Preparedness of SUCs in CALABARZON in the Implementation of Flexible Learning in the New Normal

Rhodora S. Crizaldo, **Jake Raymund F. Fabregar**[*], **Jovan B. Alitagtag**
College of Education/Graduate School and Open Learning College
Cavite State University, Indang, Cavite, Philippines
[*]Email: jrffabregar@cvsu.edu.ph

Abstract

The study was an attempt to provide an assessment on the level of preparedness of state universities and colleges (SUCs) in CALABARZON in the implementation of flexible learning in the new normal. The study also looked into the significant differences between the perceived assessment of the faculty members and students on the SUC's level of preparedness on the implementation of flexible learning in the new normal; priority areas/skills which the SUCs should consider and strategies which may be proposed in the implementation of flexible learning. This study utilized mix-method of research design. Responses were obtained using a researcher-made questionnaire and were interpreted using statistical tools such as Mean and Mann-Whitney U Test. The findings revealed that the level of preparedness of SUCs in CALABARZON in the implementation of Flexible Learning in the New Normal was verbally interpreted as "Prepared" as perceived by both faculty and student respondents. It was further revealed that there is a significant difference between the assessment of the faculty members and students on the SUC's level of preparedness on the implementation of flexible learning in the new normal. The corpus of data revealed 10 themes that account for the priority areas/skills vis a vis strategies for the implementation of flexible learning in the new normal from the perspectives of the faculty and students of SUCs in the region. The themes could be summarized into 10 thematic areas that are crucial in the implementation of flexible learning in the new normal: 1) student competency; 2) health and well-being; 3) student support and information; 4) course design; 5) pedagogy; 6) professional development; 7) assessment; 8) organization; 9) resources, and 10) school-community partnerships and linkages. These themes led to a knowledge creation of Flexible Learning Framework in the context of higher education in the new normal. There is need for SUCs to strengthen the implementation of flexible learning that entails opportunities to reshape education; learning delivery and the operation of educational institutions.

Keywords: preparedness, state universities and colleges, implementation, flexible learning, new normal

Introduction

As a transboundary crisis, COVID-19 pandemic has caused a significant challenge to various sectors in major parts of the world as it permeated severe socio-economic consequences and disruptions to functioning sectors like education. The current scenario has prompted the policy makers and education leaders to come up with the timely response in adapting to the new normal in education. During a virtual meeting of the House committee on higher and technical education, CHED Chair Prospero de Vera said the "more practical solution" amid the coronavirus threat is to move toward flexible learning, which uses digital and non-digital technology. (Cervantes, 2020).

From a practical standpoint, flexible learning options will provide alternative, tailored education and support to the learners who might be disengaged from mainstream education system because of the pandemic. Mehrbach and Beingessner (2018) explain further that flexible learning environments imply that the school adapts the use of resources such as staff, space, and time to best support personalization. It's a combination of different structures, instructional strategies, and curricular approaches that allow learners to have access to what they need when they need it, to know what their next steps are in their learning, and to pursue areas of strength and interest.

However, the implementation of flexible learning arrangement in most SUCs in the country is yet open to varied reactions from policy makers, leaders, teachers, student organizations and parents in the attempt to put together the on-the-go deal of implementation in the middle of the crisis. Some legislators have pushed the "no vaccine, no classes policy", yet according to CHED Chair De Vera, the universities should design the delivery of their flexible learning based on the situation of the students, the faculty, as well as the school for a more inclusive learning process amid the health crisis (San Juan, 2020). He also added that CHED will not allow schools that will put the students at a disadvantage.

At this point in time, there is no substantial body of research and best practice evidence on evaluating the crisis governance strategies of every SUC in the country. The optimal use of the flexible learning arrangement will still be unique to each of the SUC given their varied or quite limited resources, extent of readiness and/or preparedness of the teachers and students and stakeholders and in terms of various ways of responding to crisis management. Hence, this project aimed to provide an assessment of the level of preparedness of state universities and colleges (SUCs) in CALABARZON in the implementation of flexible learning arrangement in the new normal. This research hopes to provide foresight policies and guidelines in facilitating flexible learning during educational disruption. Essentially, this research is a response to SDG goal of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Objectives of the Study

The study was an attempt to provide an assessment on the level of preparedness of state universities and colleges (SUCs) in CALABARZON in the implementation of flexible learning in the new normal.

Specifically, the study aimed to answer the following questions:

What is the level of preparedness of SUCs on the implementation of flexible learning in the new normal as perceived by:

Faculty members

Students?

Is there a significant difference between the perceived assessment of the faculty members and students on the SUC's level of preparedness on the implementation of flexible learning in the new normal?

What priority areas and/or skills should SUCs consider in the implementation of flexible learning in the new normal?

What strategies can be proposed for the effective implementation of flexible learning in SUCs?

Methodology

This section presents the methods and procedures used in this study. It includes the research design, population and sampling technique, instrumentation, data gathering procedures, and treatment of data.

Research Design

This study used the mixed-method of research design with the aim of generating findings from both the qualitative and quantitative approaches on the preparedness of SUCs in CLABARZON in the implementation of flexible learning.

Sampling

The target populations were faculty members and students in state universities in CALABARZON during the academic year 2020-2021. The researchers used Stratified Proportional Sampling as the method of data collection and the retrieval rate of the survey questionnaires was 76%.

Cochran's formula was used to get the sample size of the study. There is a total of 4,307 faculty members and 126,924 students in SUCs in CALABARZON, totaling to 131,231 population. The study comprised a total of 737 respondents obtained from SUCs in CALABARZON, namely: Batangas State University, Cavite State University, and Laguna State Polytechnic University, Southern Luzon State University, and University of Rizal System. SUCs were coded as SUC1, 2 and so on in the following tables and do not follow the same order in the previous statement in order to keep the confidentiality of the data and the SUCs under study.

As shown in Table 1, out of the 353 total sampling for the faculty-participants, 274 faculty-participants responded to the survey obtaining 78 percent retrieval.

Table 1. Distribution of the faculty-participants sampling and actual number of survey questionnaire retrieval per SUC

State University/College	Population Size	Sample Size	Percentage (%)	Actual Number of Survey Questionnaires Retrieval	Percentage (%)
SUC 1	972	80	23	0	0
SUC 2	1,508	124	35	124	100
SUC 3	884	72	21	72	100
SUC 4	321	26	7	26	100
SUC 5	622	52	14	52	100
TOTAL	4,307	353	100%	274	78%

Table 2. Distribution of the student population and sample per SUC

State University/College	Population Size	Percentage (%)	Sample Size	Actual Number of Survey Questionnaires Retrieval	Percentage (%)
SUC 1	33,076	26	100	0	0
SUC 2	43,634	34	132	132	100
SUC 3	24,248	19	73	73	100
SUC 4	7,303	6	22	22	100
SUC 5	18,663	15	56	56	100
TOTAL	126, 924	100 %	384	283	74%

Table 2 displays a total of 384 sample size for the student-participants and out of this total sampling, 283 was the actual retrieval rate equivalent to 74 percent retrieval.

