Teaching Strategies in Flexible Learning: The Political Science Department Experience

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the experiences of Political Science students with the teaching strategies employed by their teachers in the context of flexible learning. This learning modality was practiced during the pandemic when classes were conducted synchronously and asynchronously. It covered three main objectives: (1) to ascertain the level of effectiveness of the teaching strategies in flexible learning used by the Political Science faculty members in their professional courses as perceived by the students; (2) to identify the factors contributing to the level of effectiveness of the teaching strategies as perceived by the students; and (3) to determine the challenges the students encountered in relation to the teaching strategies employed by their subject teachers for flexible learning. This study used the mixed-method approach. A structured questionnaire was developed to collect the necessary data and was distributed to 153 respondents. For the analysis of the answers obtained from the interview of 12 students, thematic analysis was used to determine the challenges and factors affecting the effectiveness of the teaching strategies. The findings revealed that the most effective strategy was the use of visuals, including PowerPoint presentations, as it stimulates the imagination and helps students develop visual thinking skills. Other learning strategies were considered only effective because they do not warrant a conducive learning environment suited for synchronous and asynchronous classes. The factors that contributed to the effectiveness of these strategies included the creation of school policies to accommodate flexible learning modalities, managing learner behavior to provide productive learning opportunities, presenting appropriate content, and engaging teachers in targeted behavioral interventions. The most frequently observed challenges in the conduct of flexible learning include engagement issues such as reporting without proper feedback, the overwhelming volume of activities, and irregular attendance by teachers.

Keywords: teaching strategies, flexible learning, Political Science department, experience

INTRODUCTION

During the pandemic, people's lives were completely upended due to the drastic and abrupt changes in social norms and lifestyles, given the stringent preventive measures imposed in the community. The restrictions on the mobility of people brought about by the deadly COVID-19 virus impacted various human endeavors, including running essential errands, outdoor recreational activities, livelihoods, and business undertakings.

Moreover, a great deal of challenges have been faced by private offices and government agencies since the mandatory community quarantine was implemented. Hence, schools and universities were never exempt from this situation.

Consequently, CHED Chairman Prospero de Vera III stated that HEIs are ready by August 2020, though the battle with the coronavirus is still ongoing. He said that high-performing universities have adopted flexible learning before COVID, so this kind of learning modality is not new at all. Other universities, on the other hand, are also preparing before the opening of classes that involve the use of digital and non-digital technology, where the Internet is not required at all (Magsambol, 2020). On September 2, 2020, CHED issued Memorandum No. 4, Series of 2020, declaring the adoption and promulgation of flexible learning to be implemented in the private and public HEIs. Given the mandate to study at home, schools tend to improvise to serve their clientele without sacrificing the quality of education their students deserve.

There has been a considerable amount of time for online classes to be adopted in schools to determine if quality education has been delivered to some extent among our students. However, pragmatically speaking, we cannot deny the fact that certain factors hinder learning outcomes. Learning options were then provided to cater to the various needs of the students. For example, synchronous modality is used when the internet connection is stable, and asynchronous modality is used when the situation is deemed otherwise. However, there are other reasons why asynchronous learning is sometimes adopted; it may be due to school activities that require teachers to be on-site, or student activities that allow them to be excused from attending online classes. The rest could be attributed to poor internet connection, power interruptions, natural calamities, and many other unforeseen circumstances.

The challenge of implementing flexible learning modalities has encouraged the political science program, whose curriculum is designed to cultivate students' analytical and critical thinking skills, research, communication, and ethical engagement (CMO NO. 5, s. 2017), to reevaluate and reform its teaching strategies to attain its desired learning outcomes. In the study of Holmes (2012), he identified two challenges that political science needs to focus on: (1) promoting civic spiritedness on the part of the students, and for teachers to reflect on the pedagogy to facilitate learning, and (2) to have a purposeful impact on public policy. This challenge in the field is still relevant in the present situation, as Go (2023) reiterated that political scientists should be able to advise policymakers at different levels of governance; thus, the discipline is very much ready for integrating theory and practice.

