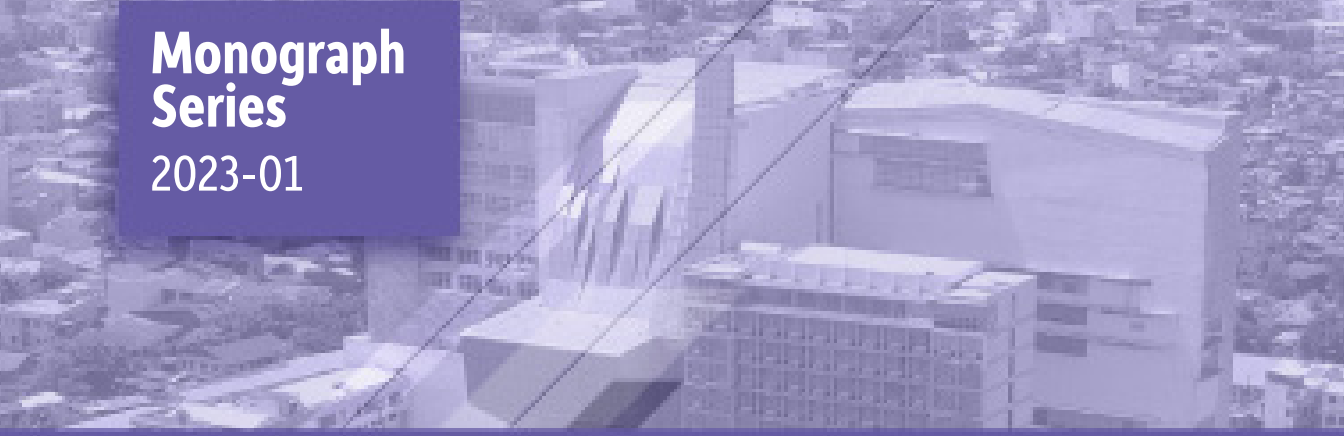

Monograph Series
2023-01

University of the Philippines
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HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH AND POLICY REFORM PROGRAM

Contemporary Issues in Philippine Higher Education 3

Fernando dlC. Paragas
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Higher Education Research & Policy Reform

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The UP CIDS PUBLIC POLICY MONOGRAPH SERIES
is published by the
UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES
Lower Ground Floor, Ang Bahay ng Alumni
Magsaysay Avenue, University of the Philippines
Diliman, Quezon City 1101
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Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/upcids
Twitter: https://twitter.com/upcids
Website: cids.up.edu.ph

ISSN 2719-0722 (print)
ISSN 2719-0730 (online)

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Preface

Professor Fernando Paragas, PhD[1]
HERPRP Convenor and Monograph Editor

Our first monograph on contemporary issues is a sampler of five topics that can be studied about Philippine higher education. It features papers on macrolevel concerns between the public and private sectors—from the changing dynamics between them, as discussed by Karol Mark Yee, to their complementarity in offering various programs of study, as explained by Ian Nicole Generalao and Clarissa C. David, PhD. It includes an article on criminology education written by Teresa Jayme-Ho, PhD. It illustrates how to study program performance through licensure exam results. The two other papers build on pandemic response, a topic that our previous monograph expounded upon, from two perspectives and locations: firstly, the framework-informed strategy at the UP Los Baños, as detailed by Aileen Virrey Lapitan, Francis F. Faderogao, and Rowena DT Baconguis; and, secondly, the pioneer implementation of an innovation camp at the Asia Pacific College, as documented by Jayvee Cabardo, Roselle Wednesday Gardon, and Lorena Rabago.

1 Fernando de la Cruz Paragas (fcparagas@up.edu.ph) is Dean of the University of the Philippines College of Mass Communication (UP CMC) and a professor at its Department of Communication Research. As a Fulbright scholar, he completed his PhD in Mass Communication at Ohio University.

This second monograph further demonstrates the diversity of topics on higher education. Two papers are both evaluative in nature but focus on completely different topics. Allen Espinosa, PhD and Donnadette SG. Belza discuss preservice teacher education, while Agnes Quilingquiling writes about education service delivery. Complementing these national-focused articles are three papers that show how higher education policies operate and how they can be studied at various levels. Kai Cardoz explores the trend of microcredentials to complement or provide an alternative to current modalities of higher education. Iva Melissa Magsalin, meanwhile, studies an integral, but relatively understudied, component of higher education: extra-curricular organizations. Finally, Lorenzo Ereñeta, illustrates how one can begin studying and approaching a course—in this case, Understanding the Self—with policy recommendations in mind. As the papers by Quilingquiling, Cardoz, Magsalin, and Ereñeta have the ongoing pandemic as their context, they build upon our efforts to study higher education in the new and next normal.

The five authors in this monograph are our Research Consultants (RC) whom we have recruited to explore different aspects of higher education. The RC program seeks to support or mentor scholars in higher education and diversify the pool of researchers working in the area. We are pleased that our contributors come from the Philippine Normal University, the University of the Philippines, the Ateneo de Manila University, and the De La Salle–College of St. Benilde. We are delighted as well that they represent a range of scholars from the junior to the senior.

This monograph and the ones before it, even as they show that there is indeed much to be studied in higher education, only cover a minute section of our field. There is much that remains to explore through seminal pieces and to substantiate eventually in full-length research papers. We hope you will join us in this advocacy for higher education research and policy reform—and that you will be among our contributors in our upcoming publications.

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Accountability in Preservice Teacher Education:
Do professional standards respond to a quality assurance mechanism that would increase public confidence in teaching?

Allen Espinosa[1] and Donnadette SG. Belza[2]

Abstract

Quality education is conventionally viewed to be dependent on the quality of teachers and teaching, giving rise to the implementation of teaching standards. In the Philippines, the Department of Education instituted the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) in 2017, and it is now linked to teacher hiring and recruitment, selection and placement, teacher promotion and career progression, professional development, and performance assessment. This chapter reviews the definition and roots of teaching standards and the current efforts of integrating the PPST into the preservice teacher education provision in the Philippines, in light of the growing importance of the PPST in the Philippine basic education system.

1 Dr. Allen A. Espinosa (espinosa.aa@pnu.edu.ph) is an assistant professor of science education at the Educational Policy Research and Development Center, Philippine Normal University. His research interests include active learning, student engagement, conceptual change, and social justice in science education. Dr. Espinosa has a PhD in science education from the University of Melbourne.

2 Donnadette SG. Belza is a senior research officer at the Office of the Vice President for Academics of the Philippine Normal University. Her professional work pertains to applied education research. Ms. Belza's main interests are in gender and literature, which is the topic of the MA thesis she is writing.

Introduction

In 2017, the Department of Education (DepEd) developed its own teaching standards, the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST). DepEd wrote in its issuance of the PPST that it recognized the vital role of teachers in raising student outcomes. The agency also emphasized that "quality learning is contingent upon quality teaching. Hence, enhancing teacher quality was of utmost importance for long-term and sustainable nation building" (DepEd 2017, 1). The PPST aims to

> (i) set out clear expectations of teachers along well-defined career stages of professional development from beginning to distinguished practice; (ii) engage teachers to actively embrace a continuing effort in attaining proficiency; and (iii) apply a uniform measure to assess teacher performance, identify needs, and provide support for professional development. (DepEd 2017, 1)

DepEd envisioned the reconfiguration of the National Competency-Based Teachers Standards (NCBTS) in line with recent developments in education in the Philippines linked to the "K to 12 Reform and the ASEAN integration, globalization, and the changing character of the 21st century learners" (DepEd 2017, 3).