Instruments of the Study

For the quantitative part, the study used a researcher-made survey questionnaire converted into a google survey form. This survey form was used to generate the responses of both the faculty

and student-participants on the level of preparedness of SUCs in the implementation of flexible learning.

The level of preparedness was evaluated using a 4-point Likert Scale: strongly agree (4) , which means the item is highly prepared; agree (3), which means prepared; disagree (2), which means it is almost prepared; and strongly disagree (1), which means it is not prepared. The scale for scoring and interpreting the SUC's preparedness is shown below:

Response Scale	Degree of Intensity	Descriptive Interpreta-tion	Mean Interval
4	Strongly agree	Highly Prepared	3.50 and above
3	Agree	Prepared	2.50 - 3.49
2	Disagree	Almost Prepared	1.50 - 2.49
1	Strongly disagree	Not Prepared	1.00-1.49

For the qualitative part, semi-structured guide questions were included in the survey instrument which aimed to elicit the participants' views and opinions on the priority areas which SUCs should consider in the implementation of flexible learning and proposed strategies for the effective implementation of flexible learning in the new normal.

Prior to the conduct of the survey, the researcher-made survey questionnaire and semi-structured guide questions were subjected to content validation. The evaluators were composed of a faculty member and/or expert in the fields of Educational Management, Research and Curriculum Development.

Data Gathering Procedures and Data Analysis

The study employed the mixed method research design, using both the quantitative and qualitative approaches. Upon proper endorsement from the CHED Region IV Office and survey protocols and permit from the concerned authorities of the University, the online survey was conducted through the social media platform (FB and instant messaging).

The online survey was conducted from September to October 2020 from a total of 557 participants from SUCs in CALABARZON. Upon retrieval of the survey forms, the data were interpreted and analyzed using mean and Mann Whitney-U test.

The study also entailed the qualitative interpretation of the responses on the priority areas which SUCs should consider in the implementation of flexible learning and proposed strategies for the effective implementation of flexible learning in the new normal. The data were subjected to thematic analysis with the aim to discover and examine the themes or patterns of meaning within the data. The corpus of data and analysis were also subjected to Interrater's test of reliability to validate the analysis and findings.

Ethical considerations were observed all throughout the duration of the research. Consent of the participants was sought prior to any conduct of survey or any participation in phase of the research. Likewise, the study maintained the confidentiality of the data and information obtained from the participants and adhered also to the provisions in the data privacy law.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings on the level of preparedness of the SUCs in the implementation of flexible learning, the differences on the assessment of the faculty and student-participants, the priority areas/skills which the SUCs should consider and strategies which may be proposed in

the implementation of flexible learning and the discussion of the underlying implications of these findings to some theories and pedagogical practices in higher education.

Level of Preparedness of SUCs in the implementation of Flexible Learning

The level of preparedness of SUCs in the implementation of flexible learning in the new normal was measured based on the responses of the faculty and students on a 4-point Likert scale researcher-made questionnaire patterned after the CHED Draft Guidelines on the Implementation of Flexible Learning. Level of preparedness in the study refers to the extent of readiness of the SUCs in Region IV-A or CALABARZON in adopting and using the flexible learning arrangement and approach in the context of new normal in education. Following the directives of the Commission on Higher Education, flexible learning will provide alternative, tailored education and support to the learners who might be disengaged from mainstream education system because of the pandemic. Flexible learning in the study is generally regarded as a teaching approach using both digital and non-digital technology customized and tailored fit on the varied contextualized learning environments of the students and faculty.

Faculty-Participants' Assessment on the Level of Preparedness of SUCs in the Implementation of Flexible Learning

Table 3 shows the assessment of the faculty participants in their perception on the level of preparedness of SUCs on the implementation of flexible learning. It can be observed that majority of the indicators were verbally interpreted as "Prepared" with a grand mean of 3.44. The item indicator "The SUC ensures that health and safety protocols are maintained at all times" obtained the highest mean of 3.58 and verbally interpreted as "Highly Prepared". This finding shows an indication of the strict adherence of the SUCs in the directives issued by CHED as member agency of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID). As mentioned by Cervantes (2020) in his article HEIs shall limit the physical interaction of students and faculty in school premises; social distancing and wearing of face masks must be observed and the provision of alcohol shall be mandatory. This implies that in the implementation of flexible learning, the faculty participants have seen the strict compliance of the SUCs to the basic health and safety protocols that need to be put in place in the new normal.

Table 3. Faculty participants' assessment on the level of preparedness of sucs in the implementation of flexible learning

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1. The SUC designs flexible learning which considers the needs of the students.	3.54	Highly Prepared
2. The SUC provides flexible learning at an advantage for the students in the areas of learning content, schedule, access and assessment.	3.50	Highly Prepared
3. The college/university exercise academic freedom in the implementation of flexible learning and other alternative modes of delivery.	3.55	Highly Prepared
4. The SUC determines the flexible learning that they will utilize based on their capability, condition, LGU guidelines and advisories.	3.55	Highly Prepared

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
5.The SUC develops learning continuity plan which reflects transition and integration of flexible learning approaches.	3.51	Highly Prepared
6.The SUC has learning continuity plan with minimum requirements as prescribed by CHED.	3.52	Highly Prepared
7.The SUC ensures that flexible learning complements with outcomes-based education approach.	3.45	Prepared
8.The SUC uses flexible learning that employs various means of delivery and assessment.	3.50	Highly Prepared
9.The SUC reviews the curricular offerings and makes necessary modifications in the course contents/requirements that can be delivered to the students through various modalities.	3.46	Prepared
10.The SUC reviews the curricular offerings and makes necessary adjustments in the course design, delivery, pedagogy, and assessment mechanisms that can be delivered to the students through various modalities.	3.48	Prepared
11.The SUC provides orientation to teachers, learners and parents on the learning system to be implemented.	3.50	Prepared
12.The SUC has complete learning system package which includes course syllabi, study guides, learning activities, available repository of learning resources, schedule of lessons/ consultations, assessments, monitoring of student's engagement, schedule and mechanics of submission of requirements, grading system, feedback portals, student support systems, etc.	3.33	Prepared
13.The SUC disseminated to students and teachers the system and procedures for the transition to flexible learning.	3.45	Prepared
14.The SUC puts into place mechanism for students to receive/access printed or digital course packages/instructional materials through courier, designated pick-up points or through digital platforms.	3.34	Prepared
15.The SUC establishes means of teacher and student engagement/communication (SMS, mail, chats, etc) in order to ensure personalized, effective, efficient, and timely mentoring and feedback mechanisms.	3.44	Prepared
16.The SUC has strong partnerships with agencies and organizations to strengthen and/or complement existing resources, infrastructure or connectivity to ensure undisrupted learning of the students.	3.27	Prepared
17.The SUC determines the level of technology to be used for the delivery of programs based on connectivity of students.	3.36	Prepared

