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Research Article

Exploring Flexible Learning Experiences

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ABSTRACT

Flexible learning is a popular mode of learning in this 21st century since it allows flexibility in almost all aspects of the teaching and learning process. The study explored the flexible learning experiences of college students enrolled in the school year 2022-2023. The focus were in terms of internet connection, communication, conferencing platform, online teaching strategies, assessment of learning, student participation and submission of requirements. Results revealed that internet connection is a problem as they engaged in flexible learning modality since most of the activities related to flexible learning uses internet. Indeed flexible learning is a struggle to many students. The study made use of mixed method as its research design. After considering several literature about flexible learning, a survey questionnaire was drafted and eventually validated by experts prior to its distribution to the respondents via google form. The data gathered for the quantitative part were treated using weighted mean and a 5 point Likert Scale was used. A corresponding verbal interpretation of 5 Always, 4 Often, 3 Sometimes, 2 Seldom and -1 Never was also used. Weighted mean was used to treat gathered data. Likewise, an unstructured interview about the challenges encountered in flexible learning was also conducted through online via conferencing platforms. Qualitative data gathered from interviews were treated using thematic analysis. Result of the study will serve as basis to an intervention program to address concerns on flexible learning.

Keywords: *Flexible learning, Teaching and learning, Online learning, E-learning, Learning experience*

Introduction

The pandemic has brought tremendous changes in the education landscape not just in the Philippines but all over the world. Traditional face to face classes were suddenly

changed to flexible mode of learning due to the closure of schools from basic education to university level. Such move from educational institutions were in response to the declaration made by the World Health Organization

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ordering all students and teachers to stay at home. At this point, only front liners were allowed to leave homes and movement were strictly monitored. Work in both public and private sectors were done via online or in skeletal workforce. Chaos and fear prevailed for weeks to months to years. The education sector encountered serious problem due to the need to continue delivery of education amidst covid-19 pandemic. Educational institutions all over the world has no choice but to close schools in order to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Countries rich and poor were not spared by the problems brought about by the pandemic. In the Philippines, the department of education (DepEd) and commission on higher education (CHED) both immediately identified measures on how education will continue despite the problem on human mobility. The Commission on Higher Education issued memorandum CHED Memo No 4 series of 2020 containing policies and guidelines in the conduct of flexible learning. The memo prompted all educational institutions to shift from the traditional face to face class to flexible mode of learning immediately. The adapted mode of learning changed their methods of teaching and mode of delivery of lessons and change the mode of submission of various school requirements. Such action was made to ensure that education continues.

Flexible learning is a method where students are given freedom in how, what, when and where they learn. Flexible learning environments address how physical space is used, how students are grouped during learning and how time is used throughout teaching. With space, students may be given dedicated breakout rooms to work collaboratively. (<https://spark.school/flexible-online>).

Schools may restructure traditional schedules to provide students with time for collaboration and other activities such as guest speakers or performances to assist their understanding of a topic.

Flexible learning refers to the ability to customize one's pace, place and mode of learning. With pace, for example, students may take accelerated programs or engage in part-time learning to ensure they have time to work on the side. Learning can take place in a variety of

settings, including in the classroom, at home via the Internet, while commuting or as part of a work-study program. Mode refers to the way that content is delivered by technology, typically through blended learning, fully online courses or technology-enhanced experiences (www.topchat.com)

Flexible learning is defined in CHED's memorandum order No. 04 as "a pedagogical approach allowing flexible time, place, and audience, but not solely focused on the use of technology. "Even before the health crisis, Philippine education was already on its way to flexible learning. Modes of flexible learning include: face-to-face contact, websites with interactive content and/or chat rooms, discussion boards, broadcast video, teleconferencing or videoconferencing, print resources, audio tapes and fieldtrips (<http://learnline.cdu.edu.au/com-monunits/documents/Modes>)

