

UP! UP! and Beyond: Students' Position on CHED's Initiatives on Flexible Learning During Pandemic and Moving Forward

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Abstract

The pandemic COVID-19 has drastically changed the way education has been delivered for the past year and a half, the situation called for the sudden adaptation of flexible learning in schools which led to the need for accommodation and innovation not only institutional but also involving the stakeholders. The research employed the participation of students from selected state universities and asked them about their perception on how they thought Commission on Higher Education's approach in handling the situation during the pandemic and continuing the flexible learning programs moving forward. Results provide proof that there is a general discontent from on how CHED and various institutions' initiatives and approaches during the pandemic, as well as, on the preparations and considerations on their plans of considering flexible learning as a norm moving forward which ultimately affect not only the perceived maintenance on the quality of education that we have but also on the mental health and motivations of the students moving forward.

Keywords: Flexible Learning, COVID-19, CHED, Students' Well-being, Stakeholders, Pandemic, Mental Health

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has drawn out the challenges and risks of education systems and status quos (Baticulon et al., 2021; Daniel, 2020). Education was one of the many sectors caught in surprise as it grappled to continue learning for all and still enforce preventive measures. The Philippine community quarantine classifications initially changing every 15th day, the trifocal education system, consisting of the Department of Education, the Commission on Higher Education, and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, was eyeing what perhaps is the only viable solution at the moment, the distance education. The situation called for the sudden adaptation of community quarantines and other preventive measures like handwashing, wearing of facemask, and social distancing (WHO, 2020). The virus outbreak brought numerous problems in the educational system worldwide and in the Philippines, such as, closures and suspensions of classes (Viner et. Al., 2020). The higher educational institutions are trying their best to make sure that learning will remain unrestricted during the Pandemic, because of that flexible learning in schools were implemented, which led to the need for accommodation and innovation not only institutional but also involving the stakeholders (Cortez, 2020; Daniel, 2020; Tria, 2020). Flexible learning as defined by Shurville et al. (2008 as cited by Joan, 2013) "is a set of educational philosophies and systems, concerned with providing learners with

increased choice, convenience, and personalization to suit the learner". According to Mohanty (2019) stated that flexible learning's "overarching purpose is to increase opportunities and options available to learners and give them greater control over their learning through a variety of learning modes and interactions". It is not an alternative mode of education but an overarching driving force that provides learners greater choice (Collis & Moonen, 2011) with the pronouncement of the CHED chairman De Vera on flexible learning becoming a norm moving forward the researchers will utilize the lens of positioning theory in order to see how students from state universities position CHED based from the said statement as well as their experience regarding the implementation of flexible learning during this time of pandemic.

The background of the issue of having Flexible learning as a norm moving forward

In an article written by Magsambol (2021) on May 21, 2021 Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Chairman Prospero de Vera III, said that the commission is planning to adopted a policy that flexible learning will continue for the foreseeable future. De Vera emphasizes that flexible learning will be a norm and primary motivation for the said decision is to decrease the risk that the students and other "stakeholders" will face because of the pandemic. De Vera stated "we are ready because our top universities have been doing flexible learning even before COVID and the other universities have shifted to flexible

learning during the quarantine. There's no going back to the traditional, full-packed face-to-face classrooms". The CHED Chairman also mentioned that the universities have the freedom to use the most effective mode of instruction available with some have been using the pure online mode, others pure modular or asynchronous, and there are those using a combination of the two (Abisado et al., 2020; Anzaldo, 2021; Daniel, 2020).

The decision of the commission has been criticized and received so much attention especially from state university students who were experiencing difficulties in coping with online learning in the country. According to the report on Magsambol, (2020), CHED flexible learning "ensures the continuity of inclusive and accessible education when the use of traditional modes of teaching is not feasible, as in the occurrence of national emergencies".

Implementing flexible learning during the pandemic and the Philippines

After the rise of COVID-19 cases in the country, the limitation on social interactions and gathering led to the cancellation of several processes in society. Work were suspended, as well as, the ongoing classes in schools. This resulted to the need for a shift in the approach and jumpstarted the utilization of an alternative form on the transfer of knowledge (Ali, 2020; Furqan et al., 2020). Because of the abruptness of the situation, it was established that the transition could be considered to somehow be difficult for schools (Ancheta & Ancheta, 2020). In turn, the need to understand the nature as well as the efficacy of flexible and online learning became an integral part to not only provide an effective alternate considering the time of preparation but to also cater the needs of the society outside the walls of the classroom or in this case "digital" classroom (Armstrong-Mensah et al., 2020).

