

Flexible Learning Modalities in the Philippines: COVID-19 and Beyond

*Jupeth T. Pentang, Manuel L. Bucad Jr. & Ronalyn M.
Bautista*

The form of education encompasses a plethora of significant changes toward innovation, discovery, and progress, and this form will always need to evolve and adapt to the challenges faced, encountered, and experienced by trailblazers. Flexible learning approaches have grown in popularity in the Philippines in recent years, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Flexible learning refers to any educational system that gives pupils more control over their study time, place, direction, or pace (Cassidy et al., 2016; Davies et al., 2020). Students have more say over when, where, and how they learn. Flexible learning is a combination of digital and non-digital technologies (Santiago et al., 2021) that aims to make education accessible and inclusive. Studies have found that flexible learning improves learning outcomes, increases student engagement, and enhances

student satisfaction (Alraimi et al., 2015; Bautista & Valtoribio, 2024; Kuo et al., 2014; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019).

In 2020, the Philippine Commission on Higher Education (CHED) issued guidelines requiring higher education institutions to employ flexible learning modes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, the Department of Education (DepEd) released a Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan that includes various flexible learning modes. The pandemic brought several challenges (Agayon et al., 2022; Caasi & Pentang, 2022; Gocotano et al., 2021) but also created opportunities for implementing flexible learning methodologies in the Philippines, including online (Giray et al., 2022; Lopena et al., 2021), modular (Agayon et al., 2022; Bacomo et al., 2022; Dangle & Sumaoang, 2020; Hamora et al., 2022; Roque, 2022; Tanucan et al., 2023), blended (Alvarez, 2020; Tupas & Linas-Laguda, 2020; Villanueva et al., 2022), and distance (Dimitropoulos et al., 2022; Joaquin et al., 2020; Roque, 2022) learning.

Online Learning

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for social distancing, online learning has grown in popularity in the Philippines (Mariano-Dolesh et al., 2022; Tan & Ong, 2021). Online education can take many forms, including synchronous or asynchronous classes, video lectures, discussions, and exams. Despite geographical distance, online learning has enabled students to complete their education and stay connected with their lecturers and peers. However, online learning has its challenges. Many Filipino college students struggle with online learning due to technical and internet connectivity issues, mental health concerns, financial constraints, and difficulties with time and space management,

despite the advantages of convenience and eliminating the need for public transit during the COVID-19 pandemic (Giray et al., 2022). Disparities in access to the internet, computers, and technical skills limit the participation of many stakeholders, including students, in online learning. Lack of internet connection is the most significant obstacle affecting the learner community (Lopena et al., 2021). Additionally, some students may require more social interaction and face-to-face support from teachers and peers.

Synchronous and asynchronous online modes of learning

Synchronous communication occurs in real-time. Lecturers can deliver material directly to students in class. Synchronous online lectures can still be conducted via online class platforms. Students who studied primarily in synchronous settings reported more peer-centered activities, such as feedback, than those who studied mainly in asynchronous settings. Conversely, teachers observed fewer distinctions between synchronous and asynchronous teaching methods, particularly in terms of feedback activities (Fabríz et al., 2021; Palupi, 2022).

Asynchronous communication is not limited by time. In this mode, the lecturer provides material that students can use as a reference. Students can learn from PPT files, PDFs, and videos at their own pace. However, students in mostly asynchronous settings experienced challenges, including technological problems and difficulties engaging some students or teams (Zhang et al., 2022).

Learning Management System

Before the pandemic, the Learning Management System (LMS) was extensively researched in the Philippines and was a crucial instrument for online education. LMS provides a structured platform where students can

continue to cooperate, interact, and socialize while studying remotely. It is an ideal strategy for encouraging student engagement with content and maintaining education (Alturki et al., 2021; Ashrafi et al., 2020; Raza et al., 2020). With frameworks that support online collaborative groups, professional training, discussions, and communication among LMS users, the standard LMS fosters an inclusive learning environment that promotes academic development. Instructors should balance active learning, use of LMS technology tools, and adherence to qualified curricular guidelines (Bradley, 2021).