Given these premises, this study aimed to (1) ascertain the level of effectiveness of the teaching strategies in flexible learning used by the Political Science faculty members in their professional courses as perceived by the students; (2) to identify the factors contributing to the level of effectiveness of the teaching strategies as perceived by the students; and (3) to determine the challenges the students encountered in relation to the teaching strategies employed by their subject teachers for flexible learning. This way, professors could practice the best teaching strategies for flexible learning. Students' personal experiences in flexible learning will help validate the teaching strategies, as they would explain why some of these strategies have failed while others are deemed highly effective. The findings of this study will benefit academics, both local and international, by recommending effective teaching strategies that can be replicated in their respective fields of work, while inspiring future researchers to explore other factors for potential research.

CONCEPTUAL/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study employed the educational theory of Constructivism, in line with the teaching strategies, and Behaviorism, a psychological theory, to explain the students' behavior in response to the approach applied to them.

The theory of constructivism, as proposed by Piaget, states that one's experiences are how knowledge is created and forms its meaning. (Teachnology, n.d.) In a constructivist view, learning happens through active collaboration and interaction among students and teachers. Learning occurs through an inductive process, where teachers initiate the exploration of ideas in an active and learner-centered environment (ASU, 2021).

Since our educational system focuses on the outcomes of our students' learning, the idea of constructivism as a theoretical framework best aligns with the concept of student-centered instruction. Although teachers employ flexible teaching strategies, the design of their lessons allows students to work at their own pace, enabling them to explore different resources and exercise their critical thinking in the process. Students are in constant communication with their teachers through various convenient online or electronic means, implying that teachers serve as guides who facilitate their students' learning.

Constructivist teaching strategies include role-playing, open-ended questions, and real-world hands-on problem-solving activities that enable students to learn through interaction and experience. These learning engagements promote active student participation, encouraging teamwork and individual significance. In the learning process, it adopts effective collaboration, dynamism, and helps create a learning experience based on real-world contexts that enhance the students' critical thinking skills and deep appreciation of the subject matter.

Behavioral learning theory, as presented by John B. Watson and B.F. Skinner explains learning as a change in observable behavior shaped by environmental stimuli, reinforcement, and punishment. The core strategies applied by teachers using this theory include positive/negative reinforcement, punishment, modelling, shaping, cueing, token economies, behavior contracts, and direct instruction (National University, 2023).

These strategies offer several benefits, such as encouraging students to repeat pleasant behaviors and avoid unpleasant ones, enhancing students' engagement in activities by stimulating their interest, and helping teachers to monitor and make some adjustments to instruction based on students' performance. It therefore offers important ways to shape the behavior and learning among students, such as creating effective teaching strategies, a conducive learning environment, and strengthening students' participation that cater to the different needs of the students.

Behaviorism enables students to develop mastery in skills and knowledge through constant practice and reinforcement, which leads to better retention of information, better behavior, and academic success. This study, therefore, delved into investigating students' experiences through interviews and surveys to assess the behavior manifested by students in response to the strategies used by teachers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The respondents of the study are political science students who were enrolled in the program during the pandemic, when classes were held online. A sample population was identified per year level from the second to the fourth year. The stratified sample size was calculated using the formula: stratified sample size = (sample size/population size) × *stratum size.* Out of the total population of 253, the sample size is 153, with a distribution of 48 (2nd year), 46 (3rd year), and 59 (4th year), respectively. For the interview, 12 students were purposively selected as key informants from each year level to ensure equal representation. Data gathering was conducted during the second semester of the 2023-2024 school year.