Several researches identified not only the strengths of flexible learning in various forms (Joan, 2013; El-Seoud et. al, 2014; McGarry, 2015) but also those who identified specific opportunities and challenges flexible learning had based on experience students and teachers alike during this time of pandemic (Boholano & Valen Jamon, 2021; Hoq, 2020). With these several considerations and preparations are needed to provide opportunities of better delivery of subject matter and implementation of flexible learning be done. From preparations of materials, training of the teachers and development of curriculum (Ali, 2020; Barrera et al., 2020; Baticulon et al., 2021; Usita, 2021; Mukher &

Chowdhary, 2020) to the consideration of the motivations and readiness of the respondents (Guanzi et al., 2020).

In the Philippines, several concerns were brought up regarding the continuation of education and implementation of flexible learning during the pandemic that may have influenced the perception of the students of flexible learning becoming a norm moving forward. In the country, the most common form of flexible learning used is the modular and online delivery of lessons. Barrera et al., (2020) stated that since there is a significant number of students who use mobile data as source of their connection there should be a need to prepare "learning schemes" that minimizes or have lower data usage. Another consideration is the limitations or "technological constraints" as defined by Xie et al., (2020) as one of the "shortcomings of online class" because of the possibility diminishing the level of learning online brought about by unpreparedness of the institutions and community to adapt to the abrupt change on how learning is delivered. That, and a deprived sense of "belongingness and connectedness" which could lead disengagement (Tria, 2020). It is important to note that collaboration is another important aspect that needs to be done during this time of pandemic (Joaquin et al., 2020; Tria, 2020).

The disadvantages of online learning manifest from the individual differences of the students' in terms of physiological capabilities to the technical difficulties experienced by the students, aside from the issue of slow and unstable internet that causes videos to freeze and streaming to be disconnected, there may be problems with ambient noises that can be too distracting (Daniel, 2020; Joaquin et al., 2020). As mentioned by Isla (2020) distractions such as "dogs barking, tricycles passing by, construction noises from the neighbour, just to name a few". And because students are at home, there's also the tendency to feel sleepy and lazy (Xie et al., 2020).

Another concern for the efficacy of online classes is on the preparedness and skills of the teachers (Boholano & Valen Jamon, 2021; Usita, 2021; Barrera et al., 2020), as well as the need for an improvement in the curriculum that is tailored to the setup of flexible learning conditions and schedule (Cahapay, 2020; Joaquin et al., 2020). With these in consideration along with the health and economic difficulties brought about by the pandemic, it could be said that the reason why there are movements such as the #academicfreenow and #nostudentleftbehind, albeit rejected, boils down on the idea that the students are

against the continuation of flexible learning in the Philippines (Felipe, 2021). with the country being considered to be one of the several places where slow and expensive internet service in Asia (Salac & Kim, 2016). Another is on the need for a reliable gadget which not everyone has the capability of buying, considering the pre-requisites required for a device and the know how needed to be able to manage the demand of online classes (Isla, 2020). Classroom interaction is only online (Tria, 2020; Pardanjac et al., 2009), students and teachers only get to talk on video calls and social media platforms, which might become a factor to the perceived experience of the students specially in terms of the value of social face to face interactions.

But with the safety of the students considered it is only right to consider that online class and flexible learning is a viable option. With that in mind, it is only right for everyone to find ways and opportunities to improve the learning experience of students during this time of pandemic. An example of such, is the study of McHaney, Reiter, and Reyachay (2018) which confirms that “simulation-based online instruction when combined with good pedagogical approaches, appropriate technology and educational technology, and the presence of experts will provide a better experience in simulations” where those “simulations” could increase appreciation to online lessons. In addition, Bekmurat et al. (2020) mentions that because computer technology and the Internet are both boundless even a small boy has already been equipped with a device or a cellphone. It is no surprise that innovations and the use of technology have been the direction of teaching and learning even before the pandemic.

Research Objectives

The study was carried out to investigate and assess the students of State Universities positioning on CHED on the integration of flexible learning in school system moving forward. The students in State Universities are continuously exposed to challenges that demand progressive update for the continuous flexible method of learning (Baticulon et al., 2021). It resulted to some student’s organization expressing that the foregoing announcement is totally against the interest of the Filipino youth due to the financial, mental and logistics problems of distance learning (Joaquin et al., 2020).

