

READINESS OF APAYAO STATE COLLEGE-CONNER CAMPUS TO FLEXIBLE LEARNING MODALITIES

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to determine students' level of readiness for flexible learning modalities and to identify difficulties encountered in the implementation of flexible learning at Apayao State College. A questionnaire was used to gather data supported by Focus Group Discussion on the validation and reliability of gathered data. Results of the study showed that 90.41% of the respondents are aware of the new learning modalities. 75.38% prefer Offline Learning or the use of Worktexts and 97.33% used Smartphones in their e-Learning. Problems encountered include poor and/or fluctuating signals; lack of training for the new learning modalities; insufficient technological and financial resources; family and work responsibilities. Furthermore, the respondents were Quite Ready to Much Ready for the implementation of the flexible learning modalities although 69.92% said that e-learning does not provide sustainable, adequate, satisfactory, and quality education.

Keywords: Readiness, flexible learning modalities, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Section 3 of Presidential Proclamation No 929 s. 2020 which states that all government agencies to render full assistance and cooperation with each other to mobilize the necessary resources to undertake, critical, necessary and appropriate disaster response aid and measures to curtail, and eliminate the threat of COVID-19. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are therefore obliged to protect and ensure the continuity of learning while maintaining health amidst the pandemic.

As such, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) encourages HEIs to adopt flexible learning methods for the academic year 2021-2022, given that not all of the students have the required resources for online learning. Flexible Learning is the design and delivery of programs, courses, and learning interventions that address learners' unique needs in terms of place, pace, process, and products of learning. It ensures the continuity of inclusive and accessible education when the use of traditional modes of teaching is not feasible, as in the occurrence of national emergencies. Flexible Learning is a pedagogical approach allowing flexibility of time, place and audience including, but not solely focused on, the use of technology (SEAMEO, CHED 2020).

Apayao State College is the lone HEI in the province of Apayao. The college in its quest to maintain and sustain learning amidst the pandemic considering the above discussions implemented five (5) teaching modalities. First is online learning where ICT enabled learning modalities like cloud-subscribed, asynchronous-based teaching-learning for students with internet connectivity. The teacher provides materials, activities, tests in the Self-Directed Learning Support Management System (SeDi LMS) extended by the Isabela State University (ISU) that can be accessed by the students at any time. Offline (Modular) modality has been implemented as an option for students with limited ICT resources, mobile networks and connectivity. This modality involved the printing of modules, work texts and course guides to

students. Modules are distributed by week with corresponding due or submission dates. Another modality of facilitating learning implemented is through the Radio broadcasting network. With this modality, a School-on-the-Air through the Kasaranay Community Radio was launched covering the teaching of five (5) General Education Curriculum (GEC) subjects with a total air time of nine (9) hours a week. Another alternative delivery system implemented by the college is on-site teaching. Faculty members conducted community-based teaching for ASC Students in areas where the students cannot be reached by on-line modes and no communication signals. Lectures for classes with computation exercises/ skills and hands-on activities were conducted in Barangay halls per cluster of students on pre-identified schedules. The fifth modality is the establishment of Barangay E-Learning (BEL) Hubs in Selected Municipalities. The College established kiosks with computer desktops equipped with internet connections for selected barangays of Apayao. Memorandum of Agreements (MOAs) was forged with LGUs for this Community-based e-learning Hub/ Kiosk in selected Barangays known as Barangay E-Learning (BEL) Hubs.

Moreover, readiness, capability building and upgrading of teachers specifically capabilities on the use of various alternative deliveries both non-ICT and ICT platforms in education were taken into consideration by the school. Seminars and training were conducted to help faculty increase their knowledge, hone their skills and deepen their understanding of flexible learning, and be readily prepared to deal with the new normal education amidst the pandemic.

