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The Lived Experience of the Faculty of Polytechnic University of the Philippines in the Implementation of Flexible Technology- Enhanced Learning (Flextel)

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Abstract. Nowadays, the use of technology in education is in demand due to the new normal set-up in our educational system. Connecting with students is one of the most rewarding aspects of a professor's job. However, the FLEXTEL mode of learning creates a struggle because there is not enough time to design a truly flexible medium, difficult to prevent cheating, and its difficulties in access to ICT. Many colleges and universities have begun to offer online courses because of the rapid development of the Internet. Traditional face-to-face training is no longer a feasible option. However, there are numerous worries and issues developed, especially in terms of the quality of online education (Dhawan, 2020). This study aimed at determining the lived experience of faculty in the implementation of flexible technology-enhanced learning at PUP Branches and campuses in NCR. Generally, this study was designed with the following objectives: to understand the lived experience of the faculty in the implementation of Flexible Technology -Enhanced Learning and to describe how the faculty face the issues and challenges in the implementation of Flexible Technology-Enhanced Learning at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines, Branches and Campus-National Capital Region. The salient findings of the study are as to the lived experiences of faculty in the implementation of Flexible Technology Enhanced Learning our themes about the experiences of faculty emerged: Theme 1 focused on the exciting yet challenging experience of faculty in facing the reality of implementing FLEXTEL as prescribed by the University. It is about their acceptance in the beginning and their struggles along the way. Theme 2 was about the problems encountered in terms of disruptions and internet outages which emphasized its effect during the implementation. Theme 3 is a description of the faculty's need for ample preparation which also signifies a of time on their part lastly, theme 4 centered on the burden of the faculty on the possible decrease of students' performance as they employ FLEXTEL in their teaching and learning process. In general, themes supported the overall views of faculty's experiences in the implementation of FLEXTEL. Then, as to how the faculty faced issues and challenges in the implementation of Flexible Technology Enhanced Learning there were three essential emerging themes explained: Theme 5: Flexibility and positivity at work highlighted the faculty's attitude in response to the issues and challenges encountered; Theme 6: Continues learning and Upskilling stressed the importance of keeping themselves willing to learn new things and upgrade their skills to meet the demands of this system and lastly, Theme 7: Self-Reflective Change emphasized the necessity of change from within to easily adapt changes in terms of strategies and approaches. Undoubtedly, the participants acknowledged that though there are issues and challenges encountered in the implementation of FLEXTEL, there are still ways to manage it no matter how tough it is. Furthermore, based on the textural and structural descriptions, the following conclusions were drawn: the lived experiences of faculty in the implementation of Flexible Technology Enhanced Learning are indeed exciting yet challenging. It is sensational at first yet, during the process it is

filled with struggles to defeat; and the faculty have acknowledged that student learning is the heart of every teaching process therefore, they need to face whatever issues and challenges are encountered in the implementation of FLEXTEL.

Keywords. Flextel, Positivity, Flexibility, Self-Reflective, Implementation, Challenging

I. Introduction

Nowadays, the use of technology in education is in demand due to the new normal set-up in our educational system. Connecting with students is one of the most rewarding aspects of a professor's job. However, the FLEXTEL mode of learning creates a struggle because there is not enough time to design a truly flexible medium, difficult to prevent cheating and difficulties in access to ICT.

Many colleges and universities have begun to offer online courses because of the rapid development of the Internet. Traditional face-to-face training is no longer a feasible option. However, there are numerous worries and issues developed, especially in terms of the quality of online education (Dhawan, 2020).

In the context of the pandemic globally, the 2030 United Nations Education Agenda urges all countries to participate to create well-balanced educational systems that provide flexibility primarily designed to get the desired outcome as a result of providing the finest possible learning environment supports that students' learning needs, routines, and personalities by incorporating tools and/or modes that are both technical and non-technological (Cayetano, 2021).

Moreover, universities must start understanding and identifying medium-term and long-term implications of this phenomenon on teaching, learning, student experience, infrastructure, operation, and staff. Scenario analysis and understanding of the context of each university are necessary for the current challenges they are confronted with by Frankki et.al as cited by (Dayagbil et al., 2021).