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
18.The SUC establishes a multi-media or learning resource center to provide technical support to faculty members in the development of IT-mediated instructional materials.	3.29	Prepared
19.The SUC provides access to available electronic library and Open Educational Resources (OERs) as reference in various flexible learning pedagogies.	3.26	Prepared
20.The SUC utilizes learning management system (LMS).	3.43	Prepared
21.The SUC implements grants and/or support capacity building programs for administrators, faculty, and staff on transitioning to flexible learning.	3.38	Prepared
22.The SUC ensures that health and safety protocols are maintained at all times	3.58	Highly Prepared
23.The SUC provides information/reminders of the health and safety protocols through the display of reminders in conspicuous areas within the school premises.	3.50	Highly Prepared
24.The SUC develops consortia/coalition/networking to facilitate capacity building programs and sharing of resources.	3.36	Prepared
25.The SUC coordinates with CHED regional offices for the implementation of the college/university's learning continuity plan.	3.49	Prepared
GRAND MEAN	3.44	Prepared

Note: Mean Interval: 3.50 and above – Highly prepared; 2.50 - 3.49 – Prepared; - 2.49 – Almost prepared; 1.00-1.49 – Not prepared

Furthermore, the aforementioned result is closely followed by the indicators "The college/university exercise academic freedom in the implementation of flexible learning and other alternative modes of delivery" and "The SUC determines the flexible learning that they will utilize based on their capability, condition, LGU guidelines and advisories" which both got the mean of 3.50 and verbally interpreted as "Highly Prepared". These findings suggest the contextualized approach which the faculty members might adopt in the implementation of flexible learning in the new normal. Interestingly, the exercise of academic freedom among state universities is still evident.

On the other hand, the faculty participants perceived that SUCs are "Prepared" in the item indicator "The SUC provides access to available electronic library and Open Educational Resources (OERs) as reference in various flexible learning pedagogies" which obtained the lowest mean of 3.26. faculty members are also considered a fundamental component of flexible learning in the SUCs. As pointed out by Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Chairman J. Prospero De Vera III, HEIs will adopt the flexible learning systems as strategies but it would depend on the circumstances and capability of HEIs especially the teachers and students and the capability to open depend on the ability to adapt to new system. It could be recalled also that CHED has made it clear that with the implementation of flexible learning, quality of education will not be especially that they are coordinating with various agencies that might help educational institutions and does not encourage the mass promotion concept. CHED had issued advisories that HEIs will be allowed to start classes

if the school can show their capability and to deal with the situation. (Halare, Philippine Daily Inquirer,2020).

In general, the overall mean of 3.44 denotes that the assessment of the participants in on the level of preparedness of SUCs in the implementation of Flexible Learning is "Prepared". These results imply that majority of the faculty believe that SUCs in CALABARZON exhibit a certain level of preparedness in the implementation of flexible learning yet these SUCs in the region are also confronted with challenges and coping strategies in dealing with the current situation. The current situation makes evident and even exacerbates disruption in education but it also entails opportunities to reshape education; learning delivery and educational institutions. The 'new normal' in education has already started in some contexts, but it also brings with it a number of challenges particularly as far as education and learning institutions are concerned.

Student-Participants' Assessment on the Level of Preparedness of SUCs in the Implementation of Flexible Learning

Table 4 on the next page shows the assessment of the student-participants in their perception on the preparedness of SUCs in the implementation of flexible learning. It can be seen in the table that all item indicators are assessed by the student participants as "Prepared".

The item indicator "The SUC ensures that health and safety protocols are maintained at all times" obtained the highest mean of 3.29. This is followed by the item indicator "The SUC provides information/reminders of the health and safety protocols through the display of reminders in conspicuous areas within the school premises" which obtained the mean of 3.25. These findings suggest a strong indication that the SUCs are following the mandate of Commission on Higher Education on health and safety protocols in the new normal. As mentioned by De Vera, as cited by Hallare (2020) in her article in Inquirer, no more face-to-face classes because they don't want to risk the health and life of the students and teachers.

Moreso, the item indicator that also obtained the mean of 3.25 is "The SUC establishes means of teacher and student engagement/communication (SMS, mail, chats, etc.) in order to ensure personalized, effective, efficient, and timely mentoring and feedback mechanisms." According to De Vera, as mentioned by Cervantes (2020) in his article, schools must look crisis management, and communication plans. Thus, student respondents believed that SUCs are prepared in this matter.

According to Dr. Robert Joan (2013), schools must provide adequate infrastructure to establish flexible learning mainly internet facilities. However, the item indicators "The SUC provides access to available electronic library and Open Educational Resources (OERs) as reference in various flexible learning pedagogies" and "The SUC has strong partnerships with agencies and organizations to strengthen and/or complement existing resources, infrastructure or connectivity to ensure undisrupted learning of the students" got the lowest mean of 2.84. These findings might be an indication of the adjustment of the students on the shift from the traditional learning to flexible learning in the new normal. In support of these results, Torneo, Tan and Roleda (2020) in their Policy Brief on responding to the COVID-19 pandemic presented the survey data which showed that the majority of HEIs have limited experience with FLS and that only a slight majority have FLS as part of their university policy. Among those with their own OERs, the majority expressed willingness to share these for the use of others. Many respondents from various HEIs expressed that they have the capability to develop materials for flexible learning, with capability being greater in larger institutions. Majority of HEIs are also willing to join a consortium of different HEIs and other support agencies to be able to deliver online teaching and learning.

The overall assessment of the student respondents in their perception on the level of preparedness of SUCs in the implementation of Flexible Learning is "Prepared" with overall mean of 3.12.

