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ABSTRACT

The compelled shift of pedagogy design has brought some disparities and challenges in the education program, more specifically to the students. In light of today's uncertainties, it is critical to study students' online learning experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although several studies have looked into this subject, little is known about the issues students confront and the methods they employ to deal with them. This research study aims to fill in the gaps thru phenomenological method using interview. Specifically, it gives light on their perspectives of Business Entrepreneur students on their challenges and struggles in flexible learning.

Participants cited flexibility, time management, and resilience were their positive experiences. They had problems and had to make significant changes to their routines and learning methodologies, underscoring issues on isolation and connection.

Keywords: Lived Experiences, Challenges, Flexible Learning, Pandemic, Qualitative

INTRODUCTION

As face-to-face instruction gives way to entirely remote online instruction, where peer dialogue and knowledge production take place primarily in asynchronous discussion forums, synchronous video conferences, and social media, students and teachers have adapted to the change. The changes forced institutions due to Covid 19 spawning outbreak hampering physical education.

Online learning describes a setting where students are taught synchronously and asynchronously while managing their academic programs using the Internet and other technology resources (Usher & Barak, 2020; Huang, 2019). Asynchronous online learning takes place without a set schedule for various students, whereas synchronous online learning incorporates real-time interactions between the teacher and the students (Singh & Thurman, 2019). Online learning has assumed the role of temporary remote instruction in the COVID-19 pandemic scenario, acting as a response to an emergency.

The transition to a new learning environment has, however, been hampered by significant issues with policy, pedagogy, logistics, socioeconomic considerations, technology, and psychosocial issues (Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020; Khalil et al., 2020; Varea & González-Calvo, 2020).

According to Dereso et al. (2022), the COVID-19 pandemic's unexpected emergence of uncertainty changed teaching and learning procedures and affected the entrepreneurial intents of students who might otherwise become future business owners. The forerunner in providing a learning environment to foster students' entrepreneurial behavior is higher education institutions (Welter, F., 2020).

In order to adapt to the current environment, educators and policymakers have realized that it is becoming increasingly necessary to transition learning activities from traditional classroom settings to online ones (Toquero, 2020). According to research, improving learner autonomy in a virtual learning environment can be accomplished by designing a digital learning plan that includes an examination of the learning culture (van der Merwe & Wolfson, 2019; Mukherjee & Hasan, 2020). To address this issue, it is important to strengthen teachers' pedagogical and technological competencies. The difficulties and opinions of students who employ flexible learning must be heard in order to do this.

Research Questions

This study sought to examine how flexible learning affected business school students throughout the pandemic and their experiences with it. It specifically sought to provide responses to the following queries:

1. What are the opinions of students pursuing a business education on flexible learning?
2. What difficulties did the students in business education face?

METHODS

Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach to investigate students' lived experiences with flexible learning during the COVID-19 epidemic.

According to Tuffour (2017), "the goal of phenomenology is to describe the meaning of experience from the perspective of the experienter—both in terms of "what" was experienced and "how"." This methodological choice allowed the researcher to critically describe the essence of the phenomenon (in this case, the experience of using e-learning during the COVID-19) and thus develop a rich, detailed, and contextualized meaning and understanding. By integrating their numerous assumptions, the researcher played the function of an "interpretive bricoleur," building knowledge. This study's constructivist-interpretivist foundation encouraged the investigation of contextual and holistic information, or the significance of the phenomena.

Participants of the Study

The sources of data in this study were twenty business education students duly enrolled in the Learning Environment Network System, a flexible learning format for instruction at Cagayan State University-Aparri Campus.

Inclusion criteria set for the recruitment of participants included the following: (a) currently enrolled in the institution, (b) undergoing flexible learning and are c) student in the College of Business Entrepreneurship and Accountancy.

Locale of the Study

Cagayan State University at Aparri served as the study's setting. Being a comprehensive institution, one of the undergraduate academic program offerings it offers is Business Entrepreneurship.

Research Instrument

For this study, an interview guide was designed as a tool for gathering data. Open-ended, loosely organized oral interviews with audio recording were the main method used to collect data. Depending on the option of each participant, the interviews were either performed over the phone, through video call, or in person.

The interview questions sought to uncover pertinent information about their personal experiences. During the interview, questions pertaining to their opinions, the difficulties they encountered with the new learning design were posed. These questions included their opinions on flexible learning, how it affected or changed their studies, and the various difficulties that came with it.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to conducting the study, the researcher emailed the participants and requested their full consent. The researcher carefully and purposefully chose the volunteers. The method used for this study's data collection was a formal interview conducted via zoom with the participants. The researchers and participants established a solid connection throughout the interview by outlining the goals and parameters of the study, their rights to secrecy, and their right to decline at any moment. Participants were invited to freely chat and tell stories in their own language. Discussions about the participants were based on their convenience and availability. The researchers determined the data saturation level in a technique that was done concurrently with data.

