

Ready or Not? A Critical Policy Analysis on the Implementation of Flexible Learning Policy and Its Effect on High School Learners

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Abstract

In 2019 Corona Virus Pandemic created a massive impact in the Philippines most especially in Education. All face-to-face classes from kindergarten to tertiary level were suspended because, many provinces, municipalities, and cities in the country were in lockdown. Private and Public School Teachers, Administrators, and Students were incarcerated inside their houses. And to respond to this educational crisis, the Department of Education and Commission on Higher Education implemented a flexible learning policy. However, grounded on the estimated figures of the Department of Education, enrollment in kindergarten to senior high school for the school year 2020-2021 was decreased by more than 25% from the previous year (DepEd). According to UNICEF (2020), Many of the world's children, especially in the poorest households, do not have access to the Internet, personal computers, television, or even radio, which amplifies the impact of existing learning inequalities. As a result, many students may not go back to school. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to critically evaluate the existing policy for flexible education, to narrate the different strategies of the public-school teachers for them to ensure the learning of their students, to describe the experiences of the students in dealing with the modular learning approach and lastly to determine the support provided by the government to teachers and students.

Keywords: Modular Learning, Flexible Learning Policy, Junior High School, Public School

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Introduction

In the Philippines, face-to-face learning engagement of students and instructors inside the school has been suspended due to the COVID-19 widespread. And so, for the progression of education and for each school to still accomplish its mission and vision to deliver quality and excellent education to each Filipino learner, the Department of Education executed Modular Distance Learning. In the study of Dangle et. al (2020) they discussed the process of modular learning methods in the Philippines, according to them the learners can contact the teacher through e-mail, phone, text message, or instant messaging, among other methods. If all is feasible, the instructor can make home visits to students who require remediation or support. Printed Modules will be distributed to children, parents, and guardians by instructors or local government officials (Llego, 2020, Dangle et al., 2020). And through the policy implemented by the Department of Education and participation from teachers and parents, the agency also ensures that through the existing flexible policy the needs of each student are met. Nonetheless, the great challenge now is to ensure the attention of every learner to grasp their lessons from the module effectively. Many students especially in secondary education cannot pay much of their attention to their studies because of the responsibilities they play in their families, most especially those students who belong to the poor sectors of the society (Dangle, et. al, 2020), as result there is an increased number of dropouts from primary to secondary education.

With these challenges it is vital, therefore, to investigate the reality of this policy implemented by the Department of Education and the manner that which it guarantees the needs of students and teachers. The following therefore are the research questions of the study:

1. What is the main feature of the flexible learning policy of the Department of Education?
2. What are the obstacles and difficulties faced by learners and teachers in adjusting to the remote learning process during the Pandemic?
3. What is the effect of flexible learning on the learning process of Junior High School Students?
4. What are the supports of the Local Government in the implementation of the Flexible Learning Policy?

Research Methods

The study used Sequential Mixed-Methods Explanatory Design because it features two separate phases: quantitative and qualitative (Creswell et al. 2003). Moreover, the quantitative data of the study was administered thru surveys to students and teachers, to identify the uncovered areas that affect the social interaction of the students, the difficulties and obstacles faced by teachers and students, and the support of the local government on the implementation of the policy. The selection of respondents was done through the convenience sampling technique, and the total number of the target respondents was determined thru Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error. On the other hand, the qualitative phase of the study utilized informal interviews with the key informants to give accurate validity to the result of the numeric data from the questionnaire. The total population gathered in the study are 1,486 students and 169 teachers from two public school in Rizal Province, Philippines, namely Bayugo National High School, and Morong National High School.

Results and Analysis

What are the obstacles and difficulties faced by learners and teachers in adjusting to the remote learning process during the Pandemic?

In the Philippines many students, associations, and groups are calling for an academic freeze, they pointed out that most Filipino families have problems in terms of computer, internet, or gadget accessibility.