Furthermore, due to the impact of the epidemic on educational systems around the world, universities must take immediate response to seek out alternative cutting-edge teaching-learning resources and/or modalities that would make the change over from the previous method of teaching to innovative teaching. Truly, there was an overnight shift of normal classrooms into e-classrooms, that is, educators have shifted their entire pedagogical approach to tackle new market conditions and adapt to the changing situations. During this tough time, the concern is not about whether online teaching-learning methods can provide quality education, it is rather how academic institutions will be able to adopt online learning in such a massive manner (Carey, 2020).

Moreso, Covid-19 has moved curriculum online, forcing children physically apart from each other and from their teachers and especially from the in-person dialogical encounters that classrooms can provide. The public space disappears into the pre-designed screen space that software allows, and the machine now becomes the material basis for a curriculum of things, not people. Like the virus, the pandemic curriculum becomes embedded in devices that technologize our children (Pacheco, 2021).

In the Philippine setting, 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 contains pertinent data and recommendations for the application of flexible learning and teaching both for undergraduate and graduate programs. With this, the Polytechnic University of the Philippines followed CHED's advice and moved back their summer program from June to July 2020, using the Flexible Technology Enhanced Learning Mode (Flextel) approach of education following the OVPAA ADVISORY NO. 3 S. 2020 from the Vice President for Academic Affairs. As a result, education has undergone significant transformations, with the rise of e-learning, in which instruction is done remotely and via digital platforms. In order to teach the specified courses, teachers employed various e-learning tools such as texts, emails, social media groups, google classroom, zoom app, discord, and others.

However, despite the number of quantitative studies that investigated the implementation of flexible learning, no study yet has been conducted at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines- Branches and Campus-National Capital Region, particularly qualitative research that focused on the lived experience of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines in implementing Flexible Technology Enhanced Learning (FLEXTEL).

Thus, the researcher attempted to discover closely the lived experiences of faculty and how they were able to face the issues and challenges encountered in the implementation of FLEXTEL during a pandemic. This could serve as a blueprint to address the current dilemma in facilitating and delivering learning in times of crisis such as this. Likewise, a basis for achieving the most appropriate strategic scheme in making quality education possible amidst the pandemic.

1.1 Objective of the Study

The overall objective of this study was to analyze how the local community perceives urban farms as Agri-ecotourism destinations of Taguig City. The study had the following objectives which were (1) to determine the extent of awareness of the existence of urban farms by the local residents of Taguig City, (2) to measure the different factors that influence the perceptions, attitudes, and participation of the local community in urban farms, (3) to identify the significant difference between the different factors that influence the perceptions and attitudes of the local residents toward urban farms and the socio-demographic profile of the respondents, and (4) to propose recommendations as a basis for tourism promotions of urban farms in Taguig City.

II. Methods

Considering the research problem, this study focused on the experiences; the difficulties, the problems, and the challenges encountered by the faculty in the Polytechnic University of the Philippines Branches and Campus-National Capital Region in the implementation of Flexible Enhanced Technology Learning (Flextel), the researcher employed the phenomenological research design.

Phenomenological research focuses on describing what all the participants have in common as they experience online learning. Its basic purpose is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the overall essence. Further, its goal is the return to the concrete, captured by the phrase 'Back to the things themselves (Creswell, 2020). Specifically, this study explored the experiences; the difficulties, the problems, and the challenges encountered by the faculty in implementing FLEXTEL. The researcher used empirical data and documentary data for the conduct of the study. Empirical data were acquired

from the respondents of the study who were the selected faculty from Polytechnic University of the Philippines Branches and Campus-National Capital Region. Probability sampling was incorporated as the sampling approach in this research, wherein each member of the population has a known chance of being included in the study sample (Bhardwaj, 2019). In the selection of the participants of this study, the researcher considered fifteen (15) selected faculty of Polytechnic University of the Philippines-Branches and Campus-National Capital Region. Fifteen participants were enough, since according to (Creswell, 2020), the required number of participants for a phenomenological study is 5 to 25 individuals who experienced the same phenomenon. The actual sample of the study was chosen through purposive sampling using the following Criteria:

