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The Perception on the Implementation of Flexible Learning in the Time of Covid 19

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Abstract

The rapid spread of Corona Virus 2019 known as COVID 19 has brought disturbance to a large number of people's lives and economic stability. It has greatly challenged the people's holistic way of life with uncertainties considering the significant public health risks COVID-19 poses. This pandemic has affected the global educational systems which led to delve into advanced teaching-learning tools or modalities that would help bring about the transition from the usual face-to-face mode to flexible learning. The objective of this study was to find out the perception of the respondents on the implementation of Flexible Learning in the delivery of nursing education programs as the basis for the recommended course of actions in the schools of nursing. This is a descriptive-quantitative study, which utilized a self-rated standardized questionnaire—The flexibility questionnaire developed by Bergamin et al., (2012). The questionnaires were purposively administered to a total of sixty-six (66) respondents composed of the deans, coordinators/program heads, and faculty members of selected nursing schools in Metro Manila. The results had shown that the respondents agreed to all indicators mentioned in the survey tool. It has therefore shown in this study that respondents desired an approach to flexible learning in which teaching and learning could exercise regulation and jurisdiction.

Keywords: Flexible Learning, COVID 19, Time Management, Teacher Contact, Content

Background of the Study

Flexible learning is designed towards achieving the desired outcome of providing a suitable learning environment that best complements the learning needs, patterns, and styles of students, utilizing both technological and non-technological tools and/or modalities. The United Nations Education Agenda for the year 2030 encourages all nations to develop well-balanced schooling frameworks that offer Flexible Learning Pathways for their students. Across a number of countries, various schools are resorting to advanced flexible learning spaces to improve academic performance, as an alternative to the traditional classroom settings.

Moreover, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic which has begun in December of 2019 has caused major impact as well as disruptions to a great number of people, organizations, and institutions worldwide. Subsequently, this pandemic has affected educational systems globally, resulting in the nearby closures of several educational institutions, schools, colleges, and universities. In effect, these have led to an immediate response to look for other innovative teaching-learning tools and/or modalities that would facilitate the transition from the previous method of teaching to innovative teaching.

In addition, this pandemic has brought about enormous insufficiencies and imbalances in the education systems—from the internet and online accessibility, technological gadget and device, and the supportive environments needed to focus on learning, up to the misalignment between resources and needs. Even further, teachers across the education levels—from basic education to higher education, also had to become accustomed to new educational models and methods of delivery of teaching, for which they may not have been trained.

Locally, as per CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 04, Series of 2020, the Commission on Higher Education disseminated Guidelines on the Implementation of Flexible Learning to be applied by the public and private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) beginning the academic year 2020 to 2021 and may be extended upon consultation with the partners concerned and upon review of the Commission. This document has contained pertinent data and recommendations for the application of

flexible learning and teaching both for the undergraduate and graduate programs.

This study was conceived to determine the perception of the respondents concerning the implementation of Flexible Learning in the delivery of nursing education programs as the basis for the recommended course of actions in the schools of nursing. It is in this regard that flexible learning can certainly ensure the continuity of the inclusive and accessible process of receiving or giving systematic instructions when the use of traditional modes of teaching is not capable of being done during the presence of widespread crises—such as in the case of COVID-19 pandemic.

Likewise, it is also hoped that this study would serve as one of the bases for sustaining the value offered by various educational institutions to remain relevant, and constantly reinventing and innovating their learning environments that would expand and complement the delivery of learning and that would enhance the student-teacher relationship. Lastly, considering the challenges and the magnitude of the crisis posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in the education system, this study may serve as a source of insight and realization towards policy experiences, data, and analyses, which could pave the way toward the establishment of relevant educational policy modifications.

Considering the continuously changing situations of our learners, educators, and learning institutions, this and other related studies could provide us a better understanding of possible or available options that would allow customizations of teaching and learning delivery modes that are more responsive to students' needs towards quality and equitable education. These give the academic institutions possible alternatives for their educators to select from, as to whichever delivery mode would be most suitable to them considering the learning content, timetable, and accessibility.