Table 1: Represents the obstacles faced by students in dealing with modular learning activities

Statements	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
My teachers are approachable and always have free time for my academic concerns	2.62	0.99	Agree
The modular activities and lessons make me feel motivated in my study	2.46	0.92	Disagree
I have gadget/s that help me to answer my modules	2.60	0.97	Agree
I have a strong internet connection	2.41	0.91	Disagree
My school provided a mechanism where I easily track my academic standing and progress	2.55	0.94	Agree
I do not have an electricity problem so I can easily study at home	2.60	0.97	Agree
I am supported and guided by my parents while answering the module	2.55	0.98	Agree
I am monitored by my teachers in answering the module through online classes	2.48	0.92	Disagree

Table 1 represents the obstacles faced by students in dealing with modular learning activities, they can answer all the activities and exercises in the modules on their own, they can easily talk to their teachers about the academic-related concerns, their teachers are approachable and always have a free time for the academic concerns, the school provided a mechanism where they can easily track their academic standing and progress, they also have gadget/s and have no electricity problem so that they can study at home, they are also supported and guided by their parents while answering the module yet, most of them have problem with their internet connection. As a result, most of them believed that their teachers failed to monitor them in answering the module through online classes.

Table 1 A: Represents the percentage of the challenges faced by students during their modular learning activities

Statements	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Harder to learn the subjects	334	53.4%
Fewer explanations of teachers given during online classes	375	59.9%
Technical problems during internet connection	286	45.7%
Lack of practical applications	179	28.6%

While in Table 1A shows the percentage of the disadvantage of modular learning in the learning experiences of the students during the implementation of flexible learning policies. The table reveals that 53.4% of the students said that the topics in the module are difficult to understand, 59.9% said that there are fewer explanations from teachers during the online classes, 45.7% found that they cannot comply on time due to technical problems caused by poor internet connection, and 28.6% said that the modules have been lacking on the practical applications of the topics. This implies that the reasons why they cannot submit the online activities on time are due to poor internet connections, the modules do not have a detailed explanation of the topic, and some of the teachers do not provide more explanations of some topics that are difficult to understand. This further concludes that although the modules have their essential practical applications of the topics, the teacher should take into consideration the proper explanation of how their students would easily understand them.

Table 1 B : Represents the percentage of the advantages of Modular Learning Delivery to the Students

Statements	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Health and safety	420	67.1%
Better structured classes	85	13.6%
There is no need to travel going to school	289	46.2%
Doing other activities at the same time	157	25.1%
Flexibility / Accessing course anytime	295	47.1%

Table 1B shows the percentage of the advantage of modular learning in the learning experiences of the students during the implementation of flexible learning policies. The table reveals that 67.1% benefit their health and safety, 13.6% benefit them since classes are better structured, 46.2% benefit their cost of transportation, as they do not need to travel going to school, 25.1% benefit the need to do other activities at the same time, and 47.1% benefit in terms of time flexibility since they can access their courses anytime. This implies that the health and safety, transportation cost, and time flexibility to access learning anytime are considered the most advantageous during the implementation of flexible learning policies since they have the highest percentage while simultaneously doing activities and the structured classes got the lowest percentage which considered as the least beneficial.

Table 2: Represents the percentage of the challenges faced by the teachers in dealing with Flexible Learning Modality

Statements	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Lack of social interaction	73	67.6 %
High chances of getting distracted because of my role in the household	41	38.0 %
Complicated technology	42	38.9 %
Not all students do their module wholeheartedly	90	83.3 %
Some parents spoil their children and do the task instead of their children	71	65.7 %
Some students tend to copy the answer from others without reading the module	76	70.4 %

Table 2 shows the percentage of the disadvantage of modular learning in their teaching experiences during the implementation of flexible learning policies. The table reveals that 67.6% of the teachers said that modular learning lessens their class's social interaction, 38.0% said that they are getting distracted because of their role in the household, 38.9 % find

it hard to adapt to the usage of technology, 83.3% said that not all students do their module wholeheartedly, 65.7% said some parents spoil their children by doing their modules, and 70.4% of them said that some students tend to copy the answers of their other classmates. This implies that copying the answers of their other classmates is considered the most detrimental during the implementation of flexible learning policies since it has the highest percentage (70.4%) while distractions are caused by the household chores, the lowest percentage (38.0%), are considered as the least detrimental. This further implies that the distraction caused by doing household chores is a burden to students so most of them tend to copy the answers of their classmates.