The PPST was intended to be integrated into the various human resource systems of DepEd—teacher hiring/recruitment, selection and placement, teacher promotion and career progression, professional development, and performance assessment. In its issuance, DepEd (2017) wrote:

> The PPST shall be used as a basis for all learning and development programs for teachers to ensure that teachers are properly equipped to implement the K to 12 Program. It can also be used for the selection and promotion of teachers. All performance appraisals for teachers shall be based on this set of standards. (2017, 1–2)

Of all its human resource systems, DepEd first integrated PPST into its Results-based Performance Management System (RPMS). RPMS, a mechanism that monitors and measures the performance of public school teachers that is linked to a performance-based bonus (PBB), has been in place since 2015 (DepEd 2015). With the coming of the teacher standards in 2017, PPST-based RPMS was implemented beginning in 2018. Thus, the domains of PPST became the key result areas in RPMS, and the indicators

of PPST became the objectives/targets in RPMS. Performance indicators/descriptors in the five-point scale assessment had to match the new objectives, and other assessment tools for classroom observation and self-assessment were developed in line with the standards.

Other systems like hiring, career progression, and professional development started to be linked to the new standards.

In view of the growing importance of the PPST in the basic education system, this policy paper reviews the definition and roots of teaching standards and the current efforts of integrating the PPST into the preservice teacher education provision in the Philippines.

Professional standards

The link between quality teaching and improved student outcomes has been the focus of conversations in education for the last three decades (Darling-Hammond 1998, 1999; Kleinhenz and Ingvarson 2007; NRC 2010; World Bank and Australian Aid 2016; Call 2018), which resulted in "the call for an increase in teacher accountability and quality" (McDaid 2010, 780). In fact, the development of teaching standards began on the grounds of protecting and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in the United States (Kleinhenz and Ingvarson 2007). In 1946, the National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards was founded. The agency aimed to "upgrade the status of teaching to a profession" (Cohcran-Smith and Zeichner 2009, 74 quoted in Call 2018, 93).

A definition of standards is useful in understanding their importance in the teaching profession. Skyes and Plastrik (1992, 4) defined standards as "a tool for rendering appropriately precise the making of judgments and decisions in a context of shared meanings and values." This definition complemented Kleinhenz and Ingvarson's (2007) definition that professional standards were to be taken as "professional values" and as "measures." The former saw standards as exemplars of what was considered quality teaching, and the latter viewed them as those that define levels of professional performance. When viewed as measures, standards development had three important components: (1) what is to be measured (referred to as content standards), (2) how teaching will be measured, and (3) what counts as meeting the standards (referred to as performance standards) (Kleinhenz and Ingvarson 2007). While standards help teachers understand what they should know and what they can do in

the conduct of their practice, the standards "do not prescribe one way of teaching" (Kleinhenz and Ingvarson 2007, 9). The standards should be free of context and allow varied teaching styles (CEPPE 2013).

Chile's Centre of Study for Policies and Practices in Education (CEPPE) provided a substantial definition of standards for professionals that included teachers.

> Standards can be understood as definitions of what someone should know and be able to do to be considered competent in a particular (professional or educational) domain. Standards can be used to describe and communicate what is most worthy or desirable to achieve, what counts as quality learning or as good practice. Standards can also be used as measures or benchmarks, and, thus, as a tool for decision-making, indicating the distance between actual performance and the minimum level of performance required to be considered competent. (2013, 14)

Darling-Hammond (1999, 29) explained that the standards have two basic features. One, teaching standards were "linked to student learning." Two, they were "performance-based." These features were helpful for teachers in assessing their effect on learners and improving their practice.

Other than being assessed, teachers took on new roles in the establishment of the standards. Darling-Hammond stated that teachers:

- "sit on boards and committees in charge of developing and reviewing the standards and assessments;
- participate in the writing, piloting, and refinement of assessment tasks;
- analyze the practice of exemplary teachers to develop standards, tasks, benchmarks, and professional development materials aimed at helping other teachers meet the standards;
- serve as assessors for the assessments; and
- act as mentors for teachers who are developing their portfolios." (1999, 29)

It was pointed out at the beginning that the professional standards intended to raise teaching quality to positively impact student learning. Conversely speaking, teacher standards was a form of quality control. It operated within the "discourse of accountability, evaluation and assessment" (Révai and OECD 2018, 10). Kleinhenz and Ingvarson (2007,

vi) argued that "profession-wide standards provide a more valid basis for teacher accountability than performance management schemes and standardised tests of student outcomes."

Accountability was defined as a "mechanism by which institutions meet their obligation to report to others about how their resources have been used and to what effect" (Trow 1996 quoted in NRC 2010, 153). Standards-based accountability, in particular, has been a cornerstone of K–12 education reform efforts in the United States. Many believed that standards-based accountability, together with standards-based testing, was going to stay due to its positive effects (NRC 2010).

The setting of standards was not without oppositions. Some of these oppositions expressed concerns on the standards being used against teachers and ending up on deskilling and demanding more from them (Kleinhenz and Ingvarson 2007). The professional standards for teaching, as Darling-Hammond (1998) and Kleinhenz and Ingvarson (2007) argued, should be owned by teachers and not by governing boards and agencies. Kleinhenz and Ingvarson noted that

> Without a demonstrated capacity to define and apply standards, a profession is defenceless against policies that may run counter to quality practice and conditions that enable practitioners to do their best. Teaching standards give the profession an opportunity to play a stronger part in key decisions about quality in teacher education and continuing professional learning, on behalf of the public. These are decisions about who joins the teaching profession, who trains teachers and how, and what the profession's members should get better at with experience. (2007, 1–2)

Darling-Hammond warned that teaching standards were no magic bullets that could solve other problems of the education system.

> By themselves, they cannot solve the problems of dysfunctional school organizations, outmoded curricula, inequitable allocations of resources, or lack of social supports for children and youth. Standards, like all other reforms, hold their own dangers. Standard setting in all professions must be vigilant against the possibilities that practice could become constrained by the codification of knowledge that does not sufficiently acknowledge legitimate diversity of approaches or advances in the field; that access to practice could become overly restricted on grounds not directly related to competence; or that adequate learning opportunities for candidates to meet the standards may not emerge on an equitable basis. (1999, 39)

Links of the teaching standards to other aspects of the profession

Teaching standards are three-pronged or are a "three-legged stool" (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future 1996 quoted in Darling-Hammond 1999, 10). There are three different, but complementary, purposes of the standards which also apply to three different stages in a teacher's career, namely:

- standards for accrediting preparation programs,
- standards for licensing teachers, and
- standards for certifying accomplished practice (Darling-Hammond 1999).

Accreditation ensures that all teacher preparation programs meet the standards. A licensure examination ensures that graduates who will enter the profession have the necessary knowledge to practice. Certification allows for measuring and recognizing higher levels of practice which guides professional development throughout one's career. One cannot go without the other as "the standards envision licensing, certification, and accreditation systems that are structured to develop more thoughtful teaching rather than merely to select candidates into or out of teaching" (Darling-Hammond 1999, 29).

For the first point, the standards have a significant impact on preservice teacher education. In the United States, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) developed standards designed for teacher training institutions. The standards "refer not only those standards that teachers should meet by graduation, but process standards that describe the opportunities and conditions that teacher training institutions should offer their students if they wish to be accredited" (CEPPE 2013, 14).

CEPPE (2013) conducted a study on the primary purpose of standards-linked assessments in the following areas: Australia (along with the states of Queensland and Victoria), Brazil, Canada (along with the provinces of British Columbia and Québec), Chile, England, Germany, South Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, and the United States (along with the states of California and Texas). CEPPE (2013, 40) found that assessments to accredit teacher education programs were "less frequent" than those to license or certify teachers. Failure to satisfy assessments entailed the

closure of teacher training institutions. Accreditation of teacher education programs may (e.g., Australia, Belgium) or may not be (e.g., France) linked to standards (Révai and OECD 2018).

Professional standards in the teacher education curriculum

Earlier in the discussion, accountability was established to be the discourse of standards setting. Accountability, then, also has a direct impact on teacher education (NRC 2010). One was on "monitoring of individual *teachers*, through certification and licensure;" two was on "direct monitoring of teacher preparation *programs*, by means of program approval and accreditation" (NRC 2010, 154).

