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Challenges of the New Normal: Students' Attitude, Readiness and Adaptability to Blended Learning Modality

Lalin Abbacan-Tuguic

Department of Education, Kalinga State University, Philippines

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Abstract— In Mid the second semester of the academic year 2019-2020, the Kalinga State University commenced the application of a blended/Flexible learning approach which combines synchronous and asynchronous learning modality.

This study explores students' attitudes, readiness for learning to determine their adaptability to a blended learning environment using different technological platforms and investigate problems and challenges that the students faced in their learning.

Drawing upon 508 questionnaires using the Google form, with closed and open-ended questions along with virtual interviews with 25 interviewees, The researcher analyses the survey data quantitatively and open-ended questions and virtual results qualitatively and then merges the two sets of results to assess in what ways the results about students' attitude and readiness to blended learning converge and diverge employing the convergent parallel-side by the side mixed-method approach.

Mixing the two databases by merging the results during interpretations, the findings revealed Technological Lapses, which covers the educational device's unavailability; unreliable internet connectivity hinders the success and productive implementation of blended learning adaptability. Students also have a positive attitude and showed a moderate level of readiness to implement blended learning. But there is a negative correlation between the students' attitude and students' readiness towards blended learning environment;

Conversely, results from open-ended question responses and the virtual-interviews confirmed or validated the results from the closed-ended questions

Keywords— Blended Learning, Students' Attitude, Students' Readiness.

I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic quickly led to the closure of universities and colleges worldwide in hopes that public health officials' advice of social distancing could help to flatten the infection curve and reduce total fatalities from the disease. Face-to-face schooling is constructed as a specific threat from which the learners must be protected, and emergency flexible learning is the safety measure proposed to protect the learners within the community.

"The CHED Advisories have consistently advised HEIs to refrain from conducting face-to-face or in-person classes or mass gatherings in their campuses. These advisories have been disseminated in the print and broadcast media and several zoom meetings with HEIs considering the threat of community transmission due to the mass

ISSN: 2456-7620 https://dx.doi.org/10.22161/ijels.62.65 gathering of students. The CHED has not issued any policy to allow face-to-face classes, and the IATF clearly states that limited face-to-face classes in low-risk MGCQ areas must comply with CHED guidelines," said CHED Chairman J. Prospero E. De Vera III.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), like the Kalinga State University, strive to provide practical learning experiences to address the learners' needs. Blended learning through synchronous and asynchronous has emerged to address these needs and has been adopted by various HEIs. Furthermore, it can help students develop critical twenty-first-century skills such as communication, information literacy, creativity, and collaboration and develop the ability to use digital technologies for various purposes (Zurita, Hasbun, Baloian, & Jerez, 2015). While these are essential skills, students' ability to acquire these skills will depend on their attitude and readiness to learn in a blended learning environment.

However, not all students and academic staff members are willing to adopt blended learning when introduced by their institutions. Although this teaching and learning approach offers various advantages to students and academic staff, there are many factors to consider that may affect its adoption.

As a result, one of the factors to consider is the Advances in network and communication technologies, which have shifted the way we deliver instruction to learners in any location. Due to enhanced communication systems and newer media formats, various innovative instructional methods have provided learning solutions meeting the diverse needs of instructors and learners in schools and other organizations. A significant concern in adopting the new technologies is whether learners are ready to utilize and adopt new technologies for the convenience and efficiency of learning educational content (MacDonald, J. 2003 as cited by Lim, D. H., et al. 2007). This study explores students' attitudes, readiness for learning to determine their adaptability to a blended learning environment using different technological platforms and investigate problems and challenges that the students faced in their learning.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

I. Benefits of Blended Learning

The reports provided by the U.S. Department of Education (2010) indicating, "on average, students in online learning conditions performed better than those receiving face-to-face instruction" Students mentioned better overall satisfaction in blended learning courses rather than in traditional lecture as reported in the International Journal of Technology in Education (IJTE) (Martinez-Caro & Campuzano-Bolarin, 2011).

