiences, performance, and achievements during the pandemic. The researchers interviewed the twenty-three seminarians at Holy Infant Seminary, Pagadian City, Zamboanga del Sur. The findings of the analyzed data demonstrated the different factors that heightened and strengthened the academic formation such as the academic activities, ways of performing academic activities, and seminarians' academic improvements. Further these gathered data showed how the seminarians' academic formation continues to grow and develop despite the challenges caused by the pandemic. The study concluded that to increase the seminarians' academic accomplishments, the Seminary needs to evaluate the other factors that seriously affect the seminarians' academic performance and engagement in activities. The study recommended that researchers shall explore further on the different aspects of formation in the Seminary and encourage the seminary formators to design an engaging exercise in each formation for better development, optimum growth, and fun-filled experiences.

**Keywords:** *Academic Formation, Academic Activities, Seminarians, Seminary*

## INTRODUCTION

Academic formation is paramount in all aspects and plays a crucial role in the lives of seminarians. It is an educational process that enables the seminarians to freely give themselves in acquiring learning and knowledge before becoming priests. Academic formation is crucial for the called and chosen young servant of the Lord to understand the different concepts. It includes being able to play an active role throughout the radiance of Christ's thinking and accumulate a piece of knowledge which then grows by promoting excellence as a servant of Christ. Therefore, it is geared to understanding and conforming to Him (Pastores Dabo vobis, no. 51, citing *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 15). Academic formations start a lifetime quest for such a better comprehension of heavenly truths. It strengthens not just barely about clergy's conviction (Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology, 2022). Priests seem to be the representatives of the Catholic faith community and serve the Lord wholeheartedly and spread the good news to different places. Consultation methodologies and concepts must be learned leading to theoretical concepts and be responsive to the liturgical traditions' challenges in the Catholic community. It aims to foster the bounty of every individual brainpower. As a result, human formation is complemented and guided by academic formation, making it possible to serve one another as fellow believers (Naparan, 2020).

However, during the time of pandemic, academic formation of the seminarians was an enormous challenge due to many difficulties faced by them as students, including not moving to their parent's house because they are not allowed to go home for safety. Gaining access to the internet and other technologies figuring truly innovative ways to advance their academic formation and pastoral aspirations, juggling their academic responsibilities in order to finish their academic activities, and discovering the materials they need to finish assessment tasks (Rev. Dr. Kevin Lenehan (2020)). Those who are called to serve the ministry and decided to follow the footsteps of Jesus, not scared off, stopped the pandemic. Since the seminarians reside together in the seminary, they chose to use blended learning, which combines in-person instruction with virtual education and research. The utilization of the blended learning was realized by the Seminary Formators applicable to the present circumstances. While they hope for warmer weather to offer extra outdoor educational experiences, this is the finest they can do for their academic.

The researchers' observations and previous evidence sparked a desire to continue this research study. Most seminarians, specifically in this present time of crisis, have been able to experience academic challenges and carry the burden of impacts caused by COVID-19, which predominantly makes them realize the importance of finding ways in holding firm to their academic formation. This study elaborates on the academic formation of the seminarians, by describing the different academic activities imposed by the theological training ground and investigating how the seminarians perform those tasks during the pandemic. The researchers conducted a study describing the seminarians' academic formation during the pandemic. The result of this study considers the difficulties and trials faced by the seminarians' academic lives in the seminary. The findings of this research study will be utilized as an initial point of reference for developing and putting into practice feasible approaches to deal with the issue at hand and help the seminarians improve their academic formation performance.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This research is anchored on the theory of Self-determination Theory which proposes that seminarians are driven by three fundamental psychological demands: relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Some seminarians might have lost their sense of self-reliance during the pandemic as they were compelled to adjust to new train schedules and learning conditions. As they battled to soak up new technology, methods of learning and upkeep their academic achievement, they might have also felt incompetent. Nevertheless, they might have also discovered strategies to keep up virtual links with their fellow students and instructors, maintaining a sense of relatedness.

Another theory that supports this study is the Transformational Learning. This theory implies that human beings can undergo considerable distinctive development and adjustment by critically reflecting and questioning their preconceptions and views. Seminarians might have been challenged to face their preconceptions and views on their academic and spiritual pursuits throughout the pandemic. They might have had to think about how technology influenced their academic endeavors and spiritual lives as well as new approaches to figuring out their faith and calling in light of a worldwide economic downturn.

## **Method**

### **2.1 Research Design**

This research study utilized qualitative design since the inquiries responded to an interview, observations, and document analyses. To better comprehend ideas, views, or encounters, qualitative research collects and analyzes non-numerical data. It can be applied to comprehensively understand a situation or develop a new study methodology (Bhandari (2020). Remarkably, the fact-finding also used the phenomenological approach, a paradigm of a descriptive design. The phenomenological approach refers to how the researcher examines the phenomena and occurrences by documenting and analyzing the actual experiences. The anatomy of a particular phenomenon was appropriately described by the researcher and urged researchers to cast aside their biases and preconceived notions to concentrate primarily on the present experience. Then, the phenomenological approach to discover the significance of the pandemic situation to the seminarian students about how they responded to it was observed (Bliss, 2016; Groenewald, 2004).