With the above discussions, it is imperative for the school to fully determine its readiness for flexible learning as it is being implemented during the pandemic. Thus, this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Arimbuyutan, et al. (2007) posit that the e-learning system is still in its early stages in the Philippines although open and distance learning had been documented in the Philippines since 1952. Adoption was slow due to underdeveloped infrastructure, high cost, and the Filipino trait of resisting a new and unfamiliar system. This was validated by Medallon's (2012) study of 350 new millennium higher education learners in the Philippines' Region IV-A that, given the technological advancements, there has not been much change in how students want to be taught. They adopt technology as a tool but still prefer the teacher's presence in the classroom. Contrary to these findings is the study by Garcia (2017) on college students in the Philippines who use e-learning through a learning management system (LMS). He found that factors affecting adoption are not limited to infrastructures such as internet connectivity, system interactivity, and integrated multimedia instruction; it also includes learner experience, skills, and attitudes. Good planning, which includes assessing the learner's skills and attitudes to eventually measure student readiness, will allow the opportunity for e-learning to be fully and comfortably adopted in the Philippines.

Arimbuyutan, et al. (2007) as cited by Reyes, et al. (2021) emphasized that because of the Filipino trait of being resistant to change, students struggle with adjusting to virtual learning environments from face-to-face learning during the pandemic. From the traditional teacher-centered to this student-centered approach (Rasouli, et al., 2016), questions on the

Filipino student's readiness for the new learning environment must be answered. Rohayani and Kurniabudi (2015) mentioned that skills and attitudes are the most significant factors that influence e-learning in HEIs. Navani and Ansari (2016) posit that the implementation of any e-learning program should be preceded by the measurement of readiness so that the institution is able to design a suitable and appropriate system to fit learning requirements. Similarly, Adams, et al. (2018) affirm that imposing an e-learning system without assessing student readiness and needs is indeed an unfortunate move that causes this system to fail in HEIs. According to Rivera (2018), students' lack of readiness for e-learning adds to the academic pressure. In fact, several studies found student readiness as a predictor of successful completion of online coursework (Kuo, et al., 2014; Demir 2015).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The study generally aims to determine the readiness of the Apayao State College-Conner campus to flexible learning modalities.

Specifically, it seeks answers to the following questions:

1. How aware are the students of the implementation of flexible learning modalities?
2. What is the student's level of readiness for the flexible learning modalities?
3. What are the difficulties encountered by the students in the implementation of flexible learning modalities?

METHODOLOGY

The study made use of the descriptive survey method of research. Five hundred thirty-two (532) students across the eight (8) programs offered in the campus served as respondents of the study. All of the respondents answered the survey questionnaire while fifty (50) were involved in the focus group discussions. The identification of respondents was purposive due to health protocols, restrictions, and lockdowns implemented in the communities and in the school. The main data gathering instrument is a survey questionnaire with 19-item questions that required either making a selection on a 4-point scale or making short open-ended statements. The questionnaire sought information on how participants worked with the flexible learning handout/brief—their reflections; its language clarity and clarity of information; if and how they approached the activities and if the brief assisted in giving a better understanding of the project; and if they worked with friends. Focus group interviews conducted followed a set of open-ended questions. They sought reasons for the rejection or preference for either the flexible learning option or the classroom option; the approach to doing projects and activities; how the visual diary project was approached; problems related to study, including studying in a second language; and general reflections on the flexible study. Answers that required further probing were followed up in an unstructured way, making the interview style semi-structured, conversational, and (on occasion) retrospective. To improve the validity and reliability of the data, all interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Self-Assessment on the Implementation of Flexible Learning

According to the data in table 1, 90.41% of the respondents say that they are aware of the new normal learning modalities being implemented by ASC and 9.59% respond that they are not aware. Also, most of the respondents says that they were ready with the new style of learning being implemented by the school covering 84.02% of the total respondents and they rely most on Facebook as a source of information for learning that covers a response of 54.89% since 89.66% of them have smartphones to use for online classes. As to the internet stability in the respondent's area, 39.85% can't acquire stable internet so they access signals outside their homes. Data shows that their internet load and gadgets were mainly provided by their parents. Also, survey results show that most of the respondents would find learning easily through watching and listening to the discussions by the teacher.

