Research Article

Instructional Barriers and Challenges Faced by Faculty and Students of Graduate School in One Hei in The New Normal Set Up

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ABSTRACT

The education system in our country also adjusted to the new normal set-up. The new normal set-up is not easy for everyone to immediately cope up with. It requires us to take things to a new approach of learning online. It pushed us to adapt to the settings we are not used to, and we are having difficulty coping with this set-up we are currently in. Also, the professors are having problems finding ways to provide a better way for the students to learn more effectively. From what we are having right now about the new way of education, there were several expected and known challenges that graduate students will meet and have met during their schooling. We cannot change the fact that our new way of living nowadays caused by a deadly virus leads us all into numerous difficulties to continue our everyday life. Specifically, this paper presented the experience by the respondents about the degree of online learning barriers. Identified barriers included in the study are administrative/instructor issues, social interactions, time and support for homework, technical skills, technical problems, academic skills, learner motivation, cost and access to the Internet. A survey questionnaire adapted from Muilenburg & Berge (2005) was used in this study. The weighted mean for measuring the challenges level is the statistical tool used in the data processing. Based on the results, Infrastructure and internet bandwidth should be the priority for investment. For higher education Institution, an increase awareness about online learning among teachers is encouraged. Teachers must attend and as much as possible, participate in webinars and open online courses (MOOCs) available. Moreover, it is highly recommended that before any online learning, qualified and trained online facilitators and technical support must be formed.

Keywords: instructional barriers, graduate school and challenges

Introduction

In December of 2019, the world was surprised by a coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. On February 11, 2020, gave an official name for the disease, the Corona Virus Disease 2019, abbreviated as COVID–19. Due to the fast transmission of the disease, most countries have reported COVID-19 cases. Based on the timeline, on March 7, 2020, the Philippines confirmed its first local transmission. Since the said virus can easily be transmitted, the national government imposed lockdowns or community quarantines on March 12, 2020, to limit the spread of the virus. Korinne Griffith–Kansas Capitol Bureau (2020).

In the Philippines, all agencies, sectors, and establishments follow the new normal set–up, and one of these sectors is education. The physical reporting or face–to–face classes in all schools were suspended for both basic and tertiary levels and even in graduate school until a vaccine for COVID – 19 was made available. Due to educational institutions' closure, remote learning is the only alternative solution for education to continue. Several strategies and learning modalities were also introduced, like modular, online, and blended learning. According to Kasrekar (2020), the primary problem is classes' conduct despite the closure order. The physical reporting or face–to–face method has a higher risk of spreading the virus; the safest solution is using online and modular platforms through synchronous and asynchronous strategies. According to Ruel F. Ancheta and Helen B. Ancheta (2020), these platforms challenge both the students and the teachers as it occurs something new to them. An "adopt quickly" response to the new normal in teaching and learning amidst the pandemic should be made. (Tanhueco–Tumapon, 2020).

Institutions need to use strategies and modify new forms of teaching–learning pedagogy despite of the very short notice. In light of this, La Consolacion University Philippines – Graduate School adopted the online platform using synchronous and asynchronous methods. This study examines the Instructional Challenges Faced by the Faculty and Students of Graduate School of La Consolacion University Philippines in New Normal Set-Up.

In 1994, early course delivery via the web had started, and is followed abruptly by an approach that is more structured, using the new category of course management systems (Graziadei et al.). According to the Online Education in the United States in 2011, online education has slowly but steadily grown in popularity on 2010 to the point that at least one course online were taken by almost one-third of U.S. postsecondary students. People often interchange online learning with e-learning, Web-based training, computer-based training, computer-based instruction, and technology-based instruction. There are challenges encountered, specifically, instructional challenges faced not only by students but also by the teachers.

Retention rates in online learning are low globally. In comparison to face-to-face learning, the retention rates for online courses have been calculated to be 10 to 20% lower. that is according to Top degreesonline.org. Similarly, the U.S. News and World Report announced that the average retention rate among first-time part-time students is 39% (Burnsed, 2010). According to an article by Rob Jenkins in the Chronicle of Higher Education, Luzer cited that "students were more likely to fail or withdraw from online courses than from face-to-face courses regardless of their initial level of preparation." Koller, Ng, Do, and Chen (2013) assert "retention in massive open online courses (MOOC) should be viewed in the appropriate context; the apparently low retention in MOOCs is often reasonable."

