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THE STATUS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE E-LEARNING CLASSROOM IN SELECTED HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN REGION IV-A AMIDST THE COVID-19 CRISIS

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Abstract

Because of the COVID-19 crisis, Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) have resorted to online classes or E-Learning Classrooms to deliver the content of their curriculum in various platforms. This action research examines the status of the implementation of the E-Learning classroom in selected HEI's in Region IV-A by conducting a qualitative approach using a survey questionnaire to a small group of professionals who have been teaching various courses in the tertiary level. This study utilized the descriptive method of research to bring out the current status of the implementation of the e-learning classroom in selected HEI's. An online survey data were collected and analyzed using the descriptive and documentary analysis. Findings indicate that the respondents had good experiences in introducing the E-learning classroom as an immediate response to the country's enhanced quarantine situation. Although all the E-learning platforms used by the respondents are free of charge, still, students have encountered problems like lack of resources, difficulty of Wi-Fi connection, and lack of training among the students and faculty members. this study recommends professional development workshops for both faculty members and students and preparation of advanced lessons, slide presentations, and examinations per unit to cope with the prescribed number of hours set by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). It is also expected that this action research would serve as a future guide for conducting an in-depth study using a structured interview to validate its findings.

Keywords - COVID-19, E-Learning Classrooms, Platforms, Experiences, Professional Development, Training, Workshops

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INTRODUCTION

Due to the threat of the COVID-19, many educational institutions in Region IV-A have suspended their academic activities and classes. All the non-teaching personnel had to stop working and advised by the President of the Philippines to stay at home. COVID-19 is a disease that could easily infect the immune system that can cause greater harm to individuals who are infected. Many countries have declared a national emergency just like the Philippines and the United States of America. De Guzman and Pastor [1] opines that the COVID-19 has no positive impact on the world most especially on academic institutions like that of a Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) of learning. Most of the cities around the Philippines are empty. All types of vehicles are few. Important business establishments are open. Conferences and meetings are strictly prohibited. Flights to and fro are affected and they have been grounded. Some grocery stores and drug stores are being emptied of masks, hand sanitizers, and disinfecting medications. Students are advised to stay home and study by their own selves. Everyone is in doubt as to when this crisis would end [2].

There were no empirical studies related to the E-learning Classroom as an intervention in times of crisis, or studies related to determine the status of E-Learning Classrooms in HEI's; however, there are several researches that discuss E-Learning as an effective tool or strategy in teaching. Chua, Sibbaluca, Mack, et.al[3] suggested using the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) as a technical tool for promoting the process of teaching and learning. According to them, teachers should be innovative in developing such an analytical learning atmosphere that will best fit the needs of today's generation of students.

McHaney, Reiter, and Reychay [4] confirm that simulation-based online when combined with good pedagogical approaches, appropriate technology and educational technology, and the presence of experts will provide a better experience in simulations. Simulations could be so motivating tool for elearning classroom. Bekmurat[5] mentions that because computer technology and the Internet are both boundless even a small boy has already been equipped with a device or a cell phone. It's no surprise that new innovations have been part of the cycle of teaching and learning.

Thus, they recommend that teachers should make use of simulations to integrate this effectively into their teaching approaches.

The administrators, Deans, Heads, professors may work together to come up with the best E-learning solutions as an immediate intervention in these times of crisis.

The researchers of this study initiated a survey to find out the status of the E-Learning Classrooms in various HEI's in the country. To learn their status means to provide the best alternative learning mode for the students and faculty members and to discover the best recommendations from them while currently experiencing the E-learning Classrooms amidst the COVID-19.

Research Objective

The main objective of this study was to find out the status of the implementation of selected Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in Region IV-A in the conduct of their E-Learning Classrooms. Specifically, it determined the experiences of faculty members in using the E-learning classroom; identified whether

the intervention was appropriate to each course; and discovered the various types of free platforms online. Finally, the researchers were able to find out some problems concerning the use of the E-learning classrooms and possible solutions to improve this type of intervention.

Scope and Delimitation

The study is limited to identifying the status of the implementation of the E-learning Classrooms in selected HEI's in Region IV-A and in determining the problems encountered with some possible solutions to improve this intervention process.

The Significance of the Study

This action research will serve as a step-by-step guide to develop an in-depth analysis of the E-learning implementation in HEIs in times of emergencies such as the COVID-19. This is also applicable to all types of urgencies when class suspensions have been declared by the institution or the whole country.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

The research paradigm used in this study is an action research which is generally common to qualitative research paradigm. It includes documentary collection and analysis, participant observation using the online survey. The findings of the study will serve as future work in conducting a structured interview to further improve the decisions in this study.