In view thereof, using the discursive lens of positioning theory the researchers aimed to answer the question, “What are the students of the State

Universities positioning of CHED on the integration of flexible learning in School Systems moving forward?” By identifying how the students position CHED, the rights of the students as well as the duties of CHED was highlighted. By defining them, it is easier to identify the direction and considerations the CHED should make for the plans that they have for the foreseeable future.

Methodology

Research Design

The research used a qualitative design under the discursive framework of positioning theory (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003), the research analyzed the statements of the students derived from semiformal interviews and investigated how the students position CHED on the context of the pronouncement of CHED chairman De Vera of having flexible learning as a norm for education moving forward.

Participants

The researchers employed Fifteen (15) students purposively to be a part of the investigation. Several criteria were considered for the recruitment of the students as participants of the study: (i) The students should be enrolled in a state university, (ii) The said students were able to experience flexible learning from the previous school-year, (iii) and lastly, the students are aware of the pronouncement of CHED regarding the adaption of flexible as a norm in education moving forward. The students were reached through online recruitment and while the research utilized the snow ball technique which asked for referrals from the interviewed students themselves for people they know who fit the criteria (Barbour, 2014).

Data Procedure

The researchers obtained data from this study through the recruitment of selected students from state owned universities in the Philippines with that being the only consideration for participation in the research. They were then asked a semi structured questionnaire that was scrutinized and evaluated by the group of researchers as well as their professor in research from

the Polytechnic University of the Philippines, this is to ensure the nature of the questions to focus more on the experiences and perception of the participants without being led into manipulations in meanings.

Lastly, a verbatim presentation on the statements of the respondents were employed by the researchers in order to capture, to a certain degree, the genuine meanings of the participants statements. This leads to the creation of the most common and dominant reactions and perceptions of the participants who were considered to be the positions, while, the lesser common perceptions were presented as the counter positions.

Data Analysis

In order to achieve the goal of the research in presenting the positioning of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) by the students from state universities regarding their plan of normalizing flexible learning moving forward, the researchers abided by the procedures and guide in processing information with the position diamond as defined by Harré & Moghaddam (2003) and following the steps by step procedures as suggested by Willig (2008). This is done by first identifying the main constructs that are associated with CHED, identifying the characteristics of these constructs as applied on the pronouncement of CHED regarding flexible learning as a norm moving forward. Then, an in-depth analysis was made to identify the rights and duties assigned to CHED and the students from the discourses gathered. Exhaustive analysis was done to ensure that the labels and positions truly represent the participants of the study.

Validity and Reflexivity

The research underwent strict deliberation and critique from the entirety of its conceptualization until its completion. Advising from the adviser and deliberations from the group of PhD graduate students of psychology, and taking appropriate measures to ensure that the reflexivity of the researchers is based on exhaustive process of not only basing from our own experiences but are also guided by the literature available. This leads to changes and revisions from those evaluations and considerations to maintain a valid perspective during the analysis of data.

The researchers used the six different safeguards designed to increase the accuracy and validity of the research. These safeguards include: triangulation, establishing a data trail, acknowledging researcher subjectivity, member checks and participant review,

prolonged engagement, and consideration of disconfirming evidence and contradictory interpretations. (Daytner, 2006)

The researchers used triangulation by having multiple data to confirm a warranted interpretation or conclusion. As such, the researchers included several different participants in data gathering to understand their view on the statement of CHED Chairman De Vera on online learning. The researchers also established a data trail in such a way that all the data may be inspected by the group. Thus, the researchers recorded the interview via zoom videoconferencing. Thus, prolonged engagement was considered, researchers had a spontaneous and untimed session with each of the respondents. Further, the researchers transcribed in verbatim all the sessions, hence, the summarization and interpretation. Furthermore, the subjectivity of the researchers was acknowledged as students who are also on online learning. In addition, constant checking and review was done through the group and the class professor for editing of the research. The researchers also took into consideration the disconfirming evidence and contradictory interpretations by giving equal importance on individual responses of the respondents. Responses were tabulated into two tables reflecting the positions and counter positions of the respondents.

Results

The table shows the dominant positions and counter positions of CHED by the students from state universities, it leads to the identification of rights and duties for both the CHED and stakeholders. The table shows how the students perceive the regulation and decisions of CHED and its effects to their school and personal lives.