One of the reasons for BL mode being more preferred and effective is assumed to be the requirement to involve students in active learning through diverse learning approaches that include active peer communication, processing the information gained by constant selfreflection and "checking their understanding, organizing their knowledge, and making connections with what they already know" (Glazer, 2012, p. 3). The key features of blended learning pedagogy are interaction, flexibility, and suitable assessment forms (Smith & Hill, 2019).

The study of López-Pérez et al. (2011) shows that blended learning positively affects reducing dropout rates and a positive attitude on improving exam marks. Moreover, the students' perceptions on the attitude and readiness for blended learning are interrelated, with their final marks depending on the blended learning activities and the students' age, background, and class attendance rate Graham, C. R., Woodfield, W., & Harrison, J. B. (2013)

II. The use of Technological Platforms in BL

Information technology (IT) has provided a new means for blended learning outside conventional classrooms. With the trend of using Information Technology, blended learning is an approach that gives the best advantage from class and online learning. It also helps the higher education to improve their understanding of how students see blended learning and formulate strategies to implement blended learning successfully. Furthermore, students' technological knowledge of various aspects of learning can also be essential in assessing students' readiness, which is a prerequisite for the successful application of blended learning (Firdaus, F. et al. 2020; and Tang, C., & Chaw, L. 2013)

One big challenges is how users can successfully use the technology and insuring participants' commitment given the individual learner characteristic and encounters with technology (Hofmann, T. et al., 2014). Hofmann adds that users getting into difficulties with technology may abandon the learning and eventual failure if technological applications. In a report by Oxford Group 92013), some learners (16%) had negative attitude to blended learning, while 26% were concerned that learners would not complete studyin blrended learning. Learners are essential partners in any learning process, and therefor, their background and characteristics affect their ability to carry on with learning effectivity, and being in blended learning, the design tools to be used may impingeon the effectivenessof their

learning.(Keskin,S.,&Yurdugul,h.(2020)

Instructional strategies differ considerably from those that were formerly used to educate them. In this regard, university educators need to understand university students' readiness for blended learning by considering the technological-related factor that may affect this instruction method.

III. Students' Attitude towards Blended Learning

Birbal, R. et al.(2009) emphasizes that the attitude on learning flexibility reflects good points of blended learning, including better access to learning materials and freedom to decide where and when to study and at what pace. Blended learning improves students' attitude towards study management, which motivates them to organize their time when studying online as well as their familiarity with digital technologies which enables them to collaborate with other students for assignments and to interact with the lecturer. This study suggests five learning aspects through which student attitude can be examined to study their readiness for blended learning. These five learning aspects are learning flexibility, online learning, study management, technology, and online interaction.

IV. Students' Readiness for Blended Learning

Blended Learning readiness is defined as knowledge, skill, social. psychological, affective characteristics, and physical opportunities necessary for learners to make the most of e-learning environments (Yurdugül & Demir, 2017). Blended Learning readiness consists of six main components: computer self-efficacy, internet self-efficacy, online communication self-efficacy, self-directed learning, learner control, and motivation towards blended learning activities (Hung, Chou, Chen, & Own, 2010). The first three factors are related to learners' competence in technologies and communication tools for e-learning. The constructs of self-directed learning and learner control refer to learners' pedagogical knowledge and blended learning skills. These skills include students' learning methods, self-assessment, access to resources, resource management, and time planning. Self-directed learners can determine their learning needs, goals, and learning strategies without the help of others and also evaluate their learning results. Learner control can be considered an individual's ability to manage the learning process (Yilmaz, 2017). The construct of the motivation towards elearning addresses the willingness and interest of students in affective terms.