METHODS AND PROCEDURE

The work was carried out in three (3) stages. The first step was searching online academic journals for the appropriate research papers. The second step was the online survey of 15 professors teaching at different courses in Philippine Area IV-A. These courses include: Math, English, History, Social Sciences, NSTP, Marketing, Business, Computer Science and Courses in Professional Education. These professionals were sent the survey link, and they answered open-ended questions. The third process used the descriptive and documentary analysis to collect and analyze all the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The massive action on E-learning classroom was the decision of almost all the HEI's in the Philippines amidst this crisis. However, the Commission on Higher Education has declared for leniency to all HEIs so that students could cope with the requirements set by their professors. The researchers have distributed an online survey called survey monkey [6] to find out the status of implementation of their E-learning Classroom and as an immediate intervention in these times of crisis.

When asked about the professors' experiences in the implementation of the E-Learning Classroom in the Philippines, majority had the positive remarks as shown below:

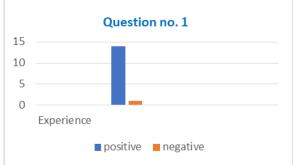


Figure 1: Experience in the Implementation of the E-Learning Classroom

The 15 professionals who are all from Cavite, Philippines in Region IV-A, who responded to this question, 93.33% had positive experiences in the E-learning Classroom while 6.66%

had a negative experience. Most of the respondents feel great, happy, and convenient with this transition. The learning will never get interrupted. Some of them believe that this was the best solution for this kind of situation. Some of the professors also mentioned that they enjoy the use of the E-learning Classroom even if it was their first time to use this platform. Students were also responding as they point out that they also want to learn while staying in their own homes. It was indeed a nice experience for most of the participants and because E-learning is new, there was difficulty at the beginning; however, as they were exploring how to utilize the platform, this becomes easy to utilize. One professor also points out that this idea is not so encouraging. Students who have no means to do the E-learning Classroom would be receiving the lowest marks in the classroom.

It is evident that teachers who have been positive in the use of the E-Learning classrooms are those who are motivated to teach and to learn the new technology. Teacher's motivation plays a vital role in providing the best strategies for students, whether online or traditional classrooms. In a Blog posted by UNESCO in the Learning Portal, in order to improve the motivation level and status of teachers, there is a need to uplift their status to retain high-quality teachers who are vital to improving education [7]. In this blog, they stressed that when there is full support from the work environment, it would create a positive working relationships among people and these may reduce and improve teachers' motivation and effectiveness.

Although it was fun and easy, teachers may be able to learn more how to conduct it with the students. Overall, the professors who were teaching in various courses have positive feelings and experience in using the E-Learning Classroom.

Q2: Is the E-learning Classroom applicable to your course? Why?

Table 1: Reasons for E-learning Classroom to be Applicable or Not

UI NUL		
Applicable	Course/s	Reasons
or Not	Taught	
Applicable		
Yes	English	Materials are accessible.
	(Grammar)	Assessments can be conducted easily.
	English	Activities can easily be done
	(Literature)	online. The links are all available online.
	Social Studies	Both traditional and
		modern approaches are
		important in Social Studies
		field.
	Business	Best alternative mode of
		learning in times of crisis.
	Computer	Easy to communicate with
	Science	students and the lessons
		can easily be transferred to
		them via E-learning
		platforms.
	Professional	PowerPoint presentations
	Education	can be done. Interactions
	Courses	are similar to the Face-to-
		Face classroom. Students
		can be seen on video and
		they speak naturally when
		questions are asked.
		Our students are future
		educators and they need to
		experience this type of
		transition. They should get
		used to it and apply this in

		the future.
	Marketing	This is very convenient because it relates to online marketing
	Psychology	This is very relevant. I could easily provide links to my students. They could raise questions immediately.
Yes and NO	NSTP	Our course is purely community-based project, so its usefulness is less advantageous
NO	Math	It is difficult to explain the formula online. Face to face is still the best way for them to learn.

During this COVID-19 crisis, many private companies and business corporations have provided the HEI's temporary online materials or platforms to address the immediate need of institutions most especially the teachers and students. These online classrooms are extremely beneficial for the students when using E-learning, it is not only considered add-on, it has become part of the educational setting. For example, in the field of IT, having intensive hands on helps prepare students for their future job rather than using the traditional textbooks [7]. If the institutions combine hands on activities, lecture, and E-learning, students have higher retention rates and greater productivity.