Flexible learning is learner-centered, encouraging greater independence and autonomy on the part of the learner. Its ethos is to enable and empower learners and give them greater control of their learning and become more self-directed. Flexible learning characteristics include of course flexible access, recognition of prior learning, flexible content, flexible participation, flexible teaching and learning methods, flexible resources, flexible assessment and on-going evaluation. Learners, instructors, and institutions all have a role to play in flexible learning: Learners must take responsibility for their own learning, taking advantage of opportunities that are presented to them and being able to self-advocate for the delivery method that best serves their learning needs. Instructors must be able to identify opportunities for flexible learning, "with a growing emphasis on managing the learning process rather than being the primary provider of learning material." Institutions must build flexible systems that provide students with choices in their learning, as well as maintaining the frameworks that ensure a quality learning experience. Moreover, flexible learning is where the instructor serves as a facilitator, enlisting learners' active involvement via various technologies available over the internet when they are physically separated from one another during teaching.

Flexible learning allows both students and teachers to maximize their time in teaching learning process since it allows them to pause and recharge. Thus allows better teaching due to enough time for lesson preparation and better learning as well on the part of the students due to higher retention of knowledge since they can repeatedly browse their learning materials Ryan and Tilbury (2013). Additionally, Lleo (2020) cited that flexible learning as a pedagogical approach allowing for flexibility of time, place and audience, including but not solely focused on the use of technologies.

Generally, flexible learning can be classified as synchronous learning is learning that happens at the same time for the instructor and the learners, meaning that there's real-time interaction between them. It can happen on- or off-line while Asynchronous learning is learning that doesn't necessarily happen at the same time for the instructor and the learners. Synchronous and asynchronous as two types of online learning. Asynchronous type of learning allows the students access learning materials posted when there is available internet connection while synchronous learning allows the students to access learning materials posted real-time. These would include videos and lectures and other attachments used in learning Cassidy et. al. (2016). Asynchronous learning resources includes self-paced classes, modules, recorded and downloadable video lessons, lecture notes and online discussions or social network websites Villarin (2020).

Both type of flexible learning provides both advantages and disadvantages. Among the advantages is allowing students to learn at their own pace, feeling more motivated and in control of their education, can participate in virtual classes and access learning tools stored in the learning management system University of Perpetual Help (2020).

Disadvantages associated with flexible learning is one in which the students at times becomes helpless since there is no physical presence of the teacher to guide their learning. It became an urgent need for them to explore other innovative learning modalities that will facilitate migration from traditional to flexible teaching and learning options. As learners are differently situated in terms of time, pace and

place, these options allow customization of delivery modes responsive to students needs for access to quality education. This shall also give students the options to choose the delivery mode most convenient to them as early as the time of their enrollment.

The change in the teaching and learning process requires collaboration among stakeholders and strengthening the culture of sharing knowledge, resources and best practices. Everyone is called to be part of this transition and transformation towards the new normal.

In response to the need to embrace flexible learning, educational institutions immediately conducted series of capacity building activities for their faculty members to prepare them on the use of conferencing platforms and learning management systems. Professional and private organizations also sponsored webinars discussing various concerns of flexible learning. Universities and other institutions subscribed to google workspace, MS team and other software that may help improve the delivery of learning through flexible learning mode. Upon shift of educational institutions to flexible learning mode various concerns were identified inspite of series of actions done. Among these concerns were internet connection, mode of communication, conferencing platform, online teaching strategies, assessment of learning, students' maximum participation and submission of requirements. In this regard, that the study was conducted to describe experiences of students of state funded university in a flexible learning mode. The researcher tried to identify the actual flexible learning experiences of students enrolled in a state run higher education institution. Findings of the study will be crucial in crafting an intervention program that will help address and further improve the flexible learning experiences of students.

Methods

Quantitative part contained internet connections, means of communication, conferencing platform, online teaching strategies, assessment of learning, student participation and submission of requirements.

An interview guide was crafted by the researcher for the qualitative part.

The participants of the study were college of education students enrolled during the 1st semester of academic year 2022-2023. There were 145 students taken through random sampling. The questionnaire was made in form of google form and were sent to students via facebook messenger and email considering the students' consent. Interview were also done online via google meet.

