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 students a 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.

Given these premises, this study aimed to determine whether the teaching methods employed by professors in the Political Science department had a positive impact on their students' 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.

Behaviorism, as presented by John Watson, focuses on the learning process through observable behavior (ASU, 2021). The stimulus-response model is a clear manifestation that all behaviors are products of events and situations in the environment. (First Discoverers, 2021)

Students' attainment of the course learning outcomes is what teachers are more concerned about. The teaching strategy employs various assessments to monitor the student's progress. According to Skidmore College (2021), teachers employ both direct and indirect methods of assessment to evaluate students' learning abilities, knowledge, and values. Some of these methods include the use of portfolios, assessments, exam surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

Applying Watson's idea, student behavior, as manifested in online learning, including assessments used by teachers, will determine whether the strategy is effective or properly delivered to the students. This study, therefore, will investigate students' experiences through interviews and surveys to assess the behavior manifested by students in response to the strategies used by teachers. It will recommend which of these strategies should be adopted and which require further enrichment.

Materials and Methods

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. Also included is a list of factors that determine 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, was employed to generate data on the challenges experienced and, at some point, on the factors affecting the effectiveness of the teaching strategies.

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.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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 2 present the commonly used teaching strategies, along with their level of effectiveness. Table 3, on the other hand, illustrates the various factors contributing to the perceived effectiveness of the teaching strategies used in flexible learning. Lastly, Table 5 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	Frequency	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, like the use of PowerPoint presentations, which was reported by 137 students, accounting for 89.5% of the total respondents. This high percentage indicates a strong reliance on visual materials to enhance understanding and engagement in the learning process.

Following closely, the Student-centered inquiry approach, which encompasses activities such as research, reflection papers, and journals, was identified by 133 students, or 86.9% of the participants. This strategy

emphasizes active learning and critical thinking, encouraging students to explore and reflect on their own learning experiences. Cooperative Learning, involving collaborative work, was reported by 121 students, making up 79.1% of the responses. This strategy facilitates peer interaction and teamwork, which are essential skills in both academic and professional settings.

Differentiated Instruction, which includes varied assessment tools tailored to individual student needs, was utilized by 83 students, or 54.2% of the respondents. 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.

Additionally, online interactive educational games represent another innovative approach, albeit with varied results. These games can make learning more engaging and enjoyable, particularly for students who thrive in interactive and gamified environments. However, their effectiveness depends on factors such as game design, curriculum relevance, and students' technological proficiency. The positive reception of cooperative learning, where students collaborate in small groups, further highlights the instructors' flexibility. This strategy not only supports academic education but also helps students develop essential interpersonal skills, such as communication and teamwork. By incorporating group projects and collaborative activities, instructors create a dynamic and interactive learning environment that caters to social learners, enhancing the overall educational experience.

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

Teaching Strategies	Not Effective		Effective		Very Effective		Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
	F	P	F	P	F	P		
Visual presentations (use of PowerPoint presentations)	4	2.6%	79	51.6%	70	45.8%	2.4	Very Effective
Student-centered inquiry (research, reflection papers, journals, etc.)	8	5.2%	95	62.1%	50	32.7%	2.3	Effective

Cooperative Learning (Collaborative Work on a given task)	17	11.1%	88	57.5%	48	31.4%	2.2	Effective
Differentiated Instruction (use of different assessment tools suited to individual needs	16	10.5%	82	53.6%	55	35.9%	2.3	Effective
						Total	**2.3**	**Effective**

The data in Table 2 presents the level of effectiveness of various teaching strategies utilized in flexible learning as perceived by the students and offers insightful observations into the effectiveness of different instructional methods.

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.

Student-centered inquiry, which encompasses research, reflective papers, and journals, was also well-received by a substantial number of students. Respondents rated this strategy as effective with a weighted mean of 2.3, which further reinforces the value of active learning and self-reflection in promoting deeper understanding and critical thinking.

Cooperative Learning, involving collaborative work, was rated as effective with a weighted mean of 2.2, indicating that while collaborative efforts are generally beneficial, they may not be universally effective for all students. On the other hand, Differentiated Instruction, which utilizes varied assessment tools suited to individual needs, received positive feedback from students, with a 2.3 weighted mean, indicating its effectiveness; nonetheless, its implementation may need further refinement to address all students' needs and enhance its effectiveness.