This study used the mixed-method approach. Each objective has a corresponding methodology to ensure the correctness of the data needed. A structured questionnaire was made to identify teaching strategies employed in flexible learning and assess their effectiveness as perceived by respondents. The Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the internal consistency or reliability, which is appropriate for Likert-type scales as used in the questionnaire. For the items identifying the teaching strategies used by the teachers, the scale demonstrated an acceptable reliability (α=.73). Subscale reliabilities were as follows: Visual presentations (α=.23), student-centered-inquiry (α=.18), cooperative learning (α=.23), instruction (α=.23), and differentiated learning (α=.92). These results indicate that the questionnaire is a reliable instrument for measuring students' perception of effective teaching strategies.

On the other hand, the second part of the questionnaire, where students were asked to identify the factors that contributed to the effectiveness of teaching strategies, demonstrated low internal consistency (α =.299), likely due to diverse content areas. Despite this, the items conceptually represent key facets of the construct, and exploratory factor analysis supports their relevance. Given the exploratory nature of this study, the scale's use provides preliminary information, though future research will aim to refine and enhance its reliability. The study also employed multiple linear regression (standardized beta) to identify the factors contributing to the effectiveness of the teaching strategies.

Following an in-depth discussion of the challenges experienced and other concerns raised by the students' survey answers, an interview was conducted. For the analysis of the answers obtained during the interview, the qualitative aspect of the study, thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke (2006), was employed to generate data on the challenges experienced and, at some point, on the factors affecting the effectiveness of the teaching strategies. Following the steps of thematic analysis, the researcher started with the familiarization of the data, followed by the initial coding or breaking the data into smaller chunks, then grouped into broader themes, and refined them before integrating into the analysis with supporting quotes and interpretations.

In terms of ethical considerations, the researcher ensured that the code of ethics was observed during the data gathering phase. Informed consent forms were given to the respondents to assess their understanding of the

nature and procedures of the interview before they decided to participate in the study. An additional consent form was provided to obtain their approval for any recordings and documentation before starting the interview. The researcher emphasizes the participants' complete anonymity and confidentiality to ensure their privacy and security.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The primary objective of this study is to identify and evaluate the teaching strategies in flexible learning as perceived by Political Science students (n = 153) at the Bicol University College of Social Sciences and Philosophy. Tables 1 and 1.1 present the commonly used teaching strategies, along with their level of effectiveness. Table 2, on the other hand, illustrates the various factors contributing to the perceived effectiveness of the teaching strategies used in flexible learning. Lastly, Table 3 outlines the challenges encountered by students regarding the teaching strategies employed by their course instructors in flexible learning.

Level of Effectiveness of the Teaching Strategies in Flexible Learning

This section provides for the identification of teaching strategies used by the course instructors in flexible learning, as identified by the students. Table 1 below presents a summary of the respondents' answers.

Table 1. Teaching Strategies Utilized in Flexible Learning as Perceived by the Students

Teaching Strategies	f	Percentage
Visual presentations (i.e., use of PowerPoint presentations)	137	89.5%
Student-centered inquiry (i.e., research, reflection papers, journals, etc.)	133	86.9%
Cooperative Learning (i.e., collaborative work on a given task)	121	79.1%
Differentiated Instruction (i.e., use of different assessment tools suited to individual needs)	83	54.2%

The survey results revealed a varied range of teaching strategies employed by course instructors in the flexible learning environment for AB Political Science students. The most frequently utilized strategy was Visual presentations (89.5%), like the use of PowerPoint presentations. This high percentage indicates a strong reliance on visual materials to enhance understanding and engagement in the learning process.

Differentiated Instruction ranked second (86.9%), which includes varied assessment tools tailored to individual student needs. This approach highlights the instructors' efforts to address diverse learning styles and capabilities, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed.

The results indicate a strong preference for traditional and research-based teaching strategies, with a particular emphasis on visuals and student-centered inquiry. Visual presentations, which often incorporate diagrams, charts, and videos, are highly valued for their ability to make abstract and complex concepts more tangible and understandable. This approach caters to visual learners and enhances retention by providing concrete representations of information. The effectiveness of visuals in a flexible learning environment underscores its role in maintaining student engagement and facilitating deeper comprehension. Similarly, student-centered inquiry, which includes research projects, reflection papers, and journaling, empowers students to take an active role in their education. This strategy promotes critical thinking, self-reflection, and independent problem-solving —essential skills in higher education and beyond. By encouraging students to explore and investigate topics independently, instructors can foster a sense of curiosity and intrinsic motivation, resulting in more meaningful and lasting learning experiences.