Moreover, phenomenology explores forms of experiences as they encountered from a first-person viewpoint. It examines people's experiences and concentrates on how they were affected by a phenomenon. It identifies the specific causes and purposes. The researchers utilized this design by understanding the meaning of the seminarians' experiences regarding their struggles in academic formation amidst the pandemic. The researchers analyzed and investigated the commonalities of their experiences and how they were distraught and afflicted by a particular phenomenon.

### **2.2 Research Environment**

This study was conducted at the priesthood training ground, considered as the only formation ground for the priesthood in the Diocese of Pagadian. It is located within the locality of Pagadian City, Zamboanga del Sur. The Holy Infant Seminary continues to provide an efficient effort in shaping the academic formation of the seminarians while facing the challenge of COVID-

19. It is the ultimate home of the seminarians amidst the pandemic since they are not allowed to go home, specifically for their safety. It became more resilient and encouraged every young servant of the Lord never to give up their chosen vocation. It motivates the seminarians to stay true to their core and learn to adapt to the changing times. It shone amid the pandemic by revising and formulating some practical academic activities for the seminarians to answer and perform. Consequently, an insufficient number of studies on the given context, through the conduct of this study, the theological formation was chosen to provide significance within the investigation of the study.

### **2.3 Research Participants**

Twenty-three (23) seminarians from the seminary participated in the conduct of this study. These research participants embodied academic activities, ways of performing strategies academic activities and achievements in pursuing their academic formation during the pandemic crisis. Since the pandemic continued to spread around society, the mandate for seminarians to stay up at the hall of priesthood training was highly required. However, it was also a way of taking advantage of the researchers to encourage seminarians to participate in the study.

Below are the short descriptions of the participants according to their year level:

Senior High School. It aims to introduce a candidate to priestly life and the formative process. Hence, the focus of this stage is Prayerful, Discernment leading to the purification of one's motivation, Academics, and the Solid Basis of Spirituality.

*Discipleship Year 1.* It aims to accompany the seminarian in the conscious and free affirmation of his choice to follow Jesus in a life of discipleship. It is about educating the man, the disciple, rigorously and systematically. Hence, this focuses on the Radical Understanding and Personal reflection of experiences concerning Priestly Calling.

*Discipleship Year 2.* It aims to accompany the seminarian in the conscious and free affirmation of his choice to follow Jesus in a life of discipleship. It is about educating the man and the disciple rigorously and systematically. Hence, this is focusing on Commitment to Priestly Life.

*Discipleship Year 3.* It aims to accompany the seminarian in the conscious and free affirmation of his choice to follow Jesus in a life of discipleship. It is about educating the man and the disciple rigorously and systematically. Hence, this focuses on the Transformation into the image of Jesus, the High Priest.

*Returnees / Discipleship Year 4.* It aims to accompany the seminarian in the conscious and free affirmation of his choice to follow Jesus in a life of discipleship. It is about educating the man and the disciple rigorously and systematically. Hence, this focuses on the Integration of all areas in life concerning Priestly Vocation.

Sampling is the process of choosing the population through which they will ultimately gather information for their study (McCombes 2019). The researcher used purposive sampling to determine the seminarians included in the research and to identify the significant impacts of a pandemic on the seminarians' academic formation. Purposive sampling is a method that is

frequently used in qualitative research to find and choose instances with significant amounts of data so that scarce resources are being used as efficiently as possible (Patton, 2002). It entails locating and choosing individuals or groups of people with particular expertise or experiences, including an exciting occurrence (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

## **2.4 Research Instrument**

The researchers were the main instrument aided by an interview guide in this study. An interview guide is a set of subjects or inquiries the interviewers intend to bring up during the conversation (Blackstone, 2012; Esterberg, 2002). In essence, the researcher should guarantee the validity and dependability of the instrument that was utilized in the study. Every investigation project legitimacy, as well as plausibility heavily relied on the tools' suitability.

Interviewing is an excellent approach to learning more about a topic of interest. The researcher and the interviewee may find it engaging because they will share life experiences and encounter them amid a pandemic attack. It is a crucial technique for verifying the veracity of the sensations that researchers have formed through observation (Frankl & Wallen, 2019).

Interview was the method the researchers utilized when they considered it as a requirement to speak with people in person in order to communicate and extract ideas through conversation that almost seemed to be of shared understanding. The conversation occurs when the interviewer verbally asks the respondents research questions to elicit an oral answer. When carrying out a research interview, the researcher needs to determine a prospective collection of knowledge and design the conversation to gather appropriate responses from the participant.