Overall, 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). Visual presentations, which include the use of PowerPoint, help make abstract concepts more tangible and easier to understand, thereby enhancing student engagement and information retention. The high effectiveness ratings for student-centered inquiry, which encompasses activities such as research, reflection papers, and journals, indicate that these methods foster critical thinking, self-directed learning, and deeper comprehension. These strategies align well with the principles of active learning, where students are encouraged to take an active role in their education process, leading to more meaningful and lasting learning outcomes.

However, there is variability in the effectiveness of differentiated instruction and online interactive games, indicating a need for ongoing evaluation and adaptation of these methods to better meet diverse student needs. Differentiated instruction, which involves tailoring teaching methods and assessment tools to individual student needs, shows promise but also reveals challenges in consistent implementation. The mixed feedback suggests that while differentiation can address diverse learning styles and abilities, it requires careful planning, adequate resources, and continuous professional development for teachers to be effective. Similarly, online interactive games, though engaging for some students, may not universally appeal to all learners. The effectiveness of these games can depend on factors such as game design, the relevance of content, and the student's familiarity with the technology. Therefore, it is essential to continuously assess and refine these strategies to ensure they effectively contribute to student learning.

The positive reception of cooperative learning also emphasizes the importance of peer interaction and collaborative efforts in enhancing the learning experience (Mahmood, 2020). Cooperative learning strategies,

which involve students working together in small groups to achieve common goals, promote the development of essential skills such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving. The high effectiveness ratings for this strategy suggest that students benefit from the social aspects of learning, where they can share ideas, provide mutual support, and learn from each other. This collaborative approach not only helps in the academic context but also prepares students for real-world scenarios where teamwork and cooperation are crucial.

The findings highlight the need for a balanced approach in flexible learning environments, where traditional, research-based strategies are complemented by innovative methods tailored to diverse student needs. Educators need to remain adaptable and responsive to feedback, continuously evaluating and refining their teaching strategies. Professional development opportunities that focus on the effective implementation of differentiated instruction and the integration of technology in teaching can further enhance the quality of flexible learning.

In conclusion, while strategies such as visual presentations, student-centered inquiry, cooperative learning, and differentiated instruction remain effective, there is a clear indication that flexible learning environments require a diverse array of teaching methods. The variability in the effectiveness of these strategies underscores the importance of ongoing assessment and adaptation. By fostering a culture of continuous improvement and embracing a variety of instructional approaches, educators can better meet the diverse needs of their students, ultimately leading to a highly effective and engaging learning experience.

Factors Contributing to the Level of Effectiveness of the Teaching Strategies in Flexible Learning

The effectiveness of teaching strategies is determined by factors favored by the students, as indicated in Table 3.

Table 2. Factors Contributing to the Level of Effectiveness of Teaching Strategies Utilized in Flexible Learning

FACTORS	YES		NO	
	F	P	F	P
A. Planning				
Teachers create partnerships with parents/guardians and colleagues	85	55.6%	68	44.4%
Appropriate training of teachers to help them teach the class effectively during the flexible learning modality	144	94.1%	9	5.9%
Effective planning by teachers on the adaptability of instruction	142	92.8%	11	7.2%
The online survey of schools, teachers, and students with their parents to determine the most appropriate flexible learning options	136	88.9%	18	11.8%
Creation of school policies to cover flexible learning modalities	146	95.4%	7	4.6%
B. MANAGEMENT				
Maximization of time available for instruction	142	92.8%	11	7.2%
Managing learner behavior to provide productive learning opportunities	147	96.1%	6	3.9%
C. INSTRUCTION				
Effective delivery of instruction	145	94.8%	8	5.2%