Table 4. Student participants' assessment on the level of preparedness of sucs the implementation of flexible learning

INDICATORS	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1.The SUC designs flexible learning which considers the needs of the students.	3.15	Prepared
2.The SUC provides flexible learning at an advantage for the students in the areas of learning content, schedule, access and assessment.	2.87	Prepared
3.The college/university exercise academic freedom in the implementation of flexible learning and other alternative modes of delivery.	3.15	Prepared
4.The SUC determines the flexible learning that they will utilize based on their capability, condition, LGU guidelines and advisories.	3.17	Prepared
5.The SUC develops learning continuity plan which reflects transition and integration of flexible learning approaches.	3.17	Prepared
6.The SUC has learning continuity plan with minimum requirements as prescribed by CHED.	2.92	Prepared
7.The SUC ensures that flexible learning complements with outcomes-based education approach.	3.18	Prepared
8.The SUC uses flexible learning that employs various means of delivery and assessment.	3.19	Prepared
9.The SUC reviews the curricular offerings and makes necessary modifications in the course contents/requirements that can be delivered to the students through various modalities.	3.19	Prepared
10.The SUC reviews the curricular offerings and makes necessary adjustments in the course design, delivery, pedagogy, and assessment mechanisms that can be delivered to the students through various modalities.	3.19	Prepared
11.The SUC provides orientation to teachers, learners and parents on the learning system to be implemented.	2.99	Prepared
12.The SUC has complete learning system package which includes course syllabi, study guides, learning activities, available repository of learning resources, schedule of lessons/ consultations, assessments, monitoring of student's engagement, schedule and mechanics of submission of requirements, grading system, feedback portals, student support systems, etc.	3.22	Prepared
13.The SUC disseminated to students and teachers the system and procedures for the transition to flexible learning.	3.19	Prepared
14.The SUC puts into place mechanism for students to receive/access printed or digital course packages/instructional materials through courier, designated pick up points or through digital platforms.	3.17	Prepared

INDICATORS	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
15. The SUC establishes means of teacher and student engagement/communication (SMS, mail, chats, etc) in order to ensure personalized, effective, efficient, and timely mentoring and feedback mechanisms.	3.25	Prepared
16. The SUC has strong partnerships with agencies and organizations to strengthen and/or complement existing resources, infrastructure or connectivity to ensure undisrupted learning of the students.	2.84	Prepared
17. The SUC determines the level of technology to be used for the delivery of programs based on connectivity of students.	3.16	Prepared
18. The SUC establishes a multi-media or learning resource center to provide technical support to faculty members in the development of IT-mediated instructional materials.	3.15	Prepared
19. The SUC provides access to available electronic library and Open Educational Resources (OERs) as reference in various flexible learning pedagogies.	2.84	Prepared
20. The SUC utilizes learning management system (LMS).	3.17	Prepared
21. The SUC implements grants and/or support capacity building programs for administrators, faculty, and staff on transitioning to flexible learning.	2.91	Prepared
22. The SUC ensures that health and safety protocols are maintained at all times	3.29	Prepared
23. The SUC provides information/reminders of the health and safety protocols through the display of reminders in conspicuous areas within the school premises.	3.25	Prepared
24. The SUC develops consortia/coalition/networking to facilitate capacity building programs and sharing of resources.	3.17	Prepared
25. The SUC coordinates with CHED regional offices for the implementation of the college/university's learning continuity plan.	3.24	Prepared
GRAND MEAN	3.12	Prepared

Note: Mean Interval: 3.50 and above – Highly prepared; 2.50 – 3.49 – Prepared; - 2.49 – Almost prepared; 1.00-1.49 – Not prepared

Over-All Assessment of Level off Preparedness of SUCs in the Implementation of Flexible Learning

Table 5 presents the assessment of both respondents in their perception on the preparedness of SUCs in the implementation of flexible learning. Looking closely, it can be observed that all item indicators are assessed by the respondents as "Prepared".

Table 5. Over-all assessment of level of preparedness of sucs in the implementation of flexible learning

INDICATORS	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1.The SUC designs flexible learning which considers the needs of the students.	3.35	Prepared
2.The SUC provides flexible learning at an advantage for the students in the areas of learning content, schedule, access and assessment.	3.19	Prepared
3.The college/university exercise academic freedom in the implementation of flexible learning and other alternative modes of delivery.	3.35	Prepared
4.The SUC determines the flexible learning that they will utilize based on their capability, condition, LGU guidelines and advisories.	3.36	Prepared
5.The SUC develops learning continuity plan which reflects transition and integration of flexible learning approaches.	3.34	Prepared
6.The SUC has learning continuity plan with minimum requirements as prescribed by CHED.	3.22	Prepared
7.The SUC ensures that flexible learning complements with outcomes-based education approach.	3.32	Prepared
8.The SUC uses flexible learning that employs various means of delivery and assessment.	3.34	Prepared
9.The SUC reviews the curricular offerings and makes necessary modifications in the course contents/requirements that can be delivered to the students through various modalities.	3.33	Prepared
10.The SUC reviews the curricular offerings and makes necessary adjustments in the course design, delivery, pedagogy, and assessment mechanisms that can be delivered to the students through various modalities.	3.33	Prepared
11.The SUC provides orientation to teachers, learners and parents on the learning system to be implemented.	3.24	Prepared
12.The SUC has complete learning system package which includes course syllabi, study guides, learning activities, available repository of learning resources, schedule of lessons/ consultations, assessments, monitoring of student's engagement, schedule and mechanics of submission of requirements, grading system, feedback portals, student support systems, etc.	3.27	Prepared
13.The SUC disseminated to students and teachers the system and procedures for the transition to flexible learning.	3.32	Prepared

INDICATORS	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
14.The SUC puts into place mechanism for students to receive/access printed or digital course packages/instructional materials through courier, designated pick up points or through digital platforms.	3.25	Prepared
15.The SUC establishes means of teacher and student engagement/communication (SMS, mail, chats, etc) in order to ensure personalized, effective, efficient, and timely mentoring and feedback mechanisms.	3.34	Prepared
16.The SUC has strong partnerships with agencies and organizations to strengthen and/or complement existing resources, infrastructure or connectivity to ensure undisrupted learning of the students.	3.06	Prepared
17.The SUC determines the level of technology to be used for the delivery of programs based on connectivity of students.	3.26	Prepared
18.The SUC establishes a multi-media or learning resource center to provide technical support to faculty members in the development of IT-mediated instructional materials.	3.22	Prepared
19.The SUC provides access to available electronic library and Open Educational Resources (OERs) as reference in various flexible learning pedagogies.	3.05	Prepared
20.The SUC utilizes learning management system (LMS).	3.30	Prepared
21.The SUC implements grants and/or support capacity building programs for administrators, faculty, and staff on transitioning to flexible learning.	3.15	Prepared
22.The SUC ensures that health and safety protocols are maintained at all times	3.43	Prepared
23.The SUC provides information/reminders of the health and safety protocols through the display of reminders in conspicuous areas within the school premises.	3.37	Prepared
24.The SUC develops consortia/coalition/networking to facilitate capacity building programs and sharing of resources.	3.27	Prepared
25.The SUC coordinates with CHED regional offices for the implementation of the college/university's learning continuity plan.	3.36	Prepared
GRAND MEAN	3.28	Prepared

Note: Mean Interval: 3.50 and above – Highly prepared; 2.50 – 3.49 – Prepared; - 2.49 – Almost prepared; 1.00-1.49 – Not prepared

The item indicators that obtained the highest mean of 3.43 is "The SUC ensures that health and safety protocols are maintained at all times". This is followed by item indicator "The SUC provides information/reminders of the health and safety protocols through the display of reminders in conspicuous areas within the school premises" which got the mean of 3.37. The result revealed that

both respondents believed that the implementation of SUCs in terms health and safety protocols are maintained and ensured.