The Department of Education (DepEd), the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) in the Philippines have modified their usual teaching methods by implementing a structured and readily accessible online learning system via LMS (Fabito et al., 2020; Pitogo et al., 2022). The exponential growth of LMS utilization has led to empirical studies exploring the variables influencing students' and teachers' adoption and continued use. Navarro et al. (2021) showed that LMSs are valuable tools for facilitating learning in undergraduate engineering programs in the Philippines because of their availability and interactive environment. However, incorporating collaborative learning tools could make LMSs even more effective.

Modular Learning

In this approach, learning resources are arranged into modules that students can complete independently. This strategy is frequently combined with other forms of flexible learning, such as online or blended learning (Dangle & Sumaoang, 2020). Students in modular education receive

modules containing educational materials, activities, and assessments that they can work on at their own pace and schedule. The modules are often self-contained, meaning students can study the topics without direct teaching from an instructor. Despite technical and non-technical challenges, modular remote learning has increased students' understanding of the material (Hamora et al., 2022; Roque, 2022). Implementing modular learning remains challenging in the Philippines (Agayon et al., 2022; Bacomo et al., 2022; Caasi & Pentang, 2022). According to Tanucan et al. (2023), implementing printed modular distance learning (MDL) requires attention to four presences: structural, community, intervention, and quality assurance. Addressing these issues would create a supportive and positive learning environment that promotes student learning and achievement.

Blended Learning

Blended learning combines online and in-person instruction to provide a more flexible learning environment. It is increasingly popular in the Philippines because it enables schools to maintain social distancing while providing students with some face-to-face education (Alvarez, 2020; Tupas & Linas-Laguda, 2020; Villanueva et al., 2022). In a blended learning model, students often engage in online activities outside the classroom, such as watching videos, participating in online discussions, and completing assignments. They also attend in-person sessions for direct instruction.

Distance Learning

Distance learning is similar to online learning but may also include more traditional methods of remote education, such as mailing course

materials. It is often used in areas with limited internet access (Caasi & Pentang, 2022; Laswadi et al., 2023). Distance learning involves students receiving instruction from their teachers remotely, generally via digital technologies such as online platforms, video conferencing, and email (Dimitropoulos et al., 2022; Joaquin et al., 2020; Roque, 2022). Online learning is especially viable for distance learning during quarantines and viral outbreaks since it allows students to access learning materials and communicate with their lecturers remotely.

Hybrid Learning

Universities and colleges are seeking innovative ways to boost student enrollment while offering flexible course options and maintaining sound financial management. E-learning tools and technology have been used to supplement conventional courses at higher education institutions, creating a “hybrid” e-learning model that strives to enhance students’ learning experiences. Hybrid learning combines in-person classroom instruction with offline and online learning or deliberately blends conventional teaching with technological advancements. Despite some challenges, hybrid learning has gained popularity recently, particularly during the coronavirus pandemic (Damo & Padagas, 2020; Dimitropoulos et al., 2022; Faradita et al., 2022; Oji et al., 2022; Tumasias, 2022; Young et al., 2016; Zakaria et al., 2022).

The learning modalities in the Philippines underwent significant transformation at the onset of the global pandemic, which had a severe impact on the economy and the education sector. Universities and basic education institutions designed alternative learning modes that comply with the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) regulations on COVID-19. Hybrid

learning predates modern instructional technologies, but its evolution will inevitably be linked to current information and communication technologies and a supportive environment for technology adopters, particularly among teaching academics in senior high schools.

The Roadmap Ahead

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed the educational landscape in the Philippines, accelerating the adoption of flexible learning techniques. Nonetheless, the pandemic has highlighted the importance of ongoing support and training for teachers and students to use these new instructional practices effectively. Despite the initial challenges faced during the pandemic, the implementation of flexible learning approaches signals a fundamental shift in the Philippines toward a more modern and adaptive approach to education.

Research should focus on identifying and enhancing best practices for implementing and improving these modalities to support the long-term success and growth of flexible learning techniques. This research should consider the unique challenges faced by students and other stakeholders, including the digital divide, socioeconomic and geographical barriers, as well as cultural and language diversity. Furthermore, education stakeholders should collaborate to provide the tools, resources, and training necessary for the successful adoption of flexible learning techniques in the Philippines. This collaborative approach would ensure that, beyond the pandemic, all students, regardless of background or circumstance, have access to high-quality education and that the country continues to adapt and respond to evolving educational needs.