Purpose of the Study

E-learning's importance and its continuous growth, and its use in the workplace, it is critical to understand the barriers that hinder such technologies' successful adoption. Understanding learner perceptions of barriers, the different types of barriers, and their relative importance, will enable those responsible for workforce development to focus upon the most critical potential barriers to successful e-learning implementation. The aim of this study is to identify the barriers and challenges to online learning among faculty members and graduate school students in a higher education institution in the New Normal set-up during the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, this paper will

present the degree of online learning barriers as experienced by the respondents. Identified barriers included in the study are administrative/instructor issues, social interactions, learner motivation, academic skills, technical skills, technical problems, time and support for studies, cost and access to Internet.

Statement of the Problem

The present study explores the various instructional challenges faced by the LCUP Graduate School in the New Normal set-up. The sub-problems through which the main problem will be reached are as follows:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of the respondents based on the following:
   a. Age
   b. Sex
   c. Course
   d. Years in LCUP
2. How do the respondents identify the program instructional challenges in the New Normal Set Up?
3. What is the attitude of the respondents towards program instruction in the implementation of the New Normal Set Up?

Methods

The study implemented a descriptive and utilized a survey method. The study was conducted in LCUP Graduate School, a higher education institution (HEIs) in the Philippines. The instrument used in data gathering to accomplish the study's specific objectives was a survey questionnaire adapted from Muilenburg & Berge (2005). Respondents were asked to rate each barrier identified by Muilenburg & Berge (2005) according to the five-point Likert scale choices: 1 - not a barrier, 2 - somewhat of a barrier, 3 - a barrier, 4 - a strong barrier, and 5 - a very strong barrier. The survey administration process was done online using Google Form from January 25 to February 28, 2021. The statistical tool employed in the data processing is the weighted mean for measuring the challenges level.

Result and Discussion

This part presents the results and discussion of the data gathered. The primary purpose of this study is to discover the various instructional challenges faced by the LCUP Graduate School in the New Normal set-up.

1. ***Sub-problem No.1: What are the demographic characteristics of the respondents based on the following:***
   a. ***Age***
   b. ***Sex***
   c. ***Course***
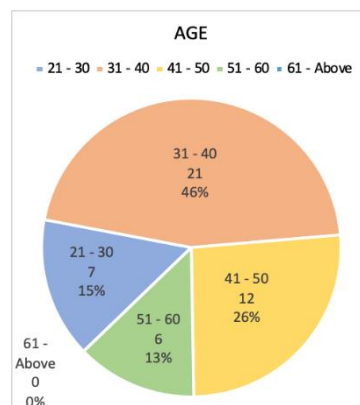   d. ***Years in LCUP***

Figure 1. Age of the Respondents

Figure 1 shows the comparative sex distribution of the respondents based on their age group. There were seven (7) respondents (15%) whose ages were between 21-30 years old. 46% percent belongs to the twenty-one (21) respondents whose age group was from 31-40 years old. Twelve respondents, or 26%, were from the age group 41-50 years old. The remaining 13% belongs to the six (6) respondents whose age is between 51-60. Unfortunately, none of the respondents belongs to the 61 and above age group. As Figure 1 exhibits, most of the respondents of the present study are middle-aged individuals.
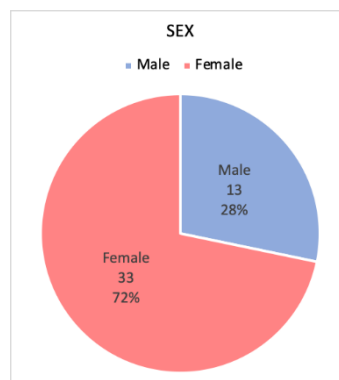

Figure 2. Sex of the Respondents

As Figure 2 shows, regarding sex, 33 respondents who were females covered 72% of the total sample population. The remaining 28% belong to the 13 male respondents. Based on the gathered data, there were almost three times as many female respondents compared to males.
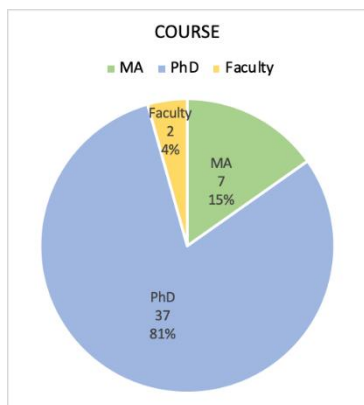