The selected participants were full-time regular faculty with or without designation of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines- Branches and Campus-National Capital Region, Academic Year 2021-2022, and faculty who were both handling online and modular modes of learning. The researcher conducted the interview using a research interview protocol through Google Forms. The interview protocol was a predesigned form containing the research questions which were general and open-ended considering the guidelines of Morse and Field as reintroduced by Woodgate (2008). However, the interview question was self-made and not standardized, so the researchers presented it to credible authorities such as an expert in the field of qualitative research for comments and recommendations for validity. The researcher-made interview protocol was presented to the adviser for initial validation and submitted to the research validators for finalization.

The researcher secured a certification from the PUP University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and sought permission from the Vice President for Branches and Campuses endorsed to the Director of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines in Taguig Branch, San Juan Branch, Quezon City Branch and in Paranaque Campus informing the conduct of the study. Then, the participants were informed through phone, messenger, and email regarding their participation in the study.

Data was collected considering the availability of participants, gaining access, and establishing a rapport with them, which were all important to procure good data (Creswell, 2018). After the validation of the research instrument utilized in the study, the researcher conducted online interviews and utilized Google Forms with open-ended questions with follow-up communication to all participating faculty.

Moreover, the responses gathered through the Google sheet attached in the Google form were downloaded and opened utilizing the Microsoft Excel program for further analysis. Ethical standards were maintained throughout the course of the study by careful attention to the following issues: Central to any ethics protocol at the start of any study was the need for informed consent (Scott, Wishart, and Bowyer, 2018). In this research, participants were requested to sign an informed consent which provided an accurate description of the nature and aims of the study. Also, their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence was clearly stated. Participants were further requested to sign an informed consent form for the interviews. Another ethical consideration as a fundamental ethical principle in qualitative research is protecting the privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of data.

All gathered data from the research interviews were transcribed and coded to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the participant's data. Data, when analyzed, were kept for a reasonable period. The researcher then discarded the data so that it does not fall into the hands of other researchers who might misappropriate it (Creswell, 2020). Pseudonyms or aliases were

provided for any subsequent publication of the research results. This was also in adherence to the Republic Act 10173-Data Privacy Act of 2012.

III. Results and Discussion

1. As to what the participants' lived experiences in the implementation of Flexible Technology Enhanced Learning.

Theme 1: Exciting yet challenging. Exciting yet challenging means it isn't going to be easy, but you will get to test your skills as you push yourself. Generally, the majority of the participants responded that their experiences are indeed exciting, mostly at the start. However, as they go through the process of implementation, they experienced challenges. Some have expressed that at the start there is excitement but eventually they find themselves under stress. They really did their best to prepare themselves to facilitate teaching and learning success in the new normal. They were entangled between their desire to fulfill their task and the pressure just to make things possible to happen despite their limitations and restrictions due to the pandemic. Most of them said that their role in the implementation is complicated as described in the following:

- (1) *Exciting but somewhat complicated at the start.*
- (2) *I find it good since you can do it remotely but tedious at the same time due to numerous preparations which are more than the usual F2F.*

The above findings are consistent with the view of Malipot (2020) who stressed that teachers also air their problems on modular distance learning such as reproduction costs and being forced to attend school as late as 11:00 p.m. to complete the printing on time.

It is also confirmed by the study of Dangle & Sumaoang (2020) which showed that the implementation of modular instruction fostered various challenges to teachers, students, and parents and the main challenges that emerged were lack of school funding in the production and delivery of modules, students struggle with self-studying, and parents' lack of knowledge to academically guide their child/children.