These blended learning readiness components have a significant impact on learners' satisfaction and motivation in blended learning (Yilmaz, 2017). To provide positive elearning experiences, learners must be ready for blended learning (Keskin, S., & Yurdugül, H., 2020). Blended learning readiness structures are an essential indicator that learners are ready for this process. Today, since the learners are accepted as a digital native, researchers start with the assumption that the learners are sufficient to use blended learning technologies (Keskin, S., & Yurdugül, H., 2020).

However, the attitude towards the usage of these technologies at different levels and the problems observed in blended learning processes have led to the need to evaluate the learners' blended learning readiness

Thus, if Blended learning environments are considered as a system, learner characteristics, which are the inputs of this system, considerably affect the outcomes from the system. E-learning readiness is one of the integral inputs in this system. Therefore, the readiness features of the learners to use e-learning environments emerge as an important construct in many studies (Yurdugül & Demir, 2017).

V. Problems and Challenges to Blended Learning

The lack of suitable infrastructure and access to technology can cause some constraints for the successful integration of BL. Tshabalala, Ndeya-Ndereya, and Merwe (2014) have constructed a list of challenges that add to the constraints in implementing blended learning: "lack of policy, lack of faculty support, lack of technological and computer skills, large class sizes, and inadequate technological resources."

In the same vein, Smith and Hill (2019) identified a range of drawbacks, such as the necessity for clear goals and blended learning objectives. Furthermore, Mirriahi, Alonzo, and Fox (2015) indicated that a lack of institutional definition of blended learning causes some challenges, as well as the lack of staff capacity to engage with BL, increases the probability of misinterpreting the BL principles and practices.

As an example, the case study conducted by Tshabalaha et al. (2014) in South Africa investigated academic staff's perception of blended learning to allow for the identification of challenges encountered. It was determined that "the absence of a policy on blended learning; inadequate staff training; limited access to the computer laboratory for students" were problematic to the success of BL (Tshabalaha et al., 2014, p. 107).

Moreover, due to their study, Smith and Hill (2019) postulate that additional teacher training should be conducted for the staff before implementing blended instruction. This concept could be done through the appropriate governance and strategic leadership within an institution Namyssova, G., Tussupbekova, G., Helmer, J., Malone, K., Mir, A., & Jonbekova, D. (2019)

III. FIGURES AND TABLES

INPUT PROCESS OUTP	UT
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Fig.1: Conceptual Framework of the Study



Fig.2: The research process in this study using the Convergent Mixed-Parallel Design

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Table 2. General information about participants and
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instructional	Discussion Groups	545	75.16%

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outside Home with 12		Computer Shop	3	0.65%
		Other Sources		
an internet 2.61%		outside Home with	12	
		an internet		2.61%

Г			
	connection(
	neighbor, other		
	establishments)	7	1 520/
** 1, 1, 1	None	7	1.53%
How reliable	Moderate	165	
are your	Reliability		35.95%
MOBILE	Low Reliability	254	55.34%
DATA internet			
connections at	No Internet		
home for	Connection	40	
blended/flexible	Connection		
learning			8.71%
How reliable	Moderate		
are your	Reliability	137	
BROADBAND	Kenability		29.85%
Internet (DSL,	Low Reliability	189	41.18%
Wireless Fiber,			
Satellite)			
internet	XX X		
connections/	No Internet		
services at	Connection/Not	134	
home for	Applicable		
blended/flexible			
learning			29.19%
How reliable			29.1970
are your Other	Moderate	110	
Sources outside	Reliability	110	23.97%
the home with	Low Reliability	210	45.75%
an internet	Low Retubility	210	43.7370
connection(
neighbor,	No Internet	120	
Barangay Hall)	Connection/NA	139	
for			
blended/flexible			20.200/
learning?			30.28%
XX71			
What social	Facebook	154	33.55%
media	FB Messenger	2.47	
platforms do	Group Chat	347	75.60%
you use in	E-mail	237	51.63%
blended/flexible	You Tube	68	14.81%
learning	Others(Please		
	Specify)	33	7.19%
	······································		
What Learning			
Management	Facebook	111	24 100/
System or e-	Maggar		24.18%
learning	Messenger Group	234	5 0.000/
platforms do	Chat		50.98%
-	Gmail	145	31.59%
you want to use for future	School's own LMS	53	11.55%
flexible	Google Classroom	256	55.77%
nexible	Edmodo	42	9.15%