The documentation procedure also included zoom video and audio recording. The interview recordings were password-protected in the drive's digital storage area by the researcher. The researcher then verified that all the information had been collected, prepared a transcription, conducted an analysis, and then went back to the participants to get confirmation of the themes that had developed and to report the concepts and themes.

Ethical Considerations

Given the study's qualitative research approach, the contact between researcher and participants may be ethically challenging. As a result, developing particular ethical norms in this regard is critical. First and foremost, the researcher sent an email to the study participants outlining the goal of the study, the risks, advantages, and alternatives, as well as an extended opportunity to ask questions. The full consent was then obtained. Anonymity of Individuals who participated were ensured. Participants' personal information and data on the drive's digital space with passwords were encrypted, and removed after three months.

Data Analysis

Twenty participants participated in the study to achieve the study's goal of exploring the lived experience of Business Entrepreneurship students with flexible learning. The interviews were taped, transcribed, and evaluated thematically.

The researchers chose Colaizzi's seven-step data analysis method.

The transcript was read and reread several times until an overall feel of the material was gained. Significant remarks relating to the issue being researched were marked in each transcript and placed on a separate sheet with page and line numbers. To create meanings, major statements were used to interpret significant statements and translate data from native language to English. Formulated interpretations were organized into Cluster Themes. Following this, an Exhaustive Description was made by combining the results of the study into a thorough description of the phenomenon under study. Finally, the fundamental structure of the phenomenon was described.

Trustworthiness

To reinforce the credibility of the findings, the following aspects were included in this study (Angen, 2000):

1. Research question, methodology, and method are all in sync.

The research question is of the phenomenological variety. The method used phenomenological analysis of participant interviews, with the participants serving as the primary knowledge providers (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2009).

2. Transcriptions' dependability.

To assure transcribing accuracy, the researcher employed many confirmations, including member checking. In this study, the member check was utilized to increase the correctness, credibility, and trustworthiness of the research by clarifying responses and questions answered in the first interview, as well as to collect any extra data relevant to the study. The participants in this study checked to determine if a "true" or authentic representation of what they said was made.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section covers the analysis and interpretation of the data gathered during the online zoom interview with participants on their experiences with flexible learning. The topics that arose from the transcribed text during the interviews are used to convey the experiences of these business education students. Important statements in the participants' own words are offered to provide the depth and richness of their descriptions of their insights, meaning, and inspirations received from their experiences.

Views of business education students on flexible learning

The participants were asked on their positive views on flexible learning. Based on the inductive analysis of the data, four major themes have emerged:

Flexibility

Students have complete control and accountability for their learning through flexible learning. Rather than being required to attend a class, people can choose and allot time for their learning. This control not only enables them to coordinate their education and their commitments but also ensures that they are learning at the best time. One participant noted about her time of learning.

"In the traditional set-up, we learn during day-time from 8 to 5, with the online learning, I choose my own learning time and most of the time, I work better in the evening. "

Taking opportunity of the new learning modality, another participant also quoted:

"Ang maganda sa online learning is, Madami akong natutunan nakakapag work ako as receptionist secretary and cashier sa isang clinic" (What's good in online learning is, aside from learning a lot, I am able to work as receptionist secretary and cashier in one clinic)

The participants also highlighted having more quality time with their family.

I am able to make my own schedule.

I experienced to be more flexible with my time

I could make family bondings. I could learn basically at anywhere.

Learner-related elements such as time, place, learning materials, interaction, and learning pace are the most addressed characteristics of flexibility in e-learning (Li & Wong, 2018; Soffer, Kahan, & Nachmias, 2019). The flexibility in flexible learning demonstrated the learner's autonomy in picking the learning goal and meaning that they could control.

Resilience

The ability to bear stress and manage adversity is referred to as resilience. Academically, resilient learners can deal with stress, stay motivated, and concentrate on their schoolwork. According to Yeager and Dweck (2012), resilience is the mindset of not giving up on problems because any efforts made will almost certainly result in success. Participants in the study viewed resilience as a positive aspect of flexible learning. Grit is characterized by resilience. Previous research has established that grit is an important predictor of learners' improved performance in the classroom and in the real world, according to Paat, F., et al (2020).

Resilience springing out from students' grit in the flexible learning is reflected in the following responses.

All the challenges that I encounter gives me motivation to study well.

Sa lahat ng hirap, ma's ginaganahan akong mag arak lalo na kapag may mga hindi ako alam pero go on. (Of all my difficulties, I become gritty in leaning especially if there are things I do not know but I still go on.