Presentation of appropriate content	152	99.3%	1	0.7%
Active engagement of the students in the learning process	142	92.8%	11	7.2%
Teacher's assessment of students' progress	139	90.8%	14	9.2%
Effective communication skills are essential for a teacher to teach effectively	151	98.7%	2	1.3%
The teacher engages students through creative, hands-on activities that foster a love of learning	141	92.2%	12	7.8%
D. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT				
The school caters to a positive learning environment, featuring the integration of technology in the classroom	128	83.7%	25	16.3%
Minimal distractions, clear routine, positive atmosphere, and varied approaches and formats of teaching.	129	84.3%	27	17.6%
Engaging and relevant curriculum.	139	90.8%	15	9.8%
Attention to student attendance and mobility.	142	92.8%	12	7.8%
Appropriate behavioral interventions	145	94.8%	8	5.2%

Planning

Effective planning emerged as a crucial element in the success of teaching strategies. Creating partnerships with parents/guardians and colleagues was acknowledged by 55.6% of students, indicating the importance of collaborative efforts in supporting flexible learning. However, 44.4% did not see this as a contributing factor, suggesting variability in its implementation or impact.

Appropriate training of teachers, with a striking 94.1% of students affirming its importance, underscores the need for educators to be well-prepared to navigate the challenges of flexible learning modalities. Similarly, effective planning for instruction, including the ability to incorporate necessary changes quickly, was recognized by 92.8% of students, highlighting the dynamic nature of flexible learning environments.

Conducting online surveys to determine the most appropriate flexible learning options was seen as beneficial by 88.9% of students, emphasizing the value of stakeholder feedback in planning. Moreover, the creation of school policies to support flexible learning was deemed important by 95.4% of students, underscoring the necessity of institutional support and clear guidelines.

Management

Management factors were overwhelmingly recognized as contributing to the effectiveness of teaching strategies. Managing learner behavior to provide productive learning opportunities was identified by 96.1% of students, underscoring the importance of effective behavioral management in maintaining a focused and productive learning environment.

Instruction

Instructional factors were highly rated by students in terms of their contribution to the effectiveness of teaching strategies. Effective delivery of instruction was acknowledged by 94.8% of students, underscoring the need for clear and effective teaching methods. The presentation of appropriate content received the highest affirmation,

with 99.3% of students recognizing its importance, indicating that relevant and well-organized content is essential for effective learning.

Active engagement of students in the learning process was seen as important by 92.8% of students, reinforcing the value of interactive and participatory teaching methods. Teachers' assessment of students' progress was recognized by 90.8% of students, highlighting the importance of regular and constructive feedback in supporting student learning.

Effective communication skills were deemed crucial by 98.7% of students, emphasizing the role of clear and effective communication in teaching. Additionally, engaging students through creative, hands-on activities was considered important by 92.2% of students, indicating that innovative and interactive teaching methods can foster a love of learning.

Learning Environment

The learning environment also played a significant role in the effectiveness of teaching strategies. Offering a positive learning environment, including the use of technology and quality library resources, was recognized by 83.7% of students. This highlights the importance of a supportive and resource-rich environment in facilitating learning.

Minimal distractions, clear routines, and varied teaching approaches were considered important by 84.3% of students, indicating a need for a structured and focused learning environment. An engaging and relevant curriculum was affirmed by 90.8% of students, emphasizing the importance of curriculum design in maintaining student interest and motivation.

Attention to student attendance and mobility, as well as the use of appropriate behavioral interventions, was recognized by 92.8% and 94.8% of students, respectively, underscoring the importance of monitoring and supporting student behavior and engagement in the learning process.

Overall, the data suggest that 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 high percentages of affirmation for 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. The data indicate that students highly value the ability of their instructors to manage these aspects effectively, as evidenced by the high percentages of affirmation for maintaining a conducive learning environment and managing learner behavior. 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. The data shows strong student support for these elements, highlighting the importance of clear and effective communication, relevant and well-organized content, and interactive teaching methods. 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 data indicate that students appreciate environments that minimize distractions, offer a clear routine, and provide varied approaches to teaching. Such environments are essential for accommodating diverse learning styles and preferences, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to thrive. 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 from the high percentages of student affirmation 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 blended learning. By the term “challenges”, it pertains to the obstacles or difficulties that impede in achieving student’s 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 the students encountered with the teaching strategies employed by their subject teachers for flexible learning

Themes	Dimensions (Subthemes)	Collective Description
Engagement Enigma: Teaching and Engagement Issues	Reporting is 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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