More so, the indicators "The SUC provides access to available electronic library and Open Educational Resources (OERs) as reference in various flexible learning pedagogies" and "The SUC has strong partnerships with agencies and organizations to strengthen and/or complement existing resources, infrastructure or connectivity to ensure undisrupted learning of the students" obtained the lowest mean of 3.05 and 3.06 respectively and verbally interpreted as "Prepared".

As a whole, the overall assessment of both respondents in their perception on the level of preparedness of SUCs in the implementation of Flexible Learning is "Prepared" with overall mean of 3.19.

Difference between the Perceived Assessment of the Faculty Members and Students

Table 6 on the next page shows the difference on the perceived assessment of faculty members and students on the implementation of flexible learning in SUCs. Evidently, the two mean ranks referring to 200.81 (faculty) and 130.19 (students) showed a big difference. Mann Whitney value of 7787.00 is affirmed by Asymp. (2-tailed) value of .000 describing that the difference on the perceived assessment of the respondents on the level of preparedness of SUCs on the implementation of flexible learning was very significant.

This can be understood further that the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, the alternative hypothesis "there is significant difference between the perceived assessment of the faculty members and students on the implementation of flexible learning" was accepted. The interpretation varies from the indicators in Item 1-6; 8, 21, 22, 23 and 25. The findings revealed that the faculty and students have differing views on the level of preparedness of SUCs. The faculty expressed a slightly higher level of assessment on the level of preparedness of SUCs in the implementation of flexible learning compared to the students mainly due to the fact that the faculty have at least acquired a certain level of involvement in the strategic plans of the SUCs. In this unprecedented situation, SUCs have intensified the participation of the faculty in devising the most effective solutions and strategies to respond to the needs and concerns of the students who are considered as the most vulnerable groups in this time of pandemic.

Table 6. Mann-Whitney Test: Comparison on the Assessment of the Respondents on the Level of Preparedness of SUCs on the Implementation of Flexible Learning

Groups	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	Asymp. Sig. (2 tailed)	Result	Decision
Faculty	200.81	7787.00	.000	Very Significant	Reject Null
Students	130.19				

Priority Areas and/or Skills vis a vis Strategies to Consider in the Implementation of Flexible Learning in the New Normal

The study also entailed the qualitative interpretation of the responses on the priority areas which SUCs should consider in the implementation of flexible learning and proposed strategies for the effective implementation of flexible learning in the new normal. The written responses were obtained from the online survey instrument and consisted of short phrases usually 1-2 phrases and/or sentences which comprised the corpus of the analysis in terms of the themes and patterns of meanings that arise within the data. In the study, priority areas and/or skills refer to the top most course of action in the context of SUCs which varies from strategies, needs, skills, ideas and personal observation and opinions that need to be taken into consideration in the implementation of flexible learning

in the new normal. The corpus of data and analysis were also subjected to Interrater's test of relia-bility to validate the analysis and findings.

The corpus of data revealed 10 themes that account for the priority areas/skills vis a vis strategies for the implementation of flexible learning in the new normal from the perspectives of the faculty and students of SUCs in the region. As shown in Table 7, the themes could be summarized into 10 thematic areas that are crucial in the implementation of flexible learning in the new normal: 1) student competency; 2) health and well-being; 3) student support and information; 4) course design; 5) pedagogy; 6) professional development; 7) assessment; 8) organization; 9) resources, and 10) school-community partnerships and linkages.

Table 7. Priority areas and/or skills and strategies to consider in the implementation of flexible learning in the new normal

Priority Areas/STRATEGIES	SAMPLE RESPONSES
Student Competency	<1> "Human skills, Technical skills and Conceptual skills" <2> "The competency of the students with regards to the usage of mediums and environment as well." <3> "The SUCs should give emphasize in the course that requires performance, skills and hands on activity to really understand the topic in major subjects. They should provide us technical support and guidance like give or show us demo video and the likes. This I think will ensure that the students will learn." <4> "Sa tingin ko kailangang mag-focus pa rin ang SUCs sa pagkatuto ng mga bata, lalo na sa new normal ngayon, at karamihan ay may synchronous learning na, mas mabuti na mas magabayan pa rin ang mga students on learning and improving their skills in their respective skills and expertise, syempre iba nga lang talaga ang maibibigay ng face to face learning.
Health and well-being	<5> "Continous practice of health protocol during this time of pandemic…" <6> "Health and safety of students" <7> "The ability of the student to comply to the requirements without risking its health, or feeling pressured" <8> "…Learning in this type of new normal has needed a lot of areas to be prioritized but most importantly, the safety and quality of learning should be consider too because in this time of pandemic, students suffers in a lot of stress and trauma because of fear and less capability to access this type of learning"
Student Support and Information	<9> "Technical and technological support. Enhanced Information dissemination essentials for adapted learning modalities." <10> "As faculty, the student's welfare should be the top priority, their capacity to learn under the new normal." <11> "System upgrade like student or automatic enrollment of students from the registrar list" <12> "They need to better organize the online platforms they will use for the continuation of schools, they also need to make sure that their connection to each student will be smooth in modules, it is better if the lessons

Priority Areas/STRATEGIES	SAMPLE RESPONSES
	contained in it are easier to understand so that students can understand faster. When passing the requirements, consider the students because not everyone has a connection or access to the internet anytime."
Course Design	<13> "I think priority must be given to the delivery of learning content that ensures attainment of OUTCOMES; how these contents can be contextualize in way that students can easily grasp its 'meaning' and 'meaningfulness', e.g. why should this particular content needs to be learned; choosing the most essential contents to avoid cognitive overload" <14> "The capability of the faculty specifically the senior faculty in creating interactive modules and online interactions should be honed." <15> "…Finding ways and approaches that could best serve the students and teachers that no one should be left behind. Engaging online and offline learning classes." <16> "Personally, the SUCs should consider the available resources of both faculty members and students, as well as the preparedness on delivering the curriculum, and should ensure that policies/guidelines are disseminated and being followed."
Pedagogy Table continued from page 17	<17> "I think SUCs should consider improving the skills of the faculty on the different strategies to use on providing quality education through flexible learning." <18> "The capability of every student to engage in this new type of learning. For example, tracing every student who have poor connection of internet. Professors should consider who try hard to cope up with the lessons." <19> "they need to be more prepared in their way of teaching, because were in the new way of lecturing, they must explain the topic in shorter time but we can understand easily." <20> "They should aware themselves with the rightful dissemination of workloads, since there are instances where in everything is mixing up and ends up students having a hard time complying with all the requirements."
Professional Development	<21> "I think SUCs should consider improving the skills of the faculty on the different strategies to use on providing quality education through flexible learning." <22> "…training of teacher - online platforms , ICT skills, management of online class" <23> "prioritize the improvement of the faculty's proficiency in the basic digital literacy" <24> "Teachers capability in using online learning applications such as zoom, google meet, google forms etc."
Assessment	<25> "Assessment of Learning Outputs" <26> "The teachers' way of teaching, assessments especially major exams, grades, and other concerns." <27> "Those students in public schools should be prioritize and should be