The study used a survey questionnaire made of two parts: part 1 contained the experiences in flexible learning which includes internet connection, means of communication, conferencing platform, online teaching strategies, assessment of learning, student participation and submission of requirements and part 2 asked about the challenges they encountered in flexible learning. The questionnaire was validated by experts prior to distribution. In addition, an interview guide was used to facilitate the focus group discussion.

The collected data were analyzed and tabulated using mean. Descriptive statistics deal with measurements of various aspects of population. The qualitative data was treated using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) within qualitative data. Clarke and Braune's six-steps thematic analysis was used. Thematic analysis is the study of patterns to uncover meaning. It is about analyzing the patterns and themes within the data set to identify the underlying meaning Crosley (2021).

The study assures that participants of the study joined voluntarily. Participants were given the right to decide on their participation in the paper. The researcher discussed clearly to all participants the purpose of the study. A letter containing explanation of the paper and an assurance of confidentiality was attached to the questionnaire. Personal identifications were undisclosed in the study.

Result and Discussion

Internet Connection

The emergence of technology plays a significant role in how education landscape evolved in the past years. Lessons were now available both online and offline. Learning materials are also available now via internet. Vast information may be taken from the internet. Even prior to pandemic several institutions has been using internet in conducting classes as one of its delivery modes. Meanwhile, *teen use of the internet at school has grown 45% since 2000. The vast majority of teens and their parents believe that use of the internet helps students in the classroom and in their studies.* The internet is a common tool that many teens use to search for information on colleges or other schools. Fifty-seven percent of online teens have gone online to get information about a college, university, or other school they were thinking about attending. Raine (2024)

Table 1. Internet Connection

Internet Connection	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1 I usually experience an unstable internet connection	3.37	Sometimes
2 II typically access the internet using mobile data.	3.61	Often
3 I typically access the internet using wifi connection	4.23	Often
4 Poor weather condition affects my internet connection.	4.39	Often
5 I only rely on free data to connect to the internet.	4.07	Often
Average Mean	3.93	Often

Displayed in table 1 is the data on the students experiences in terms of internet connection which revealed that "unstable internet connection is being experience sometimes as indicated by the weighted mean of 3.37 which is interpreted to be sometimes followed by the

3.61 with verbal interpretation of often -this stated that students mostly connect to the internet using mobile data only. Furthermore, the table shows that students are mostly relying on FREE data only to access the internet, as shown by the weighted mean 4.07 which is

interpreted as often. Meanwhile, poor weather condition leading to poor internet connection has a weighted of 4.39 which is interpreted as often. This finding revealed that internet facilities is yet to be improved. Underdeveloped nations are having difficulty in internet connection due to insufficient infrastructure Pham and Nguyen (2020). Further, Kapasia et. al. (2020) internet access is one of the factors that are exacerbated when the students are disadvantaged or from distant location.

Communication

Students and teachers maintains a line of communication for a successful teaching and learning experience. Everyday communication plays a crucial role in delivering lessons. Teachers send communication to students when giving assignments and other activities. The need for

better teacher student communication is much needed especially in flexible learning experience where there is limited number of face to face encounter between teacher and student. Today, students received messages through various messaging applications like facebook messenger, twitter, instagram messenger, viber, telegram, wechat and whatsapp. Students prefer these means of communication since there are convenient and user-friendly and at the same time cost- effective. Raine (2024) further stated that three-quarters of online teens use instant messaging – that represents close to 16 million youth. The four leading social apps in Asia and the Pacific region are WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, WeChat, Viber, and LINE. Aside from apps that are popular around the world, there are also several local apps that are hugely popular in the region.