learning	Moodle	31	6.75%
	Other(Please Specify)	26	5.66%

Table 3. The factors that affect the readiness of students
for a blended learning environment

	for a blended learning env	ironment	
		Mean	Descript
			ive
Di	mensions for Readiness to		Interpre
Ble	ended Learning		tation
On	Learning Flexibility:	1	
1.	I am ready to increase my		Ready
	opportunity to access unlimited		5
	lecture materials and use		
	information	3.65	
2.	I am ready to study at my own		Ready
	pace and have the opportunities		
	to reflect on what I have		
	learned	3.57	
Su	b Area Mean	3.61	Ready
	Online Learning	5.01	Iteuuy
3.	I am ready and comfortable		Approac
5.	with self-directed learning, for		hing
	it helps me better understand		Readine
	the course lessons	3.23	
4.	I am ready for online-based	5.25	SS
4.	-		Approac
	learning activities as it		hing Readine
	provides richer instructional		
	content to understand course		SS
	requirements better than face to	2.95	
-	face approach	2.85	
5.	I am ready to learn from things		Approac
	I hear, like lectures, audio		hing
	recordings, and video format		Readine
	lessons, and	3.37	SS
6.	I am ready having my lessons		Approac
	on online-based activities for I		hing
	am likely to finish a degree508		Readine
	responses	3.32	SS
			Approac
			hing
			Readine
	b Area Mean	3.19	<i>SS</i>
On	Study Management:	n.	
7.	I became multitasked and		Approac
	organized my time better when		hing
	studying online with the		Readine
	Blended Learning modality	3.49	SS
8.	Blended learning through		Ready
	online motivates me to prepare		
	well for my studies by	3.54	

developing strong time		
management skills		
9. I am ready to be more		Ready
responsible for my studies		ready
through the Blended Learning		
modality	3.51	
Sub Area Mean	3.51	Ready
On Technology Readiness:		
10. I am ready with technological		Approac
learning because my university		hing
provides the resources		Readine
necessary for students to		SS
succeed in the online-based		
Blended Learning modality	3.12	
11. I am ready to use platforms for		Approac
learning- Social networking		hing
applications (Computer		Readine
software and web-based		SS
services that enable people to		
interact with each other; blogs,		
wikis, video conferencing,		
online chat,		
Facebook/Messenger) which		
help me with learning	3.18	
		Approac
		hing
		Readine
Sub Area Mean	3.15	SS
On Classroom Learning	1	l.
12. I still believe that learning face		Ready
to face more effective for it		
offers more opportunities to		
collaborate with other students		
in the classroom part.	3.63	
13. There are more opportunities to		Ready
collaborate with teachers face		
to face, and still like the fast		
feedback when I meet my		
lecture in person in the		
classroom learning part of		
Blended /Flexible Learning	3.52	
Sub Area Mean	3.57	Ready
	3.41	Approac
		hing
		Readine
		Neuume

IV. CONCLUSION

Since the availability of the technology platform is the main characteristics of blended learning, school and students should invest in better accessibility for online learning.

Other research should be considered to understand how blended learning is related to students' characteristics like age, gender, disabilities if they have, such as blindness and hearing disabilities.

KSU as an HEI's should explore partnerships with relevant agencies and organizations to strengthen and complement existing resources or connectivity to ensure undisrupted learning of the students and should survey grants and/or support for faculty on transitioning to flexible learning.

The systems and procedures for the transition to blended/flexible learning should be disseminated to all students, which may be in the form of a policy document such as a manual or incorporated in the student handbook. HEIs should implement students' mechanisms to receive/access printed or digital course packages/instructional materials through designated pick up points or through digital platforms.

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