Another example of a business company that has just recently established their customized learning experience platform is the Odilo. It is intended for all levels, for every user, and learning profile (skills, interest, age, aspirational job, level, etc.). They design the platform to match the brand and unique values and culture of individuals or institutions. They adapt the learning experience and its content to meet the needs of every learner [8]. As Kamenez[9] is of the opinion that involving teaching, self-learning and self-control of knowledge and teachers in information technology can have greater advantages over this technical knowledge.

The issue of applicability depends on the creativity of the professor teaching the course and the availability of resources the students may have. However, now that many companies have offered their free products and services, HEI's should grab the opportunity to make use of these available resources for their students. These could be a great aid in their studies while making themselves safe and secure in their homes.

Q3: Which learning platforms are you currently using for your students to learn at these times of crisis?

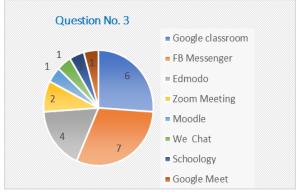


Figure 2: Learning Platforms Used by the Professors

Most of the professors find the Facebook Messenger to be one of the most convenient mode of alternative learning. This is most especially when the students could not afford to be connected with Wi-Fi. In FB messenger, if the students have free data, they could easily see the instruction of their professors including the tasks they need to do. The Google Classroom is one of the best platforms which could be accessed for free by 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 like the Google Classroom. Edmodo is a user-friendly platform that could create a class, submit assignment, post a message or announcement, and could upload and share materials for the students. Zoom is a free video call meeting where a teacher can share his/her slide presentation that everyone could see. Students could interact and raise questions to their professors. They could also see each other online and ask questions during the lecture. For those who have slow connections, the professor could even write the important messages on chat boards. With this platform, students feel comfortable and easy to learn the topic. Just like Google Classroom and Edmodo, Schoology allows the teachers to create a class and uploads resources and materials online. This is something new to them and would continue to explore its usefulness. Google Meet has similar features with Zoom. Students could be seen online and interact with their teacher. Moodle has also a similar feature with Edmodo and Google Classroom while we chat is used for chatting and uploading materials to students. Although these E-learning platforms are free, the availability of resources could be the hindrance why students or teachers could not fully utilize them. However, teachers and students alike should be grateful that these Elearning platforms could be available without charge from the institution or individual. They make the academic life easier most especially during these COVID-19 crises.

The E-learning platforms the professors have been using are the most popular ones. However, there are other platforms which have not been explored yet like: Lark, Odilo, Big Marker, and many others. This means that e-Learning Classrooms are very popular around the world, most especially during crisis or emergency. The COVId-19 has revealed vulnerabilities in colleges and universities around the globe. It is clear that society needs flexible and resilient education systems while facing the unpredictable futures [10].

${\bf Q4:}\ {\bf How}\ {\bf do}\ {\bf your}\ {\bf students}\ {\bf respond}\ {\bf to}\ {\bf your}\ {\bf alternative}\ {\bf mode}$ of learning?

Table 2: Students' Response to Alternative Learning Mode

N	Students' Response		
1	Enjoyable, easy to use, it interests the students.		
2	The students were active in the beginning, but they have		
	started to be passive when they heard some		
	announcements about ONLINE suspension.		
3	Enthusiastic. Some are not happy.		
4	Positive		
5	They could easily communicate during their preferred		
	time.		
6	Responsive. They are interested to learn.		
7	Happy. Sometimes they are confused due to many		
	workloads.		
8	Extremely happy. They prefer this mode of learning to be		
	with their loved ones.		
9	Positive and Negative responses because not all of them		
	have the Internet connections.		
10	Protesting. Many want to go on vacation.		
N	Students' Response		
11	They are interested to learn even if they only have free		

	data.	
12	Enjoyable and exciting	
13	At the beginning, it was difficult, but some of them go	
	online earlier than their professor.	
14	Fine and fun	
15	Not everyone is interested due to lack of resources.	