Table 1. Percentage (%) Distribution of Respondents based on Self-Assessment.

Questions	Frequency	Percentage
Are you aware of the new normal learning modalities implemented by ASC?		
Yes	481	90.41%
No	51	9.59%
Are you ready for the new normal learning modalities implemented by ASC?		
Yes	447	84.02%
No	85	15.98%
Where did you get the information on the learning modalities implemented by ASC?		
FB	292	54.89%
Messenger	155	29.14%
ASC personnel	85	15.97%
Which of the following learning modalities do you prefer?		
Online	92	17.29%
Offline	401	75.38%
Onsite Teaching/Learning	31	5.38%
Barangay e-learning (BEL) hubs	8	1.5%
Which of the following gadget/s do you personally own?		
Smartphone	477	89.66%
Tablet	10	1.88%
Laptop	40	7.52%
Radio	5	0.94%
How do you rate stability of the internet in your area?		
Very stable signal 24/7	36	6.77%
Slightly fluctuating/unsteady signal	164	30.83%
Poor signal	212	39.85%
Very poor signal	79	14.85%
No internet signal	41	7.71%
What is the type of internet connectivity in your area?		
5G	2	0.38%
4G	229	43.05%
3G	169	31.77%

2G	95	17.86%
LTE	7	1.32%
HSPDA	1	0.19%
EDGE	29	5.45%
From where do you access the internet?		
Home	228	42.86%
From other people's wi-fi that can be accessed from home	26	4.89%
Outside home	268	50.38%
Who finances your internet load?		
Parents	289	54.32%
Own earnings	218	40.98%
Scholarship	24	4.51%
If it becomes a necessity/requirement, what gadget/s can you get for yourself?		
Smartphone	378	71.05%
Tablet	30	5.64%
Laptop	119	22.37%
Desktop	3	0.56%
Radio	23	0.38%
How will you acquire the gadget/s?		
Buy using parent's money	305	57.33%
Buy using scholarship's stipend	391	7.33%
Buy using own money	188	35.34%
What powers your ICT and electronic gadgets at home?		
Electricity	518	97.33%
Solar power	11	2.07%
Hydro power	3	0.56%
What style do you find learning most easy?		
Listening	144	27.07%
Watching	21	3.95%
Watching and listening	217	40.79%
Reading	150	28.20%
Which teaching learning modality/process motivates you to learn most?		
Personal interaction	89	16.73%
Listening to discussion by the teacher	302	56.77%
Watching multimedia lessons	2	0.38%
Internet surfing	10	1.88%
Self-reading could help guides such as modules/worktexts	128	24.06%
Are there other people who can help you in understanding your lessons?		
Yes	121	22.74%
No	411	77.26%

Assessment on the Readiness with the Flexible Learning Modalities

It can be gleaned from Table 2 below that the respondents are Much Ready in terms of familiarity with e-learning, including its advantages and disadvantages; management of time in the conduct/participation of online classes; utilization of available learning management systems or resources; valuing and practicing social responsibility and legal use of ICT tools and resources; preparation and submission of requirements and outputs; and fostering a positive online learning environment with students and teachers. On the other

hand, the respondents were Quite Ready in terms of knowledge and skills in participating on-line classes; having ICT devices and stable internet for the on-line classes; effective utilization of the ICT devices; and motivation to utilize features of an on-line learning environment.

Table 2. Mean Assessment on the Readiness with the Flexible Learning Modalities.