Table 2 A: Represents the percentage of the advantages of Modular Learning Delivery to the Public School Teachers

Statements	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Reduce social anxiety	21	19.4 %
Healthy and safety	97	89.8 %
Flexible scheduling opportunity	49	45.4 %
Allow self-paced learning	49	45.4 %
Less travel from home to school	45	41.7 %
Less stressful	16	14.8 %
Reduce the overall cost of school	24	22.2 %

Table 2A shows the percentage of the advantage of modular learning in their teaching experiences during the implementation of flexible learning policies. The table reveals that 19.4% of the teachers said that modular learning reduced their social anxiety, 89.8% benefit their health and safety, 45.4% benefited from their flexible scheduling opportunity, 45.4% benefited from self-paced learning, 41.7% benefited from the need to travel from home to school, 22.2% reduced the overall cost of school, and 14.8% of them find it less stressful. This implies that the health and safety of the teachers are considered the most advantageous during the implementation of flexible learning policy since it has the highest percentage (89.8%). This further implies that, although modular learning benefits their health and safety, it cannot hide the fact that it affects their level of stress while coping with it

What is the effect of Flexible learning on the learning process of Junior High School Students?

The effect of the Flexible learning process on the Junior High School was analyzed in terms of modular learning, Teacher interaction with the learners, and students’ academic behavior.

Modular Learning

Table 3 shows the mean score of the level of students’ challenges with modular learning during the implementation of flexible learning policies as assessed by their Junior High School Teachers. The table reveals that the teachers moderately agree that students can comprehend instruction and learn on their own through the help of their parents, have increased understanding of the lesson, has acquired the necessary knowledge from the module, has engagement and interest, and understand completely the content of the module.

The overall result in terms of the teachers’ assessment of the level of students' challenges on modular learning came up with the total average mean of 2.93 and was verbally interpreted as moderately agree. This concludes that the students are not fully learning during the

implementation of the flexible learning policy since they cannot comprehend completely the instruction and cannot fully understand the content of the module.

Table 3: Represents the verbal interpretation of the effect of Flexible Learning on the learning process of the students in terms of Modular Learning

Statements	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Students can comprehend instruction and learn on their own through the help of their parents	3.06	0.78	Moderately Agree
Students have increased understanding of the lesson	2.80	0.78	Moderately Agree
Students acquired the necessary knowledge from the module	3.03	0.79	Moderately Agree
Students' engagement and interest level remain as instructions from the modules are easy to grasp	2.89	0.89	Moderately Agree
Students understand completely the content of the module	2.87	0.81	Moderately Agree
Total	2.93		Moderately Agree

Interactions with Learners

Table 4 shows the mean score of the level of teachers' challenges in interacting with the students. The teachers agree that the students are hard to reach at any time when matters need an immediate response even though they have an online platform like a messenger, which can be used to directly contact their students and parents. Meanwhile, they moderately agree that their students are easy to communicate with and the parents are the ones who provide feedback and address concerns regarding experiences of answering the module.

The overall result in terms of the teachers' assessment on the level of teachers' challenges on modular learning in terms of interaction with the learners came up with the total average mean of 3.35 and verbally interpreted as moderately agree. This concludes that the teachers find it difficult to interact with the learners, especially in answering the module.

Table 4: Represents the verbal interpretation of the effect of Flexible Learning to the learning process of the students in terms of Modular Learning

Statements	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
It is hard to reach the students with matters that need an immediate response	3.54	0.88	Agree
It is easy to communicate with my student as I have the means to communicate with them	3.05	0.86	Moderately Agree
The Parents provide feedback to students' experiences in answering the module	3.11	0.79	Moderately Agree
The Parents are the students' representatives in expressing their concern regarding the module	3.31	0.78	Moderately Agree
Various online platform such as messenger provides me direct possible interaction with my students and their parents	3.76	0.90	Agree
Total	3.35		Moderately Agree

Academic Behavior

Table 5 shows the mean score of the level of students' academic behavior during the implementation of flexible learning policies. The table reveals that the teachers moderately agree that students are interested to learn more and knowing more, have a good strategy and high study effort, are highly motivated to learn the topics presented in the modules, are persistent to pursue learning even when faced with obstacles during the teaching-learning process, and have the drive to reach out their learning goals.