Corona Virus 2019

The COVID-19 pandemic isn't simply impacting networks legitimately, but its monetary outcomes have greatly affected the existence of a greater number of families and people. The prompt ailments, financial effect, and unsettling influence of the social and the whole structure over

the world is aggravating a huge widespread passionate medical crisis (Ghebreyesus 2020).

Similarly, Daniel (2020), expresses that Coronavirus is the best test that government- funded training frameworks have at any point stood up to. Various legislatures have requested many schools to stop face-to-face lessons for the majority of students, anticipating that they should shift to flexible learning and virtual instructing.

According to United Nations Policy Brief: COVID 19 (2020), the COVID emergency has incited an intermittence of existing wellbeing frameworks over the globe, which have negative impacts and affect enthusiastic prosperity in coming months, and for specific years.

In the same manner, where families are restricted in their homes by COVID-19, guardians and watchmen may have significantly on edge with regards to their monetary future, thus, learning at home isn't simple, particularly for students who have decrease motivation. Such place usually has deficiency on the devices and network that more luxurious families underestimate which increases the issue (Daniel 2020).

Literature Review

Flexible Learning

According to Shurville et al. (2008), flexible learning is a group of instructive methods of reasoning and frameworks, concerned about giving students expanded decision, ease, and personalization in meeting the demands of the student. In addition, flexible learning help students to make decisions as to where, when, and how learning happens.

This can be supported by the study of Cassidy, A. et al., (2016). According to this study flexible learning is an informational approach that permits individuals for flexibility of the time, place, and audience, which includes technological and non-technological parameters.

Based on the study by Tucker, R. & Morris, G. (2012), the ability to use flexible education into instructing models by the professionals in the different disciplines, the procedure utilizes different flexible learning tools to explain the inclinations of students to overcome any issues between the student desires for adaptability and their instructor's eagerness as well as

capability to give teachings inside the restrictions in the academic setting. The findings recommend an educated beginning stage for teachers and other inventive disciplines from which to cross the challenges innate to deal with flexibility in a relentless technological world.

Additionally, flexible learning as an idea can have numerous implications for various people and associations. The names—open learning, distance learning, and flexible learning are sometimes given the same connotations (Wade et al. 1994, Lewis 1995, Jones & Rushford 1996). While open learning refers to portray a modality that is flexibly intended in singular necessities, Lewis & Spenser (1986) clarify flexible learning as frequently used in the arrangement that attempts to eliminate obstructions which hinder participation in greater conventional level for additionally proposes a student-centered way of thinking. Whereas, distance-learning has comparable qualities with other modalities, this infers topographical distance between the student and the giving organization. Typically, the learning can occur with the guide of self-instruction bundled by many resources which may include modules and videos.

Likewise, the broad features of flexible learning made it difficult to find the real meaning. Palmer emphasized the scope of using the components of flexible learning that can result to the end that almost any instructing and learning design could profess to be adaptable in some respect; hence he mentioned that people should be prudent in using the term flexibility. However, the insufficient knowledge about the meaning and proper understanding of flexible learning has resulted in confounding blended instructive typologies, such as distinguishing the part in a course that is conveyed in a non-customary manner is just like being adaptable, or comparing distance schooling with flexible learning (Palmer, 2011). In addition, Hart (2000) also emphasized the importance to set apart “flexible delivery” which is digital or low-cost driven strategies from the real “flexible learning” which is the educational objective. Hart explained the eight primary principles in the implementation of policy in flexible learning. These were: (1) Flexible access—learners are allowed to work independently and to attend classes at any time; (2) Recognition of prior learning—allows approval for formal or informal education, such as experiences and trainings in the work setting; (3) Flexible content—simple, structured courses with content that can be managed and controlled like modules; (4) Flexible participation—capable to engage in any activity;

(5) Flexible teaching and learning methods—where students are given the freedom in how, when and where they learned; (6) Flexible resources—available materials that can be used for flexible learning; (7) Flexible assessment—the manner and form of student performance that demonstrate how well they learned and applied the learning in a variety of contexts; (8) Ongoing evaluation—consists of different forms of assessment of flexible learning in the curriculum including the utilization of resources that ensure the importance of developing or revising the modules and elements in the courses as necessary (Hart, 2000).