However, the data also reveals that instructors employ different approaches to cater to diverse learning needs and preferences, demonstrating their adaptability in the flexible learning environment. As Lundin (2012) stated, this adaptability is crucial in addressing the varied backgrounds, learning styles, and access levels of students. For example, differentiated instruction involves tailoring teaching methods and assessment tools to meet the individual needs of students, recognizing that learners progress at different rates and have unique strengths and

weaknesses. By using diverse instructional strategies, such as differentiated assignments, flexible grouping, and personalized feedback, instructors can provide more equitable and inclusive learning opportunities. The mixed effectiveness ratings for differentiated instruction suggest that while it holds great potential, its implementation can be complex and requires continuous refinement.

Table 1.1 Level of Effectiveness of Teaching Strategies Utilized in Flexible Learning as Perceived by the Students

Teaching Strategies	$\bar{x}$	Verbal Interpretation
Visual presentations (use of PowerPoint presentations)	2.4	Very Effective
Student-centered inquiry (research, reflection papers, journals, etc.)	2.3	Effective
Cooperative Learning (Collaborative Work on a given task)	2.2	Effective
Differentiated Instruction (use of different assessment tools suited to individual needs	2.3	Effective
Total	**2.3**	**Effective**

Visual presentations (use of PowerPoint presentations) emerged as a highly effective strategy, with a weighted mean of 2.4 interpreted as *very effective*. This high level of perceived effectiveness underscores the importance of visual and auditory enhancements in facilitating comprehension and engagement in a flexible learning environment.

Although teachers may worry about overemphasizing the strategy at the expense of other modes, visual presentations offer easily understood ways to comprehend the lessons. To prevent low interaction, visuals should also engage students and provide a platform for expression. Thus, it is necessary to consider sequencing, identifying which visuals aid comprehension, choosing which format to use when, and the proper tools (software, video, and graphics) that appropriately represent knowledge. Combining text, audio, and visuals should also be considered. When using this strategy, teachers are primarily concerned about these issues.

Student-centered inquiry involves learning approaches where students investigate questions, problems, or topics and is often practiced by letting students choose questions, explore resources, and construct knowledge, to name a few. This is frequently accomplished by allowing students to select questions, examine resources, create knowledge, and many other methods. Students take responsibility for their education, which boosts their drive and perseverance. Writing, presentations, projects, experiments, and other forms of expression could be used to foster creativity, critical thinking, and adaptability in the way that learning is demonstrated. In guiding students through the exploration process with this kind of teaching strategy, teachers must possess a thorough understanding of the subject; otherwise, they risk losing students' attention or settling for a superficial level of engagement.

A teaching strategy known as differentiated instruction modifies the content and delivery of instruction as well as how students respond to it through projects, writing, presentations, and creative options. This approach is believed to be successful because it provides students access to educational resources, allows them to work at their own pace, and gives them multiple opportunities to demonstrate what they have learned. Therefore, to enhance or simplify complex material, teachers need to be knowledgeable about it. To guarantee equal access, they must be able to select and utilize the right technology and control synchronous or asynchronous modes.

Generally, the data suggest that traditional and research-based strategies, such as visual presentations and student-centered inquiry, are highly valued and effective in flexible learning environments (Crossland & Reudel, 2021). In the context of Political Science pedagogy in the Philippines, it sheds light on the demands to teach the course in a diverse and digital academic environment. It simplifies complex political concepts, such as constitutional principles, the structure of governance, electoral systems, and many others, by means of employing infographics, diagrams, and video explainers to enhance learning, especially for students with diverse learning needs. These teaching strategies develop the thinking and problem-solving skills of the students and, at the same time, prepare them to participate actively in democratic governance and exercise their political rights independently, which helps shape democratic life in the country.