The researchers employed structured interview, which means that each interviewee was asked a formalized series of questions classified as an interview questionnaire, and the responses were collected and noted. The research interview questionnaire was categorized into six (1) engaging question (2) central question (3) sub-questions (4) descriptive questions (5) probing questions, and (6) exit question, which asks about the specific academic activities of the seminarians and allow them to describe the coping strategies on how they overcome the challenges in facing their academic formation, and encourage the participants to share their achievements during the pandemic. As more than a result, it was categorized as a closed interview setting. To foster respect between interviewer and interviewee, the interviewer must ensure that the setting is comfortable.

## **2.5 Ethical Consideration**

Giving respect to other people is a must. It's the ethical responsibility of the researchers to respect the interviewees' privacy when gathering information from them. The survey was conducted ethically and under acceptable research standards (Kelley et al., 2003). The survey ought not to be offensive or burdensome to the participants. Research participants must be satisfied, or at ease regarding overall survey engagement in proper situations, so they were reassured if invited to do the survey once more. If the respondents report of feeling anxious, the survey alerted them to possible mental health dangers.

Participants were not compelled to address questionnaires or fill out a survey. Before taking the survey, every participant must be notified, typically through an approval that they can skip survey items or complete the survey without guilt or harm. Research participants have not been threatened in any form for recruitment. Given the significant non-response levels, researchers persistently seek potential participants through friendly communications. Study participants should not perceive these recruitment operations as aggressive or intrusive. Ensure the respondents' privacy or security. Participants' data were kept safe and protected. If the researcher intends the respondents to disclose personally identifiable facts, such individual background was protected and secured while in his or her control.

## 2. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter explores and discusses findings acquired from the seminarians of Holy Infant Seminary in their academic formation during the pandemic. The study participants were interviewed according to their formation year level and encouraged to provide details about their experiences dealing with and accomplishing their academic activities.

The three identified classifications are academic activities, ways of performing in academic activities, and seminarians' academic improvements at the Holy Infant Seminary.

### Academic Activities

There are seven themes heaved into view from the answers about the academic activities in the Seminary during the pandemic: Composing Reflections, Answering the Learning Modules, Reading Books, Joining Online Classes, Doing Class Reporting, Writing Journals, and Online Activities and Educational Quizzes.

*Composing Reflections.* The seminarians must enhance their writing and comprehension skills to establish and compose an enthralling reflection. They are meticulously trained and motivated to give their finest in making reflections since it is considered one of their academic activities in the Seminary. The research participants divulged:

*"Making reflections and essays are the academic activities that measure my core. Thus, it was also through these activities that my academic formation got strengthened. It is one of the things that I love to do, and it is one indication of my inner self or my core." –R4.*

*"The most academic activity I have encountered is salvation history because it helps us to practice making reflections."-R1*

*"The easy activity I experienced during the pandemic is making a reflection. It is the easiest activity for me". -R19.*

The making of reflections inside the Seminary has touched the thinking skills, elaborating and putting their experiences and learnings throughout the day into a creative composition. The seminarians have embraced the beauty of making reflections every time the different subjects require them to make a reflection. According to Christ the King Seminary (2018), to ensure that aspirants feel at ease and dedicated to their priesthood character in God, the Seminary's formation

phase encompasses many periods of reflection, prayer, and deepening in commitment to Jesus Christ in a community context.

*Answering the learning modules.* Considering the pandemic, face-to-face learning and teaching were totally out of place. However, printed modules are made ready for continuous learning despite rising circumstances. Seminarians silently stayed up at the Seminary and answered their modules. The research participants provided details:

*"During the study period, I am answering my modules, assessment, exams, and activity exerted with the minced effort to answer the modules. We spend much time answering the modules."—R6.*

*"The most effortless accomplishment in academics is my modules in subjects."—R7*

*"My accomplishments in academics are answering my module. I finished my Grade 12 modules."-R8.*

*"The activities that enhanced my academic learning is answering modules. For me, it is a very, very big challenge. When I opened my Google classroom and looked at the activities, those activities challenged me. My understanding of those modules in the first place is complicated". - R12*

*"Furthermore, reading comprehension or understanding the modules is a considerable talent. That is why I am improved, and it was a big challenge during this pandemic, during all those tough times to discover myself in reading. Moreover, to answer those activities. I was struggling with how we were going to. It is an enormous challenge to continue my reading comprehension and, as I said, put myself on the module and put myself in the way that is the go—no more dwelling on those activities, especially on answering the modules and activities."—R13.*

The seminarians were challenged with answering modules, but they turned it into a strategic power and used it as a vehicle to continue. Each seminary student aimed to finish the modules on time, poured out effort and stood confident that no pandemic could stop their collective dreams. They considered it as part of their improvements and development to achieve well in their academic formation.

*Reading books.* The seminarians are sincerely reminded and encouraged to embrace and immerse themselves in the beauty of reading. It enabled and assisted in expanding the vocabulary and strengthened reading and comprehension skills.