The finding that flexible learning approaches are still evolving and adapting to the changing needs of students, educators, and the community in the Philippines, with ongoing support and training required for successful adoption, has various implications for future research. First, research may identify best practices for establishing and enhancing various types of flexible learning, including hybrid, online, modular, blended, and remote learning, while considering the individual needs and challenges of students and educators. This research would ensure that these approaches are applied effectively and can be refined over time.

Second, research is needed to determine the training and resources that teachers and students require to adopt and utilize flexible learning approaches successfully. This would help guarantee that instructors and students are adequately prepared to use these methods and overcome any obstacles or challenges that may arise during the adoption process. Third, research may focus beyond the pandemic on providing equitable access to quality education. Addressing the digital divide and socioeconomic and geographical barriers to flexible learning is essential. This study aims to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, have fair access to education and are not left behind during the transition to flexible learning.

Ultimately, the conclusion highlights the significance of collaboration among education stakeholders. Accordingly, research might explore how various stakeholders, such as teachers, students, administrators, parents, and policymakers, can collaborate to support the successful adoption of flexible learning approaches. This would ensure that all parties work toward a common goal and that any issues or challenges arising during implementation can be effectively addressed.

Bibliography

- Agayon, A. J., Agayon, A. K., & Pentang, J. (2022). Teachers in the new normal: Challenges and coping mechanisms in secondary schools. *International Journal of Humanities and Education Development*, 4(1), 67-75. <https://doi.org/10.22161/jhed.4.1.8>
- Alraimi, K. M., Zo, H., & Ciganek, A. (2015). Understanding the MOOCs continuance: The role of openness and reputation. *Computers and Education*, 80, 28-38. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2014.08.006>
- Alturki, U. T., & Aldraiweesh, A. A. (2021). Application of learning management system (LMS) during the COVID-19 pandemic: A sustainable acceptance model of the expansion technology approach. *Sustainability*, 13(19), 10991. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su131910991>
- Alvarez, Jr., A. V. (2020). Learning from the problems and challenges in blended learning: Basis for faculty development and program enhancement. *Asian Journal of Distance Education*, 15(2), 112-132. <http://www.asianjde.com/ojs/index.php/AsianJDE/article/view/433>
- Ashrafi, A., Zareravasan, A., Savoji, S.R., & Amani, M. (2020). Exploring factors influencing students' continuance intention to use the learning management system (LMS): A multi-perspective framework. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 30(8), 1475 - 1497. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2020.1734028>
- Bacomo, A., Daculap, L., Ocampo, M., Paguia, C., Pentang, J., & Bautista, R. M. (2022). Modular learning efficiency: Learner's attitude and performance towards self-learning modules. *IOER International Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, 4(2), 60-72. <https://doi.org/10.54476/s149512>
- Bradley, V. (2021). Learning management system (LMS) use with online instruction. *International Journal of Technology in Education*, 4(1), 68-92. <https://doi.org/10.46328/ijte.36>
- Caasi, N., & Pentang, J. (2022). Parental factors related to students' self-concept and academic performance amid COVID-19 and distance learning. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 1(4), 202-209. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7270542>