Table 2. Communication

	Communication	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1	I receive school related messages thru SMS.	4.40	Often
2	I receive school related messages via email.	4.11	Often
3	I receive school related messages via FB messenger.	4.41	Often
4	I receive school related messages via voice calls.	4.16	Often
5	I received school related messages via other means of communication	2.22	Seldom
	Average Mean	3.86	Often

Revealed in table 2 are data regarding mode of communications. The statement with the lowest mean was the question on receiving school related messages via other means of communication. This shows that the most common platform for sending communications to students are facebook messenger with 4.41 weighted mean, via short messaging system (SMS) with 4.40. weighted mean, voice calls 4.16 and via email 4.11. All these statements got an Often verbal interpretation.

The result shows that students has limited access to internet, as a result students prefer the use of messaging applications specially those the requires less data.

Conferencing Platform

Conferencing platforms allows face to face discussion thus making learning more

engaging. Video conferencing platforms provide real time reactions and feedbacks. However, the conferencing platforms available also brought some concerns to both students and teachers. There are conferencing platforms that requires high bandwidth and thereby resulting to lagging connections and media items does not load easily and fully. If the internet signal is not strong the videos pixelates and sound are not also okay. There were also some problems associated with conferencing platforms. Upaddhay (2023) cited that teachers need to use extensions or other applications in checking attendance. Teachers and other education professionals, besides imparting lessons, have to track attendance and engagement, address learner concerns, and conduct assessments while managing several other tasks simultaneously.

Table 3. Conferencing Platform

	Conferencing Platform	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1	My teacher uses google meet at all times.	4.36	Often
2	The video resolution is very good.	3.88	Often
3	I usually get disconnected when I open my camera.	3.93	Often
4	I can easily use the different features of the conferencing platform.	3.63	Often
5	The sound quality of the conferencing application is very good.	3.37	Sometimes
	Average Mean	3.83	Often

As regard conferencing platform, the statement with the highest mean is the statement “my teacher uses google meet at all times with a weighted mean of 4.36 interpreted as often followed by the statement I usually get disconnected when I open my camera with a weighted mean of 3.93 interpreted as often, followed by the statement the video resolution is very good with a 3.88 weighted mean interpreted as often, I can easily use the features of the conferencing platform got a weighted mean of 3.63 also interpreted as often while the lowest mean was 3.37 interpreted as sometimes was the question on whether the sound of the conferencing platform was very good.

Online Teaching Strategies

Teaching in the traditional face to face class is different from teaching online. In the traditional face to face it is easy to gauge whether the students are learning or not based on their reactions and facial

reactions. These cannot be applied in an online class since students can join the class even without opening their camera. Teachers cannot also check whether students are still listening to the discussions. With these things that are happening online, there is a need for teachers to use varied online teaching strategies in order to maximize the students’ engagement. An online course, with instant access to vast resources of data and information, students are no longer dependent on the faculty for knowledge. Learning is becoming more collaborative, contextual and active. Educators must identify their objectives, design their curriculum, and then consider how the online environment serves the instructional objectives/activities of that curriculum. This requires changes in pedagogy. With this, teachers should be very innovative in his pedagogy in order to make the learning engaging university of Illinois at Springfield (2022)

Table 4. Teaching Strategies

	Teaching Strategies	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1	The pre-recorded lesson uploaded to google classroom allows independent learning.	4.27	Often
2	The teacher’s voice is clear during class discussion.	4.07	Often
3	The teacher uses all the features of the conferencing application in delivering the day’s lesson.	3.68	Often
4	Instructional materials shared on screen are visible.	4.21	Often
5	The video clips played during discussion has good quality and related to the topic.	4.12	Sometimes
	Average Mean	4.07	Often

Meanwhile, table 4 which concerns about online teaching strategies, the statement with the highest mean was pre-recorded video uploaded to google classroom allows

independent learning with a weighted mean of 4.27 interpreted as often, then followed by instructional materials shared on screen are visible with a weighted mean of 4.21, then statement on video clips played during discussion has good quality and related to the topic with weighted mean of 4.12, the teachers voice is clear during classroom discussion with weighted mean of 4.07 and the statement with the lowest mean was the statement the teachers use all the features of the conferencing platform to deliver the day's lesson with a weighted mean of 3.68. All statements has verbal interpretation of often. Effective online instruction and mentoring require a more intentional effort with advanced planning to promote communication among students and instructors to mitigate the impact of the transactional distance (Navarro et. al. 2022). This one thing may

be considered by an online teacher in conducting flexible learning as the mode of teaching.

