

Sufficiency of Flexible Learning Experience During the COVID-19 Pandemic Among Hospitality Management Students

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Abstract

This study aimed to determine the level of sufficiency of flexible learning experience among hospitality management students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, it aimed to determine differences in the influence of sex and year level on the level of the flexible learning experience. This study employed a descriptive-survey research design with a researcher-made questionnaire that has passed validity and reliability tests. The validity procedure was done by a panel of experts, whereas, the reliability procedure was done through a test-retest method utilizing 30 tourism management students as trial respondents. The study was conducted on 132 hospitality management students of Northern Iloilo State University- Victorino Salcedo Sara Campus, who were selected purposively due to the COVID-19 situational limitations. All communications to conduct the study were approved and obtained. The data gathered were analyzed using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 and EXCEL 2016 spreadsheet programs. The findings revealed that the level of sufficiency of flexible learning experience among BSHM students was generally high. There were no significant differences in the level of sufficiency of flexible learning experience among the students when they were classified according to sex and year level.

Keywords: Flexible Learning, COVID-19 Pandemic, Hospitality Management, Descriptive Survey Philippines

Introduction

In March 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19, first detected in Wuhan, China, as a global pandemic (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020), and consequently issued health safety guidelines to be strictly followed by everyone (Jyotsna and Madkaikar, 2020).

According to Suleri (2020), the virus has left a deep impact on almost all sectors; one of them being the higher education sector. The impacts of the pandemic on higher education include social distancing, quarantines, isolation measures, campus closure, border closures, and travel restrictions (QS, 2020).

The pandemic caused numerous higher educational institutions (HEIs) around the world to close schools and stop abruptly the usual face-to-face classroom instructions. Jyotsna and Madkaikar (2020), however, contended that even with the pandemic, educators ought to continuously impart education but in mind the health aspects of students, teachers, and staff. Thus, in dire need, schools were prompted to act quickly to shift in-classroom to online education (Das and Ramakrishna, 2020). With this, faculty members have to adapt to online teaching and encourage students to adopt it as well (Jyotsna and Madkaikar, 2020), as distance learning became a necessity for learners and educators all over the world (Ali, 2020).

In online or flexible learning, students have to receive their classes through digital platforms (Das and Ramakrishna, 2020), such as a smartphone, tablet, or computer, which according to Santos and Ali (2012), is applied to education in informal learning; and lifelong learning (Sharples, 2000); regardless of students' and teachers' level of expertise in technological competencies and preparedness (Bonafini, Chae, Park, & Jablokow, 2017).

Online learning is not entirely new to educational systems all over the world, however, it was just under the COVID-19 environment that its use was greatly emphasized as a proper alternative approach to the continuity of education and at the same time preventing the spread of COVID-19 virus. With its adoption as a primary learning approach in higher education, Faize and Nawaz (2020), however, reminded educators that a massive transformation of schools to online learning without ensuring quality will be ineffective.

Based on previous research on the experiences of students and teachers in flexible learning, various issues have affected its implementation. Among these were those that have to do with the instructors' assessment of learners' academic integrity (Muhammad, Shaikh, Naveed, & Qureshi, 2020), course-related perspectives (Almussharraf & Khahro, 2020), lack of Internet access, and low quality of online instructional delivery (Stein, 2020), lack of proficiency (Wheelan Ariza, 2018), lack of

professional technological training (Bonafini et al 2017), students' dissatisfaction with the quality of online learning (Betts, 2009), and insufficient online learning experience (Suleri, 2020).

In the Philippines, higher educational institutions (HEIs), in particular, the Northern Iloilo State University – Victorino Salcedo Sara Campus (NISU-VSSC) Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management (BSHM) Department, adopted flexible learning effective Academic Year (AY) 2021-2022 according to the Commission on Higher Education Memorandum Order No. 4, series of 2020. As the current academic year is about to close and the prospect of going back to face-to-face classroom instruction is still not sure, flexible learning is certainly will be around for the next academic year. How long will the flexible learning experience stays in the new normal at NISU-VSSC is not known yet, however, its impacts on the education of BSHM students might be worthy of investigation after a year of its adoption. As flexible learning was a new experience, its effects may depend on how students rate their experience with it. Considering that the BSHM course is a skill competency-based program, was the flexible learning experience provided by the university sufficient?

Thus, in light of the above premises and queries, the researchers considered it highly significant to conduct a study to determine how sufficient the flexible learning experiences were as perceived by BSHM students of NISU-VSSC.