On a second note, in the United States, the program approval process allowed fresh graduates of particular programs to be recommended for certification as opposed to having them directly apply. According to NRC (2010, 158), "Teacher education program approval is typically mandatory. However, the effects of state approval on program quality have not been systematically demonstrated. The current mechanisms and standards vary considerably across states, can be inefficient, and can include requirements that have little empirical base."

National accreditation of preparation programs for certain professional fields is required "as a way of assuring the public of the programs' soundness and rigor," but this is not the case for teacher education programs (NRC 2010, 159). Accreditation varies among US states. States may review their teacher education programs. In addition, federal agencies such as National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) may engage in the accreditation process.

Standards were central to state review and program accreditation (NRC 2010). Data from National Council on Teacher Quality's (NCTQ) 2009 study showed "that 32 states require their programs to align their curricula in some way with K–12 academic standards, and 28 require that programs align their curricula in some way with state standards for K–12 teachers" (quoted in NAP 2010, 158–59). But NAP (2010, 159) was unable to find studies that thoroughly document nor analyze state standards in evaluating teacher preparation institutionsfor accreditation.

In its review of accountability mechanisms in teacher preparation, NRC (2010, 169) concluded that "existing evidence [did] not support a

strong conclusion about the effectiveness of the current accountability process in teacher education." It thus recommended that

> The U.S. Department of Education should sponsor an independent evaluation of teacher education approval and accreditation in the United States. The evaluation should describe the nature, influence, and interrelatedness of approval and accreditation processes on teacher education program processes and performance. It should also assess the extent to which existing processes and organizations align with best practices in accountability and offer recommendations for how they could do so more effectively in the future. (NAP 2010, 169–70)

Literature indicates that embedding the standards as early as in the undergraduate teacher education level was an advantage (Darling-Hammond 1999; Kleinhenz and Ingvarson 2007; Call 2018). Darling-Hammond (1999, 35) suggested that "candidates need many more opportunities to learn about practice through practice, including structured exhibitions and performances, and extended clinical experiences integrated with coursework."

In Australia, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) was introduced in 2011 as "a quality assurance mechanism to improve the overall quality of Australian teaching and thus produce maximum impact on student learning" (Timperley 2011 in Call 2018, 99). Literature shows that teachers had issues adopting the standards. For example, they lack the time to engage with them due to a full workload (Call 2018). To address this issue, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), which developed the APST, suggested that the preservice teachers were in the best position "to be the drivers of professional standards for teachers" (AITSL 2014 in Call 2018, 101). AITSL then developed the Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA) as a new measure to facilitate the implementation of APST in the preservice level. The TPA that was aligned with APST was "a tool used to assess the practical skills and knowledge of preservice teachers. Preservice teachers collected evidence of practice to complete a TPA in the final year of their initial teacher education program" (AITSL 2017). Integrating the standards in the preservice teacher programs can be seen as part of the professional learning process rather than as an added work (Walkington 2009 in Call 2018). This entailed putting APST as an integral element within teacher education programs (Call 2018). The 2013 AITSL national survey that showed preservice teachers' "positive attitudes and approaches by preservice teachers towards the APST" was promising but needed further

exploration for sustainability and continuous successful implementation (Call 2018, 103).

Révai and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2018, 8) indicated in a paper that "studies on the implementation and impact of standards on teacher education were rare and overarching systematic reviews were identified as a research gap." Yet they provided deeper insights in select case studies (i.e., Estonia, Australia, and Singapore) on the link between professional standards and teacher education curriculum. The three countries were selected due to being high-performing systems and to historical and contextual reasons. Révai and OECD (2018, 53) argued that it was almost impossible to describe the link as "explicit, direct, and consistent," but this did not invalidate the standards' policy impact. The paper concluded that

> the way in which standards impact on teacher education is not straightforward, but rather complex. It is not the document itself, nor are its requirements of teachers' knowledge and skills that directly shape/change what is taught and how in initial teacher education. It is rather the processes through which standards are negotiated, the involvement of different actors in a dialogue through the standards as artefacts that can have an impact on teacher quality. Initial teacher education curriculum can be viewed as a similar artefact that can also generate dialogue and could (and should) influence standards. In this sense, standards should not be seen as having a higher hierarchical status, but an equal one to teacher education curricula. (Révai and OECD 2018, 54)

In one of the policy notes in the report *Assessing Basic Education Delivery in the Philippines: The Philippines Public Education Expenditure Tracking and Quantitative Service Delivery Study* (2016), the World Bank and the Australian Aid, in partnership with DepEd, recognized gaps in competencies of Filipino teachers partly because of preservice teacher training, induction, and professional development. They wrote,

> This note has shown that teacher competencies are weak and that systems to support teacher development are inadequate. While some of the gaps in teacher competencies are partly due to weaknesses in pre-service teacher training and induction, more efforts need to be made to increase the support available to teachers who are already teaching in schools. (World Bank and Australian Aid 2016, 51)

This finding suggested that needed reforms in both preservice and in-service teacher programs in the country were imperative.

Part of the government reform initiatives to support Filipino teachers was the development and implementation of the PPST. As mentioned earlier, PPST was being integrated into DepEd's systems to benefit in-service teachers. This meant changes in the systems of recruitment, career progression, and continuing professional development of in-service teachers were in place. So, what has been done for preservice teachers after the institution of PPST?

Some teacher education institutions (TEI) initiated the review of their preservice teacher education curriculum. This curriculum review was made through Curriculum Quality Audit (CQA). CQA ensured alignment of course content, activities, and assessment with the standards (Arafeh 2006 in Alugar and Itaas 2021). It was "a form of curriculum mapping and is indispensable in this current era of standards-based reform and accountability" (Alugar and Itaas 2021, 1621). In its entry to Government Best Practice Recognition Awards, Negros Oriental State University (NORSU), a public state university, defined CQA as

> a meticulous inventory process that has been designed for both developments of new programs and the redevelopment of existing program offerings. This system exhibits the crucial features of assessment methodology characterized by being systematic; standard-based; objective; rigorous; fair; evidence-based; and documented. As a quality assurance mechanism, this features the underpinning audit process; the program, and course inputs that are developed and/ or re-developed through collaboration; and the team's audit. (DAP 2020)

The Basic Education Sector Transformation (BEST) defined CQA, in the context of the Philippines, as a curriculum framework that is grounded in teacher need, based on policy directions and evidence from PPST.

Alugar and Itaas (2021) documented the experience of NORSU in doing CQA. Although their study claimed to be nonexhaustive in evaluating the implementation of CQA in the university and limited in its view of the CQA model, it made a rather sound recommendation that CQA should be institutionalized among Centers of Excellence (COE). Doing so may propel increased faculty engagement in the continuous improvement of curricula. Institutionalizing CQA may also potentially cause the formation of a "college curriculum committee" that will provide faculty capability-building and orientations, and conduct periodic curriculum reviews and other curriculum development activities (Alugar and Itaas 2021, 1637).

Issues in standards- and evidence-based education

Shahjahan (2011) traced the standards- and evidenced-based movement in education to the pursuit of "accountability." Pirrie (2001, 124, 126) highlighted calls for evidence-based practices on the "crisis of legitimization in education research" that the "most prominent champions of . . . 'evidenced-based' policy and practice in education and the proponents of and evidenced-based education" made pervasive (quoted in Shahjahan 2011, 182).

As argued earlier, standards- and evidence-based education was not without opposition. Shahjahan (2011) posited that standards- and evidence-based proponents unknowingly perpetuate colonial or Eurocentric discourse. He identified the three manifestations of the colonial discourse in standards- and evidence-based education movement: "(1) the discourse of civilizing the profession of education, (2) the promotion of hierarchies of knowledge and monocultures of the mind, and (3) the interconnection between neoliberal educational policies and global colonialism" (Shahjahan 2011, 182). As backgrounder, Shahjahan (2011, 183) cited scholars saying that standards- and evidence-based education "is another form of surveillance and control in a new educational model that emphasizes accountability and managerialism."