The research participants shared the following:

*"Reading books is one of the academic activities that measures my core and helps strengthen my academic formation during this pandemic. Reading books has helped me in improving my reading. Through reading books, I gained a lot of knowledge and vocabulary that I found in the books."—R2.*

*"Academic activities that measure my love and help strengthen my academic formation during this pandemic are reading books. During this pandemic, there is no face-to-face we only have modular class. In continuing my academic formation, I need to exercise and adapt the reading of books to avoid boredom."-R3.*

*"One of the academic activities here in the seminaries that is easy for me is reading books. It is easy because as long as I have the book, I can read immediately as long as I have time." –R9.*

*"If you make a habit just like reading a book is essential and can give me the knowledge and offer me something beneficial. I do want to read books. I am making reading books a habit of learning and improving in the formation. By reading spiritual books, I could say that I have some improvements because it helps me comprehend unfamiliar words and define them easily."-R10.*

*"I see the improvements from reading some books because I learned some words that were new and difficult to understand that I can apply to daily assignments or activities."-R11*

Every seminarian has proven that reading will help them grow and exercise their reading comprehension skills. Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (2020) mentioned that books can assist seminarians in getting ready for theological study by focusing on literature that would provide a fundamental understanding of Christian religion, and background in the past. Seminarians will learn more things when they spend more time to read. The act of reading a book to an active servant of the Lord was often discovered to have incredible power (Dickinson et al., 2012).

*Joining online classes.* Learners and instructors can easily do transition to web-based instruction in seminaries that have already provided and handled online educational classes (Matt Puddister, 2020). The research participants disclosed:

*"An online class is new to us. The online type is also unique, making the learners push to their limit, knowing that they should actively not just to participate but to learn more and more by themselves. Well, this is still a challenge nowadays". -R12.*

*"Yes, I have an online class pursuing to learn during the pandemic. We need to focus on studying even if it is being done online". -R18.*

*"For me, the activity that strengthens my academics is having a virtual class. In that way, I can quickly learn the topic or the discussion." –R20*

The online class was utilized as alternative learning in every school during the pandemic, which was also adopted by the Seminary to shape the academic formations of every seminary student continuously. Based on the statement of Barrett (2010), in many nations, the conventional student perception of higher education has been relatively constrained. However, with the effect of the Internet, this traditional perception of the "seminarians' body" has shifted. The seminarians' body for theological and educational institutions that provide online courses has significantly



changed and is no longer restricted to regional demographics. These online courses' virtual learning communities are opening a new chapter in seminarians' academic formation and education history.

*Doing class reporting.* Enable the seminarians to get accustomed to the part they would act as priests and afforded many chances to perform actual priestly responsibilities (Brescia University, 2013). According to Rob Eaton (2008), they assist seminarians in developing their power to express, justify, and preach the teachings of the resurrected Word of God. They must be allowed to interact in this way in classes. The research participants revealed:

*"One of the activities that I love to perform is reporting, and I do love this even if it is so prevailing to do. This activity is challenging to work on because it allows performing and design your presentations and create your own thoughts and presenting ideas. By having this presentation, I could refine my ideas since that is what I need to do. We need to present the information, it is quite challenging to do, but it makes me eager to learn; since I am confining my idea, it may make me sharp at the same time."-R14.*

*"It would be reporting because I could not easily comprehend my topic, which is hard. I have a hard time creating presentations, which is also my hindrance, and as a challenge for me, I reminded myself that I need to overcome this. I need to exert effort not to limit myself in discovering more."-R15*

Some of the seminarians closely get pressured when it comes to class reporting. However, they challenged themselves to push themselves into another level of learning. Class reporting is one of the instructional activities utilized by the instructors and seminary formators to boost the confidence of the seminarians and develop their speaking skills, specifically by practicing or enhancing their editing ability with modern tools such as PowerPoint presentations and other technological means. It enables the seminarians to actively participate in the learning system that will guide them to collect experiences. Based on the statement of Dunn and Dunn (1972), a seminary student's commitment is a powerful instructional instrument that can encourage learner autonomy and ought to be a component of every contemporary academic formation. They said individual instruction is the one-on-one contact between a learner and even what he learns. This teaching tool increased the students' opportunity to participate actively in the learning process. It allowed them to combine ability of the seminarians, the instructor and seminary formators to provide various academic formation experiences. The learning opportunities altered with the many kinds of assignment, hands-on activities, summer programs, and review activities for reiterating curriculum ideas.