	MEAN	DI
Familiarity of e-learning and its advantages and disadvantages.	2.53	Much Ready
Managing my time in the conduct/participation of/on online classes.	2.51	Much Ready
Using any of the available learning management system or resources effectively.	2.53	Much Ready
Valuing and practicing social responsibility and legal use of ICT tools and resources.	2.46	Much Ready
Preparing/submitting requirements/outputs	2.64	Much Ready
Fostering a positive online learning environment with students/teacher.	2.36	Much Ready
My knowledge and skills were required in conducting/participating in online classes	2.42	Quite Ready
Having computers and stable internet access intended for online classes.	2.10	Quite Ready
Using devices (smartphone, laptop, tablets) for my online classes with effectiveness.	2.40	Quite Ready
Motivating myself to utilize features of an online learning environment	2.39	Quite Ready
OVER-ALL MEAN	2.43	Quite Ready

Problems Encountered in the Implementation of Flexible Learning

As gleaned in Table 3 below, almost all (97.18%) of the respondents have not attended trainings, workshops or course related to e-learning. Moreover, majority (85.34%) uses smartphones in their e-learning. This only shows that the main limitation for the respondents was the lack of necessary trainings/workshops before the implementation of the different Flexible learning modalities. This is coupled by the lack of needed ICT gadgets/equipment which were very important during the e-learning activities. However, the respondents were responsible enough to compensate the insufficiency of trainings by surfing in the internet to better understand their modules and updating the social media while taking on-line classes with 74.25% and 12.41%, respectively.

On the other hand, the most common factor affecting the respondents' learning were insufficient technology resources (72.03%) which are mainly smartphones; insufficient financial resources (59.80%); family and work responsibilities with 37.59% and 35.49%, respectively. Finally, the respondents did not really think that E-learning could provide sustainable, adequate, satisfactory and quality education with 69.92%.

Table 3. Responses/Feedbacks on problems encountered.

	Frequency	Percentage
Attended trainings/workshops on e-learning		

Yes	14	2.63%
No	578	97.37%
Attended a course in basic education or college or graduate school through online/distance education or e-learning/teaching platforms.		
Yes	15	2.82%
No	577	97.18%
Device/s use in E-Learning/Teaching platforms		
Laptop	62	11.65%
Desktop	6	1.13%
Tablet	10	1.88%
Smartphone	454	85.34%
Management of time while learning/teaching remotely		
Playing with gadget when free	35	6.58%
Surfing the net to better understand the modules	395	74.25%
Updating the social media while taking online classes	66	12.41%
Eating food / binging	21	3.95%
Taking quick sleep / nap	15	2.82%
Factors affecting process of learning and completing the coursework		
Insufficient technology resources	412	72.03%
Family responsibilities	215	37.59%
Insufficient financial resources	342	59.80%
Work responsibilities	203	35.49%
Do you think E-Learning provides sustainability, adequacy, satisfaction and quality of education?		
Yes	162	30.08%
No	372	69.92%

CONCLUSION

Data gathered and analyzed reveal that generally, the students are aware of the implementation of new normal learning modalities. The students claimed that they are ready for the new normal learning modalities and their readiness is described as 'quite ready.' Most of them prefer the offline modality of the different modalities implemented by the school in flexible learning since basically, they want to learn through watching and listening to the discussion of the teacher. Students' preference to offline modality is also attributed to several factors such as poor internet connectivity, having smartphones as the dominant ICT gadget owned by the students, and the expense of buying ICT gadgets and internet load. Moreover, the students do not have training in e-learning, distance education, and online learning platforms. Insufficient technology and financial resources are the top two problems of the students which contribute to their assessment that e-learning does not provide sustainability, adequacy, satisfaction, and quality of education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Re-enforcement of students' knowledge and readiness of the different learning modalities under flexible learning can be done through the conduct of seminars and training on e-learning, flexible learning, and online learning platforms. The school may opt to lend or allow the students to use ICT equipment such as laptops, desktops, and printers to learners in specific and secured locations. Further improvement and encouragement of mass utilization by the students of the school-established BEL-Hubs can be a great solution to the insufficiency of technology resources. In terms of poor internet connectivity, this may be addressed or solved in partnership with the local or provincial government as this is a municipal/provincial problem.

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