In the first point, Shahjahan (2011) cited how many proponents of standards- and evidenced-based movement compared education with other fields of study (e.g., medicine) and viewed the former as backward, saying in colonial terms that education, which remains in a "barbarous disorder," had not accepted the gift of scientism (186). This discourse of disorder or chaos, Shahjahan (2011, 186) further cited, renders the empire or imperial domination as superior and that only through "evidence can an ideal order and outcome be brought to the world of education," hence the institution of standards- and evidence-based procedures.

In the second point, Shahjahan (2011) cited that proponents of standards- and evidence-based education assume a standardized notion of evidence. The positivistic, quantitative methods of determining evidence had also been deemed superior means of data collection to support policy making. This, as Shahjahan (2011, 190) pointed out, "are very similar to the techniques used during the colonial era to establish governmentality." He further argued that

> systemic knowledge production was a tool of colonial administration that allowed the colonizers to name, classify, and control the 'other' as well as provide legitimacy to the colonial administration. (190)

In the third point, Shahjahan (2011) cited that transnational organizations, such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization were globally controlling education through the curricula to meet the demands of the new global economy. He further cited scholars saying that the standards- and evidence-based approach to education appeared to carry a neoliberal agenda. In this sense, the "rhetoric of accountability requirements and high-stakes testing in the evidence-based education movement is influenced by a global market ideology that promotes the importance of remaining competitive with other countries" (Hursh 2007 in Shahjahan 2011, 194).

Shahjahan (2011) argued that an anticolonial perspective needs to be integrated in the standards- and evidenced-based movement in education, or a reappropriation of it is necessary, to further investigate this field of inquiry. He thus proposed these reflective questions:

> How does academic excellence flourish in schools attended mostly by minoritized students? How do teachers who reject the status quo and define excellence as responding to community needs, find ways to promote excellence for all students regardless of their circumstances? What ideological paradigms underlie teacher education? *What is the role of teacher preparation programs in perpetuating and promoting these values of equity and social justice?. . .* Whose cultural assumptions and histories inform such accountability systems, "evidence," "data," and "learning outcomes"? "Whose notions of evidence matter most? And to whom does evidence matter most?" (Shahjahan 2011, 199–200; emphasis mine)

He concluded by proposing a slowing down in education practice and policy to assess what education experts and stakeholders are overlooking (e.g., systemic inequities and social differences and contexts).

Concluding statement

A review of the extant literature suggests that the discourses on what counts as quality education (that reads as high student achievement) have been dependent mostly on the quality of teachers and teaching. The focus has been so directed at teachers and teaching that other contexts involved

surrounding different education systems have been left undiscussed. Given that, the standardization of student outcomes assessments, the "professionalization" of teaching, and the link between student outcomes and teaching have become the sole measures of what quality education is. The focus is also on measurable evidence (reads as quantitative data) to show improvements in quality. Much of this data is dictated by international assessments focused on competency in Mathematics, Science, and English, which is exactly what the global market needs from its workers. What is most glaring is how this Western discourse on quality teaching has taken a superior position on countries and states that iterated, followed, and integrated the same discourse in their education systems—a kind of top-down, colonial-to-colonies approach.

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Improving education service delivery in the Philippines:
An assessment of key education policies in the new normal

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Abstract

This chapter reviews and assesses education policies instituted by the Department of Education (DepEd), the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. The chapter conducts a comparative analysis of key accomplishments by Major Final Output and Performance Indicators in fiscal years 2019 and 2020 in order to understand how policies are translated into programs, projects, and activities. It concludes with recommendations for DepEd, CHED, and TESDA in the "new normal."

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The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented disruption in the delivery of education and services, including basic education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and higher education programs. More than a year into the pandemic, about 1.2 billion students, from formal education and TVET system worldwide, are still affected by school closures (UNESCO 2021).

To manage the impact of COVID-19 on Philippine education, the Department of Education (DepEd), the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) explored mechanisms and strategies to ensure the continuity of quality education programs and provide opportunities for greater collaboration among national government agencies, local government units, civil society organizations, and the private sector.

For school year (SY) 2021–2022, DepEd continued to adopt a blended learning approach in the delivery of basic education. Starting 15 November 2021, the Philippine government permitted 100 public schools and 18 private schools throughout the country to conduct a pilot run of face-to-face (F2F) classes (Ku 2021). DepEd proposed to add 177 public schools to the program as active COVID-19 cases continued to decline and with President Rodrigo Duterte's approval (Ku 2021).

In February 2021, CHED issued guidelines on the gradual reopening of higher education institutions (HEIs) for limited face-to-face (F2F) classes. By December 2021, CHED targeted to start the implementation of limited F2F classes in all degree programs of HEIs in areas under Alert Level 2.[1]

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1 Since 18 October 2021, the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF 2022) implemented a five-level alert system for COVID-19 transmissions in October 2021. The guidelines stipulate that:

a. Alert Level 1 - refers to areas wherein case transmission is low and decreasing, total bed utilization rate, and intensive care unit utilization rate is low.

b. Alert Level 2 - refers to areas wherein case transmission is low and decreasing, healthcare utilization is low, or case counts are low but increasing, or case counts are low and decreasing but total bed utilization rate and intensive care unit utilization rate is increasing.

c. Alert Level 3 - refers to areas wherein case counts are high and/or increasing, with total bed utilization rate and intensive care unit utilization rate at increasing utilization.

d. Alert Level 4 - refers to areas wherein case counts are high and/or increasing, with total bed utilization rate and intensive care unit utilization rate at high utilization.

e. Alert Level 5 - refers to areas wherein case counts are alarming, with total bed utilization rate and intensive care unit utilization rate at critical utilization. (IATF 2022, 2)

TESDA issued the Omnibus Guidelines for TVET under the New Normal Arrangements (Circular 045-2021), which set forth protocols for implementing health and safety standards in TVET institutions during training sessions andnational competency assessments (2021, 5–7). TESDA also adopted the COVID-19 recovery plan entitled "Oplan TESDA Abot Lahat: TVET towards the New Normal" that "[transitions] TESDA's systems, processes, and programs into the new normal and allow[s] the agency to cater to the skills needs of the people" (Bungallon 2022, 164; TESDA Memorandum Circular No. 158, s. 2020).

Overview of key education policies in the new normal

On 8 March 2020, President Rodrigo Duterte issued Proclamation No. 922, declaring a state of public health emergency due to the COVID-19 outbreak. During the implementation of the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ), people were only allowed to purchase essential goods and report to work in essential services (Tomacruz 2020). Proclamation No. 1021 was issued on 16 September 2020, extending the state of calamity to 12 September 2021. The state of calamity had been in place since 16 March 2020 (Proclamation No. 929). All government agencies and local government units were enjoined to mobilize the necessary resources "to undertake the critical, urgent, and appropriate disaster response aid and measures in a timely manner to curtail and eliminate the threat of COVID-19" (Proclamation No. 1021 2020).

Following the issuance of the Proclamation, government agencies such as DepEd, CHED, and TESDA rationalized the utilization of regular maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE) and other local funds to provide support for the COVID-19 response. Consequently, the educational institutions issued their respective guidelines for the remainder of SY 2019–20 in light of COVID-19 measures. They were designed to provide guidance in completing academic and training requirements while complying with the stringent physical distancing measures and other protocols for managing COVID-19.

DepEd COVID-19 policies

In June 2020, DepEd issued Department Order No. 012, entitled "Adoption of the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan for School Year

2020–21 in Light of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency." The Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) was a "package of education interventions that [responded] to basic education challenges brought about by COVID-19" (DepEd Order No. 012 2020, 1). The initiatives were primarily aimed at "[protecting] the health, safety and well-being of learners, teachers and personnel"; "[preventing] the further transmission of COVID-19"; "[ensuring] learning continuity"; and "[facilitating] the safe return of teaching and non-teaching personnel and learners to workplaces and schools" (DepEd Order No. 012 2020, 1).