*Writing Journals.* As the Columbia Theological Seminary (2019) discussed, keeping a journal is a spiritual development to get acquainted with writing your tales or spiritual history. Maintaining a daily journal is a fruitful and enlightening strategy to increase our grasp of how Christ works in everyday life. They expressed:

*"One of my academic activities was journal writing, and the thing that I like the most because I can evaluate my experiences through my reflection on the day, my learning, and what I have learned throughout the day, which helps me a lot to have a better life." -R11*

*"Lastly, the academic activities we have successfully done are making reflections, making journals, and learning new vocabulary words." –R6*

The seminarians were required to have their journal writing where they could freely share what they have felt, experienced, and learned throughout their journey in the seminary, specifically during their academic formation and the times that there was no one they could talk to in their weakest moments. According to Boud (2001), learning is a fundamental component of all forms of expression, including giving shape to the world as it is perceived, regardless of the motive. The lens of learning is crucial for viewing the writing we produce. Learning is not the only angle on journal writing. Nevertheless, recognize that keeping a journal is closely linked regardless of what else it might be intended to accomplish. Learning is its primary goal.

*Online activities and educational quizzes.* Regular evaluations have been performed to gauge how well seminarians adhere to the standards established by their educational competence. Submissions of activities will be online. A picture of the creation and the accomplishment of project outcomes must be posted online for the assessment tasks. Evaluative criteria have been used to evaluate the results, and the instructors proved that the seminary students created the activities. Images or videos must be provided (Holy Rosary Minor Seminary, 2021). The research participants come out with this statement:

*"The academic activities during the pandemic that measure my understanding of academics are my online assignments. Because teachers cannot explain online lessons, I should understand them alone. When I do these assignments and have a sound output, I can say how much I have learned and how much I have understood, and because of that, I can see my improvements in academics." –R9.*

*"It is the educational quizzes and activities online. What I like the most about the online activity is the quizzes and activities posted in Google classroom because it is fun and educational, so it helps us learn to discover, which is fun." –R12.*

*"These activities are exams and online quizzes through our oral participation and listening. Self-studying and reading comprehension may be the way to accomplish those activities by applying all our learning. That is all." –R13*

*"Maybe the activities that helped me strengthen my actions during the pandemic are my online activities. When I based it on my previous academic status, my work was limited because I did not take notes so much in an online class. However, I was exposed to an online class and learned many kinds of stuff. I could find tools or apps that are helpful to my studies, such as Adobe, Grammarly, Canva and YouTube."-R21*

The seminary students engaged themselves in activities and quizzes that were available online. In just one internet search, different websites offering free access to the quizzes and activities came out. This platform was in use when COVID-19 attacked worldwide, and it assists seminarians to continue learning and actively participate. Online quizzes and activities are instructional tools that can be used. Arsyad (2011) claims that online quizzes and activities

distribution are categorized as online education. Because they demand gadgets and networks, web-based quizzes can be categorized as online-based media. A quiz or an activity is a piece of software that presents content as questions or queries that help students better grasp the topic.

### **Ways of Performing Academic Activities**

There are six themes heaved into view from the answers about ways of performing strategies and academic activities in the Seminary during the pandemic: Managing time effectively, prioritizing academic activities, Inspiring, and encouraging other seminarians, performing academic activities, using educational tools and apps, and staying focused on achieving goals.

*Managing time effectively.* In far more ways than one may think, Seminary provides a gateway to the practice of priesthood. Each of them has a list of necessary and repetitious chores to complete. Manage and arrange their responsibilities, and they have been required to establish limits in the Seminary by managing their schedule and time-well (Trinity Seminary College, 2022). The research participants said.

*"Managing time and being responsible everyday can help me attain excellence in my academic activities. Indeed, here in the seminary, we already work our time well. We woke up early in the morning for the Eucharist mass, ate, went to school, studied, and had Physical Education to play and enjoy. Through this, I perfectly manage my time and being a responsible in performing my academic activities." – R2*

*"I have a style in performing my academic activities that make my intellectual formation work better during this pandemic. I manage my time and am aware of my responsibilities. I have time to answer my modules, sleep, and talk to my co-seminarians so I will not get bored because I do not want to pressure myself. I still give my time to rest and enjoy myself to avoid stress." –R3.*

*"Using my time wisely and acting as a responsible seminarian are the techniques that made my academic formation work better. Here in the Seminary, I used my time wisely in improving my academic performance instead of sleeping during siesta time."- R4.*

*"My adjustments and techniques in handling my academics during the pandemic are managing my time and being responsible to work on my school activities. I would prioritize those what need to focus, especially the difficult subjects, so I could finish it."- R7.*

Inside the seminary, all seminarians did their best to manage their time well, besides the hectic schedules, getting busy working with their schoolwork and other important priorities in life as seminarians. Time management is essential to every seminarian since they must slowly set themselves and embrace the daily life routine of the priesthood. Pearce (2007) claims that everyone can learn how to spend time and when they function best by planning and maintaining activity logs over many days. Please record what you do and how long it takes to complete activities without

changing behaviour more than necessary. Record what they need to take, such as the school task and seminary schedules, and on their vacant time, they can interact with their fellow seminarians or take a nap to relax. Peter F. Drucker (1909-2005) and Alex (2009) state that the management's most precious asset is time; nothing else can be supervised when it has yet to be handled. Managing their life entails managing their time and managing their time entails managing the situations that arise in their daily life (Murthy, 2006).