My great experience is kahit sobrang hirap intindihin mga ibang topic, nalalagpasan ko parin mga yon (even when it is so hard understanding other topics, I still get through them)

Learners who are self-supervising, self-regulating, like self-exploration, and have open minds, among other characteristics, influence the flexible learning effect (Talosa et al., 2021; Matteucci & Soncini, 2021).

Time administration

Time management, adhering to study findings. To be able to study freely, they must display an attitude of spontaneous learning. As a result, learners must have a greater capacity for self-learning in order to complete the course. This provides chances with flexible learning based on making learners self-responsible and self-directing in their learning choices.

Despite of this pandemic, I learnt how to improve my time with my everyday routine.

I experienced to be more flexible with my time

I learn to be independent

Challenges

Asked on the challenges they encountered during the pandemic, the following were the themes extracted.

Challenge on the Teaching- Learning Methodology.

Majority of the respondents agreed on the value of interaction in learning on three aspects- technology, teachers and classmates and content.

Anxiety in Solo-learning

It was not easy learning in isolation. There are things I think I am able to learn more by reaffirming it to someone else. The participants have noted challenges on doing the learning in isolation. Evidences of this is presented in the quoted verbatims below.

it's not easy to self-study.

Stressed, says another participant with a request saying sana hinay hinay po pagbibigay ng activities kasi po napapagod na po kami. (hoping teachers would not just give and give activities as we also get exhausted. This was supported by similar responses saying "Struggling po kasi may ibang prof na bigay lang ng bigay ng Activities kahit sobrang nahihirap" (Struggling because there are other teachers who just give and post activities even if it's too difficult).

some teachers lack in teaching and instructions they just give activity.

I am suffering a little bit anxiety and a little bit struggling on my online class especially majors.

Hindi ako masyadong maka sunod sa ibang subject and untill now it hard for me with the new learning.

These responses are eye openers that educational institutions should rethink their approach to teaching as a whole. Academically, while students can learn anything online, their learning may suffer, especially in classes that require face-to-face interactions (Franchi, 2020). However, the difficulty involves instructional intervention in the institution.

According to Burns (2016), forty percent (40%) of learners worldwide have dropped out of distant education. Burns identified the assumption that learners must study alone - hence the term "solo learner" - as one of the explanations. She said that without a sense of connection, learners' interest drops and they eventually leave or quit the program.

Challenge on technological connections.

The students also unveiled that they consider the challenges arising from the technology in flexible learning. internet shortage, technical problems and glitches and inadequate service support of the program used were reported as the sources of challenges. The following sentences can be given as examples to the opinions of the participants on this theme

Mahirap din para sa aming mga estudyante Ang magonline schooling Kase karamihan samin ay walang budget. (Online schooling is difficult to us students because most of us do not have budget.

kakulangan ng mga kagamitan (Lack of technological materials)

wala po akong laptop na gagamitin para sa aking laboratory (I don't have laptop to use for my laboratory)

Nasira ang phone at Na-LCD naman laptop ko (My phone got destroyed, and so with my laptop) says, another frustrated participant.

The absence of technology and infrastructure, according to the participants, is the root of the problems they face during the distant education process. Participants cited internet scarcity, a lack of infrastructure, inadequate

infrastructure, technical issues, and insufficient service support for the application used as causes of obstacles. The following statements can be used to illustrate the participants' perspectives on the subject at hand. Orlando and Attard (2015) claimed that "teaching with technology is not a one size fits all approach because it depends on the types of technology in use at the time and also the curriculum content being taught."

Challenge on Inadequate interactions

The main concerns of participants was the creation of effective interactions for maximum learning. Interaction is essential regardless of the mode or the platform for teaching and learning.

One of them said :

"The professors often upload offline sessions which are one-sided in the LENS, and we cannot actively participate in practical terms. Therefore, students' participation and so with interaction are not seen in my point of view, and that is a big problem."

I too have questions but I'm afraid to speak it out where I could not even see how my teacher would take it for me. Says a respondent.

All of these therefore presents issues on interaction between teacher to student and student to student which may have been curtailed in the use of technology.

CONCLUSION

Participants cited flexibility, time management, and resilience were their positive experiences. They had problems and had to make significant changes to their routines and learning methodologies, underscoring challenges on teaching-learning methodology highlighting isolation, challenges on technological connection and inadequate interactions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Challenges could be addressed on the management of learning; it is in this concept that teachers are expected still to consider virtual presence to address needs of students in the flexible learning.
2. The academic office should hold specialized training courses on interactive features of the learning management system to empower professors and students in flexible education for a stronger teacher/ learner support program.
3. Another study may be conducted on determining the strategies of students in flexible learning using qualitative and or mixed method designs.

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