Assessment of Learning

Assessing students learning online is one of the challenging tasks of teachers due to several factors affecting students' learning and engagement. Teachers used varied online assessment tools to fully gauge the students' performance. Faculty used google form as assessment tool while according to most of the students it was quite adequate to follow the online assessment Gandasari et. al (2021) . Assessments that are implemented during emergency remote learning involve open-ended, as opposed to close-ended, questions and highlight the importance of educators demonstrating flexibility and understanding toward their students Allehaiby and Bahlani (2022)

Table 5. Assessment of Learning

	Assessment of Learning	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1	The teacher uses simple terms in discussion for better understanding	4.29	Often
2	Quizzes were given using google forms	4.21	Often
3	Assignments were posted using google classroom.	4.28	Often
4	Assignments were turned in easily using google classroom.	4.37	Often
5	Major examinations were given using google classroom	4.33	Often
	Average Mean	4.29	Often

For the assessment of students learning, the statement with the highest mean of 4.37 was the about assignments that were easily turned in using google classroom, followed by 4.33 major examinations were given using google classroom, teacher uses simple terms for better understanding with 4.29 mean, then 4.28 mean for assignment were posted using google classroom and 4.21 mean was the lowest wit statement quizzes were given using google classroom.

Students' Participation

In whatever mode of learning, the students' maximum participation is the primordial

concern. Students' participation and engagement in all activities whether virtual or face to face may be attained by providing various activities that are relevant, meaningful and engaging. Interactive activities, integrated with technology, can be more effectively used in ELT classes to deliver better outcomes, which include enhanced motivation, active engagement, and willing participation of learners in the learning process. Longarela (2023). Students' participation significantly raised when there is presence of a contest in the course.

Table 6. Students' Participation

	Students' Participation	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1	Assessments were based on students participation in discussed lessons.	4.31	Often
2	Students are encouraged to participate at all times.	4.18	Often
3	The teacher allows interactive discussion.	4.32	Often
4	Teacher uses other applications like kahoot, quizziz and other applications.	4.12	Often
5	Teacher uses think pair share in classes.	3.82	Often
6	Teacher requires students to speak during discussions	4.34	Often
	Average Mean	4.18	Often

Reflected in table 6 are the students responses on questions pertaining to students participation. The statement with the lowest mean was teacher uses think –pair share in her classroom with a weighted mean of 3.82, followed by teacher uses other applications like kahoot, quizziz etc with 4.12 mean, then statement students are encourage to participate at all times with 4.18 weighted mean, followed by statement assessments were based on student participation in discussed lessons with 4.31 weighted mean and the highest mean was teacher requires students to speak during classes with 4.34 weighted mean. All statements generated a verbal interpretation of OFTEN. Students are subpar if they lack face to face interactions Franchi (2020) . Additionally, due to absence of interaction during online lessons, students are easily distracted by cellphones, dogs, delivered and other activities other than the ongoing online class Amadora (2020) Similarly, Bright and Vogler (2024) stated that stu-

dent preferences have shifted from a clear preference for in-person classes to more equal distribution across modalities, with reasons related to perceived better support for learning, self-regulation, and need for human interaction (face-to-face) versus flexibility (online).

Instructional Materials and Submission of Requirements

The learning process is affected by three (3) factors, the teacher who is facilitating the learning, the students who is beneficiary of learning and the learning environment which includes all things that affect the learners' learning process like the school, facilities and instructional materials. Instructional materials are crucial in enhancing cognition among students in face to face classes much more in flexible learning. There should be enough instructional materials in order to conform to millennium challenge of technological era and improve students academic performance Liliana (2024).