Factors Contributing to the Level of Effectiveness of the Teaching Strategies

The effectiveness of teaching strategies was determined by factors favored by the students, namely: planning, management, instruction, and learning environment, as indicated in Table 2. Multiple linear regression was also performed to determine which of the teaching strategies is better associated with the domains.

Table 2. Factors Contributing to the Level of Effectiveness of Teaching Strategies

Dependent Variable (Domain)	Predictors (Teaching Strategies)	β (Standardized)	Interpretation
Planning	Visual presentation	+0.35	Strongest positive contributor
	Cooperative learning	-0.35	Weak predictor
	Student-centered inquiry	0.00	Neutral effect
	Differentiated instruction	0.00	Neutral effect
Management	Visual presentation	+0.40	Strongest positive contributor
	Cooperative learning	-0.40	Weak predictor
	Student-centered inquiry	0.00	Neutral effect
	Differentiated instruction	0.00	Neutral effect
Instruction	Visual presentation	+0.45	Strongest positive contributor
	Cooperative learning	-0.45	Weak predictor
	Student-centered inquiry	0.00	Neutral effect
	Differentiated instruction	0.00	Neutral effect
Learning Environment	Visual presentation	+0.30	Strongest positive contributor
	Cooperative learning	-0.30	Weak predictor
	Student-centered inquiry	0.00	Neutral effect
	Differentiated instruction	0.00	Neutral effect

The results indicate that Visual Presentations consistently yielded the strongest positive beta values across domains, ranging from $\beta = +0.30$ to $\beta = +0.45$. This suggests that the use of PowerPoint presentations and other visual aids is strongly associated with better performance in Planning, Management, Instruction, and Learning environments. However, the Student-Centered Inquiry and Differentiated Instruction displayed a negligible beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.00$), reflecting contributions that align with the average but are not strongly predictive of any domain. These findings imply that while teachers incorporate a range of strategies, technology-supported teaching methods play the most significant role in shaping domain outcomes, while collaborative and inquiry-based approaches are applied less intensively.

On the other hand, effective planning, management, instruction, and a supportive learning environment are all critical factors that contribute to the perceived effectiveness of teaching strategies in flexible learning. Effective planning involves meticulous preparation and foresight by instructors, including the development of comprehensive lesson plans, the incorporation of flexible learning modalities, and the establishment of clear objectives and outcomes. The planning-related factors, such as creating partnerships with parents and colleagues, providing appropriate teacher training, and developing school policies for flexible learning, underscore the importance of a solid foundation in ensuring instructional success. These elements of planning ensure that educators are well-prepared to meet the dynamic needs of students in a flexible learning environment, allowing for timely adjustments and the utilization of diverse teaching methods to enhance learning experiences.

Management factors are equally significant, as maintaining an environment conducive to learning is essential for student success. This includes strategies for maximizing instructional time, managing learner behavior, and creating a structured yet adaptable classroom atmosphere. Effective management ensures that students remain focused and engaged, reducing distractions and fostering a productive learning atmosphere. Additionally, the ability to maximize instructional time ensures that students receive the full benefit of the educational content, thereby further enhancing their overall learning experience.

Instructional strategies are at the core of effective teaching, with factors such as the delivery of instruction, presentation of appropriate content, and active engagement of students being critical to their success. These

strategies not only facilitate comprehension but also encourage student participation and engagement, making learning more dynamic and enjoyable. Moreover, regular assessment and feedback are crucial for monitoring student progress and identifying areas for improvement, ensuring that students receive the support they need to succeed.

Finally, a supportive learning environment, characterized by the use of technology, a positive atmosphere, and attention to student needs, plays a vital role in the effectiveness of teaching strategies. The integration of technology, quality resources, and a focus on student well-being further enhances the learning experience, creating a holistic and supportive educational setting.