Research Questions

Generally, this study aimed to determine the flexible learning experience during the COVID-19 pandemic as perceived by BSHM students at NISU-VSSC during the Academic Year 2021-2022. Specifically, this study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents?
2. What is the level of sufficiency of flexible learning experience during the COVID-19 pandemic among hospitality management students when they are taken as a whole and classified according to sex and year level?
3. Is there a significant difference in the level of sufficiency of flexible learning experience during the COVID-19 pandemic among hospitality management students when they are classified according to sex and year level?

Theoretical Underpinnings

This study was guided by Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory developed in 1978 and finalized by him in 2000. This theory is based on the value of personal experience in coping with change as a central part of the learning process (Mezirow, 2007).

Transformative learning describes a learning process that leads to changes in the learner's old ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, and enabling behavior towards adaptation and resilience (MacLellan & Soden, 2003; Sharpe, 2016), to develop and grow (Eschenbacker and Fleming, 2020), when faced with a disorienting dilemma or cognitive dissonance. The unexpected, unplanned, and sudden shift to online learning caused by COVID-19 has certainly been an experience that has led to cognitive dissonance among students.

The experience of *not-knowing*, of lacking the knowledge to cope with situations provoked by a crisis, can be seen as a possible point of entry for learners to reflect on current ways of knowing and being in the world, and to engage in changing these ways (Hof, 2017). Transformative learning urged learners to acknowledge what they are going through so that they may find or regain some control in accepting new ways of doing things that are entirely different from what they used to believe and do (Berinato, 2020). In new learning environments, education and technology are viewed from a transformative perspective (Dalimunthe, Sutiana, Zakiah, and Handayani, 2021). Education can become transformative when teachers and students synthesize information across subjects and experiences through online courses (Sun and Chen, 2016).

The researchers deemed it fit to adopt this theory as the basis for this study because it conveys an explanation of how students and teachers respond to the challenge of the 'new normal' approach in tertiary education considering the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis upon higher education.

Moreover, the study made use of the respondents' personal information such as age and year level in the BSHM course. This information served as the independent variable in the study, and their effects on the level of sufficiency of the flexible learning experience as the dependent variable determined. How

sufficient is the experience among the students will be known through a researcher-made data gathering instrument.

Online Learning Defined

Online learning refers to learning experienced in synchronous or asynchronous environments using the Internet, where students interact with instructors and fellow students from anywhere (Singh & Thurman, 2019). Asynchronous learning is teaching and learning that do not happen at the same time (Moore & Kearsley, 2011), while synchronous learning refers to real-time lectures and time-based outcomes assessments or teaching and learning that happens at the same time, both of which are conducted through technologies such as the Internet (Oztok, Zingaro, Brett, and Hewitt, 2013).

Synchronous learning which is the most widely used utilizes chat rooms and instant messaging which allow users to decide who participates in the conversation (Sun & Chen, 2016). The invention of @ symbol in 1972 for use in the email (Maloney-Krichmar & Abras, 2003), and the advent of the World Wide Web (WWW) in 1991 for Internet connectivity (Harasim, 2000) have been the latest adapted by online education. The universal use of websites has provided opportunities for the development of online communities and groups. Emailing, conferencing, chatting, and working together via Google drive, Google Docs, Google hangout, dropbox, Facebook, Twitter, etc. have been widely used in online classrooms.

In the Philippines, according to Reyes-Chua, Sibbaluca, Miranda, Pamario, Moreno and Solon (2020), most instructors and professors used their online learning on the following digital platforms, namely, Facebook Messenger, Google Classroom, Zoom Meeting, Google Meet, Edmodo, Moodle, We Chat and Schoology. Facebook Messenger was regarded by the users to be one of the most convenient modes of alternative learning as it can be availed of even without an Internet or Wi-Fi connection. The Google Classroom is free and one of the best platforms for an institution or an individual faculty member. In this platform, the professor could create a class, assignments, tasks, announcements, or chats with his/her students. Edmodo is another popular E-learning platform that has a similar feature to Google Classroom. Zoom is a free video call meeting where a teacher can share his/her slide presentation so that everyone could see and interact with their professors. Just like Google Classroom and Edmodo, Schoology

allows the teachers to create a class and upload resources and materials online. Google Meet has similar features to Zoom. Moodle has also a similar feature to Edmodo and Google Classroom while WeChat is used for chatting and uploading materials to students (Reyes-Chua et al., 2020).