The overall result in terms of the level of students' academic behavior during the implementation of flexible learning policies came up with the total average mean of 2.95 and was verbally interpreted as moderately agree. This concludes that the teachers find it difficult to boost the academic behavior of the students since they find their students not motivated and interested to learn the topics presented in the module.

Table 5: Represents the verbal interpretation of the effect of Flexible Learning to the learning process of the students in terms of Modular Learning

Statements	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Students are interested to learn more and know more	2.99	0.84	Moderately Agree
Students have a good strategy and high study effort	2.94	0.76	Moderately Agree
Students are highly motivated to learn the topics presented in the modules	2.88	0.79	Moderately Agree
Students are persistent to pursue learning even when faced with obstacles during the teaching-learning process	2.96	0.77	Moderately Agree
The students have the drive to reach out their learning goals	2.96	0.70	Moderately Agree
Total	2.95		Moderately Agree

Table 6 : Represents the verbal interpretation of the effect of flexible learning on Junior High School Students

Statements	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
I have enough time to answer all the activities in the modules	2.59	0.96	Agree
I can easily answer all the given activities and exercises in the modules	2.35	0.85	Disagree
I can answer all the activities and exercises in my modules on my own	2.53	0.95	Agree

To further explain, Table 6 reveals the mean score of the effect of the policy on the learning process of the students. It can be seen in the table that the students agree that they have enough time to answer all the activities in the modules,

Table 7: Represents the percentage of how the students answer the task on their modules

Statements	Frequency	Percentage (%)
My parent reminds me of the deadline, so I need to accomplish it	343	54.8%
To be able to answer my module at home, my parents explain the part of the lesson that is not clear to me	228	36.4%
My teacher gives enough time to be able to answer the whole learning task	322	51.4%
My teacher guides me and help me if they can for me to improve my academic performance	200	31.9%
My parents look at my lesson and if they can answer it, then they help me	147	23.5%

Table 7 shows the percentage of students' experiences on how they answer the modules during the implementation of Flexible Learning Policy. The table reveals that 54.8% of the students said that their parents remind them of the deadline to accomplish the task in the module, 36.4% said that their parents explain the part of the lesson that are not clear to them, 51.4% said that their teachers give enough time to be able to answer the whole learning task, 31.9% said the teacher guide them and help them answer the module, and 23.5% of them said that their parents are helping them answering the task if they cannot understand it. This implies that their teachers are considerate enough to extend the deadline for submission of the task in the module.

Moreover, most of the students agreed that their parents reminded them about the deadlines of their tasks and help them with some parts of the module during times that they do not know how to answer them. However, some parents cannot give their full support in answering the task in the module because some of them are busy with their work while some of them did not finish their high school degrees.

Table 8: Represents the percentage of how the students motivate themselves in answering their modules

Statements	Frequency	Percentage (%)
I just think that I am graduating student so I tell myself that if others can do it so do I	284	45.4%
I just think that it will end as well, and I can ask the help of my teachers	244	39.0%
If I cannot answer the lesson, I read it again, I first answer the easy task then I go back to answer the difficult task	351	56.1%
I just answer all the task I don't take it as negative side	297	47.4%
I just think that it is only a trial and sometimes I ask my classmates so that I have an idea on the lesson, or I am using the internet.	200	31.9%

Table 8 shows the percentage of how the student motivates themselves to accomplish the task in the module during the implementation of a flexible learning policy. The table reveals that 45.4% of the students said that they answer the module because they think that if others can accomplish it, they can also do it on their own, 39.0% think that they have to continue their studies since this pandemic will end soon and their teachers are there to help them to answer the task, 56.1% said that in order for them to answer the task, they begin to answer the easy tasks then answer the difficult ones, 47.4% said that they answer the given task positively,

and 31.9% of them rely on their answers from their classmates and through the educational websites on the internet.