Table 1. *Positions of CHED on their plans and decisions in handling the implementation of flexible learning.*

Positions	Storylines	Rights of the stakeholders	Duties of CHED
CHED as seekers of educational advancement	The seemingly lack of effort by CHED to improve the current schema.	Right to receive improvements on the current educational setup	Duty to exhaust considerations and be proactive
CHED as provider of realistic solutions	oblivious to the realities, problems and current limitations of flexible learning	Right to demand service based on their needs	Duty to ground their decisions to the experiences of the stakeholders
CHED as provider of accessible education	CHED's plans does not have provisions for the difference on the privileges and capabilities of the students financially.	Right for programs to address limitations of poverty better	Duty to provide an inclusive form of education
CHED as a careful decision-maker	CHED has hastily decided on expected future without evidences or proof.	Right to demand for clear and justified plans for learning moving forward	Duty to provide thoughtful decision from thorough investigations
CHED as an advocate for quality education	CHED's implementations jeopardized the quality of education during the transition to flexible learning.	Right to receive a maintained or enhanced quality of education during the transition	Duty to provide seamless if not better transition which does not affect the quality of instruction
CHED as a promoter of academic freedom	CHED failed to consider the experiences and concerns of the stakeholders.	Right to be heard, consulted on how the system works	Duty to provide machineries for collaboration with the students, teachers, and institutions.

Dominant Positions

Seekers of educational advancement

This position revolves on the idea of the participants on the amount of effort the Commission on Higher Education have given into the considerations to their decision regarding the implementation of the flexible learning scheme during the pandemic and its normalization moving forward.

“hindi po sya effective para sa akin, bakit po nila ahmm itutuloy kung ganun? Like yung implementation po nila ngayon hindi po siya maganda, tapos parang wala na po akong nababalitaan na ahmm way para mapag-bet, mapagbuti pa or maimprove pa yung online set-up so bat so bat pa nila itutuloy, ganun, so iyon po yung nasa isip ko noon”

“so ano ganito na lang ba should we like stay here para lang magcope parang ang lazy na pong pakinggan kasi are we just going to work like this parang wala na rin po ba tayong choice na to do better or gumawa po ng mga policies na maaaring makapagbalik, makatulong para maibalik ang mga estudyante sa eskwelahan to a better situation dba po, parang ayun..”

“Frustrated po and ano medyo naiinis dahil um diba po wala naman pong maayos na plan, ay, wala namang maayos na naging resolution ng CHED or hindi po masyadong nakapag-research about sa um naging successful po ba yung dating or yung previous na ginanap, na online class.”

With the idea that the commission had settled with what they have currently established and failed to provide improvements and innovation to provide an effective educational scheme during this time of pandemic which will be used as a preparation for the

future. Several participants felt that the commission is simply taking the easy way out, that since flexible learning has already been put into practice, the (CHED) assumed that it is the best course of action instead of finding ways and action towards a concrete “balik eskwela” directives or a plan for the return to a face to face form of instruction.

“Parang nafeel ko po as if tinanggap nalang po nila yung situation natin and hindi nman po kasi lahat capable of doing this online set-up po”

“dahil siguro nag-assume silana mas nakapag-adapt namga students and sanay na sila, parang hindi nila naconsider mga ibang students na baka mas prefer nila ang face to face kaysa sa online set-up.”

“Uhhh also feeling ko po kasi kaya naman sila nagcome-up sa ganitong setup naman is because feeling po nila this will be the easiest way for them kasi nga po yan given po na pandemic and everything feeling ko po in a sense parang tinanggap na po nilang ganito nalang tayo like bumalik man sa dati pero this will be a part of everything since na-start naman na and sa ngayon eto naman na ang naiimplement kahit sobrang pilit.”

With all these considerations, the participating students feels that CHED is basing their decision on the idea that people, specifically students have already adapted to this system and assumed that everyone benefits the same way and level.

Provider of realistic solutions

Another position that manifested from the discourses of the participants addressed their belief that CHED’s considerations and notions about the effectiveness of online class and that the institutions and stakeholders are adapting very well and flexible learning is very effective with no flaws, which, according to the students’ basing from their experience is far from the truth.

“hindi ko nakikita na inaaddress nila yung isyu kung paano matutulungan yung mga estiudyanteng nahihirapan especially madaming issues nga na online class, like home is not conducive for learning tapos yung mga power interruptions pa ganun “

“For me po parang ano, hindi lang na-take into consideration po yung ibang mga matters or ibang mga aspect po pagdating sa online learning. Especially kasi marami talagang nagsa-suffer, though gumagawa naman po sila ng um, ng way para po ma-reach out yung mga taong yun”.

