Practicing Transformational Teaching Practices and the Integration of Flexible Learning among Students in One State University

Jherwin P. Hermosa
Corresponding author, College of Arts and Sciences and Graduate Studies and Applied Research, Laguna State Polytechnic University, Philippines, *jherwin.hermosa@lspu.edu.ph*

Edilberto Z. Andal
College of Teachers Education and Graduate Studies and Applied Research, Laguna State Polytechnic University, Philippines, *edilberto.andal@lspu.edu.ph*

This study examined how transformational teaching practices and the adoption of flexible learning strategies influence students' university experiences. Adopting qualitative approach and employing thematic analysis, 10 participants who had encountered flexible learning during and after the pandemic were involved in the research. The study incorporated a series of unstructured interview questions. These questions formed the interview protocol, which included the research inquiries. The findings revealed various key themes about transformational teaching practices, the implementation of flexible learning, and their impact on students' university experiences. These themes encompassed students' perceptions of teaching and learning, the significance of transformative education, their experiences with flexible learning, and strategies to improve university experiences. Based on the study findings and conclusions, it is recommended to create an effective approach by cultivating a collaborative environment infused with technology. Research has shown that such environments can significantly enhance student learning outcomes. The pandemic has underscored the importance of social interaction and teamwork for learners at all developmental stages, making it essential for education in a post-COVID world. Future researchers may explore the impact of philosophical beliefs on the integration of transformative teaching methods and adaptable learning approaches in the academic journey of university students through a concurrent investigation.

Keywords: collaborative environment, flexible learning, philosophy of care, students' experience, transformational teaching, teaching practices

INTRODUCTION

In response to the global pandemic, schools have undergone significant changes in management and teaching methods. Along with these changes, leadership styles such as transactional, charismatic, transformational, and interactive have gained prominence in educational management worldwide. Embracing this shift, Laguna State Polytechnic University (LSPU) has implemented a flexible teaching and learning model. This institutionally crafted model aimed to deliver quality and equitable education during these challenging times. This LSPU flexible learning method responds to the challenges in the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. As mandated by the Commission on Higher Education (CHEd), HEIs shall develop their learning continuity plan which shall reflect the framework and system for the transition and integration of flexible learning approaches anchored on the existing tools and resources of the institution, capability of staff and faculty members, and capacity of students (CHEd, 2020.) This was approved by the board

of regents of the LSPU for the opening of classes for the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021.

It is widely accepted that educational institutions have a moral duty to deliver high-quality education and research that align with societal needs (Dishon & Ben-Porath, 2018). Students, as the primary stakeholders of universities, are instrumental in shaping their own educational experiences and perceptions. Their feedback and assessments significantly impact their overall engagement with higher education. Hence, students play a vital role in university governance by offering input on crucial aspects and their overall contentment (Akdağ-Kurnaz & Ari, 2024). Yolcu (2020) argues that educational institutions should establish support mechanisms to help students deal with technical issues. Increasing student motivation and promoting active participation in distance education can be achieved through various methods. Institutions should also review educational materials and teaching methods, and encourage interactive learning experiences. Collaborating with students can enhance teaching, course design, assessments, and quality processes to achieve the best outcomes (Amaro et al. 2019).

This study focused on analyzing the impact of transformational teaching practices influenced by the implementation of flexible learning on students' experiences at the university. Both universities and stakeholders prioritize student satisfaction and their overall experience. The primary goal of universities is to deliver top-notch education and research that aligns with societal requirements. Given that students are considered the primary beneficiaries of universities, their experiences, insights, and grasp of higher education should be centered around their perspectives.