During SY 2020–21, no face-to-face classes were conducted pursuant to the President's directive. Nonetheless, the DepEd's continuity plan "emphasize[d] that learning opportunities to [the] students could be provided through blended distance learning modalities" until restrictions were "lifted or relaxed" (DepEd Order No. 012, 3–4). Under the BE-LCP, the regional directors were directed to "decide on the learning delivery modalities deemed appropriate in the context of local conditions and consistent with the COVID-19 guidelines and regulations" (DepEd Order No. 012, 4).

For SY 2021–22, the DepEd continued to adopt a blended learning approach in the delivery of basic education as stipulated in its Department Order No. 029, issued on 5 August 2021. Based on the guidelines, "[t]he conduct of face-to-face classes, whether in partial or full-scale would still not be allowed unless permitted by the President." (DepEd Order No. 029, 2021, 2). In September 2021, the DepEd (2021) proposed for the pilot implementation of face-to-face classes "in consideration of education quality, mental health and economic issues amidst the pandemic." According to UNICEF Philippines (2021), the Philippines was the only country in Asia, and one of two countries in the world, that had yet to resume in-person classes in school.

CHED COVID-19 Policies

CHED and Department of Health (DOH) issued Joint Memorandum Circular No. 2021-001 in February 2021, entitled "Guidelines on the Gradual Reopening of Campuses of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) for Limited face-to-Face Classes During the COVID-19 Pandemic." The memorandum's objective was to "serve as a guide for HEIs intending to hold limited face-to-face classes during the COVID-19 pandemic and are willing to assume the responsibilities for the reopening of their campuses

based on their capability to comply with health and safety protocols, to retrofit their facilities, to get the support of their stakeholders" (CHED–DOH Memorandum Circular No. 2021-001, 1).

On 21 September 2021, President Duterte, through Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea, allowed CHED to conduct limited in-person classes for degree programs other than medicine and allied health. Face-to-face classes were permitted in HEIs in areas under modified general community quarantine (MGCQ) for programs that require a "hands-on experience." These programs engineering and technology, hospitality/hotel and restaurant management, tourism/travel management, maritime engineering, and marine transportation (Hernando-Malipot 2021).

CHED planned to begin limited face-to-face classes in HEIs located in areas under Alert Level 2 in December 2021. The resumption of in-person classes now covers all degree programs; however, HEIs and local governments have the final say on whether they are going to hold in-person classes (Mercado 2021).

TESDA COVID-19 policies

In March 2020, TESDA developed the TESDA Abot Lahat Operational Plan (Oplan) that sought "to transition TESDA's systems, processes and programs into the new normal and address upskilling requirement in the time of COVID-19" (Bungallon 2022, 164). Oplan TESDA Abot Lahat also focused on "key sectors" that may stimulate economic revitalization, including "agriculture to support food security, health to contribute to public safety, ICT to minimize technological disruptions, and construction to revitalize the government's ambitious Build, Build, Build, infrastructure program" (Bungallon 2022, 164).

Flexible learning became a regulation that has helped stakeholders deal with the impact of the pandemic (Bungallon 2020, 164). Recognizing the varying contexts and capacity to adjust to the situation, the system provides stakeholders with the option to make use of any flexible learning delivery mode, from face-to-face, online, blended distance learning, and a combination of distance learning and face-to-face learning.

On 25 May 2021, the TESDA released the Omnibus Guidelines for TVET under the New Normal Arrangements (Circular No. 45). The guidelines set forth the establishment of training and assessment

procedures for implementing public health standards. It also defines how training and national competency assessments are conducted during the new normal. As the Philippines implemented a numbered alert system and allowed the implementation of "granular" lockdowns, TESDA issued supplemental guidelines for TVET delivery in the new normal (Circular No. 96) on 15 November 2021.

Issues and challenges

The effectiveness of education service delivery in the new normal can be best assessed by conducting a comparative analysis of key accomplishments by Major Final Output (MFO) and Performance Indicators in 2019 and 2020. This process shall be based on the physical accomplishment reports of the DepEd, CHED, and TESDA.

DepEd FY 2019 and FY 2020 physical and financial performance

In fiscal years (FYs) 2019 and 2020, DepEd reported a disbursement rate of 93.8 percent and 92.3 percent, respectively. For Major Final Output (MFO) 1: Basic Education Policy Services, the DepEd performed well in the implementation of education research studies for policy development and the review of related policies under the Education Policy Development Program. The number of education research projects completed, however, significantly decreased from 1,543 in FY 2019 to 75 in FY 2020.

TABLE 1 ► FY 2019 and FY 2020 DepEd Physical Performance
Source: DepEd 2020b, 2021b.

Particulars	FY 2019 GAA Targets	Actual	FY 2020 GAA Targets	Actual
MFO 1: Basic Education Policy Services				
Education Policy Development Program				
Outcome Indicators				
Percent of completed education researches used for policy development	30%	100%	30%	100%
Percent of satisfactory feedback from clients on issued policies	55%	81%	78%	73%
Outputs Indicators				
No. of policies formulated, reviewed and issued	50	38	30	41
No. of education researches completed	126	1543	510	75
No. of proposed policies reviewed	60	97	70	73

Basic Education Inputs Program				
Outcome Indicators				
Percent of schools meeting the standard ratio for teachers			97%	97%
Elementary	97%	Ongoing data retrieval	97%	97%
Junior High School	98%		98%	82%
Classroom Pupil Ratio				
Kindergarten	1:25	Ongoing data retrieval	1:28	Ongoing data retrieval
Grades 1–3	1:30			
Grades 4–6	1:40			
Junior High School	1:44		1:40	
Percent of schools with computer package				
Elementary	97%	Ongoing data retrieval	100%	100%
Junior High School	100%		100%	91%
Output Indicators				
No. of new classrooms constructed	66,021			14,776
No. of textbooks and instructional/learning materials procured	8,903,357			22,974,895
No. of textbooks and instructional/learning materials printed delivered				32,325,999
No. of equipment distributed				
Science and Math Package	4,742			
ICT Package	3,827	Lot 4-with ORS Lot 1,2,3,5,6,7-for contract signing		
TechVoc Equipment	3,547			
No. of teaching items created	10,000	10,000		
MFO 2: Basic Education Services				
Inclusive Education Program				
Outcome Indicators				
Percent of learners enrolled in				
Multigrade (public)	432,523	278,498	192,561	244,518
SPED (public)	240,629	439,703	256,749	Ongoing data retrieval
ALIVE (both public and private)	370,195	171,885	157,236	144,047
IPED (public)	3,081,971	168,634	128,500	2,504,075
ALS	729,425	759,723	794,143	478,672

No. of schools offering the following programs (SY 2019–20)				
ALIVE	1,660	4,418	4,887	5,121
IPED	33,635	3,034	3,050	41,881
SPED	12,449	17,527	8,523	Ongoing data retrieval
Multigrade Education	8,379	1,293	1,317	1,162
No. of CLCs offering ALS Program	34,752	27,150	11,000	22,782
MFO 3: Regulatory and Developmental Services				
Support to Schools and Learners Program				
Outcome Indicators				
Retention rate				
Elementary	99%	99%	99%	99%
Junior High School	95%	96%	96%	95%
Completion rate				
Elementary	87.18%	97.15%	97%	97%
Junior High School	77.48%	88.84%	89%	86%

Proportion of children and young people achieving mastery, closely approximating mastery and mastered		Revised Performance Indicator in PDP and FY 2020 GAA: "Proportion of learners achieving at least nearly proficient level in NAT increased"		
Elementary (Grade 6)	69.91%		26%	The assessment cannot be administered due to COVID-19
Junior High School (Grade 10)	17.59%		43%	
Senior High School			13%	
Output Indicators				
No. of learners benefitting from the "School Feeding Program"	1,836,793	1,740,612	1,821,465	3,517,934
No. of schools provided Oral and Medical Supplies from the "School Dental Health Care Program"	1,886			

In 2020, the implementation of the Basic Education Inputs Program was sustained. Among elementary schools, 97 percent met the standard

ratio for teachers, and 100 percent had a computer package. From 2019 to 2020, the number of textbooks and instructional learning materials notably increased from 11,677,918 to 22,974,895.