Table 7. Instructional Materials and Submission of Requirements

	Instructional Materials and Submission of Requirements	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1	Uploaded materials are accessible.	4.19	Often
2	Learning materials are in the format that requires low bandwidth to be accessed	4.31	Often
3	Learning materials are shared using cloud storage.	4.53	Often
4	Projects may be submitted using email.	4.26	Often
5	Assignments may be submitted using email.	4.54	Always
6	Assignments may be submitted using messenger	4.35	Often
7	Deadlines of assignments are clearly posted.	4.52	Often
8	Teachers provide enough time to comply with the requirements.	4.26	Often
9	Extensions deadlines are given for a valid reason.	4.52	Always
	Average Mean	4.18	Often

For instructional materials and submission of requirements, the statement with the highest mean was statement that assignments may be submitted using email with 4.54 weighted mean interpreted as always, followed by learning materials were shared using cloud storage with 4.53 weighted mean equivalent to always, then deadlines of assignments were clearly posted and extension deadlines are given for a valid reason as indicated by the weighted mean of 4.52 interpreted to be always, followed by assignments may be submitted using messenger with 4.35 weighted mean, learning materials are in the format that requires low bandwidth to be accessed with 4.31 weighted mean and the statement with the lowest mean was uploaded materials are accessible. Results suggests that teachers in flexible learning maybe very considerate to accommodate students concerns.

Challenges in Flexible Learning

To further gather data in terms of the experiences of students in flexible learning, respondents were asked through an online interview. The responses were treated using thematic analysis and there were six (7) themes generated. These were loads of assignments, poor weather conditions, gadgets and mobile phones, internet connections, conferencing platform, learning environment and power interruptions.

Loads of Assignments

Respondents stated that in flexible learning loads of assignments and activities are one of the challenges they have. Respondent No. 1 stated "*Load of assignments and activities*", respondent no. 94 said "*loaded activities*". Students enrolled in flexible learning mode are being challenged by loads of assignments and activities while respondent no 47 said "*number of activities in a week*"

This finding implies that students need to learn how to manage their time in order to accomplish assigned activities. Additionally, a study about Math students lived experiences in flexible learning stated that the absence of instructional materials that explain how to answer the activities and task provided is one of the difficulties encountered when engaging in

flexible learning Timario et. al. (2023). Moreover, students are concerned about learning and evaluation technique and excessive task load, technical problems and confinement Fawas (2021).

Poor Weather Conditions

The students are also experiencing problems in terms of poor weather conditions as stated by different respondents. Respondent no. 112 stated "poor weather affects internet connection", meanwhile respondent no.11 said "I usually get disconnected when poor weather condition".

The problem on poor weather condition is beyond the control of both students and teachers. At times when poor weather conditions prevail, educational institutions resorts to either suspend of classes or shift to asynchronous mode.

Gadgets and Mobile Phones

Students respondents also identified gadgets and mobile phones as one of the concerns for flexible learning. Some of the statements were those of respondent no. 2 "gadgets the students are using", respondent no. 18 "*lack of gadgets that can be used*", respondent no 32 "*connection device*" respondent no. 36 "*lagging device*", respondent no 42 "*lack of gadget, don't have proper storage and limited space*".

Students find it challenging to study online to lack of adequate equipment, limited studying space at home, student stress, and a lack of fieldwork and access to laboratories. The problem on digital divide is very much visible in flexible mode of learning. This is in contrary to the idea that use of smartphone as a learning tool improves remote education teaching and learning Day et. al (2021). Likewise, many students without smartphones or internet connectivity are left out Hossain (2020). Similarly, the use of smartphones as a learning tool enhances teaching and learning in distance education . Smartphone is crucial in maintaining an open communication line between the teacher and the learner Holland and Kellog (2020) . This is specially in a flexible learning mode of learning where there is absence of physical contact which is crucial part of the teaching and learning process.