Concludingly, the varied nature of effective teaching in flexible learning environments is evident based on the responses of students across planning, management, instruction, and learning environment factors. Addressing these various aspects comprehensively ensures that students receive a well-rounded and effective education, tailored to their diverse needs and preferences. This holistic approach to teaching not only enhances academic outcomes but also fosters a positive and engaging learning experience for all students.

Challenges the students encountered with the teaching strategies employed by their subject teachers for flexible learning

This section examines the challenges students face with professors' teaching strategies in continuous blended learning. By the term “challenges”, it pertains to the obstacles or difficulties that impede the achievement of students' expected learning outcomes. To gain a deeper understanding of these challenges, interviews were conducted, and participants were encouraged to share their thoughts on how these challenges affected their ability to engage with and benefit from the teaching strategies used in their courses.

Table 3. Challenges encountered by the students in the teaching strategies for flexible learning

Themes	Dimensions (Subthemes)	Collective Description
Engagement Enigma: Teaching and Engagement Issues	*Reporting is an ineffective teaching strategy* *Overwhelming online activities* *Lack of dynamic engagement and active learning opportunities* *Inappropriate behavior of professors during online classes*	Reporting is often not effective due to a lack of structured tasks, poor retention, dull presentation, and inadequate explanations. The challenges of online teaching are exacerbated by the sheer volume of assignments and a largely passive learning environment. This situation raises concerns among educators about their ability to meet professional standards, highlighting the urgent need for more engaging and effective online teaching methods.
Complex and Misaligned Content: Academic Material Difficulties	*Long-winded and Repetitive Material* *Conflicting Instructions and Rubrics*	This theme highlights the issues of long-winded and repetitive content that overwhelms students and impedes their ability to grasp key concepts. It also underscores the confusion caused by conflicting instructions and rubrics, which leave students uncertain about expectations and hinder their academic performance.
Techno-Homebound Hurdles: Technological and Household Challenges	*Lack of or poor internet connectivity* *Distractions from the household environment*	Refers to the persistent issue of poor or unreliable internet connectivity, which disrupts the continuity of online education and hampers access to essential resources. Additionally, it highlights the various distractions present in the household environment, from noisy surroundings to the demands of household chores and family responsibilities.

Wellness Woes: Health and Personal Management	*Health issues* *Poor self-discipline and time management*	Refers to the critical challenges students face concerning their physical and mental well-being, as well as their ability to manage time and maintain self-discipline. This theme highlights the health issues that arise from prolonged screen time and the stress associated with adapting to new learning strategies, which contribute to anxiety, frequent headaches, and deteriorating eyesight.

Engagement Enigma: Teaching and Engagement Issues

This refers to the challenges that hinder effective student participation in the blended learning modality. Professors often assign topics to students for reporting during online classes but fail to offer meaningful insights or guidance, which diminishes the educational value of the exercise and leaves students feeling unsupported and disengaged. Additionally, the persistence of an overwhelming volume of online activities, including assessments, readings, and tasks from multiple subjects, is particularly challenging to manage within limited time frames. This excessive workload can lead to burnout and a decline in motivation among students. The blended learning modality, particularly the conduct of online classes, often fails to recreate the interactive and spontaneous nature of in-person learning, resulting in a passive learning experience. Students also highlighted the importance of immediate feedback and opportunities for spontaneous discussions as crucial for deepening their understanding and keeping them engaged. Still, these elements are often missing in the digital classroom. *"It means that you don't get to talk to your professors and classmates in person, and it can be disappointing"* (participant 1).

Furthermore, students pointed out that there are behaviors exhibited by professors, such as being off-camera during the entire meeting, lacking spontaneity, making insensitive remarks, and creating an uncomfortable and ineffective learning environment. This behavior not only alienates students but also undermines the credibility and effectiveness of the teaching process.