Therefore, learning may not always be flexible considering it coordinates a portion of the attributes above. The critical components of really flexible education are the flexibility of figuring out how to students' requirements and conditions and the educator's job as somebody who screens, coordinates, and manages activities towards objectives of data obtaining growing aptitude, and personal growth (Paris & Paris, as cited in Bergamin et al., 2012).

Autonomy in and control over one's learning process can be seen as a condition for self-regulated learning. There are several categories and dimensions for flexible learning; following professional publications, time, location, lesson content, pedagogy method, learning style, organization, and course requirements are all elements to consider. Using these categories and the dimensions of flexible learning, ten experts revised the comprehensibility of these items that led to a solution with three fixed factors: flexibility of time management, teacher contact, and content. Bergamin et al. (2012) developed and validated a questionnaire for an open and distance learning setting. The results show the positive effects of flexible learning on self-regulated learning strategies. Generally, groups that have high flexibility in learning indicate that they use more learning strategies than groups with low flexibility.

In the said study, the means of the relevant scales, factors of flexible learning—(FTM) flexibility of time management, (FTC) flexibility of teacher contact, and (FC) flexibility of content, and learning strategies (C) cognitive, (MC) metacognitive, and (RB) resource-based were calculated. They have used the classification criterion percentiles to divide the sample into three mostly equal groups (high, medium, and low flexibility) and calculated an ANOVA to analyze the differences. Moreover, a nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance

when a Levene's test indicated non-homogenous variances across groups was utilized. To evaluate the direction of the differences, Tukey's HSD post hoc analysis was applied.

Given that they have postulated a positive relationship between flexible learning and self-regulated learning strategy, they formulated the hypotheses as follows: Perceiving high flexibility in learning of (H1) time management, (H2) teacher contact, (H3) content, and (H4) the overall score of flexibility in learning provides significant positive effects on the reported cognitive, metacognitive, and resource-based learning strategies.

Conceptual Framework

This study on flexible learning was guided by the concept of Bergamin et al., (2012), that flexible learning coincides with the ability of the students to appreciate what, when, and how learning occurs. This implies beforehand learners are required to possess skills of autonomous and self-regulated learning to engage effectively in learning activities in terms of time, pace, and content. That means to say, the primary role of the educators is to help learners develop the ability to be "self-directed" when offering flexible learning (Sadler-Smith & Smith, 2004).