METHOD

This research employed a thematic analysis to explore and gain an understanding of the experiences of students who have encountered transformational teaching practices and the integration of flexible learning at Laguna State Polytechnic University, San Pablo City Campus (LSPU SPC). The data collection occurred at the LSPU SPC during the second semester of the academic year 2022-2023. To ensure a diverse and qualified pool of participants, two methods were utilized. Firstly, notifications were posted on Instagram and Meta (formerly known as Facebook) to inform interested individuals about the study and encourage them to contact the researchers through an online screening survey. Secondly, the researcher also engaged with their network of contacts to collect insights and experiences pertinent to the study, utilizing these connections to enhance the research findings.

In this investigation, a purposeful sampling technique was employed to select 10 participants (Creswell, 2015). These participants were specifically chosen among third-year and fourth-year students attending LSPU SPC, who had been exposed to flexible learning for a minimum of two years. LSPU adopts flexible learning which is engaging, authentic, research-based, OBEdized, and with assured quality. The university provided faculty training in migrating to the new normal, emphasizing the essential learning outcomes, teaching-learning activities, and assessment in flexible learning. Flexible learning is contextually categorized as synchronous online, asynchronous online, e-learning offline, remote offline (modular), and/or a combination of such. The majority of the participants fell within the age range of 21-23 years, with a total of 6 participants, while 4 participants were aged 24 or above. The female respondents outnumbered the male respondents, with 7 females and 3 males. In terms of their academic track, 4 participants were enrolled in the Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM) Strand, 2 in Humanities and Social Science (HUMSS) Strand, 2 in Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) Stand, 1 in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Strand, and 1 in General Academic Strand (GAS) Stand.

The study incorporated a series of unstructured interview questions. These questions formed the interview protocol, which included the research inquiries. The initial in-depth interview took place for about an hour, accommodating the participants' availability. Alongside the interview notes, audio

recordings of the interviews were made. Before commencing data collection, the interview questions received validation from external experts. The data collection process began with an initial screening, during which the purpose of the study and the participants' expectations for the interview were discussed. The participants were provided with an informed-consent form, and comprehensive study details, and asked to schedule their first interview.

The interviews were conducted with a focus on prioritizing the comfort and convenience of the participants. They were held either through video-conferencing platforms or in person, based on mutual agreement between the interviewer and participants. This flexibility in the interview method ensured that geographical constraints or personal preferences did not hinder participation. Additionally, we strictly adhered to ethical guidelines to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. Pseudonyms were assigned to all individuals involved, preserving their identities throughout the research process and in the dissemination of findings. This approach not only safeguarded privacy but also created a trustful environment, encouraging participants to openly share their thoughts and experiences.

The interview transcripts were carefully examined for codes and themes using a modified version of the methodologies. The chosen research methodology for this study was thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method commonly used to analyze sets of texts, such as interviews or transcripts. Researchers carefully scrutinize the data to pinpoint recurring themes - topics, ideas, and patterns of significance that are consistently present (Dawadi, 2020).

FINDINGS

This section displays the emerging themes found in the study. These areas include (1) *students' perspectives on teaching and learning, (2) recognizing the importance of transformative education, (3) students' flexible learning experience, and (4) improved university experience.*

Students' perspective on teaching and learning

The importance of exploring perspectives lies in their significant impact on individuals' choices and behaviors. Particularly, students' perspectives play a crucial role in shaping their perceptions and intentions in educational settings and overall development. As a result, there is a growing acknowledgment of the necessity for qualitative research on students' viewpoints (Armellini et al. 2021). This study aimed to examine the perspectives of third and fourth-year students at LSPU SPC regarding the instruction and comprehension of key educational concepts. The researchers conducted unstructured interview questions to gather insights on learning experiences. Based on the feedback gathered during the study, P3 observed that "*the process of teaching and learning played a crucial role in building students' confidence levels, allowing them to articulate their ideas effectively, regardless of their proficiency levels*" (Participant 3, Transcript 1). This underscores the understanding that students absorb information through various approaches, with some being more impactful than others, often referred to as the concept of learning styles. Educators need to recognize that students' self-perception encompasses both academic and non-academic dimensions (Coşkun & Demirci 2024).