*Prioritizing academic activities.* Despite being informed of the necessity of maintaining good health habits during the pandemic, students believed that instructors and staff prioritized academics more than health (Johnston et al., 2022). The seminarians have enabled to contemplate prioritizing their academic activities since it will be the basis for making their grades. The research participants shared.

*"My adjustments and techniques in handling my academics during the pandemic would be through working on my priorities and focusing on the difficult subjects, in order to finish my academic activities." - R5.*

*"As I have said earlier, I perfectly manage my time to focus on my priorities, focus on my goals, and perfectly work my time. As what everyone believed, "Do what you can do for today and do not wait for tomorrow." -R6*

*"It is challenging to manage our time because we have our schedule here in the seminary; that is the problem. As seminarians, we have our programs to follow, prioritizing our academic activities is what we need to do first." - R7.*

*"How can I perfectly manage my time by sitting down, thinking and working on time, and prioritizing those activities that are needed to accomplish." -R13.*

A seminary student's performance could depend significantly on how well they manage their self-discipline, which is a crucial component. As a result, it is necessary to prioritize academic tasks appropriately. Setting priorities takes much work. As stated by Wang et al. (2010), decision-makers could always choose prioritization on the things they need to accomplish first. Intelligent individuals must be able to weigh the pros and cons of particular alternatives in doing activities (Lidow, 2017).

*Inspiring and encouraging other seminarians.* Seminarians live in close-knit communities where they serve, study, pray, and spend their spare time with each other as brethren in Christ over mealtime and other activities. Sporting events, exercising, reading, and talking with their co-seminarians are all the things they do in their leisure time. On their path to becoming priests, their connections with one another are an excellent source of enjoyment, encouragement, and inspiration (Vocation Centre, 2020). The research participants revealed.

*"I would encourage them that the fruits of my hard work are knowledge and wisdom, including the values we have attained. With the knowledge, understanding, and values we have achieved that would inspire the new seminarians and the students to be diligent despite the pandemic." - R5.*

*"One thing I can say is, we cannot avoid struggles and challenges. The only way is to pursue, whatever happens, step up and continue reaching our dreams despite many efforts that we have faced. Even though we are facing a pandemic, it is not our aim to surrender."—R11*

*"I will inspire and encourage them to be responsible students in their studies and to make some effort because, as a student, I also experienced many struggles in my studies, especially outside of the seminary formation. However, I always put my mind as a student; my main goal is to learn and have an excellent academic foundation."- R12*

*"I will let you know my personal experiences/struggles concerning my studies and tell you how I survived from them to be inspired and encouraged and to avoid thinking they are the only ones who struggle. They have to make a shift in their lives. From my experience, they should believe that they can survive. Since I could have stayed, they also can." —R14*

Every action that seminarians do for their fellow seminarians could inspire and encourage them to do the same. Some seminarians will get absorbed in their nasty and weary days, but when the other person lifts them, they will divert their moods into better ones. According to Father Carola of the St. Thomas Newsroom (2023), seminarians can encourage seminarians to be faithful. Being one of the seminarians who consistently attend the early morning holy hour inspires the other seminarians. They must be present, and the other seminarian thinks they should not join, but they are there. Their commitment is pure. It helps the seminarians grow.

*Performing academic activities at best and consistently.* The seminarians gave absolute and extended effort in performing the academic activities thrown to them to progress, develop and strengthen their core in fighting for their academic formation. The seminarians narrated:

*"Performing academic activities at my best is my way to boost my confidence in pursuing even a simple exercise. Despite that, I encourage myself to face the challenges in academics."—R11*

*"My technique to accomplish and have an output performance is to be serious because we have many priorities, but how serious am I during the activity? I should think about learning to read more about and repeat reading to understand better. With that, I can give the best responses in academics."-R14*

*"Despite health challenges, I extend my time for my studies and be well-acquainted with difficult words for me to have better progress in performing my academic activities." —R13.*

*"It is essential and it strengthens me in pursuing my seminary life in a way that I am constantly reminded to be consistent in studying. Here, we have an organized schedule to learn, unlike outside. Furthermore, consistency in performing academic activities helps me become confident enough to face people, which is also essential as a seminarian." —R15.*

Every seminarian could perform their academic activities, but not everyone could be able to work at its best under pressure and consistently. In the seminary, the seminarians learn to give their best to finish and perform what they need to do and perform. Galton F. Hereditary Genius, (1869) when someone is taking on a new ability, performing an activity in school, their main objective is to perfect it to the point that they can execute everyday tasks performing an academic activity on great potential. Seminarians attempt to comprehend the activities during the initial learning period while focusing on preventing defects. Excessive errors are becoming less frequent, performance appears better than before, and seminarians must work as diligently to perform at an acceptable limit and become consistent as they gain expertise in the intermediate stage of their education.