Priority Areas/STRATEGIES	SAMPLE RESPONSES
	given proper assessment." <28> "Consider those student who are having a hard time on the internet connection. Giving them enough time to pass any requirements without deduction."
Organization	<29> "SUCs should consider priority areas and/or skills in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) like making Instructional Materials (IMs), using Learning Management System particularly Google Classroom (LMS) and using all possible tools like computer, laptop, tablet, smartphone, mobile e-learning in the implementation of flexible learning in the new normal." <30> "Proper and enough guidelines as we shift to the new mode of learning. The teachers' way of teaching, assessments especially major exams, grades, and other concerns." <31> "Improvement of the LMS system for easy accessibility and availability for both students and instructors and most especially to provide and establish strong internet connectivity in the campus." <32> "Access sa ginawang website ng school for storage and learning management system. Kapag napakadami na ang napasok sa website, biglang nagdadown ang system. Dapat ay pagtuunan pa ito ng pansin."
Resources	<33> "The priority areas that should be considered are the provision of a learning management system and mechanism to address the digital divide. This will ensure that students will develop skills necessary to land a job and pass the licensure examination in the new normal." <34> "teacher and student empowerment on the use of teachnology, OER etc" <35> "Online Library Access and Care for students not to give too much activities for one subject to the extent that students may not be able to do other subject's activities." <36> "Kailangan bigyan nila ng pansin ang mga mag-aaral na hindi gaano nakakapagparticipate sa mga google meet dahil sa kawalan ng maayos na gadget na gagamitin ang mga ito."
School-Community Partnerships & Linkages	<37> "Learnings skills are the top priority even before pandemic. So in this new normal the learning of the each students shall not be compromised. In this pandemic time, the used of ICTs are very useful, so the SUCs should implement enhancement of their technology and practice the used of it with their students. SUCs can also seek help/assistant from their respective LGU's for the free access of internet." <38> "Education stakeholders, parents, community leaders, and local government units shall be involved in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of activities and interventions relative to the continuity of education service delivery" <39> "With consideration of health protocols with specific industry"

Student competency

With the changing landscape of the Philippine higher education system from the traditional face-to-face class to flexible learning that involves the combination of online and offline learning delivery, student competency is a critical area that draws varied reactions from both the faculty and student respondents. It can be gleaned from their responses that student competency in this time of the new normal will entail adjustment on the competencies that address knowledge, performance and technology skills. In engaging in the synchronous and asynchronous learning delivery, students and faculty are expected to re-create a teaching-learning experience in the home environment with challenges unique to each of the faculty and student at their home or work environment.

Health and well-being

At the helm of the global coronavirus pandemic, the usual preparations for the schools, universities and colleges around the world have been overshadowed with social distancing concerns. In the Philippines, colleges and universities adhere to the health and safety protocols prescribed by the IATF and have adopted the flexible learning and work arrangement in accordance with the CHED and Civil Service Commission guidelines. From the written accounts of the respondents, the SUC faculty and students in Region IV-A have firmly expressed their opinion that health and safety protocols need to be continuously implemented and maintained in schools and workplace. The respondents also believe that SUCs should prioritize the health and well-being of the students and faculty as well at least for this period while everyone is adjusting to the new normal. There is a need for SUCs to recognize the added pressure and challenges posed by the new normal which has created a lot of extra work and has built up tensions and anxieties caused by varied factors such as economic, health, emotional and other related conditions.

Student Support and Information

Both the faculty and students have seen the much-needed support and attention to the students who represent the largest part of any SUCs' responsibility. The respondents believe that students should be given the kind of flexibility arrangement cut across instruction in a remote learning, health and well-being and learning mechanisms in terms of learning management system, modules and open educational resources depending on the capability of the SUCs. The new normal has also tested the capability of the SUCs to prepare its faculty and students to the most preferred mindset and attitude as part of the transition to flexible learning. In this period of transition, one of the most effective means to stay connected and be on the loop in this unstable situation, is through communication and reliable and consistent information. In the implementation of flexible learning, the faculty and students have relied on the use of social media, electronic mail and SUC websites to be able to grasp information and announcements.

Despite the majority of SUCs having answered positively to the support provided to students, the lack of contingency plans at almost one semester can lead to a negative impact in the students' experience. It is very important that SUCs do not let students feel abandoned, lacking support by the institutions.

Pope (2020) in her article on Student Reflections During the Pandemic: An Opportunity for Educators to Create a New Normal shared that schools can further support students by explicitly teaching time management and executive functioning skills. Flexible or self-determined due dates allow students a real-world opportunity to practice these skills. Educators can encourage students to self-advocate and reach out to their teachers when they are juggling multiple deliverables or when their health or well-being (or that of a family member) might necessitate even more flexibility. Creating conflict calendars where faculty members coordinate dates for major tests, projects, and

school-wide events can also help to reduce student overload and increase student engagement and achievement on assignments.

Course Design

In this time of the new normal, faculty and students have expressed the overarching impact of the implementation of flexible learning to the course design. The respondents from the SUCs in the region have found the need for SUCs to look into the meaningful learning outcomes that are expected in the use of synchronous and asynchronous learning delivery. Although the faculty revealed that most SUCs have already made initial preparation on the revision of the course syllabi and capacity building for faculty in terms of use of learning management system and instructional media, the respondents considered the transition as a totally different teaching-learning experience and would require a lot of extra work, adjustments and preparation. For them, this is a situation that demands greater amount of time and resources yet the learning outcomes will depend mainly on varied contextual factors distinct to the needs and conditions of each student and faculty.

The migration to flexible learning opens all SUCs to a certain level of sensitivity to be able to respond to the everchanging needs and concerns that may arise in the middle of the semester. The respondents also raised a fact that SUCs in the region might not be ready in going online as SUCs are confronted with issues on whether institutions would invest in a technology backbone that assists both teachers and students grappling with the problem; availability of resources and adequate preparatory training for the faculty most specially the senior teachers who are not adept with technology. As Lagua (2020) commented, preference for online learning requires planning, preparation, diligence and a degree of expertise not just for the teacher, but especially for enabling and support systems.

In the same way, the offline mode or asynchronous learning is also a critical adjustment that needs a transformation mindset to keep the students motivated and engaged while doing distance and remote learning.