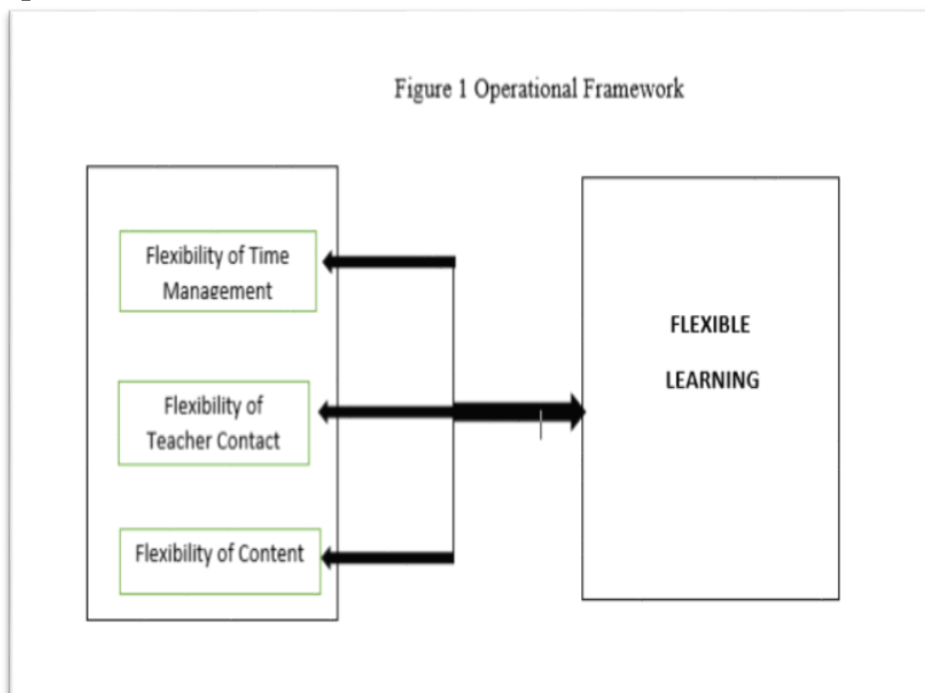
In the study conducted by Bergamin, et al., (2012), the concept of flexible learning in open and distance learning (ODL) was looked into and its relationship to learning strategies in the context of self-regulation was examined. Their argument was based on the fact that flexible learning is a core issue for distance education along with other recently introduced learning strategies in schools. They expected to obtain a set of indicators that enable students to engage in flexible learning by using self-regulated learning strategies.

The three (3) factors of flexible learning—(FTM) flexibility of time management, (FTC) flexibility of teacher contact, and (FC) flexibility of content were evaluated in a traditional learning setting as well as in an open and distance education program, to determine its overall perceived flexibility. Each of the three factors was further examined based on the three (3) learning strategies: (C) cognitive, (MC) metacognitive, and (RB) resource-based.

Utilizing hypermedia and new e-learning environments, Bergamin, et al., (2012) have seen the realization and possibility of flexibility in distance learning which distinguishes modern distance learning from the traditional on-campus tuition. It is in this perspective that self-regulation of learning has become a relevant concern. Wherein, it was asserted that students in an e-learning environment would have to be highly self-regulated to be effective learners. It was proposed that self-regulation is a critical factor for the success of learners working in online learning environment.

In the light of the aforementioned discussions about flexible learning, the researchers were led to the scheme as proposed by Bergamin et al. (2012) that aimed to clear the air with an empiric investigation about the relationship between flexible and self-regulated learning in open and distance universities, to serve as the guiding model of the study. It emphasized flexibility in learning which provides the individual's opportunities for volitional control and a collection of strategies and promotes persistence in the face of difficulties.

Operational Framework



In the current study, employing the concepts of Bergamin et al., (2012) the researchers primarily focused on the perceived flexibility of (FL) flexible learning based on its three (3) factors—(FTM) flexibility of time management, (FTC) flexibility of teacher contact, and (FC) flexibility of content, among nurse educators—comprised of Academic Deans, Level Heads/Coordinators, and Faculty Members, in selected educational institutions in Metro Manila. Wherein, each of the three factors was assessed based on sets of related statements or scenario that would measure respective flexibility according to the perception of the respondents.

Research Methodology

Research Design and Approach. A Quantitative descriptive design was used in this study. This research design was utilized to describe the perception of the respondents on the implementation of Flexible Learning. Data were gathered with the use of self-rated standardized questionnaires.

Research Participants. The participants of the study were the deans, coordinators/program heads, and faculty of different nursing schools in Metro Manila.

Sampling Design. The research utilized the Convenience sampling method over a non-representative subset of a larger population. Convenience sampling enables the researchers to relatively easy get a sample especially in this time of pandemic. The researchers constructed the sample to determine the perception of the respondents and have surveyed only whoever is available online that finally resulted for a total of 66 sample size. Inclusion criteria include at least one (1) year of teaching experience.

Data Collection. The researchers secured the approval from the Ethics Board of San Beda University. The researchers also sought permission from the respondents thru online. Data gathering took place from February to March 2021. Survey questionnaires were distributed to the participants. The participants were informed about the objectives, the potential risks, and benefits of participation in the study. The participants were given ample time to give their responses to the study. The consent of the participants was obtained before data collection.