“all I can think about po right now is like, parang hindi po kasi nila nai-sink in yung sarili nila sa situation na meron po yung mga teachers, yung professors and the

student's kaya hindi po nila masabi talaga if it's really effective.”

“feel ko hindi nila naconsider lahat kasi hanggang ngayon even after a year na nagkaron ng transition from the traditional set up to the online method ahm andami pa ding students na walang stable internet connection, walang silang ahm, gadgets that ahm, they can use para makapag-conduct ng online classes, so ang mga ginagawa lang ng mga students is talagang nagcocomply lang sa mga deadlines ganyan, hindi nila totally naaabsorb kung ano ung mga lessons or topics na kailangan nilang ma-acquire”

The discourses showed above provided evidence on the belief of the student that the commission seemed to be detached from reality and in denial of the concerns and flaws of the current flexible learning scheme. From the suffering of the students in having a more conducive environment for learning which may not necessarily be found within their homes to the difficulty of the teachers in adapting as well, all of which though are things that are being addressed through time and adjustment, are improvements brought about by the effort of the stakeholders and institutions but not from a clear directive, regulation and consideration of CHED.

Provider of accessible education

This position addresses the discourse of the students regarding the idea that the flexible learning modes that are mainly used in the Philippines requires certain tools that less privileged individuals might not be able to afford.

“hindi po lahat priveledge enough para magkaroon ng sariling gadget, magkaroon ng acces sa internet connection and everything and incorporating this remote kind of set-up po sa magiging as a new normal po sa ating educational system parang magiging unfair po sya sa already unfair education system po natin ngayon.”

“kung ako nahihirapan ako na may pribilehiyong makapag-aral in a safer environment pano pa po yung mga iba nating students na uhm walang kakayahang makabili ng mga gadgets, walang kakayahang makabili ng o maka-afford ng internet connection na according to what I've read, the Philippines has the most expensive internet services at the same time isa din po sa pinakamabagal which is disappointing, e hindi naman po lahat po di ba po.”

“Mas magiging unfair po, mas magkakaroon po ng... mas makikita po yung desparity between those who are priveledge enough who can sustain this remote learning and those who might compromise their studies po because of it.”

In the extracts above, certain conditions were defined by the respondents that can be considered as threats to the ability of the flexible learning scheme in the Philippines to promote an inclusive form of education, specifically, online learning for the students. Problems on the affordability and availability of required technology, a conducive environment to study, access to materials, and a stable internet connection. Which most of the times are achieved with money, where the respondents believed that CHED could have assumed that everyone already has those things.

Careful decision-maker

This position shows that the student participants felt that the CHED rushed their announcement of considering flexible learning as a norm moving forward. This is based on the idea that without any clear explanation, consideration and evaluation on the effectiveness of the current schema the commission decided to maintain the status quo.

“so uhm siguro yung decision ng CHED for me is parang ang bilis for them to, to decide, without considering yung sentiments ng lahat ng estudyante, parang gano ba sila nakasigurado na naging effective cya, just because pumapasa ba yung estudyante does that mean na parang effective na yung, yung, parang set up na ganito, kasi sa amin uhm, based sa experience, yung mga iba kong classmates ganyan, gusto na nilang mag file for LOA, yung leave of absence kasi tingin nila this is no longer effective e”

“Para siyang impulsive, para sakin impulsive siya na hindi siya well planned. Well, pwede naman siya maimprove, although nakakita naman tayo ng improvement, I don't know if CHED could be ano, kung magiging, kung maaattribute yun kay CHED or sa mismong university lang. So, I think marami pang trabaho ng dapat gawin si CHED at hindi lang basta ipagpatuloy lang ang online learning as it is, marami pang kailangang improvement na dapat gawin.”

“Ang rush po. Ang rush po nila magbigay “RASH” as in “RASH” kasi ang bilis po nilang uhm ang bilis po nila magkaroon ng desisyon na ganito ganyan, iincorporate na natin ang remote learning well in the first place dapat po nakikiisa po sila sa I mean nakikiisa po sila sa CHED, sa government para po mas mapabilis po yung pagbalik natin free-covid state para po manormalize ulit yung dating state of learning natin like bumalik sa campuses ganyan ensure ayun yung ligtas na balik-eskwela.

“for me po mas better po si CHED po gagawa siya ng isang plano na...isang smart plan para po sa mga estudyante.”

The statements showed above, reiterates the perception of the student participants regarding the decision making of CHED towards their consideration in integrating flexible learning without the appropriate investigations thorough enough to provide justifications clear enough for the stakeholders that highlights the improvements and polishing of the system. Consequently, instead of simply focusing on the passing rate, the well being and motivations of the students should be considered.