One crucial consideration is that self-concept can affect academic achievement, but it is also influenced by contextual and environmental factors. A positive and accepting environment plays a vital role in fostering positive self-beliefs by allowing students to attribute their successes and setbacks in learning to adaptability, providing opportunities for mastering content, and incorporating choice and engagement in learning activities. This, in turn, helps develop a healthy self-concept (Porter, 2015). Therefore, it is essential for learners aiming to boost self-confidence to prioritize the support and development of self-concept, as it significantly contributes to increasing competence (Brunner et al. 2020). Recent research has shown that students' adherence to gender stereotypes

significantly influences the gender disparities observed in educational settings (Heyder et al. 2020). During the study, the majority of the participants emphasized the importance of treating all students equally, irrespective of factors like age, gender, nationality, intellectual capacity, or physical appearance, within the scope of teaching and learning (Participant 8, Transcript 2). Interestingly, Flower et al. (2017) found a link between students who adhere to individualized learning and autonomy in the classroom and a decrease in gender-related differences in motivation. Students who prioritize fairness, autonomy, and personalized instruction appear to be less susceptible to unconscious gender biases and more attuned to the distinct strengths and needs of each student. By allowing students to choose tasks or learning settings that align with their interests and abilities, promoting equality, autonomy, and individualization creates a positive motivational environment where diversity among students is embraced as a natural occurrence, acknowledged by the teacher, and effectively addressed (Beisser & Thoma, 2021).

Recognizing the importance of transformative education

In the field of education, transformative teaching practices emphasize the need to adjust the conditions within schools and classrooms to improve learning outcomes. Whether it is educators or school administrators, those in leadership roles within educational institutions focus on reshaping both the physical and social aspects of the school environment to create a more conducive learning environment for students (Arbeiter & Bucar, 2021). To further illustrate this idea, P5 expressed the view that "*schools should establish specific goals that align with societal needs to promote transformative education*" (Participant 5, Transcript 2). Education plays a crucial role in equipping individuals with the necessary knowledge, skills, and values to tackle the complex challenges of the modern world (UNESCO, 2022).

Recent research by do-Amaral and Vargas (2023) suggests that education must evolve beyond solely teaching basic literacy and numeracy skills. In today's world, education must expand its goals to empower individuals to drive sustainable change and effectively address global challenges. This can only be achieved if educational institutions establish clear objectives based on the needs of learners in the 21st century. Merely providing universal access to education is insufficient to address ongoing issues such as poverty, inequalities, racism, and climate change. What is truly needed is a transformative education system that allows learners to reach their full potential by instilling core values, attitudes, and skills that promote respect for human rights, justice, diversity, equality, and a sustainable future. P6 emphasizes "*the importance for teachers to invest in preparation, develop innovative lesson plans, and constantly seek out new materials and methods to enhance the quality of their teaching*" (Participant 6, Transcript 2). Teaching is the interactive process of transferring knowledge and skills from an educator to a student. It involves the activities related to educating and instructing individuals. This process is transformative, influencing the mind, character, and physical capabilities of learners. Teaching requires a genuine love for learning and is a profession that is best suited for those truly committed to it. It entails a journey of development where students progress from simpler to more complex concepts and abilities. As an educator, a crucial aspect of your role is to provide guidance, inspiration, and assistance to your students as they progress in their educational journey (Zevalsiz, 2014).

To grow and develop, students should recognize the limitations of their current skills, knowledge, and perspectives. They must have the opportunity to experiment with and apply new skills and attitudes (Yale, 2017). Additionally, P2 emphasized "*the importance of a strong school administration that unites teachers, staff, students, and parents*" (Participant 2, Transcript 2). Recent studies suggest that administrative support is key in cultivating effective educators and establishing problem-solving teams that drive transformation in educational institutions. School administrators play a significant role in providing teachers with access to professional development and resources to address student needs effectively, including behavior and disciplinary issues (Tosun & Bozkurt Bostancı, 2024).