Pedagogy

Another priority area in the implementation of flexible learning in the new normal is the teaching strategies that will work better in varying degrees of adjustment on the teaching-learning process. The current global crisis shows that "scientifically, socially, and politically, the economy and technosphere are not just related, they are integral to a comprehensive response to major challenges' Hartsell, et al (2020), Maboloc (2020) pointed out that educators must address the underlying vulnerabilities and evaluate the pandemic as a threat to academic experiences and access to a fair education. Hence, in this unprecedented situation, the implementation of flexible learning does not happen the way it is conceptualized in most SUCs. Along the way, the faculty and students had been confronted with varied interpretation and conception on how flexible learning should be done. The respondents believed that there would be no best teaching method or strategy given varied contextual factors but the SUCs could look into providing capacity building for faculty and creating a welcoming and encouraging learning environment for the students amidst this education disruption. Despite the lack of face-to-face interaction between the teacher and the students, the effort to use innovative teaching techniques should continue in SUCs.

A similar foresight is explained by Marinoni et al (2020) which revealed that several respondents referred to the fact that a different pedagogy is required for distance teaching and learning and that it is a challenge for faculty to seamlessly make this sudden and unprepared shift from face-to-face to distance teaching and learning. The level of readiness or preparedness of teachers to lift this challenge is very diverse. Yet, although continuing education to the best extent possible may not guarantee the same level of quality compared to face-to-face education as initially planned for the semester, it is reported to still be better than providing no education. Institutions reported to not nec-

essarily have a management structure in place to develop the teaching capacities of staff in order for them to shift towards online learning easily and this therefore often resulted in "learning by doing" approaches or attempting to imitate what would have been the face-to-face way of proceeding, yet using distance mode.

Professional Development

The respondents revealed that the faculty should continue in engaging in professional development in this time of the new normal. Based on the responses, the faculty need to be equipped mostly with skills and knowledge on ICT, digital literacy, management of online learning platforms, integration of social media and virtual session applications such as Zoom, Google meet, Webex, and others; and other innovative techniques in teaching. Gamiao (2020) in her article on the Importance of Innovative Teaching in the New Normal published in The Manila Times on July 28, 2020 commented that "As educators gear with the "new normal" set-up in this pandemic, this is the appropriate time to use our discomfort to forge a new paradigm. This is now the time for schools to ensure that teachers do not just translate what they do inside the classroom into their online teachings. By being not only an issuer of educational content but a master curator of learning resources, teachers like us are designing efficient and effective synchronous and asynchronous learning activities for continuous engagement of students."

Assessment

Of the priority areas in the implementation of flexible learning, assessment is by far the most challenging and difficult to address. The faculty and students shared the need to focus on varied concerns on assessment in terms of learning outputs, evaluation of teachers; giving of grades and exams and understanding how the students cope with complying with the requirements, exams and tasks. The paradigm shift from the traditional classroom set up to distance and blended learning presents a different nature and process of assessment. In response to this, Tuscano (2020) shared that "At this point of the pandemic, assessments and grades continue to be controversial topics among school leaders and other members of the school community. The questions generally revolve around the relevance and implications of assessing and grading students while the global crisis continues to put security, safety, and health of everyone, especially, the students, in danger. Transitioning to remote learning also made it more challenging for teachers to gauge the students' understanding of their lessons. What kind of assessments can be properly and meaningfully used in online learning? For younger students, how much parent involvement is allowable to ensure that students can independently demonstrate mastery of learning? What kind of formative feedback can be best given to students who are learning at home? For the new normal in education, assessments and grades should be reviewed and reimagined so that they continue to be relevant to students. Schools should deeply think about their purposes and priorities in designing assessments or grading students. Beyond making students accountable for their own learning, educators should also bear in mind that in times of emergency remote learning, the higher call probably is to continue encouraging and supporting student learning. One way of doing this is to continuously give students feedback on their learning which can help them reflect on their strengths and find ways to improve themselves further. Eventually, teacher's feedback serves as verification until students finally "get the lesson."

Organization

Another priority area in the implementation of flexible learning is attributed to the organization or the SUCs as the institution governed by the Commission on Higher Education to implement the flexible learning in response to the shift from face-to-face interaction. Based on the data, the respondents raised the need for SUCs to provide efficient and effective IT infrastructure in order to facilitate the effective use of the learning management system and other innovative teaching plat-

forms. There is also a need for the SUCs to come up also with intervention plans in the event when plans and preparations do not work well or when there are foreseen need to improve the system of learning delivery. The respondents also saw the need for SUCs to come up with clear and comprehensive guidelines in the implementation of flexible learning taking into consideration the contextual factors that are unique to each SUC.

In defining institutions in the new normal, Horn (2020) pointed out that "Institutions have to be intentional in solving problems and achieving their goals. Then, they need to carefully create team structures by allowing continuing education instructional designers, technologists and instructors to connect in intentional ways with the faculty and deans constructing programs and curriculum. Horn (2020) suggested three main team structures. One is functional teams, which refers to team members working within their function and their silo. That's obviously not going to be effective here. Secondly, there is the autonomous team model, referring to bringing a group of people in together and then separating them. This way, they can create a new business model and dig into new opportunities. The third kind of team is coordinated in functions like a matrix organization. This model is used when you need to improve the components of what are being offered without fundamentally changing what those components are or how they interact with each other. This is a heavyweight team where colleges and universities need to spend their time–bringing together teams of people with functional expertise from across different domains in schools. This is a team that should be maintained for a couple of cycles of whatever is created before codifying it and make it the new normal."

Resources

Based on the data, another priority area involves resources that are categorized as physical resources in terms of ICT support, learning management system, Open Educational Resources (OERs) and other innovative support to teaching in order to respond to digital divide and human resources that address the need to ensure the health and well-being of the faculty and students and lead them to the transformation mindset and adaptability to the new normal. On similar respect, Marinoni et al (2020) suggested that institutions may choose to invest further in technical infrastructures to enable this shift from management learning systems to cloud services, to digitalization of administrative processes and of access of documents, resources and libraries. This will ultimately also enhance the opportunities for working from distance and the opportunity for learners to access lifelong learning opportunities. Some respondents indeed highlighted that this experience will generate a more accepted view on working from home.

Community Partnerships & Linkages

From the responses of the faculty and students, the need for community partnerships and linkages is also a priority area in the implementation of flexible learning in the new normal. The pandemic has opened a wider opportunity for the various groups of stakeholders and support agencies and local government units to collaborate in order to develop joint and concerted efforts and solutions to sustain learning amidst this education disruption.

Even long before, partnerships and linkages have been an essential component in the implementation of any educational program or project which are even more applicable in the new normal. Harvard Family Research Project (2010) arrived at an emerging consensus on an inter-related set of features that help promote and sustain healthy school-community partnerships: a shared vision for learning and developmental outcomes for students; a diverse set of partners with effective communications mechanisms and relationships among multiple staff at multiple levels.; and an intentionally blended staffing with role clarity to promote understanding of how the work is relevant to all.