Figure 3. Course of the Respondents

According to Figure 3, 37 respondents (81%) came from the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) program. There were seven (7) people or 15% who identified themselves as part of the Master of Arts (M.A.) program. The remaining 4% belongs to the two (2) respondents who were both faculty members.
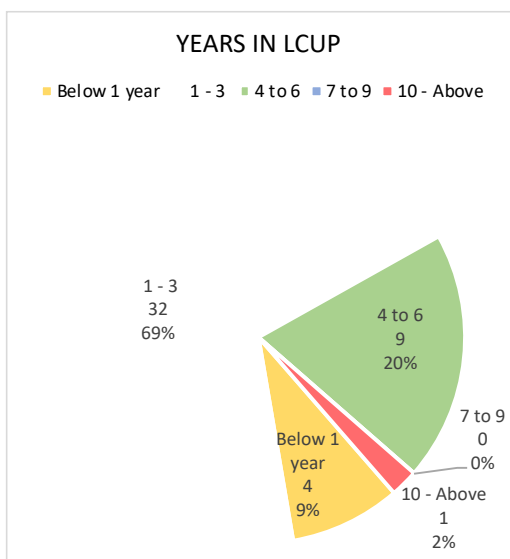

Figure 4. Years in LCUP of the Respondents

Figure 4 shows the distribution of the respondents based on the years they have been with LCUP. There were four (4) or 9% of the respondents who have been with LCUP for less than a year. The majority of the respondents (69%) are 32 people who have been with LCUP for between 1-3 years already. There were also nine respondents (20%) who are already 4 to 6 years in LCUP. Unfortunately, none of the respondents stayed with LCUP between 7 to 9 years, but one (1) respondent (2%) has been with LCUP for ten years and more.

2. Sub-problem No. 2: How do the respondents identify the program instructional challenges in the New Normal Set Up?

Administrative / Instructor's Issues

Muilenburg & Berge (2005) defined the administrative and instructor issues factor as "barriers that administrators and instructors' control, like late delivery of course materials, lack of sufficient academic advisors online, and lack of timely feedback from the instructor" (Allen & Seaman, 2007).

The overall mean for Administrative/ Instructor Issues is 3.17 and has a verbal interpretation of "a barrier." One can infer that administrators and instructors are not experts enough to teach or deliver lessons using the New Normal Set–up. Ten out of eleven items are considered "a barrier" and one a "strong barrier," which is the "difficulty in contacting academic or administrative staff."

The previous studies of Allen and Seaman (2007) pointed out that "academic leaders have consistently commented that faculty often devalue online learning and that it takes 'more time and effort to teach an online course' and demotivated faculty and downgrading of online education by faculty may be partly the cause of some if not many of the administrative/ instructor issues of online learning."

Social Interactions

Among the challenges, "prefer to learn in person" has the highest weighted mean and is identified to be "a barrier" by the faculty and students. In contrast, the "online learning seems impersonal" got the lowest weighted mean of 2.93 and interpreted as "a barrier." The overall mean is 3.04 and is interpreted as "a barrier." Social interaction, according to Muilenburg & Berge (2005), is the "learning environment that is created for learning

online,". The study of Marcial, Caballero, Rendall & Patrimonio (2015) further discusses that "social interaction is strongly related to enjoyment in online learning, the effectiveness of learning online, and the possibility of taking another online course. Therefore, improving online learning social interaction would lead to a more effective and enjoyable educational experience." Song et al. (2004) also found that "participants of the study who were not satisfied with online learning compared with traditional classroom learning felt that a lack of community (71%) within the online environment was a challenge."

Academic Skills

It was also mentioned by Muilenburg & Berge (2005) that "academic skills" factors refer to research respondents' perceived barriers to online learning due to their lack of academic skills in areas like writing, reading, or communication. In this study, using the six identified challenges under "academic skills," all are interpreted as "a barrier," and the overall mean is 2.99. The result of the present study regarding this factor shows that there is a lack of academic skills for online learning among the respondents.

Technical Skills

The results of the present study imply the lack of technical skills for online learning. The overall mean is 3.18 and is interpreted as "a barrier." The six identified challenges were also perceived as "a barrier." Among those, "fear new tools for online earning" got the highest weighted mean of 3.24, while the 3.11 weighted mean for "fear different learning methods used for online learning" is the lowest.

The perceived barriers to online learning of the respondents due to their lack of technical skills like fearing new tools for online learning, lack of software skills, or their unfamiliarity with online learning technical tools are considered to be under the "technical skills" factor (Muilenburg & Berge, 2005).