Theme 2: Filled with internet disruptions and outages. The implementation of Flexible Technology Enhanced Learning is full of intermittent internet connection and technical issues which have led to sudden class interruption. Many of the participants were in the position that their experiences in implementing FLEXTTEL are comprised of so many technical issues such as connectivity due to financial constraints of data subscription, usage of technology tools, and low specs of gadgets used. More likely, most of them perceived their experiences as stuffed with surprising interruptions of classes and because of this, students have difficulty engaging in class discussion and in the submission of their tasks on time. Poor internet connectivity is a common problem for the majority of the participants as three of them stated:

- (1) *Poor internet connection, learning is affected if the device is broken or encounters bug down.*
- (2) *Sudden class interruption because of intermittent internet connection.*
- (3) *Internet connection and. Student response because some students are taking advantage of the system.*

This is similar to the study of Tarhini et al. (2018), which stated that the efficacy of online learning is greatly dependent on the user's level of affirmation. As a necessary consequence, it is vital to examine the elements that influence how people utilize and embrace technology. Also, in designing for online or distance learning, there is a need to understand the role of technology to attain success of the engagement (Kerka, 2020). The Internet is not the only factor to also consider the equipment that is needed for the teachers and the learners to engage effectively. If these are not available, there is a need to evaluate the approach used in the teacher-learner interaction. Furthermore, With the current health crisis with the shifting of learning delivery, the challenge would be how to provide an inclusive IT infrastructure to provide quality education for all learners (Internet access and education: Key considerations for policymakers, 2017).

Theme 3: It takes ample preparation. Teaching takes a lot of effort, especially in times of pandemic. The faculty in charge have to take responsibility in terms of planning their lessons and designing modules and instructional materials suitable to the learning modes chosen by the learners. Most of the participants stated that they encountered struggle in terms of preparations which basically includes crafting modules and other instructional materials considering their learners' need. It is not only just a single what-to-do list but a series of tasks to perform as expressed by two participants:

(1) *Preparation of modules, and instructional materials, and finding the right gadgets or technology.*

(2) *Lots of materials had to be prepared. Also attending webinars consumed a lot of time, especially on my part as a faculty, I had to divide myself between office work and school requirements.*

Furthermore, some participants mentioned that preparation of the lesson using different platforms requires a lot of time since they must learn how to navigate different platforms and the usage of technology tools. The new way of teaching has been introduced and should be implemented immediately as a response to the exigency of the current situation. Two participants revealed:

(1) *Preparation for the lesson using a different platform, and time. management, usage of technology tools, pandemic-related worries*

(2) *The use of available forms via Internet providers. Difficulty in choosing the right platform and unfamiliar with how to process.*

This supports the study of Pentang (2021) stated that teachers must use available and applicable pedagogy to effectively deliver their lessons. Also, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers continue to serve by developing modules that act as students' learning guides (Agayon et al.,2022).

Theme 4: Possibility of students' declining performance. Students' performance is the end result of all the preparations made in the academic realm and achieving quality education in times of crisis is truly challenging since it offers a great chance to decrease the learner's accomplishment. To the majority of the participants, problems in terms of students' integrity and honesty in terms of their output became their major concerns. Students may cheat since they can search for the answers online and many outputs were plagiarized. Two participants shared:

(1) *Questions on the integrity of their output since many outputs were plagiarized.*

(2) *The fact that virtual exams are open books, students don't really get to master the lessons before taking assessment tests, they don't have to, since the teacher won't know if they are referring to their notes during examinations and may take advantage of the system.*

This is true with the report of Akamai (2018) that the Philippines has the lowest internet connectivity in Asia. Besides, such challenges would be equity gaps, students' security and safety, quality of learning compromised, and poor assessment results (Winthrop, 2020). Changes in the grading system, assessment, and evaluation of student's performance will also be a challenge to every administrator. Moreover, with today's mode of instruction, it is really a challenge to validate students' output and performance. In addition, Anzaldo (2021) claimed that not all learners do their modules committedly and without the presence of teachers and classmates who remind them of their work, students are more likely to become sidetracked and lose sight of deadlines.