Effective transformative education in educational institutions relies heavily on a robust foundation. Thus, to ensure the success of both your school and students, it is essential to prioritize support for teachers. If you are contemplating how administrators can assist teachers, the crucial steps involve offering guidance, fostering opportunities for collaboration among peers, conducting meaningful evaluations, and recognizing them as esteemed professionals (Thakur, 2015).

Students' flexible learning experience

In response to the changing landscape of education, the Commission on Higher Education Memorandum Order No. 20, S. 2020 acknowledges the importance of implementing innovative teaching techniques in the Philippine higher education industry. This initiative aims to shift away from conventional teaching methodologies towards more adaptable and dynamic learning strategies. (Commission on Higher Education Memorandum Order, No. 20. S. 2020.)

P9 highlighted in his discussion that "*his educational journey has helped cultivate confidence and provided a space for self-expression, regardless of their proficiency level*" (Participant 9, Transcript 2). Individuals who exhibit qualities such as self-discipline, self-regulation, a curiosity for self-discovery, and openness have a significant impact on the success of flexible learning (Pattung, 2023). These individuals should also possess a natural inclination towards autonomous learning to engage in independent study effectively. To successfully navigate a flexible learning environment, learners must demonstrate a strong ability for self-directed learning. By embracing a flexible learning approach that empowers learners to make their own decisions, a multitude of opportunities can emerge (Dizon & Errabo, 2022).

Moreover, P4 highlighted "*a significant communication gap existing between students and instructors. Instances arose where additional clarification on lecture content was required, but instructors failed to address these points*" (Participant 4, Transcript 1). The participants also expressed a desire for improved communication, impacting their perception of the flexible learning course. A comparison was made between traditional face-to-face classes and the virtual learning environment, with criticism directed towards the latter for not fulfilling their need for social interaction with peers. Carillo et al. (2023) posit that motivation plays a crucial role in self-regulated learning for technology users. Key facets of motivation include specific goals, success objectives, confidence, self-efficacy, and empowerment. In one instance during the study, P8 emphasized "*the importance of utilizing technology, such as virtual classrooms, to effectively share resources, materials, and communicate with students*" (Participant 8, Transcript 2). The challenges faced by participants regarding technology are discussed within the second main theme, which encompasses crucial technical aspects like internet connectivity and online tools. When examining the broader narratives on flexible learning, students consistently mention the role of information technology, particularly internet connection, as a significant factor impacting their effectiveness (Famularsih, S. 2020). Furthermore, students' familiarity with relevant online tools to support learning in flexible learning environments directly influences their self-efficacy. The majority of respondents are considered beginners when it comes to using learning management systems, online communication tools, storage devices, creating and packaging video materials, and uploading and managing web content.

Improved the academic experience

Educational institutions are increasingly focusing on monitoring and enhancing the overall student experience, understanding its direct influence on the institution's reputation and ability to attract new students. P1 emphasized "*the importance of receiving constructive feedback from teaching staff on their progress*" (Participant 1, Transcript 1). According to Torres and Cruz (2022), offering valuable feedback is a crucial element of promoting flexible learning. Feedback allows students to gain valuable insights into their learning journey, current standing, progress, and areas for development.

Research indicates that feedback does not detract from the quality of a student's learning experience and performance; in fact, it may enhance or be comparable to traditional learning methods.

Ekberg and Gao (2018) posit that positive feedback from teachers can indicate effective utilization of flexibility by learners, resulting in improved learning outcomes. Incorporating flexibility into personalized learning designs can promote student collaboration, especially among students with similar characteristics. P7 shared "*her experience of developing the ability to consider alternative perspectives through flexible learning*" (Participant 7, Transcript 2). This underscores the importance of exploring diverse forms of flexibility in educational settings, as highlighted by Cachero-Paderog (2023). The study suggests that the increasing diversity in student populations, encompassing various age groups, social segments, and individual needs, reinforces the importance of flexible learning. Additionally, they argue that flexible learning can promote social justice and equitable outcomes in education.