For MFO 2: Basic Education Services, the DepEd reported a decrease in the number of learners enrolled in multigrade, special education (SPED), and alternative learning system (ALS) from 2019 to 2020. The enrollment in indigenous peoples' education (IPED) increased from 168,634 in 2020 to 2,504,075 in 2020.

For MFO 3: Regulatory and Developmental Services, the DepEd was able to maintain the 99 percent and 95 percent retention rate among elementary and junior high learners in 2020. From 2019 to 2020, the completion rate in elementary schools was sustained at 97 percent, and the completion rate in junior high schools slightly dipped from 88.8 percent to 86 percent.

In 2020, the increase in the "proportion of learners achieving at least nearly proficient level" in the National Achievement Test (NAT) could not be ascertained due to COVID-19. From 2019 to 2020, the number of beneficiaries of the School Feeding Program meaningfully increased from 1,740,612 to 3,517,934.

In June 2021, the World Bank published the report *Improving Student Learning Outcomes and Well-being in the Philippines: What Are International Assessments Telling Us? (Vol.2): Synthesis Report Presentation*. The report was based on the three global assessments in which the Philippines took part—Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM).

World Bank's report indicated that the Philippines' education has been in a "crisis" mode even before the pandemic. Based on the assessments, 80 percent of students did not meet the minimum proficiency scores for their grade levels. However, only 10 to 22 percent met or exceeded these minimum proficiency scores. Former Secretary of Education Leonor Briones disputed World Bank's report, demanding that the international agency apologize (Madarang 2021b). In July 2021, the World Bank apologized to the Philippine Government for "oversight" in its report.

In the same month, the Philippine Business for Education (PBED) released a similar report about the crisis in Philippine education system.

According to PBED's report, Filipino students failed to satisfy learning competencies. According to the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2018, 72 percent of Filipinos aged 15 were "low achievers" in reading, mathematics, and science (quoted in Madarang 2021a). In addition, junior high school students were admitted to higher grade levels "despite having low proficiency rates" in Mathematics, English, Science, Filipino, and Araling Panlipunan (social studies). In 2021, around 1.1 million students did not attend school, and in 2020, 1,179 private schools ceased operations (Madarang 2021a)

The Department of Science and Technology (DOST) and the National Research Council of the Philippines (NRCP) conducted a study concerning how public school teachers experienced remote teaching. According to the study, DepEd teachers "are using their personal money to acquire devices such as laptop, computer, mobile phone, printer and other gadgets, and avail services such as internet connection needed to facilitate teaching and learning" (quoted in Luci-Atienza 2021; Sarmiento 2021) Out of the 28,859 teachers who participated in the study, only 10 percent indicated that they did not have to use their own resources. The study also presented remote teaching modes during the pandemic, including distance learning, blended learning, and home school (Sarmiento 2021; Daquioag 2021; Luci-Atienza 2021).

In the roundtable discussion initiated by the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) on 8 September 2021, DepEd highlighted key challenges of online learning, including the experiences of learners in poor households where three or more children are studying together, and homes are found to be not conducive to learning and zoom classes. To address these concerns, the DepEd instituted key mechanisms, such as hiring Learning Support Aides (LSAs) to support learning continuity interventions. The DepEd also partnered with local government units and other stakeholders in addressing the learning gap between rich and poor students.

CHED FY 2019 and FY 2020 physical and financial performance

In 2019 and 2020, the CHED incurred budget utilization rates of 55.48 percent and 82.34 percent, respectively. The CHED reported the following key accomplishments per organizational outcome and performance indicator for 2019 and 2020:

TABLE 2 ► FY 2019 and FY 2020 CHED Physical Performance. Source: COA 2020a, 2021a.

Particulars	FY 2019 GAA Targets	Actual	FY 2020 GAA Targets	Actual
Higher Education Regulation Program				
Outcome Indicators				
Percent of HEIs with centers of Excellence, center of Development, with recognized flagship program, with Autonomous or Deregulated status, or with Level III or Level IV accredited	12	18.47	18	18.57
No./percent increase of higher education graduates able to demonstrate excellence in the 21st century global knowledge Percent of HEIs subjected to reform	480,000	751,310	480,000	718,800
Outputs Indicators				
No. and percent of public and private HEIs visited/inspected/subjected to standards	1,005	1,073	1,200	1,201
Percent of HEIs given incentives for offering quality higher education programs	10	10.65	12	12.19
Percent of permits issued within the prescribed period	25	25.96	25	27.22
Higher Education Development Program				
Outcome Indicators				
Percent of tertiary graduates in science, engineering, manufacturing and construction	30	36.53	38	37.82
No. and percent increase of government industry-academe collaboration/cooperation on research and innovation projects and joint ventures, consultancy contracts and supervisory-faculty exchange	50	94	80	97
Percent of scholarship grantees from CHED completing their courses in priority programs	80	84	80	88.90
Output Indicators				
No. of scholarships and student grants awarded	315,228	158,964	221,079	296,381
No. of faculty members provided with faculty development grants	5,693	6,669	5,693	6,523
No. of research, development and innovation project proposals funded	70	88	130	134

The Department of Budget and Management (DBM) recognized CHED's physical performance during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. CHED was able to manage well its Higher Education Regulation Program, resulting in a percentage increase of HEIs with centers of excellence, and higher education graduates demonstrating excellence in the 21st-century global knowledge and are being subjected to reform.

For the Higher Education Development Program, the number of tertiary graduates in science, engineering, manufacturing and construction, and collaborative projects and scholarship grantees slightly increased from 2019 to 2020. The number of scholarships and student grants awarded also increased from 158,964 in 2019 and 296,381 in 2020.

While CHED appeared to be performing well in terms of FY 2020 physical accomplishments, the Commission on Audit (COA) flagged the agency on its low obligation rate, a result of low utilization rates in five of its programs and projects, including the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education (UAQTF), scholarships to faculty HEIs and administrators, assistance to HEIs for K–12 transition programs, Philippine–California Advanced Research Institutes (PCARI) projects, and the implementation of the Information System Strategic Plan (ISSP). Further, the CHED faced challenges in harmonizing fiscal and academic year requirements, and processing of claims in a timely manner.

TESDA FY 2019 and FY 2020 physical and financial performance

In FYs 2019 and 2020, TESDA posted obligation rates of 91.2 percent and 84 percent, respectively. The following were TESDA's key accomplishments per MFO in 2019 and 2020:

TABLE 3 ► FY 2019 and FY 2020 TESDA Physical Performance. Source: COA 2020c, 2021c.

Particulars	FY 2019 GAA Targets	Actual	FY 2020 GAA Targets	Actual
MFO 1: Technical Education and Skills Development (TESD) Policy Program				
Percent of stakeholders who rate policies/plans as good or better	93	99.7	94	99.43
No. of National, Regional/Provincial TESD plans formulated/updated	1	1	1	1
MFO 2: TESD Regulatory Program				

Percent compliance of TVET programs to TESDA, industry and industry standards and requirements	90	124	90	67.25
Percent of TVET graduates that undergo assessment for certification	86	86	86	52.62
Percent of TVET programs with tie-ups to industry	42	64	42	62
Percent of registered accredited TVET programs audited	100	100	100	97.1
Percent of skilled workers issued with certification within seven days of their applications	90	94.02	90	76.87
No. of consultations, orientations and workshops for development of competency standards/training regulations	200	204	200	291
MFO 3: TESD Program				
Percent of graduates from TESD scholarship programs who are employed	65	84.15	65	70.51
Percent of graduates from TESD scholarship programs	274,614	344,215	201,500	94,158
Percent of training institutions/establishments/ assessment centers provided with technical assistance	5,495	6,809	5,824	5,317
No. of TTIs graduates	2,013,185	298,673	182,867	146,029

For MFO 1: Technical Education and Skills Development (TESD) Policy Program, the TESDA successfully maintained the percentage of stakeholders who rate policies/plans as good or better at 99 percent. It also kept the number of national/regional/provincial TESD plans formulated/ updated to 1 in 2020.