Moreover, some of the participants are also facing difficulty communicating with their students because of the online setup. They do not have gadgets and resources to attend the class regularly and poor internet connection contributed a lot to the difficulty of the learners in complying with the learning activities. In fact, many complaints arise in connectivity issues that hamper the continuity of the teaching and learning process. Two participants revealed:

(1) *Low internet and many had to make messages to their classmates regarding the work assigned and one need to compile the group work for final submission.*

(2) *Too much money to spend for load/data connection. They encountered difficulty understanding the lesson well because they are not used to online learning. They prefer traditional learning(face-to-face).*

This is similar to the result of the study by Pentang (2021) that the school should have reliable and consistent internet access. Teachers should connect with their students or parents and give feedback on their performance. Teachers should constantly evaluate their students' growth. Lastly, teachers must be prepared for any eventuality that may develop. This situation will not soon return to normal, but rather it is more like teachers are in need to adjust and accept the circumstance. Also, according to the report of Akamai (2018), the Philippines has the lowest internet connectivity in Asia. Besides, such challenges would be equity gaps, students' security and safety, quality of learning compromised, and poor assessment results (Winthrop, 2020).

It is evident that online learning will be sustained, and education will become more hybrid. E-learning may enhance learning quality and boost productivity since it is more effective than traditional methods and is simple to use and learn Lucero et al. (2022). However, according to Aguilera-Hermida (2020), students who have no prior experience with online learning may believe that it is not beneficial. Some pupils did not have access to technological devices, and/or their family circumstances made it difficult for them to do so.

Furthermore, due to the memorandum easing academic requirements, no required attendance and no failure policy has found it challenging to regulate their performances as indicated by other participants. With this, students may still submit outputs even without attending their class. Some students were not focused and were late in the submission of their learning activities as mentioned by one of the participants:

(1) *Due to the memorandum easing academic req, no required attendance, and no failure policy, I found it challenging to regulate their performances.*

2. As to how the participants face the issues and challenges in the

implementation of Flexible Technology Enhanced Learning (FLEXTEL).

Theme 5: Flexibility and Positivity in Work. Although flexibility and the capacity to adapt and respond quickly to shifting demands and environments are nothing new, the past COVID-19 condition strains every individual within the educational system to the breaking point. Fortunately, most participants have adapted and responded positively in the middle of the crisis. They had learned to accept the change and challenges by making necessary adjustments and appropriate mindsets to carry out their task. Adaptations and a change of mind became essential in performing their tasks successfully. Two participants narrated:

- (1) *Learning to accept and be flexible for whatever may come.*
- (2) *I took the challenges positively.*

It was also evident in some of the participants' responses that at that moment they certainly had no choice but to accept the reality, adjust, and sacrifice. According to them, the use of FlexTEL demands a lot of time. They need to give time to learn how to manipulate the gadget, do some research on the internet, and take notes on its advanced applications. Setting up both synchronous and asynchronous classes takes a lot of effort and time as mentioned by the participants:

- (1) *Use of FlexTEL demands a lot of time and so the need to use office productivity assistants to make FlexTEL effective.*
- (2) *Take down notes on the steps to manipulate the gadget and research more on advance applications using the gadget.*

This is supported by the study of Colclasure et al. (2021), which stated that some faculty gave additional time to prepare for remote instruction (e.g., a week), the enormous tasks of learning new pedagogical approaches, identifying and incorporating new technologies, and changing academic content to fit a revised calendar was difficult for most faculty.

Theme 6: Continuous Learning and Upskilling. Learning never stops, especially when someone is eager to learn something new and possesses the attitude of a learner. Elevating skills by engaging the mind in learning new things can contribute more to the existing role. Most of the participants voiced that they never stop learning through training, workshops, webinars, and guidelines provided by the University. This was all done virtually, and this has helped them surpass the worries and problems in implementing FlexTEL. With the help of the University, participants were provided support in terms of advancing their skills. Some really do self-study to equip themselves in performing their tasks in the new normal. One participant said:

- (1) *I study and I equipped myself with learning and equipment like buying a laptop for me to adjust.*

This is supported by the CHED memorandum order (CMO) no. 04 series of 2020 which states that to cope with and to meet the technical requirements of online learning, educational institutions made efforts to capacitate their faculty on flexible learning and teaching options, approaches, strategies, pedagogies and modalities conducted in a form of webinar series.