*Using educational tools and apps.* The seminary students utilized educational tools and apps such as Google Classroom, Google Meet, Grammarly, Zoom, YouTube, and Adobe or Canva. These numerous online educational tools and apps are efficient for seminarians and help improve their academic engagement. Study findings from the authors, who have expertise using a range of online tools as educational tools, show that most of these materials are intensive and intriguing for seminarians' learning opportunities. Thanks to these platforms, learners now have an internet strategy (Gregory & Tyrell, 2017). The seminarians spoke about their experiences:

*"I used the online platform to fulfill activities like answering with technology integration. The teacher will give a task that students would answer online." –R17.*

*"One of my problems during the pandemic was that I did not know how to use the computer, but when the pandemic came, I discovered a lot about how to use Google classroom and how to get my lessons through Google classroom." –R19.*

*"I am able to find tools or apps that are helpful for my studies such as the Adobe, Grammarly, Canva and YouTube."- R21.*

The younger generation certainly reaps the advantages of learning. The research community, seminary formators and instructors concur that using educational applications appropriately impacts students' academic performance. Governments have implemented steps to encourage seminarians to utilize these applications. Continuous education allows for more significant teacher-student interaction and collaboration outside the traditional educational environment, facilitating the learning of traditional and non-traditional knowledge whenever needed. Similarly, education opportunities are accessible so that every seminarian can promptly obtain them anywhere at any moment (Vasquez-Carbonell, 2021).

*Staying focused on achieving goals.* Seminarians will establish specific educational objectives in these four categories. The goals must be detailed about the seminarian's hopes and aims, but they must accurately reflect the objectives of the outdoor education environment. The objective must also expand upon the abilities of the seminarian (Wesley Seminary, 2022).

*"Stay focused on the road or the course during the pandemic. There are moments that, yes, there are many activities but I reminded myself to stay focused." – R16*

*"Seminary formation demands higher academic formation for the future. Intellectual formation is crucial because, in the future, we will become a preacher. How do we teach or preach effectively if we are academically incompetent? I should focus on the academic aspect to achieve higher academic performance." – R18*

*"For me, the techniques I use during the pandemic are to focus on my studies and to read the materials given by our teachers. Even though it is hard for me, I should read it diligently to understand and accomplish my activities during the pandemic. In that way, my academic performance is improving because of reading. I realized that reading is the most important way because not all learnings are coming from the teachers but through giving my own best in responding to the academic demands." – R19*

The seminarians have identified and recognized what they want to do and achieve as they are on their way to priesthood. They must conquer every inch of the challenge and never be pulled out by temptations. Staying focused is vital to the daily life of a seminarian. A key component of achievement in learning, the school environment, and every aspect of life is staying focused and meeting results. Frequently, after setting clear goals and being inspired to work towards goals, seminarians revisit their efforts after a few periods and question wherever they go wrong. A newer research collection offers solutions to this issue. It offers empirical proof that setting objectives down on paper, deciding on activities, and forming a supportive environment boost the likelihood of achieving them (Traugott, 2014).

### **Seminarians' Academic Improvements**

There are six themes heaved into view from the answers about the description of academic improvements in the Seminary during the pandemic: Improving and developing academically, attaining academic excellence, and maintaining academic formation.

*Improving and developing academically.* The assortment of seminaries' literature was designed to assist academic formation in preparation for the Catholic priesthood, which serves as a space for one's intellectual and spiritual development (Calo, 2016). The seminarians shared their experiences:

*"I was part of the honor students. Before, I was shallow in responding to academics, but my academic perspective changed when I entered the Seminary. I have developed and improved in ways that were not like before. Being part of the honor students makes me very happy." – R3*

*"My teacher appreciated my reflection and the best answer in the class because it was the only one with a brief and concise explanation." – R14*

Most seminarians aim to reap their achievements by standing as one of the dean's listers in their school. It enthusiastically shows that they could improve and develop themselves and grow academically. One of those factors that motivated them was their seminary formators, formation strategies that boosted their confidence and high support from the seminary community. Kember and Kwan (2000) suggested four areas of academic formation: formation as information transmission, formation as promoting seminarians' development as autonomous learners and instructing as addressing seminarians' educational needs. These ideas all come to life in how seminary formators act inside the seminary, for example, by having motivating techniques, formation methods, seminarians' focus and participation, and evaluation procedures.