For the class to be academically productive, online classes need to be more interactive, and online blended learning modality should consider the necessities of the learning strategies to be utilized (Mahmood, 2020). The practice of not receiving proper feedback from professors leaves students feeling unsupported and disengaged, as they do not receive the necessary guidance or insights to enhance their understanding. Additionally, the overwhelming volume of online activities and assessments from multiple subjects exacerbates the problem, leading to burnout and decreased motivation among students. The excessive workload makes it difficult for students to maintain a balanced academic life, ultimately affecting their overall performance (Angdhiri, 2020; McMurtry, 2016).

Another notable issue is the lack of dynamic engagement and active learning opportunities in online classes. The inability to recreate the interactive and spontaneous nature of in-person learning results in a passive learning experience, where students miss out on immediate feedback and opportunities for spontaneous discussions. Professors should initiate the exploration of ideas to foster an active and learner-centered environment (ASU, 2021).

Furthermore, unprofessional behaviors exhibited by some professors, such as being off-camera during meetings and making insensitive remarks, create an uncomfortable and ineffective learning environment. Irregular attendance of professors further disrupts the learning process, leaving students feeling unsupported and frustrated. Addressing these challenges is crucial to improving student engagement and participation in blended learning modalities, ensuring a more effective and enriching educational experience.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses improving teaching strategies, managing workloads effectively, ensuring regular attendance, and promoting professional conduct. By fostering a supportive and interactive learning environment, educators can help students overcome these

obstacles and enhance their overall educational experience. This result highlights the need for a more responsive reform, shedding light on areas that require improvement to serve students and implement the institution's mandate fully. As discussed by Handog (2020), although schools are not yet ready and face additional challenges, it will ultimately be beneficial to the education system in the long run.

Complex and Misaligned Content: Academic Material Difficulties

One of the significant challenges faced by students in contemporary educational settings, as reported by the respondents, is the prevalence of lengthy, verbose, and repetitive academic material. This issue is particularly problematic as it tends to overwhelm students, making it difficult for them to identify and grasp the key concepts essential for their learning. The redundancy in the material can lead to a lack of engagement and motivation, as students may feel inundated with information that does not contribute meaningfully to their understanding of the subject matter.

Additionally, according to the participants, the lengthy and repetitive content impedes their ability to grasp and process lessons. Instead of focusing on the core ideas, students become bogged down by the volume of information, leading to confusion and frustration. This can result in diminished academic performance, as students struggle to discern the crucial elements of the curriculum from the extraneous details.

In addition to the challenges posed by complex and misaligned content, students often face confusion due to conflicting instructions and rubrics. This theme underscores the inconsistency in guidelines provided by professors, which can leave students uncertain about what is expected of them. When instructions and rubrics are not aligned, students may struggle to understand the criteria for success, which can lead to anxiety and a decline in confidence in their abilities.

The combination of long-winded, repetitive material and conflicting instructions and rubrics can have a detrimental impact on students' academic performance. When students are unable to focus on key concepts due to overwhelming content and are uncertain about expectations because of inconsistent guidelines, their ability to succeed is compromised. Thus, professors must recognize these issues and strive to create more streamlined and coherent academic materials (Mitchell, 2014). By reducing redundancy and ensuring that instructions and rubrics are clear and aligned, educators can help students better understand the essential concepts and meet the expected standards. This, in turn, can lead to improved engagement, motivation, and academic performance.

Techno-Homebound Hurdles: Technological and Household Challenges

In the context of blended learning, poor internet connectivity presents several challenges. For instance, students with unreliable internet may struggle to participate in live online sessions, access digital materials, or submit assignments on time, *"The signal here in our area is so slow that I can't even connect to the point that I have to go to our rooftop just to attend classes, submit paperwork or do the tasks online"* (participant 1). This inconsistency can lead to gaps in learning and a fragmented educational experience. Educators, in turn, may find it difficult to implement synchronous teaching strategies, such as live lectures and real-time discussions, which are integral to the blended learning model. *"Some of my peers and I faced difficulties due to limited internet connectivity. This disparity in access created a learning gap, making it crucial for professors to consider these limitations while designing their teaching strategies"* (participant 7).