The pandemic impacted the TESD Regulatory Program. It reported reductions in the percentage rates of TVET programs complying with TESDA and industry standards and requirements, TVET graduates taking assessments for certification, accredited TVET programs audited, and skilled workers issued with certification within the prescribed application period.

For MFO 3: TESD Program, the TESDA reported a decrease in the percentage of graduates from TESD scholarship programs and the percentage of training institutions provided with technical assistance from 2019 to 2020. During the same period, the number of TTI graduates decreased from 298,673 to 146,029.

The 2019 COA Annual Audit Report for TESDA noted late transfers to procuring entities for the procurement of various goods and services such as toolkits for the students were noted. TESDA was also in public scrutiny after the alleged transfer of PHP 160 million worth of anti-insurgency funds from TESDA Central Office to its regional offices. The 2020 Annual Audit Report highlighted that the fund transfers were "highly questionable for lack of proper authority/legal basis and absence of appropriate guidelines as to how the fund shall be utilized" (quoted in Senate 2021).

In the UP CIDS roundtable discussion held on 8 September 2021, TESDA stressed that the pandemic affected TVET since it entails hands-on training. To respond to the situation, TESDA Executive Director David Bungallon said that the agency "designed a flexible learning modality to include the blended learning—a combination of online and offline learning with face-to-face learning" (UP CIDS 2022, 173). In addition, Bungallon noted that "TESDA also strengthened its online program as a learning tool, and introduced e-learning sessions for the trainers. In addition, TESDA lobbied with IATF for some TVET programs to be allowed to conduct limited face-to-face learning" (173). However, TESDA faces an important challenge: "How training institutions, the TVIs, can cope with the impact of this disruption including the impact of the fourth industrial revolution wherein most of the industries now will now shift to areas that address digitalization" (173).

Key recommendations

Amidst the pandemic, educational institutions face challenges in the delivery of quality services while ensuring the health and safety of learners, teachers, and other stakeholders. DepEd, CHED, and TESDA are encouraged to undertake a formal assessment of the Philippine education system, looking at how key policies are translated into programs, projects and activities which are funded for implementation.

It is recommended:

(1.) That DepEd continue to administer the National Achievement Test (NAT) for students to determine their academic levels and knowledge learned in major subjects during the pandemic. Aside from determining the retention and completion rates in elementary and junior high schools, NAT scores are crucial in assessing the proficiency levels

of students. To date, the Philippine Statistical Authority (PSA) has yet to publish the functional literacy rate for 2020. In 2019, the functional literacy rate was estimated at 91.6 percent based on the results of the 2019 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS).

While the findings of the World Bank study appears to be "insulting," it would be worthwhile to review and analyze the report to help address the challenges faced by students, parents and teachers in coping with the COVID-19 pandemic (Madarang 2021b). The results of the study are anchored on established global assessments, including the PISA 2018, TIMSS and SEA-PLM, which the country participated in.

(2.) That DepEd collaborate with civil society organizations such as the Philippine Business for Education (PBEd) to discuss their findings on the current state of Philippine education. The study shows that Filipino students struggle to achieve proficiency in the subjects of Reading, Math and Science; and major subjects such as Mathematics, English, Science, Filipino and Araling Panlipunan (Social Studies). More than a million students did not attend school in 2021, and more than a thousand schools closed in 2020. The same study reveals that three out of four public schools do not have internet access.

(3.) That DepEd address issues related to the provision of gadgets and learning equipment to teachers. The NRCP study concludes that DepEd teachers spend their own money to buy devices and equipment and avail internet connection services needed for teaching and learning. The report also provides information on the frequently used remote teaching modalities during the pandemic.

(4.) That DepEd strengthen the engagement of Learning Support Aides (LSAs) to support learning continuity interventions; and foster greater partnership with local government units and other stakeholders to help address the learning gap between rich and poor students.

(5.) That CHED closely monitor the implementation of key programs, including the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education (UAQTF), scholarship to faculty HEIs and administrators,

assistance to HEIs for K–12 Transition Programs, the Philippine–California Advanced Research Institutes (PCARI) Project, and the Information System Strategic Plan (ISSP) COA flagged in its FY 2020 Annual Audit Report.

(6.) That CHED analyze and address challenges related to the utilization of funds, such as harmonizing fiscal and academic year requirements, and processing of claims in a timely manner. These challenges affect CHED's implementation of the cash-based budgeting system, which requires agencies to disburse funds within the fiscal year.

(7.) That TESDA assess the implementation of the TESDA Regulatory Program, which was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. TESDA may identify and analyze factors contributing to the decrease in the percentage rates of TVET programs complying with TESDA and industry standards and requirements, TVET graduates taking assessments for certification, accredited TVET programs audited, and skilled workers issued with certification within the prescribed application period.

(8.) That TESDA monitor the status of the TESD program. It must analyze the reduction in the percentage of graduates from TESD scholarship programs and the percentage of training institutions provided with technical assistance from 2019 to 2020.

(9.) That TESDA formulate appropriate guidelines on the utilization of funds will help the agency address misuse-related issues.

(10.) That TESDA strengthen its online program as a learning tool and scale up e-learning sessions for trainers.

(11.) That TESDA explore approaches and strategies to cope with the impact of COVID-19 and other disruptions brought about by the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The TVET PH Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) Framework comprises specific measures to guide public and private TVET providers in ensuring they produce 4IR-ready learners, trainers, assessors, and training institutes.

DepEd, CHED, and TESDA are recommended to improve the management of funds by strengthening their programming and planning processes, ensuring that proper targeting of beneficiaries is observed.

The educational institutions should also strategize on the obligation and disbursement of their funds, assessing their absorptive capacity to implement their policies, programs, and projects.

To supplement government budgetary constraints, DepEd, CHED, and TESDA should explore other financing modes such as public–private partnerships (PPP) and official development assistance. If deemed to be viable, PPP can also help achieve learning outcomes especially during the pandemic through provision of digital tools and platforms, and establishment of state-of-the-art learning facilities and equipment.

The Philippine government should also continue to provide an enabling environment for foreign relations and official development assistance, recognizing their critical roles in the delivery of education services. Amidst the allegations of corruption in the government's handling of the pandemic, bilateral and multilateral agencies are encouraged to look into how ODA-financed programs and projects are implemented on the ground.

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Stack up:
Microcredentials and the future of higher education

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Abstract

Microcredentials are a type of alternative credential increasingly offered by providers of massive open online courses (e.g., Coursera, EdX). Consisting of several courses, modules, or project-based units, microcredentials can be "stacked" into larger credentials, offering opportunities for more flexible education, higher-paying jobs, and personalized learning. Examining the rise of microcredentials during COVID-19 lockdowns in relation to career progression and higher education, this chapter details emerging possibilities and challenges for the labor market and educational institutions.

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Overview

In March 2020, the world stopped as the COVID-19 pandemic struck. Governments were appalled by the rapid spread of the virus and the rising number of cases each day. Lockdowns were imposed to curtail the spread of the virus and to flatten the curve. These lockdowns later affected the food chain security, global economy, education, healthcare, mental health, and safety from domestic abuse. On the other hand, lockdowns reduced pollution levels and boosted telecommunication industries (Onyeaka et al. 2021).

One of the sectors that were greatly hit by the pandemic was education. Classes were suddenly disrupted, and face-to-face activities were prohibited. Academic institutions had to quickly find solutions and adapt to the current state of education. Schools and universities across the world shifted to remote and/or online learning in order to keep their students learning amid the health crisis.