This further implies that in order for the students to answer the task in the module, they have to browse and read the lessons repetitively until they completely comprehend the whole idea of it. This concludes also that students are motivated through positive reframing and relying upon themselves mostly on what others can do, so they can do it also.

What are the supports of the Local Government Unit/Department of Education in the implementation of the Flexible Learning Policy?

Tables 9 and 10 reveal that the Department of Education sometimes supports the teachers and students by providing internet or mobile data allowance, while the Local government unit especially the barangay aids the teachers to deliver the modules to the students.

On the other hand, the Department of Education often give teachers ample time to prepare the modules, they also provide an allowance for printing and delivering the copies of the modules, conduct online orientation, and seminars/training for their teachers.

Table 9: Represents the support of LGU and DepEd to Public School Teachers

Statements	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
The DepEd provides all the modules to be distributed to the students.	3.79	0.96	Often
There are enough funds given by the government for Modular Distance Learning	3.57	0.82	Often
The LGU provides internet or mobile data allowance	2.88	1.04	Sometimes
The DepEd or LGU provides aides to deliver the modules to the student	3.17	1.05	Sometimes
There are online seminars, orientations, and training provided by DEPED or LGU in the preparation of modular distance learning	3.87	0.99	Often
There is no problem with electricity in your area, so it is easy to print the module	4.00	1.08	Often
The DepEd provides the internet data allowance	3.04	0.98	Sometimes
There is enough time in preparing course materials based on the academic calendar provided by the DepEd	3.45	0.99	Often
It is easy to monitor the attendance of the student because the DepEd provided platforms to effectively communicate with the students	3.16	0.97	Sometimes
Total	3.44		Often

Table 10: Represents the support of LGU and DepEd to the Students

Statements	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
The city government provided internet or a mobile data allowance for me to contact my teachers	2.14	0.86	Disagree
The city government provided internet data allowance that can be used for my study	2.10	0.84	Disagree
The city government provided help by giving us gadgets so that I can submit my modules to my teachers	2.26	0.91	Disagree

Conclusion

The research found that the major problems faced by the learners and teachers is the poor internet connection in their areas. Due to this circumstance, teachers cannot fully monitor the academic standing and progress of the student through an online meeting. Although the module is an essential practical application of the topics that the student is assumed to learn, some students have a hard time learning the subjects due to the insufficiency of explanation and poor internet connection during their online classes.

However, the implementation of a Flexible learning policy through a modular approach provided benefits to the students and teachers in terms of transportation expenses, health, and safety. The students can also submit and access their module anytime they want yet most of them have a hard time managing their time properly due to unstructured classes which eventually, adds burden to them since they must do other activities to all their enrolled courses at the same time. Since the teachers cannot monitor their students anytime, some students do not answer their module wholeheartedly, they tend to copy their classmate's works or even ask their parents to do it for them instead. On the other hand, the study also discovered the effect of flexible learning policy on the learning process of the students in terms of the following:

- *Modular Learning*

The students did not learn much during the implementation of flexible learning policy, they sometimes experience a hard time understanding the lesson in the module.

- *Interaction with Learners*

The teachers find it difficult to interact with their students, especially in a situation where they need an immediate response from them.

- *Academic Behavior*

The teachers find it difficult to boost the academic behavior of their students since students are not motivated and interested to learn the topics in the module.

Therefore, the discrepancies in terms of Modular Learning, the Teacher's interaction with the learners, and the academic behavior of the students during the implementation of the flexible learning policy resulted in certain failure of some students to answer the activities and exercises in the module, despite the reminders of their parents and their teachers' considerations.

The study also discovered some problems faced by students and teachers in terms of dealing with the modular distance learning approach and these are the following:

- Some students admitted that their parents were the ones who answered some questions in the module.
- Some students cannot answer their module because they are too busy doing their house roles and their parents cannot help them since most of their parents are busy at work while some of their parents are elementary graduates.
- Some students are comparing themselves mostly to what their classmates can do.

The Local Government and the Department of Education should support more teachers in terms of giving them enough funds for the distribution of the learning materials, allowances for the data and internet, and seminars/training about the skills that they needed for distance education and the city government also should support the teachers by providing the internet/mobile data allowance and give the students gadgets to be used for the online classes.

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