Learner Motivation

Muilenburg & Berge (2005) described learner motivation as "the teacher educators' characteristics that would affect motivation in online courses such as whether they procrastinate, choose easier aspects of an assignment to complete, or feel the online learning environment is not inherently motivating. "Only five items were identified (all are perceived as "a barrier") in this challenge and got an overall mean of 3.17 with verbal interpretation "a barrier." It infers that learners in the new normal set-up are not motivated. The highest weighted mean is "lack of personal motivation for online learning," while the lowest is "must take on more responsibility for learning" and "the online learning environment is not inherently motivating," which both got 3.09.

Time and Support for Studies

Time and support got an overall mean of 3.18 with a verbal interpretation of "a barrier." All five identified challenges got a verbal interpretation of "a barrier" with "insufficient time to learn during online training courses" as the highest while "lack of support from family, friends, and employer" got the lowest, 3.33 and 2.96, respectively. The results tell that there are a limited time and support for studies.

The time and support for studies are also fundamental (Allen & Seaman, 2007). "This factor concerns the respondents' perspectives on whether a lack of time or support from family, friends, or people in the workplace causes barriers to their online learning" (Muilenburg & Berge, 2005).

Cost and Access to the Internet

Muilenburg & Berge (2005) stated, "find access to the Internet too expensive, fear the loss of privacy, confidence, or property rights or otherwise find access to the Internet limited to the point of raising barriers to them." There are three items under the Cost and Access to the Internet factor. The cost and access to the internet got a 3.47 weighted mean and the only challenge with a verbal interpretation of "a strong barrier." The result implies that the cost of the internet is expensive and access and connectivity are weak. This can glance to the item "lack of adequate internet access," which got the highest weighted mean of 3.57 and "a strong barrier" verbal interpretation followed by "online learning technology costs too much,"

3.48 and also interpreted as "a strong barrier." In contrast, "needed technology is not available" got the lowest weighted mean of 3.37 and a verbal interpretation of "a barrier."

Technical Problems

The technical problem concerns the "lack of consistent platforms, browsers, and software, or the lack of technical assistance that causes obstacles to online learning" (Muilenburg & Berge 2005). Among the three items under technical problems, two got the same weighted mean of 3.41 with a verbal interpretation as "a strong barrier," these are "lack of consistent platforms, browsers, and software" and "incompatibility creates technical problems," respectively.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

In summary, the "cost and access to the internet" is the challenge identified with highest barrier (overall mean of 3.47 and perceived as "a strong barrier) while the lowest barrier is the "academic skills" (overall mean of 2.99 and interpreted as "a barrier." This study reveals that the faculty and students' major challenge in the new normal set-up is the internet's cost and access. Furthermore, administrative/instructor issues, technical problems, technical skills, time and support for studies, learner motivation, social interactions, and academic skills are barriers to the New Normal set-up.

3. ***Sub-problem No. 3: What is the attitude of the respondents towards program instruction in the implementation of New Normal Set-up?***

ATTITUDE OF RESPONDENTS

Here are the common comments among the forty – six (46) respondents. These comments show the respondents' attitude towards program instruction in implementing New Normal Set–up. Most of the comments "the administrator should be more responsive," "the instructors must be more considerate especially in giving activities," "the online learning is indeed challenging, but the professors are very considerate," "I think the assignments or outputs that required by some of the professors add up to

the challenges of the students. Some assignments need to do beyond the asynchronous or research day. Hoping that they will give consideration if the required outputs are not submitted on time," these only support the data on Table 1 (Administrative/Instructor Issue) that "difficulty contacting academic or administrative staff" got a weighted mean of 3.56 and interpreted not "a strong barrier." Therefore, the attitude of the respondents implies dissatisfaction with the administrative service and instruction issue. Despite the challenges faced by the respondents, some still found the professors considerate.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results show that most of the present study respondents are female, middle-aged individuals enrolled in the Ph.D. program and are between 1-3 years stay in LCUP. In terms of the program instructional challenges faced by the respondents, the "cost and access to the internet" obtained the highest mean, while the rest of the categories got an "a barrier" interpretation, including the "academic skills" that got the lowest weighted mean score. Furthermore, the respondents exhibit a dissatisfied attitude towards the administration/instruction issue.

Based on the result of the study, the researchers came up with the following recommendations. First, the educational institutions, particularly now in the new normal, should invest more in infrastructure and internet bandwidth. Second, the institution should help raise the competency about online learning among teachers, particularly in higher education institutions, by taking advantage of the available massive open online courses (MOOCs).

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