According to Schroeder (2012), online education can be categorized by its users as University-Based Online Education, and Massively Open Online Courses (MOOC). In the University-Based Online Education, students enrolled in this university online program to obtain degrees and diplomas. In Massively Open Online Courses (MOOC), students are enrolled according to their self-motivation, learning goals, prior knowledge and skills, and similar interests (Schroeder, 2012).

In the research literature, online education is variously termed as “distance education,” “e-learning,” “online learning,” “blended learning,” “computer-based learning,” “web-based learning,” “virtual learning,” “tele-education,” “cyberlearning,” “Internet-based learning,” “distributed learning,” “flexible learning”, etc., but all of these terms can be sufficiently synonymous and used interchangeably (Sun & Chen, 2016).

Primary Elements of Online Learning

According to Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2009) there are three (3) primary elements for successful online education which are social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence.

Social presence is briefly defined as students' participation. Teaching presence is essential to balance cognitive and social presence (Garrison et al. 2000). Cognitive presence included a triggering event, exploration, integration, and resolution.

Triggering an event comes from identifying a problem or an issue for further investigation. Exploration is done when learners examine an issue or problem utilizing reflection and discourse. Integration is where learners continue to examine what they have learned from exploration and develop ideas and construct meanings. The final step of cognitive presence or inquiry is the resolution through the determination of a definite result and the new knowledge is applied (Kupenzyński, Wiesenmayer, & McClusky, 2010).

Good online instructors are those who possess the knowledge and skills on how to use and adapt updated technologies, who are available online at all times, who frequently check for emails and text messages,

who promptly reply to questions and concerns, and who grade and return assignments with feedback on a timely manner (Bailey & Card, 2009).

With instructor-student interactions being the key to successful online education, the more often those connections occur, the more engaged the students are in their courses (Rao & Tanners, 2011).

Perceptions and Attitudes of Students towards Online Learning

According to Reyes-Chua et al (2020), students' perceptions and attitudes towards online learning were diverse. Their list included the following: enjoyable and exciting; easy to use; it interests the students; enthusiastic; some are not happy; positive; students could easily communicate during their preferred time; sometimes confused due to many workloads; some were extremely happy; some preferred online learning to be with their loved ones; some were negative because of the unavailability of the Internet; others protested as many want to go on vacation instead; and, many were interested to learn even if they only have free data. In general, students enjoy the E-learning platforms used by their professors (Reyes-Chua et al 2020).

COVID-19 Pandemic and its Impact on Higher Education

COVID-19 has become a global health crisis. As of October 6, 2020, almost 36 million people have been infected and over one million have died (Joaquin, Biana, & Dacela, 2020).

The closure of schools, colleges, and universities not only interrupts the teaching for students around the world; the closure also coincides with a key assessment period and many exams have been postponed or canceled. The global lockdown of education institutions is going to cause a major (and likely unequal) interruption in students' learning; disruptions in internal assessments; and the cancellation of public assessments for qualifications or their replacement by an inferior alternative (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a severe impact on higher education as universities closed their premises and countries shut their borders in response to lockdown measures. Although higher education institutions were quick to replace face-to-face lectures with online learning, these closures affected learning and examinations as well as the safety and legal status

of international students in their host country. Countries will continue to face reduced economic well-being, even if their schools immediately return to pre-pandemic levels of performance. A corona-induced loss of students will affect the proportionate loss of a future country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Schleicher, 2020).

In the Philippines, COVID-19, as of August 2020, had already incurred 325,000 infected and 6,000 deaths (Worldometer, 2020). To curb the spread of COVID-19, most governments have opted to employ quarantine protocols and temporarily shut down their educational institutions. As a consequence, more than a billion learners have been affected worldwide. Among this number are over 28 million Filipino learners across academic levels who have to stay at home and comply with the Philippine government's quarantine measures (UNESCO, 2020).

To respond to the needs of learners, especially of the 3.5 million tertiary-level students enrolled in approximately 2,400 HEIs, certain HEIs in the country have implemented proactive policies for the continuance of education despite the closure. These policies include modified forms of online learning that aim to facilitate student learning activities (Joaquin, Biana, & Dacela, 2020).

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive-survey research design to determine the level of sufficiency of flexible learning experience during the COVID-19 pandemic among hospitality management students of NISU-VSSC during AY 2021-2022.