In general, students enjoy the E-learning platforms used by their professors. However, there were some who could not really get connected due to slow connection or they have no capacity to produce the resources. To some students, it is their first time to utilize these platforms and they have difficulty accessing them. They have limited time to learn how to utilize them thus, delaying the submission of their assignments online. To some students, they thought that this crisis is temporary and they prefer to go on vacation rather than to learn or to study, but they were also those who are eager to learn and stay positive that this crisis would not last long. They believe that the intervention provided to them is just temporary and the first thing to do is to obey or comply with their professors. Since the Commission on Higher Education has declared to be more lenient on E-learning classroom issues, the professors become more humble to ask their students first before implementing a new platform. This action makes the students delighted and become interested to

In comparison with Q1, teachers have enjoyed using the E-Learning classroom, however, students do have their positive as well as negative experiences too. In an article online [10], the authors brought out some positive as well as negative types of student experiences. The shift from Face-to-Face classroom to the e-learning sessions would mean an initial great increase in the number of hours work both on the sides of students and teachers; however, these may result to a very promising result. Other institutions have already resorted to using coursera, zoom, and other videoconferencing platforms just to make sure that the teaching and learning process take place whether in an asynchronous or synchronous approach. The researchers would conclude that those universities who utilized these approaches several years ago would benefit from these e-learning classrooms because they have enough experience with these technological tools and they could deliver their own courses correctly and properly with the support of their institutions.

Nevertheless, in the Philippines setting, colleges and universities have struggled with accommodating the abrupt change from F-to-F to online learning due to lack of technological resources of faculty members and students. Undeniably, when the Commission on Higher Education declares to put leniency about this online classroom issue, some institutions have totally suspended their E-Learning Classroom classes. However, some of these Universities have continued and offer a simple type of learning on Facebook Messenger and simply sending messages via E-mails. This means that many of these HEIs have not been ready to face the new challenge, but there is a need to provide an urgent solution thus, E-Learning Classrooms have been created, whether the institution is READY OR NOT?

In some institutions in Australia, they also experienced difficulty of switching from F to F to online classes. Some professors and their leaders are facing problems in this immediate transition. Some of their concerns are students do not have access to Wi-Fi or computers [11].

The whole world is experiencing similar experiences, although students do enjoy learning online, they also struggle to find solutions to their own problems in order to learn and receive instructions from their professors online. Those who could do something even amidst this COVID-19, are those who are really willing to learn and continue to nourish their minds with knowledge. Those who could not do anything could not be

blamed because they had no means to do it even if they try all their best.

Q5: How was the preparation of the e-learning Classroom? (This is on the part of the Professors in HEI's)

The majority of the respondents say that the preparation was easy. There were eight who gladly share their preparation experience. The platform is accessible and very comfortable to apply it while staying at home with their families. One professor shared that providing tasks to students is easy, but the burden on the part of the teacher is the checking of their work because when these will all be collected, it will entail time and efforts to correct them. Others do enjoy uploading of slide presentations or sending them links to follow. Some teachers say it was difficult but rewarding most especially if you are the one making and editing the video. There were seven participants who declared difficult due to some reasons like: (1) no perfect Wi-Fi connection, it was difficult to explain Math online, Social Studies need an actual insight and opinion, so doing it online could be difficult to express oneself.

At the Royal Academy of Engineering in the United Kingdom [10], the researchers claim that it is never easy to prepare an e-Learning Classroom. Indeed, they come up with a study and a book titled, "Development of e-learning resources." Among their recommendations, the researchers would like to adapt the following:

- ✓ Commission Students: one way to start with the e-learning courses is to get students involved in the process. They may have bright ideas to start with the e-learning platforms in an institution
- ✓ Creative Brainstorm: Invite those who are knowledgeable or those who have expertise in terms of e-learning resources development, including the Management Information Systems' Department to brainstorm with them and listen to all their ideas.
- ✓ Put e-learning in accreditation: If we suggest that this elearning system is put in accreditation, the effective use of e-learning resources to support and enhance the educational experience of students will become part of the accreditation process. According to this study by the Royal Academy by making this a subject for explicit consideration in the accreditation process, universities will focus on it and improve [10].

In the similar study, they also suggested the use of Facebook and other Social Media to begin with the e-learning classrooms. In many aspects, FB could be a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) with much of similar functionality. As compared to other Social Media Platforms, FB is so familiar to almost all students all over the world. Somehow, everyone has a ready-made account to begin with the e-learning classroom. In the Philippines, students could utilize free data or they could buy a small amount of load to access this tool. Teachers could even start preparing the e-learning classroom by creating a page or blogs for their students assuming that the English class should be able to communicate in English. Thus, their confidence and ability to become creative will be revealed.

Q6: What problems have you encountered during the implementation of the E-Learning classroom?