Moreover, the reliance on digital tools and platforms in blended learning means that poor internet connectivity can limit the use of interactive and multimedia resources. *"Dealing with technical issues during online classes, such as poor internet connectivity or software glitches, can be incredibly frustrating"* (participant 11). Educators may have to simplify or exclude these resources, thereby reducing the engagement and effectiveness of their teaching strategies. As a result, the intended benefits of blended learning—such as increased flexibility, personalized learning, and enhanced interactivity—may not be fully realized for all students.

In addition to technological challenges, the household environment presents numerous distractions that can impede both teaching and learning in blended learning modalities. Noisy surroundings, such as loud family

members, household appliances, and neighborhood commotion, can significantly disrupt students' focus and concentration during online sessions. These auditory distractions make it difficult for students to engage fully with the material, leading to decreased comprehension and productivity.

Furthermore, the demands of household chores and family responsibilities add another layer of complexity to the home learning environment. Students may be required to balance their academic responsibilities with tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for younger siblings. *"There are instances when I have to open my camera and I am carrying my brother, I spend 80% of my time dealing with all the household chores"* (participant 5). This dual burden can create significant strain, leaving students with less time and energy to dedicate to their studies. Similarly, educators working from home may face their own set of household distractions, which can impact their ability to consistently prepare and deliver high-quality instruction.

Wellness Woes: Health and Personal Management Challenges

Health issues have emerged as a significant barrier to the effectiveness of teaching strategies within this modality. Prolonged screen time, a hallmark of online learning as part of the blended learning modality, can lead to various physical and mental health problems, including anxiety, frequent headaches, and deteriorating eyesight. *"I experienced frequent headaches, and I also had eye checkups during one of those times since my vision got a little worse" (participant* 6). Students who spend extended hours in front of screens are at risk of developing Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS), characterized by eye strain, dryness, and blurred vision. These symptoms can reduce students' ability to focus and engage with the material, thereby hindering their learning process. Additionally, the sedentary nature of online learning can contribute to physical discomfort and musculoskeletal problems, further impacting students' overall well-being and academic performance.

Mental health issues, such as anxiety and stress, are also prevalent among students adapting to new learning strategies. The pressure to meet academic expectations, coupled with the challenges of navigating blended learning environments, leads to increased levels of stress and anxiety. These mental health concerns can impair cognitive functions, such as concentration and memory, making it difficult for students to absorb and retain information.

In addition to health issues, poor self-discipline and time management are critical challenges that students face in blended learning environments. The flexibility offered by blended learning requires students to take greater responsibility for their learning, which can be difficult for those who struggle with self-discipline and time management.

Time management is another crucial skill that students must develop to succeed in blended learning. In this modality, balancing online and face-to-face components, along with other personal and academic responsibilities, requires effective time management. Students who struggle with this skill may find themselves overwhelmed and unable to allocate sufficient time to each task. This can lead to a cycle of stress and poor performance, further exacerbating health issues and diminishing the overall effectiveness of blended learning strategies (Angdhiri, 2020).

CONCLUSION

While policies and plans are in place for flexible learning, there are still shortcomings in their implementation that prevent them from being fully effective. As for the teaching strategies identified in this study, although appealing, the way teachers execute them does not guarantee that students will achieve the intended learning outcomes. The nature, therefore, of the flexible learning modality should be approached differently depending on the expected outcomes of the subject. However, on the part of the students, certain circumstances hinder their academic involvement, as they are differently situated in terms of financial aspects, family background, place of residence, and many other factors. There are still many areas to improve in the conduct of flexible learning, which is primarily based on the teaching strategies employed by teachers. As for the overall findings of the study, students had a variety of experiences, but most of them were related to their struggles in the new learning environment, which caused them financial burden, health problems, and disengagement from the learning process.

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