Theme 7: Self-Reflective Change. You can sit back, contemplate, and get perspective on what is truly important to you by practicing self-reflection. You'll be able to choose more wisely how to pursue objectives in life that are in line with your requirements and interests as a result. In this study, most participants do improvements from within themselves to combat the insurmountable need of the current situation. It started with identifying their needs and reaching out to others for support and assistance. They see the need to improve the delivery of instruction and change their strategies. They have tried different approaches and new teaching styles both online and offline.

(1) *I tried to understand well the training online and this improved my personal and professional life.*

(2) *We tried to help and shared their knowledge, especially on technology and module writing.*

Moreover, some participants stated that to cope, they really need to manage their time. Time management became an important aspect in handling both personal and professional life in times of crises. Due to the high demand of time for professional development, participants must know their priorities as well.

Since student monitoring and assessment of learning is difficult in today's educational setting (Baryam, 2021), it is critical to rigorously validate the student's work. Still, the teachers were able to make time and double the effort to cope with monitoring and evaluating students' learning.

It is also apparent to some of the participants that to deal with some issues faced they need to consult their colleagues and peers. They shared their vast experiences in teaching and best practices.

This viewpoint proves Travis and Price's as cited in Hussein's (2011) claim concerning the utilization of technologies in higher education course delivery, emphasizing that the actual struggle for faculty is establishing their attitude in the delivery and management of instruction (Ulanday, 2021).

IV. Conclusion and Recommendation

The researcher came up with the following conclusions based on the textural and structural descriptions:

The lived experiences of faculty in the implementation of Flexible Technology Enhanced Learning are indeed exciting yet challenging. It is sensational at first yet, during the process it is filled with struggles to defeat, and the faculty have acknowledged that student learning is the heart of every teaching process therefore, they need to face whatever issues and challenges encountered in the implementation of FLEXTEL.

Considering the findings and conclusions of this study, the researcher elicited the following recommendations for expected actions:

Faculty in Higher Education Institutions should anticipate that in times of pandemic and other calamities, the implementation of Technology Enhanced Learning is indeed exciting yet challenging. They have to bear in mind always that students' learning is the heart of every teaching process so that they may be able to cope and face whatever issues and challenges encountered.

In the implementation of FLEXTEL, faculty should have to be more open in embracing the change though it is a bit challenging with proper adjustment and appropriate mindset. Thus, they must attend training, workshops, and webinars for proper guidance and directions.

To provide immediate and appropriate solutions to the problems met, faculty may have to utilize consistently the common feedback of learners applying different learning modes as suggested by the University.

The Higher Education Institution should ensure strict implementation of FLEXTEL through a well-framed and appropriate Learning Continuity Plan to address students' unique needs and as recognition of their diverse learning styles.

A seamless capacity building may be established in the institution to provide continuous professional development for faculty, training for learners, and technical support for the content development and delivery of online courses.

The HEI administrator may upgrade infrastructure in terms of technology. They may consider the alignment of budget allocation in strengthening the usability of the University's Learning Management System with strong internet connectivity. Also, Organizational Structures as a support system to help and monitor and a strategic plan to develop collaboration with stakeholders (Local Government Units (LGU), alumni, and partner agencies). Good partnerships with LGU may provide avenues where students, during the off-class time, will go to the learning hub in the LGU, complete with internet connectivity, to work on their tasks in case they don't have connectivity at home.

The Higher Education Institutions may have to recalibrate the curriculum to address the competencies which were left at the time of the class suspension, and discipline-based course mapping was conducted. Under this action, the following may be considered: revision of the unified syllabus; integration of the outcomes-based teaching and learning strategies using flexible learning platforms such as distance and online learning options, and the learning assessment strategies suitable for individual student needs.

The Commission on Higher Education may have to revisit and review the created Institution's Learning Continuity Plan (LCP) for sustainability, monitoring, and more resilience of flexible Learning.

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