Respondents

There were 132 respondents to the study from the NISU-VSSC BSHM Department composed of 51 first-year students, 41 second-year students, 33 third-year students, and 7 fourth-year students who were attending flexible learning during AY 2021-2022. They were chosen using purposive-convenience sampling.

Instruments of the Study

To gather the needed data, a researcher-made questionnaire, consisting of Part I-Personal Information and Part II-Questionnaire Proper, was

formulated.

Part I obtained personal information from the respondents such as sex and their year levels in the BSHM course. Part II collected data needed to determine the level of sufficiency of flexible learning experience during COVID-19.

The researcher-made questionnaire was submitted to a panel of experts in the field of research and hospitality for the content validity procedure and to examine whether to accept, revise, or reject the items in the proposed instrument.

Although validity is important for study, it is not sufficient unless combined with reliability. To effect reliability measurement, a test-retest method was employed among thirty (30) selected BSTM students as trial respondents. The overall instrument obtained a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.801, interpreted as having Good (Low Skates testing) internal reliability indicating that the instrument was reliable.

Procedures

Prior to the actual conduct of the study at NISU-VSSC, the researchers sought the approval of the Department Chairperson, and Research Adviser to conduct the study among the BSHM students who were the respondents of the study. An informed consent form duly signed by the respondents was also secured for ethical considerations. The researchers selected 132 respondents from all year levels. Data gathering procedures were conducted through google forms. The researchers made sure to make the purpose of the study clear to all the respondents.

Results

This section presents the results, analysis, and interpretation of data. This contains the findings of the study which are explained in tabular form, by the use of an arbitrary scale.

Table 1. *The Demographic Profile of the Respondents*

Category	Frequency	%
A. Entire group	132	100
B. Sex		
Male	34	25.80
Female	98	74.20
C. Year Level		
First Year	51	38.60
Second Year	41	31.10
Third Year	33	25.00
Fourth Year	7	5.30

Table 2. *Level of Sufficiency of Flexible Learning Experience during the COVID-19*

Category	N	Mean	SD	Interpretation
A. Entire group	132	3.59	0.688	High
High-Very High	77(58.33%)			
Average	48(36.36%)			
Low-Very Low	7(5.30%)			
B. Sex				
Male	34	3.50	0.777	High
Female	98	3.62	0.656	High
C. Year level				
First Year	51	3.50	0.652	High
Second Year	41	3.52	0.720	High
Third Year	33	3.72	0.666	High
Fourth Year	7	4.05	0.728	High

Table 3. *T-test results on the level of sufficiency among BSHM students classified according to sex*

Category	N	Mean	SD	t-test
Male	34	3.50	0.777	t(130)=0.879 p=0.381
Female	98	3.62	0.656	(Not significant)

Table 4. *ANOVA results on the differences in the level of sufficiency among BSHM students classified according to year level*

Year Level		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-test	Sig. p
	Between groups	2.673	3	0.891	1.919	0.130
	Within groups	59.418	128	0.464		(Not significant)
Total		62.091	131			

Discussion

This study aimed to determine the level of sufficiency of flexible learning experience during the COVID-19 pandemic as perceived by BSHM students at NISU-VSSC, Sara, Iloilo during AY 2021-2022.

The findings of the study revealed that the respondents of the study were mostly female first-year students. Moreover, the level of sufficiency of flexible learning experience during the COVID-19 pandemic among hospitality management students was generally high, whether they are taken as a group or by individual category. Female students have a slightly higher level of sufficiency than male students. Fourth-year students have a higher level of sufficiency among the respondents. Furthermore, there was no significant difference in the level of sufficiency of flexible learning experience among hospitality management students when they were classified according to sex and year level.

The results of this study support the findings of Yuan (2021) in his study which is geared toward discovering the university student's attitudes and satisfaction toward online learning during COVID-19 in Malaysia. The findings of this study show that most of the students have a positive attitude and satisfaction with online learning delivery. This study revealed that relevant implications of the instructional pedagogy approach and appropriate integration of technological tools can be very helpful to ensure continuous success in delivering learning content during this COVID-19 pandemic time.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the majority of the BSHM students are female and the most number is from the first and second-year levels. Most of the BSHM students responded positively to their flexible learning experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of them engaged actively in both synchronous and asynchronous mode of learning such as modular classes and actual online classes. The high level of sufficiency of flexible learning experience among BSHM students indicates that their needs as students were satisfactorily met. Sex and year level of BSHM students do not necessarily influence their flexible learning experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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