Collected documents were secured, kept confidential, and were only accessible to the researchers. The collected documents will be destroyed after five (5) years from the date of publication. The study was presented during the San Beda University Research Summit last April 2021.

Measurement and Instrumentation

The Flexibility questionnaire was developed by Bergamin et al., (2012), to measure flexibility. The participant's perception of flexibility was indicated for each item on a 5-point Likert scale where 1= Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3= Neutral; 4= Agree and 5=Strongly Agree. The questionnaire has three dimensions: the flexibility of time management, the flexibility of teacher contact, and the flexibility of content. The pilot study was done and base on the results of the questionnaire reliability, it was excellent. Table 1 shows the Questionnaire Reliability Analysis.

Table 1.

Computed Value of Cronbach Alpha of the Questionnaire Items

Items	Cronbach alpha	Remarks
Flexibility of Time Management	0.819	Good
Flexibility of Teachers Contact	0.889	Good
Flexibility of Content	0.904	Excellent
Overall	0.943	Excellent

Note: Acceptable if Cronbach alpha is greater than the 0.70 minimum value

The table shows the computed value of Cronbach's alpha. The value of alpha for items Flexibility of Time Management (0.819), and Flexibility of Teachers Contact (0.889) are "Good" while item Flexibility of Content has a value of (0.904) which is "Excellent". The overall value of alpha of all the items combined is 0.943 which is excellent, indicates that this questionnaire tool used in this study has passed the reliability test.

Data Preparation and Analysis

The data gathered from the participants were encoded utilizing a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The Flexibility questionnaire was utilized to determine the perception of the respondents on the implementation of flexible learning in the delivery of nursing education programs according to the three key areas. The average score of the respondents was computed using descriptive statistics, particularly Weighted Mean.

Results

Dimensions of Flexible Learning

The following tables show the perception of the respondents toward flexible learning according to the three (3) identified the key areas: Table 1—flexibility of time management, Table 2—flexibility of teacher contact, and Table 3—flexibility of content, in the delivery of nursing education programs.

Table 2.

Respondents' Perception of Flexibility of Time Management

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
flexibility of time management can decide when to teach	4.27	Agree
flexibility of time management can define the learning pace	4.24	Agree
flexibility of time management can repeat the subject matter at will	4.09	Agree
flexibility of time management can arrange the learning time	4.12	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	4.18	Agree

Table 2 shows the respondents' perception of the flexibility of time management. It is shown in that all indicators such as "flexibility of time management can decide when to teach", "flexibility of time management can define the learning pace", "flexibility of time management can repeat the subject matter at will" and "flexibility of time management can arrange the learning time" are all interpreted as "Agree" having a weighted mean of 4.27, 4.24, 4.09 and 4.12, respectively. The overall weighted mean is 4.18 interpreted as "Agree". This implies that in general, respondents often highly prioritized flexibility of time management particularly goal setting, prioritization, organization, and management of stress. Wherein, almost every time it matters to them to have short- and long-term goals. They are also likely to assess what needs to be achieved within a given timeframe, and rate tasks according to their importance. They are often well-organized and are likely to maintain an up-to-date calendar and keep a tidy work or study environment. Likewise, they often see the need to find healthy ways to manage the pressures of work while maintaining productivity to make working and/or teaching more efficient.

Table 3.

Respondents' Perception of Flexibility of Teacher Contact

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
flexibility of teacher contact can contact the teachers at any time	3.82	Agree
flexibility of teacher contact can use different ways of contacting their teachers	4.30	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	4.06	Agree

Table 3 shows the respondents' perception of the flexibility of teacher contact. It is shown that all indicators are both interpreted as "Agree". These indicators are "*flexibility of teacher contact can contact the teachers at any time*" and "*flexibility of teacher contact can use different ways of contacting their teachers*" has a weighted mean of 3.82 and 4.30. The overall weighted mean is 4.06 interpreted as "Agree" which implies that flexibility of teacher contact is likely to create a safe learning environment

with supportive relationships and value for teamwork. This likewise often ensures that communication between teacher and student helps improve the teaching and learning process. Almost every time, effective communication can have an impact on the students' academic progress, feelings of self-worth, perceptions of school, and their career.