- Cassidy, A., Fu, G., Valley, W., Lomas, C., Jovel, E., & Riseman, A. (2016). Flexible learning strategies in first through fourth-year courses. *Collected Essays on Learning and Teaching*, 9, 83-94. <https://doi.org/10.22329/celt.v9i0.4438>
- Damo, L. E., & Padagas, R. C. (2020). Can hybrid learning supplant the brick-and-stone classroom in teaching “strategies for academic success in college”? A focus assessment study. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(5), 1711-1718. <http://doi:10.13189/ujer.2020.080507>
- Dangle, Y. R., & Sumaoang, J. (2020, November 27-29). *The implementation of modular distance learning in the Philippine secondary public schools* [Paper presentation]. 3rd International Conference on Advanced Research in Teaching and Education, Dublin, Republic of Ireland. <https://www.doi.org/10.33422/3rd.icate.2020.11.132>
- Davies, R. S., Dean, D., & Ball, N. (2020). Flipped classroom and flexible design: A pedagogical approach to improving student learning and engagement in a graduate-level course. *TechTrends*, 64(4), 582-591. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-020-00489-1>
- Dimitropoulos, K., Mystakidis, S., & Fragkaki, M. (2022, September). Bringing educational neuroscience to distance learning with design thinking: The design and development of a hybrid e-learning platform for skillful training. In *2022 7th South-East Europe Design Automation, Computer Engineering, Computer Networks and Social Media Conference (SEEDA-CECNSM)*, 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1109/SEEDA-CECNSM57760.2022.9932939>
- Fabito, B., L. Rodriguez, R., O. Trillanes, A., G. Lira, J. I., Z. Estocada, D., & Q. Sta Ana, P. M. (2020, August). Investigating the factors influencing the use of a learning management system (LMS): An extended information system success model (ISSM). In *2020 The 4th International Conference on E-Society, E-Education and E-Technology*, 42-46. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3421682.3421687>
- Fabriz, S., Mendzheritskaya, J., & Stehle, S. (2021). Impact of synchronous and asynchronous settings of online teaching and learning in higher education on students’ learning experience during COVID-19. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 4544. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.733554>
- Faradita, M. N., & Rahmawati, E. (2022). Pengaruh hybrid learning terhadap hasil belajar siswa pada pembelajaran tatap muka terbatas. *Jurnal Ilmiah Mandala Education*, 8(3), 2641-2646. <http://dx.doi.org/10.58258/jime.v8i3.3674>
- Giray, L., Gumalin, D., Jacob, J., & Villacorta, K. (2022). Exploring the online learning experience of Filipino college students during COVID-19

pandemic. *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun*, 10(1), 227-250.
<https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v10i1.691>

- Gocotano, T., Jerodiaz, M., Banggay, J., Nasibog, H., & Go, M. (2021). Higher education students' challenges on flexible online learning implementation in the rural areas: A Philippine case. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 20(7), 262-290.
<https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.20.7.15>
- Hamora, L., Rabaya, M., Pentang, J., Pizaña, A., & Gamozo, M. J. (2022). Students' evaluation of faculty-prepared instructional modules: Inferences for instructional materials review and revision. *Journal of Education, Management and Development Studies*, 2(2), 20-29.
<https://doi.org/10.52631/jemds.v2i2.109>
- Joaquin, J. J. B., Biana, H. T., & Dacela, M. A. (2020). The Philippine higher education sector in the time of COVID-19. *Frontiers in Education*, 5, 576371. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2020.576371>
- Kuo, Y. C., Walker, A., Belland, B., & Schroder, K. (2014). A predictive study of student satisfaction in online education programs. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 15(1), 111-131.
<https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v15i1.1687>
- Laswadi, L., Setiawan, M., Efyanti, Y., Pentang, J. T., & Taresh, S. M. (2023). Distance learning design: A problem-based learning with flipped classroom model through improving student learning outcomes and learning motivation. *Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan IPA*, 9(2), 216-226.
<https://doi.org/10.21831/jipi.v9i2.63166>
- Lopena, G. L., Padilla, N. D., & Madrigal, D. V. (2021). Walking through a maze: The struggles of accountancy students with online learning in the context of the COVID-19. *Philippine Social Science Journal*, 4(3), 30-38.
<https://doi.org/10.52006/main.v4i3.375>
- Mariano-Dolesh, M. L., Collantes, L. M., Ibanez, E. D., & Pentang, J. T. (2022). Mindset and levels of conceptual understanding in the problem-solving of preservice mathematics teachers in an online learning environment. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 21(6), 18-33. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.21.6.2>
- Navarro, M. M., Prasetyo, Y. T., Young, M. N., Nadlifatin, R., & Redi, A. A. N. P. (2021). The perceived satisfaction in utilizing learning management system among engineering students during the COVID-19 pandemic: Integrating task technology fit and extended technology acceptance model. *Sustainability*, 13(19), 10669. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su131910669>