Karanjakwut and Sripicharn (2024) emphasized that flexible learning may align with the socially oriented goals that universities aim to achieve in their strategies. Ginaya et al. (2018) assert that flexible learning offers various advantages for students and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), which should not be overlooked. With the increasing acceptance of flexible learning, HEIs understand the significant investment required, not just in technology but also in training and restructuring staff and systems. Muller et al, (2023) explore the increasing use of technology in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), which enables more open, personalized, and flexible offerings. This trajectory is projected to further expand in the future. HEIs must prioritize the development of policies and capabilities that allow them to harness technological advancements effectively. By doing so, institutions can better achieve their socially-oriented objectives, such as broadening access to HEIs.

In further discussion, P10 "*demonstrated a strong ability to engage with individuals from diverse backgrounds.*" (Participant 10, Transcript 2) Building a sense of community among learners, whether in online or traditional classroom settings, presents a considerable challenge. Nevertheless, the advantages of belonging to a community, particularly a virtual one, should surpass any associated drawbacks. Gaba et al. (2021) underscore the merits of collaborative learning, also known as "*collective goods,*" which encompass knowledge capital, social capital, and communion. The prosperity of the community depends on these benefits outweighing technical obstacles, time constraints, and financial expenses.

Detyna and Koch (2023) demonstrated that collaborative learning is an effective pedagogical method that can be seamlessly integrated into online learning environments. This approach emphasizes the importance of group work and cooperation between students and instructors, with active participation and interaction playing vital roles. Social interaction, cooperation, and constant evaluation of actions are essential components for building the collective knowledge base within the learning environment. Furthermore, these interactions can be facilitated regardless of physical location or other constraints through the utilization of telecommunications and electronic networks.

CONCLUSION

University students bring a diverse array of life experiences, educational backgrounds, personalities, and learning preferences to the classroom. These factors significantly shape their perspectives on teaching practices and influence their overall learning experiences. Furthermore, these unique viewpoints play a crucial role in determining their level of engagement in the learning process. The findings of the study confirm essential themes, including students' views on teaching and learning, the significance of transformative education, the flexibility of their learning experiences, and ways to enhance academic engagement.

The participants demonstrated the capacity to cultivate adaptive beliefs regarding academic success despite difficult circumstances. They actively made choices and engaged in educational activities to nurture positive self-perceptions, thereby aiding in the formation of a healthy self-image. It is widely understood that transformative education, which goes beyond mere cognitive understanding, plays a crucial role in imparting essential values, attitudes, and competencies that promote respect for human rights, justice, diversity, equality, and sustainability. In addition, individuals should exhibit a natural inclination towards self-directed learning to effectively pursue independent study. To excel in a dynamic learning environment, students must display strong self-regulated learning skills while receiving feedback to gain valuable insights into their academic journey, current progress, and areas for improvement.

In order to facilitate effective teaching and learning both during and after the pandemic, higher education institutions should focus on equipping students with digital literacy skills as they increasingly desire more innovative and engaging educational resources. By establishing an appealing online learning environment, these institutions can better meet the needs and interests of their students. Encouraging a technology-driven collaborative setting can support student development and success, as collaborative learning environments are conducive to growth. The pandemic has underscored the significance of social interaction and collaboration in education, which are essential for cognitive development at all stages of learning and crucial for education in a post-COVID society. Future researchers may explore the impact of philosophical beliefs on the integration of transformative teaching methods and adaptable learning approaches in the academic journey of university students through a concurrent investigation. In examining students' philosophical orientation, the study may opt to center on Nel Noddings' Philosophy of Care, which stresses the significance of instructing students on the importance of caring for themselves, their loved ones, individuals in different relationships with them, and even those with whom they have no association. Ultimately, promoting a culture of care should be a key objective in education to acknowledge the students' meaningful experiences.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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