Narrative from the respondents also revealed that Humanizing Teaching and Learning should be considered as one of the characteristics of flexible learning. More so, implementation of flexible

learning can be more effective if it is reflective of the following features and attributes of flexible learning such as responsive and adaptive, creative and innovative, and inclusive and comprehensive. *Flexible Learning Framework in the Context of the New Normal in Higher Education Institutions in the Philippines*
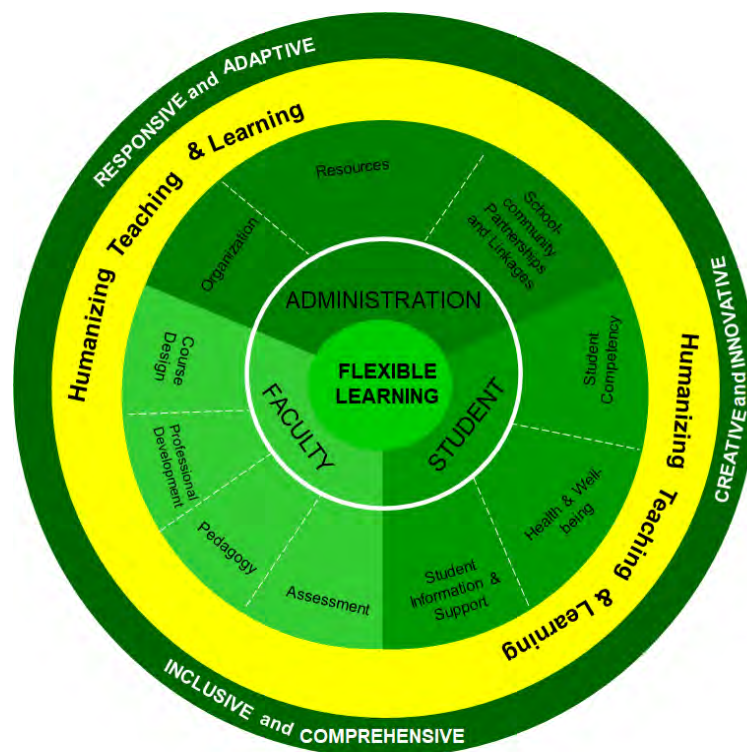
Figure. 2. Flexible learning framework in the context of the new normal in HEIs
Crizaldo, RS, Alitagtag, JB & Fabregrar, JRF, 2020

Figure 2 shows the research output of the study which depicts the flexible learning framework in the context of the new normal in Higher Education Institutions in the Philippines. The framework is a concentric model that contains 5 layers. The inner circles show Flexible Learning in the context of its major key drivers in HEIs: students, faculty and administration. The next layers depict the emerging themes that reflect the priority areas and strategies that are salient for the effective and meaningful implementation of Flexible Leaning in the new normal. The themes could be summarized into 10 thematic areas that are crucial in the implementation of flexible learning in the new normal: 1) student competency; 2) health and well-being; 3) student support and information; 4) course design; 5) pedagogy; 6) professional development; 7) assessment; 8) organization; 9) resources, and 10) school-community partnerships and linkages.The outer layers represent the use of humanizing approach to teaching and learning as pedagogical shift away from mainstreamed traditional and conventional practices by providing students and faculty with a humanizing education experience. The study identified the pedagogical influences of the teacher leaders, administrators, and students involved in the implementation of Flexible Learning. Hence, the implementation of Flexible Learning in HEIs in the Philippines in this time of the new normal should make room for

the following driving forces of Flexible Learning: responsive and adaptive; inclusive and comprehensive and creative and innovative.

Conclusions

This chapter summarizes the study by highlighting the research conducted in the topic. The conclusions were given drawn from the outcomes of the research. Moreover, recommendations were based from the findings and conclusions of the study.

The purpose of the study was to determine the level of preparedness of SUCs in CALABARZON in the implementation of Flexible Learning in the New Normal. The researchers conducted the study in the five SUCs in CALABARZON namely: Batangas State University, Cavite State University, and Laguna State Polytechnic University, Southern Luzon State University, and University of Rizal System.

In this study, researcher-made instrument was used. After the perusal of CvSU Research Center – M&E Division on the proposal and when the study had been granted for funding, letter of approval to conduct the study was sent to CHED Regional Office – IV-A. The approved letter from CHED Regional Office was sent to SUCs in CALABARZON. After then, the questionnaires were employed to the respondents via google form.

Cochran's formula was used to determine the sample size and Stratified Proportional Sampling was used to determine the target respondents. This study used mixed-method of research design with the aim of generating findings from both the qualitative and quantitative approaches on the preparedness of SUCs in CLABARZON in the implementation of flexible learning.

On the basis of the results of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

The level of preparedness of SUCs in CALABARZON in the implementation of Flexible Learning in the New Normal was verbally interpreted as "Prepared" as perceived by both faculty and student respondents. It was further revealed however that there was a notable difference between the assessment of the faculty members and students on the SUC's level of preparedness on the implementation of flexible learning in the new normal.

There is significant difference between the perceived assessment of the faculty members and students on the implementation of flexible learning.

In terms of the implementation of flexible learning in the new normal, the emerging themes that account for the priority areas/skills vis a vis strategy for the implementation of flexible learning in the new normal from the perspectives of the faculty and students of SUCs in the region. The themes could be summarized into 10 thematic areas that are crucial in the implementation of flexible learning in the new normal: 1) student competency; 2) health and well-being; 3) student support and information; 4) course design; 5) pedagogy; 6) professional development; 7) assessment; 8) organization; 9) resources, and 10) school-community partnerships and linkages. Interestingly, these themes led to an articulation of knowledge creation of Flexible Learning Framework in the context of higher education in the new normal.

In the light of the findings and conclusions, there is a need for SUCs to strengthen the implementation of flexible learning that entails opportunities to reshape education; learning delivery and the operation of educational institutions on the basis of the components of the flexible learning framework as output of this study.

Recommendations

In the light of the aforementioned conclusions drawn, the following recommendations were made:

It was found out in this study that the level of preparedness of SUCs in CALABARZON in the implementation of Flexible Learning in the New Normal was "Prepared", SUCs in CALABARZON must raise the level of their preparedness in "Very Prepared" in the coming semester and school year since there is no guarantee that the pandemic will be over.

SUCs should provide capability enhancement training to faculty in terms of technological advancement and on the use of various online learning platforms. Trainings and seminars about assessment, online classroom management, and creating contextualize module must be given as well to the faculty to enrich and improve their technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge.

SUCs in CALABRZON may use and adopt the framework created by the researchers to have a holistic area to consider in implementing a flexible learning modality in the new normal.

SUCs, Local Government Units (LGUs), and legislators may use the result of this study in policy making since this research is a response to SDG goal of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Future researchers should conduct a study on assessing the effectiveness of the implementation of flexible learning. More so, phenomenological study about flexible learning after the implementation should be conducted.

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