- Oji, V., Dillion, K., & Weaver, S. (2022). Multi-inquiry hybrid e-learning: Instructor-learner experiences. *Pharmacy Education*, 22(1), 54-62. <https://doi.org/10.46542/pe.2022.221.5462>
- Palupi, M. E. (2022). The difference between synchronous and asynchronous online learning communication during COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of English Language and Literature*, 7(1), 11-18. <https://doi.org/10.37110/jell.v7i1.138>
- Pitogo, V. A., Gonzales, E. C., & Jaictin, J. F. P. (2022, November). PLS-SEM-ANN-based technique for understanding behavioral intention to use a learning management system. In *2022 International Conference of Science and Information Technology in Smart Administration (ICSINTESA)*, 18-23. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICSINTESA56431.2022.10041597>
- Raza, S., Qazi, W., Khan, K., & Salam, J. (2021). Social isolation and acceptance of the learning management system (LMS) in the time of COVID-19 pandemic: an expansion of the UTAUT model. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, 59(2), 183-208. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0735633120960421>
- Roque, J. (2022). Modular distance learning in the area of education during the new normal: A systematic review. *AIDE Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 1(1), 66-82. <https://journal.aide-inc.net/index.php/aide-irj/article/view/9>
- Santiago, C. S., Ulanday, M. L. P., Centeno, Z. J. R., Bayla, M. C. D., & Callanta, J. S. (2021). Flexible learning adaptabilities in the new normal: E-learning resources, digital meeting platforms, online learning systems, and learning engagement. *Asian Journal of Distance Education*, 16(2), 38-56. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5762474>
- Tan, R. R., & Ong, Y. L. (2021). Technology-enhanced learning for higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic: A case study of a Philippine university. *Journal of Educational Technology Development and Exchange*, 14(1), 1-20. <https://journals.upd.edu.ph/index.php/jedte/article/view/15635>
- Tanucan, J. C. M., Alejandro, B. A., & Corcino, R. B. (2023). Towards an enhanced implementation of printed modular distance learning in the Philippines: A meta-synthesis. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 22(3), 341-358. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.22.3.21>
- Tupas, F. P., & Linas-Laguda, M. (2020). Blended learning—an approach in Philippine basic education curriculum in new normal: A review of current literature. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(11), 5505-5512. <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2020.081154>

- Tumasis, J. B. (2022, March). Web-based platform for Don Bosco High School–senior high school–technical vocational education track in adoption of hybrid learning. In *Proceedings of The International Halal Science and Technology Conference*, 14(1), 47-55. <https://doi.org/10.31098/ihsatec.v14i1.485>
- Bautista, R. M., & Valtoribio, D. C. (2024). Flexible teaching-learning modality in mathematics education of a state university in West Philippines. *Mathematics Teaching Research Journal*, 16(3), 5-24. https://mtrj.commons.gc.cuny.edu/wp-content/blogs.dir/34462/files/2024/07/Bautista-issue-53_v16_n3-p5.pdf
- Villanueva, J. A. R., Redmond, P., & Galligan, L. (2022). Manifestations of cognitive presence in blended learning classes of the Philippine K-12 system. *Online Learning*, 26(1), 19-37. <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v26i1.3021>
- Young, W.A., Allen, L., & Warfield, K. (2016). Developing online/hybrid learning models for higher education programs. *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy*, 2(6), 27-33. <https://doi.org/10.24018/ejedu.2021.2.6.180>
- Zakaria, W., Turmudi, T., & Pentang, J. T. (2022). Information and communication technology in elementary schools: A comparison between hybrid and face-to-face learning systems. *Profesi Pendidikan Dasar*, 9(1), 46-54. <https://journals.ums.ac.id/ppd/article/view/17534>
- Zawacki-Richter, O., Marín, V. I., Bond, M., & Gouverneur, F. (2019). Systematic review of research on artificial intelligence applications in higher education - where are the educators? *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 16(1), 39. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-019-0171-0>
- Zhang, R., Bi, N. C., & Mercado, T. (2022). Do zoom meetings really help? A comparative analysis of synchronous and asynchronous online learning during Covid-19 pandemic. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 39(1), 210-217. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcal.12740>