Advocate for quality education

This position showed the role of the CHED to maintain or improve the quality of education not only during this time of pandemic but in the future as well, this construct relates to the grievances and shortcomings that the participants have towards the commission as well as flexible learning in general.

“Hindi mo siya basta basta gagawing online lahat except, without reforming yung mga plano talaga, I think kailangan siya marevised, kase masyado siyang mabigat especially some topics are cannot be learned easily without the guidance of profs, online study mostly ay self-study yan eh so I think kailangan talaga siyang ireform pa.”

“Kaya nung narinig ko po na i-implement na talaga yung integration nga, frustrated talaga dahil wala naman po kaming natututunan, so um bakit kailangan ipilit yung ganung mode of learning.”

“Kasi ngayon po sobrang gulo din po talaga ng instruction ng university sa ano ba yung agawin ng rrespondence, diba po yung correspondence yung mga magmomodular learning. So ang nangyari kasi po doon sa ano sa mga correspondence, sa nagmo-modular learning ay kung, um, bahala sila kung matututo sila or what. Parang, dahil walang mai-provide na resources yung PUP, magstart ang sem ng June, ay mali, magstart ang sem ng April, pero yung module dadating ng June. So, sobrang frustrating po nun kasi aaralin mo yung isang sem sa loob lang ng isang buwan.”

“hindi po kasi maganda yung kinalabasan nung una na parang nag-cocomply nalang ang mga student, ganyan. Para um makapasa, tapos wala nang learning.”

The excerpts shown above also reflects the rejection of the student participants towards the idea of integrating flexible learning moving forward, where they felt that the quality of education is being compromised not because of the nature of the pedagogy but more so on the investment and actions taken by the commission which reflects to the systems employed by the schools, where questions regarding the implementations of the

current system which compromised the improvement and quality brought about by the idea of compliance and a seemingly band aid solution from the COVID-19 situation that will be continued even after the pandemic.

Promoter of academic freedom

The position emphasized on the role of CHED in promoting academic freedom, which can be considered to be compromised by their pronouncement of adapting flexible learning as a norm moving forward, it reflects the students' perception on the amount of inclusions and considerations or lack thereof, CHED gives towards the stake holders and the institutions they regulate.

“I think kailangan nila isama sa planning yung mga stakeholders, yung mga profs, yung mga students kase sila talaga nakakaexperience ng online class eh, hindi naman yung mga upper level, although it is CHED bakahindinilaalam kung anong nangyayari sa online class, I don't think so naconsider lahat.”

“Parang ano lang po, careless po sila or hindi po nila pinapahalagahan yung input po ng bawat ahm university siguro po ganun. Parang kung saan po meron lang po silang proof na nag ahm nag iimprove yung quality of education natin lalo na po, yun nga po nasabi ko kanina importante po yun bilang future professionals ayun po kaso lang parang nagsettle na nga lang po sila, parang careless po sobrang laking magiging epekto po iyon in the future lalo na education po yung pinag uusapan at parang long term investment po ng country po iyon eh pero yung po parang biglaan lang ganyan.”

“parang hindi naman din lahat ng universities nagpa-follow sa mga policies na ipinapatupad ng CHED so walang, hindi namonitor if yung mga policies ay ipinapatupad ng, I mean yung mga policies ay nasusunod based dun sa pinatupad ng ched yun”

The participants questioned the actions and considerations of CHED with their decisions as shown by the discourses presented, the student participants felt that the CHED failed to coordinate and cooperate with the schools and stakeholders that could be said to be the most affected by their decisions. This led to confusion on the procedures and approach on how to go about the flexible learning scheme during the pandemic and the probability of the same problems occurring moving forward.

Counter Positions

The counter positions that the Students from state

universities have for the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) are the following: CHED as seeker of educational advancement, enabler of continuing education, promoters of safety and well-being, the said constructions position CHED as someone who has the right to manage the needs of the stakeholders based on the situation and available resources, as well as, to look into the future developments, anticipate them and enact changes to follow the trends of time.

Enforcers of innovations

The first counter position relates to the notion that CHED is forward thinking and took into consideration the development and demand for innovation on how education and learning should be in the future.