Despite the declaration for lenency among the students regarding the use of the E-Learning Classroom, not all students agree with this point. Indeed, in one university, students approached their Dean to continue with the E-learning because they do not want to be idle during these moments of crisis. However, many of them really could not access online, so the FB messenger was used as an alternative mode of learning. From then on, the students became happy and tried to participate in

this advocacy. In some universities, the professors found out that the students are not thoroughly prepared to embrace the Elearning system in the classroom. They have requested that an orientation or a training should be prepared by the E-Learning Department to meet the demands of their professors using the E-Learning Classrooms. Some of them enjoy the traditional mode of learning and when this happened abruptly, some of them could not believe that it was happening. They may need a series, segmental, hands-on experience or seminar with a small group to orient the faculty members and students in the use of all these E-Learning platforms to be consistent with the academic requirements and balance the need for E-Learning and studying their own books. Another important aspect the professors have raised was the uniformity of the E-learning platform for all faculty members and students that would fit the academic needs of the curriculum. Although all these free platforms are easy to use, the administration should look into the details of each platform and determine the most suitable one to prepare the institution for future emergencies. Students and teachers also hoped that during this crisis, Advanced Lessons, Intended Learning Outcomes, Quizzes, and Examinations are prepared per unit or chapter in order to cope with the lessons while having this lockdown issue in every city. The professors also opine that majority of the students had no capacity to provide the resources like a laptop or computer in their homes, thus, E-learning could be difficult for them. What others did was to load their mobile phones and get connected with the E-Learning platforms used by their professors. Poor Internet connection was evident in all cases, thus producing poor interactions among the students. The professors tried to understand the situations and gave them time to read the uploaded materials. The submission of all the exercises and quizzes were postponed to give them time to prepare their resources and to prioritize their safety. Finally, there were some professors who have not experienced any problems regarding the implementation of the E-learning Classrooms may be because they have the enough experience to do all these tasks, they were already using the technology before the outbreak, they think positively that the situation will not get worst, and they may be motivated to conduct their classes online. Finally, despite the encountered problems, teachers have become creative in the delivery of their lessons with the help of the management in guiding the whole institution in the conduct of their E-Learning Classrooms in their respective institutions.

Given these problems encountered and some solutions provided by the respondents, the Royal Academy has suggested a few solutions to some of these problems which are modified by the researchers for improvement:

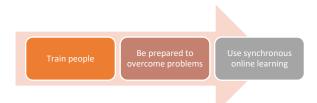


Figure 2 Recommendations for e-Learning Solutions

One possible way to make the e-learning classrooms work is to train those people involved in the e-learning program of an institution by some experts in the field of educational technology and development of e-resources. Second, in terms of emergency, be prepared to overcome possible problems. Therefore, in lieu of textbooks and references, there could be online materials for the faculty members and students to read and work with. Finally, it is advisable to utilize the synchronous online learning because the students could benefit more on this approach. Teachers could utilize a simple video and interact with their students at

the same time. This will allow students to feel isolated and improves quality of interaction.

In the Webinar conducted by Enderun Colleges [12] worldwide on e-Learning, one of the speakers some of the best strategies of e-learning in the Philippine setting most especially in giving assessments. Teachers should consider the type of internet access and device; academic load, and current level of digital proficiency. Also, teachers should provide more time, chances, or attempts for students to complete assessments, and give more focus on facilitation over control. In comparison, Ismailova, et.al. [13] discloses that the role of e-learning tools in higher education provides students and teachers with solutions to tasks such as providing internet access at all times and from various locations for each participant in the educational process, creating a common knowledge space and making efficient use of educational resources.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

The E-Learning Classroom has been used and implemented in Higher Educational Institutions in the country amidst the COVID-19 crisis. In this study, the professors utilized mostly the free platforms such as: Google Classroom, Edmodo, Zoom, FB messenger, Google meet, We Chat, Schoology, and Moodle. The professors and the students could easily adapt to these new changes to align one selves in the 21st century skills of learning. However, despite the presence of these platforms, there were concerns raised by this study. One major problem is the lack of training of the faculty members and students in using the e-Learning classroom. It is recommended that the HEI should conduct a thorough training and workshop for all students and faculty in various platforms that could be appropriate to their academic needs and to prepare the whole institution in times of crisis like the COVID-19. The second major dilemma is the lack of resources that will lead to unsuccessful e-learning classes. It is recommended that lessons, ILO's, quizzes or examinations per unit may be prepared by the department concerned or an assessment department to make sure that the students have learned what they ought to learn. In brief, Higher Education Institutions have made the intervention successful, but this could still be improved through the joint efforts of the administration, deans, heads, and faculty members make the learning possible for all students via different e-learning solutions. Finally, this action research is recommended to conduct an in-depth study using the structured interview to validate its findings.

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