*Attaining academic excellence.* Academic excellence is feasible when individuals practice Godly as outlined in the Holy books. Authentic academic excellence seldom seeks to outrank others; instead, it exalts God. Since Biblical academic success has nothing to do about how they compete with others and all to do with their perspective about the task as being something that honours God, enabled by the Holy Spirit, it is therefore attainable for every seminarian (Blom, 2019). They expressed:

*"I was part of the honor students. Before, I was shallow in responding to academics, but my academic perspective changed when I entered the Seminary. I have developed and improved in ways that were not like before. Being part of the honor students makes me very happy." – R3*

*"I think the achievement I am proud of is my academic excellence during Senior High School. I am so proud of that since I made an effort for my modules, and I am thankful that I attained what I worked hard for. I think I deserve that because I did my best in answering my modules, and I would be proud of that academic excellence and also the poem I wrote which was published in the Capstone." – R6*

The seminarians persevered and showed their best to attain academic excellence. Being grateful and happy about what they had yielded from their hard work is the ultimate success for them and their family. If seminarians know what they deserve, they will shine and pour all their efforts into fighting for it. Zimmerman (2001) analyzed that in addition to the time and commitment required to apply personality mechanisms like smart goals such as working hard to reap academic excellence, using study methods, and self-checking, another crucial factor in comprehending seminarians' drive to succeed academically is their motivational influences.

*Maintaining academic formation.* Along with offering a foundational curriculum, the handmaid and her queen expect seminarians to be proficient in several liberal arts disciplines, including philosophy and theology. A comprehensive program that fosters personal piety and models the moral and spiritual life expected of future priests was also included at seminaries. Harrington (1976) said that both parts of training should be viewed as a hierarchy of knowledge, where a solid grounding in Christian doctrine and critical thinking will result in a higher yearning for a virtuous life. They added.



*"It helps me maintain my good academic formation in a way that teaches me to always aim for excellence despite my limitations. It leads me to aspire for excellence, not to settle for less." – R11*

*"As a seminarian, I have to maintain well my academic formation because acquiring knowledge is more important to me. I have to open my mind and be eager to know about the other aspects, beliefs, and understanding about the Catholic faith". -R15*

Seminarians need to understand their vocation and maintain their academic formation because they are the future hopes of the Catholic Church. They should never limit themselves to acquiring knowledge, developing, and working their formations. McCarthy et al. (2000) claim that comprehending the function of the church throughout the globe can provide a foundation inside the Roman Catholic Teaching for discussion of seminary and institutions of theological preparations in religious discourse. From there, all Catholic churches and institutions dedicated to pursuing a single universal goal through their specific points of view, in their places, and for their respective audiences derive their missions. Theological schools and seminaries prepare seminarians for better tasks in different ministries; it naturally concerns the religious community, so we need to maintain the seminary's academic formation and other essential formations.

The presented academic factors above are the ultimate proof that the Holy Infant Seminary has developed academic activities and ways of performing strategies and identified several achievements as evidence of practical instruction and continuous academic growth amidst the pandemic. The seminarians have gained motivation, consistency, and positivity in looking forward to giving their best towards the academic formation. The pandemic has allowed them to realize that no circumstances or viruses could stop their way as they continue to acquire knowledge and experiences because they are hopeful to show the betterment of the Catholic faith and community in the future.

### **3. Implications of the Study**

By wanting to keep moving on to higher development, seminarians demonstrated the value of academic formation. Additionally, they must be capable of using critical thinking to evaluate what is admirable and advance their intellectual potential. This will be helpful, especially for individuals who complete their academic training during the pandemic. Academic, spiritual, communal, human, and pastoral formation are the four areas of formation that the Holy Infant Seminary concentrates on. Seminarians have forced to adapt the transitions of continuous learning through online and keep up to train themselves to the new rules and schedules to grow and well-formed to the different formations they have in the Seminary specifically to their academic performance.

Thus, amid the pandemic, it was emphasized in this philosophical study development. Despite their lack of literacy, the seminarians are helped by the widespread problem in utilizing computers and the internet, reading comprehension, keeping diaries, and reflecting. In terms of academics, they complete the most difficult period. Although it is insufficient, the important thing is that they accomplish their goals. Learning spans a person's entire life; it denotes a connection to

specific social groups and activities; it requires being an active participant, a member, and a specific type of person. By ignoring this aspect of learning, one is denying the importance of developing identities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Due to the seminarian's impressive response, participation, and dedication to fulfillment, as well as their encouragement to complete the specific assignments even though there is no actual discussion, this will help future seminarians to prevent themselves from getting discouraged in during a challenging situation.

Based on their past experiences, seminarians can successfully complete their studies even during the most difficult times. Finally, the seminarians who enroll in the seminary will be greatly influenced by this study to continue doing as Christ did and obeying His desire. This study will benefit the younger seminarians because they answered the survey genuinely.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Based on the findings, it is concluded that the Seminary's academic formation in this pandemic was challenging, and it tested their core of how they can be able to rise above despite of the fact that they were greatly affected by the health virus. The seminary formators and instructors played their role to deliver an effective strategy for the formation and develop an academic activity that is timely and relevant for the seminarians to become adaptive to the change of time and grow academically. To increase the seminarians' academic accomplishments, the Seminary needs to evaluate the other factors that will seriously assist the seminarians' academic performance and engagement in activities.

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