“Actually, ako mixed emotion po ako diyan kase I believe that online class is a double-edged sword. For me, I’m happy kase it’s a step forward sa education ng system natin and it brings forth innovation diba, yung remote learning, it could be an opportunity para lumawak ang scoop, sa college ko kase hindi lahat galing Pampanga, mayroon galing Baguio, ganyan.” “gusto ko yung system nung ano eh, yung system nung TESDA na may time sila mag-o online and face to face.”

The excerpt shown above indicates the awareness of some of the respondents about the effort the CHED have towards addressing their concern, albeit there is an observed reservation regarding the issue of integrating online classes or flexible learning moving forward, it could still be a welcomed changed for the fact that the convenience of flexible learning is considered.

Enabler of continuing education

This counter position identified the mindset that things like a pandemic may happen again, with that in mind, maintaining an effective system regardless of the circumstance is very much important.

“So I think it would be more convenient for others kaya ano rin, medyo aagree din naman ako dito and we could maximize the benefit of technology in learning or education and transform our educational asset plus it also helps us to be adaptable, we can, we can say naman na this won’t be the last pandemic naman diba, there will come a time na we will need another, we will this of set up again so if we have that in place mas ready na tayo pag dumating sa point na ganun.”

The convenience of others is one of the considerations in accepting flexible learning moving forward, if CHED can adapt and innovate, so can the

stakeholders. Lastly, by anticipating the worst-case scenario can we prepare ourselves to be effective regardless of situation.

Promoters of safety and well-being

By basing their considerations on the limits that the pandemic has imposed, being grounded on prioritizing the continuation of education amidst the challenges that the country is facing is commendable.

“I do understand where they are coming from kase parang.. they have implemented flexible learning and they see na it's like somehow like “great” in general sense.”

“I think Mr. De Vera is very ano naman...um, parang nagdedesisyon din naman siya para sa mga students so alam naman natin na mahirap talaga nowadays na may COVID pa and I think naka-depende pa rin naman po yan sa magiging decisions para sa ikakabubuti”

With the risk of contracting the disease and compromising the health of the stake holders with the face to face/ traditional scheme, the role of the CHED is not only to provide opportunities for continuing education but to make sure that the stakeholders’ health will not be compromised. This calls for the understanding as well as effort on the part of the stakeholders to create a situation where the system will benefit everyone.

Discussion

The results of the research presented Six (6) dominant positions namely, seekers of educational advancement, provider of realistic solutions, provider of accessible education, careful decision-maker, advocate for quality education, promoter of academic freedom, three (3) counter positions were highlighted namely, CHED as seeker of educational advancement, enabler of continuing education, promoters of safety and well-being.

One of the persisting positions observed during the discourses is on how the student participants positions’ CHED to be the seekers of educational advancement, which could be associated in the wider discourse of accountability. The assumptions and perceptions of the students on the way that CHED have considered the path of development in the educational system stems with the idea that the commission has settled with the status quo with which they deem lacking considering that there are still barriers, an example of which is on the online learning setup that the students experience

(Baticulon et al., 2021). Thus, the belief that albeit an opportunity to be on par with other countries with regards to the development of an educational system that learns to adapt to the changes and needs of the populace, the current situation is far from achieving the said goal. This results to the imposition on the duty of the CHED to start exhausting ever possible considerations to improve their plans on how to go about the integration of flexible learning moving forward.

Another notable position is about the CHED being the provider of realistic solutions, the participants expressed concerns on the ability of the commission to relate to the realities of flexible learning and online class. Given that there are students who are still thriving with the current scheme, it has been established that the CHED have failed to consider the smaller nuances of the situation and were satisfied with the data and observations that they have on their end of the spectrum. This led to the imposition of the duty of the commission to truly consider the capabilities of the students to continue, the curriculum that is being used, as well as the struggles of the students and teachers that are beyond the boundaries of the curriculum (Mukher & Chodhary, 2020; Ancheta & Ancheta, 2020; Usita, 2021; Ali, 2020), these could be from the preparedness of the teachers, the motivation and engagement of the students, the lack of physical interaction are some of the examples of the intangible things that might affect the efficacy of the current system.

Next, is the position of CHED in being the provider of accessible education, considering the state of the Philippines and the wider discourse of economics and poverty, the perception of the participants about the insistence of CHED regarding the persistence of flexible learning, and it being a norm, moving forward is a point of concern. It could be associated with the current situation brought about by the pandemic which defeats one of the primary purposes and advantage of flexible learning and online class of inclusivity and accessibility (Shurville et al., 2008 as cited by Joan, 2013) and because of the conditions in the Philippines in terms of internet connection speed and cost that should now be considered on top of the school fees (Muhkter & Chowdhary, 2020) students tend to lean towards the idea of a modular or opt for the return of face to face instruction (Guansi et al., 2020).