Table 4.

Respondents' Perception of Flexibility of Content

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
flexibility of content can focus the topics of the class	4.21	Agree
flexibility of content can prioritize topics in teaching	4.32	Agree
flexibility of content can choose different learning forms, which includes on-campus study, online study, and self-study	4.26	Agree
flexibility of content can study topics of special interest	4.18	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	4.24	Agree

Table 4 shows the respondents' perception of the flexibility of content. It is stated from the table that all indicators such as "*flexibility of content can focus the topics of the class*", "*flexibility of content can prioritize topics in teaching*", "*flexibility of content can choose different learning forms, which includes on-campus study, online study and self-study*" and "*flexibility of content can study topics of special interest*" are interpreted as "Agree" having a weighted mean of 4.21, 4.32, 4.26 and 4.18, respectively. The overall weighted mean is 4.24 interpreted as "Agree" which implies that flexibility of content has high priority toward motivating the learners by arousing curiosity; thereby simultaneously developing subject and language competency, along with cultural awareness, and essential and innovative skills. This dimension likely provides the learners/students the tools, training, information, and support

they need to create and enhance learning relevance and efficacy—either through school-provided and/or personal technology, which offers choices about where, when, and how learning occurs.

Discussion

Based on the results of this study, there were different ways of contacting teachers. Learners can contact their teachers at any time. The teachers have an important part in the implementation of the online learning environment. Instructing in an online course includes more than duplicating study hall methodologies in an alternate structure (University of Washington, 2004).

Likewise, the flexibility of content can have many options and may be applied by using different learning modalities which can be on-campus study, online study, and self-study.

Nonetheless, according to Daniel (2020), the most significant alteration, for those accustomed to educating in lecture rooms continuously, is to impose asynchronous learning. For the majority parts of learning and educating, teachers and students do not need to communicate at the same time. Asynchronous provides educators flexibility in getting ready for the learning resources and empowers students to get the requests at home. Asynchronous learning operates best in computerized designs. Educators do not require to distributing the learning materials at a set period, they might post online for on-demand access. The teachers can extract the course materials using wikis, web diaries, and email at their convenience. Educators may guard student's collaboration occasionally and making online plans for students with explicit requirements and queries. Making an asynchronous progressed study will give educators and students more space to move around.

Furthermore, flexible learning is not a method of study but a principle to be valued. Hence, it ought to be noticed that while technology is a definite crucial component for flexible learning, it does not only refer to the utilization of technologies to meet the requirements in the learning climate (Li & Wong, 2018).

Conclusions and Recommendations

It appears in this study that respondents have a big deal of inclination towards flexible learning. The concepts and applicability of flexible learning may have several meanings and relevance among different individuals, organizations, institutions, and societies. On the same regard, because of this undertaking that the teaching and learning processes and strategies are progressively being explored and liberated beyond the boundaries of time, pace, and place of study.

The commitment towards learning might depend on the students but the duty to set an appealing, stimulating, and responsive flexible learning climate as well as to upgrade the range of abilities for students—such as basic reasoning, group work, and relational abilities, is eventually the duty of the instructor and the educational organizations and institutions. Thus, the researchers would like to recommend to the administrators to provide a learning management system that will promote and give quality education to the learners in the time of the pandemic.

For the teachers, the researchers would like to recommend more opportunities to effectively engage in the flexible learning process using both technological and non-technological tools.

The minimal quantity of participants in this study may nevertheless be regarded as its limitation. For this reason, to further enhance and strengthen the findings of the study, it would be recommended to conduct the same study over a bigger population and among a wider group of participants across different courses or programs.

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