Internet Connections

In terms of internet connections, the respondents stated the following, respondent no. 5 *"internet connection is my number one barrier that hinders me from learning especially when I am into listening to the discussion of my professors"*, respondent no. 7 *Weak internet connection*", respondent 8 *"Poor internet connection and sometimes disconnect in class"* respondent no. 9 *"Based on my experiences, only unstable internet sometimes causes my problems"*, respondent no. 10. *"poor connection"*, respondent no. 12 *"poor internet connection"*, respondent no. 12 *"most of the time internet connection"*, respondent no. 13 *"delay of internet connection"*.

These statements are evidences that students in flexible learning and having trouble connecting to the internet. Students experience in online learning is the lack of technological devices to be utilized. Learning through online classes requires a good gadget. It requires good quality smartphones, laptops, and computers that students can use Gocotano and Herodiaz (2021). Teachers and students need to climb mountains and trees just to access the internet. Averia (2020)

Conferencing platforms

Different schools use different conferencing platforms. In the country, the most popular conferencing platform are google meet and MS Teams. These are some of the concerns of the respondents regarding conferencing platforms. Respondent no. 29 stated *"changing of platform"*, respondent no. 30. *"Team is difficult to use not like google meet" (MS team is difficult to use not like google meet"* and respondent no. 104 said *"MS Teams did not work in other device"* and respondent no. 46 stated that *"unable to access learning materials due to high bandwidth"*.

This data indicated the need for schools to invest on learning platforms that are students friendly in terms of accessibility. Moreover, schools may subscribe to conferencing platforms that does not require high bandwidth.

Learning environment and power interruptions

Respondent no. 26 stated *"sudden brown-out/ blackout and noisy background"*,

respondent no. 34 *"loud environment"*, respondent no. 52 said *"she can't focus on discussion due to noisy background"*, respondent no. 61 *"noisy environment"* respondent no. 65 *"noises"*, respondent no. 70 *"The learning environment I am with. Sometimes there's so much background noise that distract my study place"*. Respondent no. 97 *"The problems i mostly encounter during online learning or online class are background noises from my environment sometimes it is hard to focus, i easily get distracted"*

The learning environment has a significant impact on the cognitive and affective engagement of students. Albert Bandura's social learning theory suggests that observation and modeling play a primary role in how and why people learn. Bandura's theory goes beyond the perception of learning being the result of direct experience with the environment UC Berley (2024). Additionally, learning occurs through observation, imitation, and modeling, with the learning environment playing a crucial role in shaping these processes. The learning environment in vocational education includes physical space, instructional methods, instructional materials, and social interactions. The physical space of the learning environment can have a significant impact on the educational experiences of students. A comfortable and well-equipped learning environment can boost students' comfort, motivation, and efficiency.

Conclusions

Flexible learning is an ideal mode of learning since it allows flexibility in almost all aspects of the teaching learning process. However, there are still several issues associated with the implementation of flexible learning even in higher education. The study revealed that majority of the students who experienced flexible learning during the pandemic has problems on internet connection, conferencing platform, assessment of learning, active engagement, gadgets and teachers online teaching strategies. The study also showed that the problem on digital divide is very visible since many students cannot join classes due to absence of smartphones. Results further stated that there is a need to invest on internet related facilities in order to ensure better teaching and

learning experience like the improvement of bandwidth of internet connections and also the importance of having learning platform that is user friendly. Educational institutions may also consider the following suggestions: (1) flexible learning is not fully realized in the country since there is problem in terms of internet connection. There is a clamor to strengthen the internet signal in the entire country; (2) continue the use of FB messenger since it allows access messages even on a free data mode. However, teachers and students may also use other means of communications like viber, telegram, whatsapp etc. (3) use conferencing platform that uses low bandwidth so it will be accessible even on a low data; (4) continue uploading pre-recorded discussion so students can learn at those times where internet connection is very good. Since college students are adult learners pre-recorded discussion will help a lot; (5) though it is easy to turn in google classroom teachers may consider using other platform in submission of students works; (6) teachers may use other application that may encourage engagement among adult learners when having synchronous discussions and (7) institutions may consider paperless submission like the use of cloud storage.

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