Another dominant position is that CHED being a careful decision-maker, the participants feels that the commission has been quick on their words. Without considering and exhausting alternative ways to

accommodate the need for continuing education in our present situation, CHED has jumped into conclusion to their idea of the best possible action, this led to the concern of the students as well as the parents who does not fully understand the implications of the decision of CHED or have yet to grasp the meaning of the decision because of lack of justification or careful consideration leading to a reactive way of coping.

Being an advocate for quality education, a position that delves into the affective nature of discourse among the participants, where they felt their needs are not met by CHED and that the quality of education declined because of the seemingly abrupt implementation of flexible learning. This may or may not be rooted from the capabilities of CHED at first, since the suddenness of the change brought about by the pandemic compelled us to find alternative ways (Furqan et al., 2020) but for the past year and half, the participants failed to see any changes which worsen their perceptions towards the commission, where they feel whose efforts failed to meet their expectations.

Last of the salient positions is that the CHED is the promoter of academic freedom, related with the wider social discourse where it was their duty to provide support to the institutions, students and teachers which will translate to opportunities for collaboration and better partnership (Tria, 2020). It is highlighted that education is a collaborative process, this idea also applies to the current circumstance of the country, where the role of the parents is much more important to ensure the best result and achievement of the students (Haiyudi & Art-In, 2021). Imposition of the right of the stakeholders to be heard is being imposed in this position where being able to express themselves and be considered on the possible changes in the system is highlighted.

Although most of the striking positions of CHED is negative there are still some who positioned them on a positive light, one of which is the counter position of being enforcers of innovations. The development of technology calls for innovation in all of the processes in the world, the time where e-learning and flexible learning will be a norm is also inevitable (Furqan, 2020). Therefore, it is the duty of everyone to adapt and develop the necessary skills for the transition provided with opportunities and tools needed by the commission this coincides to the right of CHED to pursue development in the current educational system emphasized the role of the populace to support and consider the struggles as part of the labor pains towards development. This discourse emphasized the role of CHED as a regulating and decision-making

body that should be respected.

Another counter position is that CHED as enabler of continuing education, which relates to the wider discourse of societal awareness. By acknowledging the efforts of the commission regarding the limited choices they had towards the maintenance and continuation of the educational system and actually do it is something that the populace should be duty-bound to acknowledge without emphasizing too much on the flaws and disregarding the commendable aspects of it (Daniel, 2020).

Lastly, on the note of social awareness and practicality, the counter position given to CHED as promoters of safety and well-being can also be highlighted, since it is already a fact that the pandemic is not only a threat to the health of people but to the other aspects of society, it is important for CHED to prioritize the safety of the stakeholders while implementing plans for a continuation of education which can aid to the formation and growth of the students' that may translate to the maintenance or improvement of society later on (Daniel, 2020; Kolesnikova, 2021).

Conclusion

In conclusion the dominant construct and positions assumed by CHED from the perspective of the respondents indicated that the participating student are still seeing faults and things to improve to the current situation before the scheme of flexible learning be applied to education as a norm even after the pandemic. This led to the emphasis on the duty of CHED to augment their machineries and considerations to relate themselves with the stakeholders that they serve. The positions dominant positions namely, seekers of educational advancement, provider of realistic solutions, provider of accessible education, careful decision-maker, advocate for quality education, promoter of academic freedom, at first glance may seem to be only criticism towards CHED, but it can also be a manifestation on the needs of the population that are not being met along with the struggles that they expect CHED to resolve specifically with regards to the idea that flexible learning is here to stay.

While the counter positions of CHED being CHED as seeker of educational advancement, enabler of continuing education, promoters of safety and well-being. positions CHED as a department of the government that are capable of addressing the

concerns and needs of the people during the current circumstances. These positions recognize the effort and role of CHED as a decision-making body with the ability to satisfy to a certain degree the requirements needed for a continuous and developing educational system. Lastly, with the positioning of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) the students' discourses provided a glimpse on how they see the current system that we have, how it affects their well-being as well as, on the things that can be done to improve, change or retain those positions. The challenge now and for other researchers is to find or identify other positions from other members of society involved in education, such as, teachers, parents, school administrator, and possibly people in the world of work, this could strengthen the idea of the importance of the role of CHED even outside of education per se but to also establish a stronger economic ideations and psycho-social involvement.

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