In the transition to remote learning, technology played a huge role in the delivery of courses. The current high demand for educational technology, or edtech, has become a new marketing opportunity for digital learning platform providers and other edtech companies. In 2019, a year before the pandemic, investments in learning technologies were at USD 18.66 billion (Markets Insider 2020); the following year, it raised dramatically to USD 36.38 billion (Metaari 2021). The market is expected to grow to USD 325 billion by 2025 (Chernev 2022).

Through digital technology, students today become more engaged with "learning and interactivity," and relaying information through it is "easy," "convenient," and "effective" (Raja and Nagasubramani 2018, S33). It enhances teaching and learning as it offers new ways of presenting and discussing concepts. Students grasp ideas and concepts easily through visual presentations, which can easily be made through digital visualization tools and applications. In addition, teachers can make class activities more interactive, increasing student participation.

Aside from that, technology opened up new opportunities for the education sector. Interaction and collaboration among students around the world became possible (Raja and Nagasubramani 2018). Universities were able to introduce online degree programs, and online platforms were able to offer courses that students can attend without being physically present in the classroom.

When people had to quarantine themselves due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they had free "time for recreation of all kinds" (Impey and Formanek 2021, 7). Some tried to develop new skills, opened up their online businesses, or enrolled in an online class. Through massive open online courses (MOOCs), coding boot camps, and programs offered by business schools, many people had the opportunity to secure nondegree credentials (McKenzie 2020).

A MOOC is defined in different ways. Some experts define it as an open educational service and a distance learning course that can be accessed through the internet for free. A MOOC is a course designed to accommodate a massive number of participants. Some would define it as a place where people with the same interest and/or prior knowledge will come together to share their knowledge and experience for individual or collaborative learning. Relative to the major providers such as Coursera, EdX, OpenLearning, and Udemy, MOOC is defined as a course that consists of a collection of videos recorded by a renowned professor from a prestigious university, a collection of learning resources, automated assessments, discussion forums, and peer reviews that allow massive and open participation. However, if participants would want to get a certification as proof of their completion, they need to pay for it (Atiaja and Gurrero-Preonza 2016).

In March 2020, major providers of MOOCs offered access to courses offered by university partners for free. Coursera did so for 3,800 courses and 500 specializations, and for some courses, certificates were given for free. A month after, starting mid-March, enrollment in Coursera skyrocketed to 640 percent from last year, while enrollment in Udemy was up by 425 percent (Impey & Formanek 2021). According to Coursera, the most popular courses in 2020 revolve around understanding COVID-19, managing mental health, developing job-relevant skills, and pursuing personal passion (Vandenbosch 2020).

Alternative credentials

In the past, education was only accessible to a selected few and mostly men. The degrees offered were limited to the classic liberal arts. However, with the Industrial Revolution, higher education institutions (HEIs) were forced to rethink their curricula and include practical arts. In the 20th century, a bachelor's degree became a hiring credential among industries and government institutions. As a result, high school graduates were

encouraged to get a college credential or a bachelor's degree for them to be competitive in the labor market. However, as the labor market shifts, hiring credentials also change. A master's degree, once before only taken by those who want to pursue a doctorate, became a credential sought by professionals with a bachelor's degree who want to differentiate themselves from others in the labor market. Soon after, HEIs start to expand the credentials they issue (Selingo 2017).

In recent years, "alternative credentials" are emerging in the higher education arena which engage millions of learners around the world. These are new ways of acquiring and signaling new skills (Kato, Galán-Muros, and Weko 2020). In a paper entitled *The Emergence of Alternative Credentials*, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development defined *micro-credentials* as "credentials that are not recognized as standalone formal educational qualifications by relevant national education authorities" (Kato, Galán-Muros, and Weko 2020, 10).

In 2015, microcredentialing advocates announced that there is an ongoing craze in credentials—there is "a growing movement to document students' skills and better prepare them for the workplace" (Mooney 2015). This phenomenon resulted in the emergence of so-called alternative credentials (Ralston 2021).

These alternative credentials came into existence (1) to fill the gap between degree programs offered by HEIs and the skills employers seek; (2) to increase the efficiency of HEIs by offering a more targeted curriculum or training compared to the traditional degree programs they offer; and (3) for the HEIs to reach new learners across the world. It is also an innovation that lets new organizations enter the higher education marketplace (Kato, Galán-Muros, and Weko 2020).

There are three alternative credentials offered at the post-secondary or tertiary education level—mainly, certificates, badges, and microcredentials (Kato, Galán-Muros, and Weko 2020).

There are two types of certificates—academic certificates and professional/industrial certificates. Academic certificates are given in recognition of "one's completion of organized learning activity," and they "may be awarded by an educational institution." On the other hand, professional/industrial certificates are typically given after passing an examination and "are awarded by professional bodies, industries, or product vendors" (Kato, Galán-Muros, and Weko 2020, 8).

Badges can fill the gap between new college graduates and their first jobs by certifying soft skills that are usually earned outside of the traditional classroom or the technical skills they lack but can be learned in short courses (Selingo 2017). Digital badges are defined as a symbol or "a valid indicator of an accomplishment, skill, quality or interest that can be displayed, accessed and verified online" (AGC 2022). It is sometimes awarded for high-stakes accomplishments such as passing an examination or course, and low-stakes accomplishments such as watching a simple video or accomplishing a human resource (HR) training. These badges include metadata that represent who earned it, how and when it was earned, what the badge represents, and who is the issuing body (Iafrate 2017).

This paper will focus more on the third type of "alternative credentials," the microcredentials. Unlike the other two, microcredentials still need a harmonized definition. In the United States, microcredentials are learning activities that are "more than a single course but less than a full degree" (Pickard 2018 quoted in Kato, Galán-Muros, and Weko 2020, 8) In Europe, they are described as "a sub-unit of credentials that confer a minimum of 5 ECTS [European credit transfers] and could be stacked into a larger credential and be part of a portfolio" (MicroHE Consortium 2019 quoted in Kato, Galán-Muros, and Weko 2020, 8).

Microcredentials

It is important to note that microcredentials are not synonymous with a full degree—it does not constitute a full degree or even a certificate (Ralston 2021). Microcredentialing offers flexibility in learning especially to professionals. Aside from this, it has a lesser number of courses, takes a shorter time to complete, is affordable, and has more relevance to the learner's career (Ralston 2021). In comparison to the traditional learning pathways, learners think that microcredentials have "more focused content, more practical learning experiences, more up-to-date information, more personalised learning, more open access to knowledge and more flexibility in planning their studies" (MicroHE Consortium 2019, 15). It is offered either online, on campus, or a mix of both (Kazin and Clerkin 2018).

A microcredential is composed of several courses, modules, or project-based units that "cultivate a narrow range of skills or competencies" (Ralston 2021, 85). Learners can stack these microcredentials into larger ones. The more they accumulate, the higher their chances of creating direct pathways to better and high-paying jobs (Ralston 2021). There are three types of stacking credentials—progressive, supplemental, and independent.

Progressive stacking refers to a short-term credential that learners acquire, leading to a higher-level degree or credential. Supplemental stacking, on the other hand, refers to the credentials that are taken to supplement prior educational degrees, skills, and competencies to meet the demands of the labor market. Lastly, independent stacking refers to accumulated combined short-term credentials that are independent of each other (not sequentially related) and does not lead to a higher-level degree (Bailey and Belfield 2017).

This type of credential is being adopted as a strategy by the major providers of MOOCs (Selingo 2017). MicroMasters of EdX and Nanodegrees of Udemy have been prominent to professionals who both aim to advance their careers. Under the MicroMasters program, anyone can take a series of graduate courses from top universities (EdX, n.d.). By earning a MicroMaster, students can apply for slots in a full master's degree program from the universities, making them only a semester or two away from earning a full degree (Selingo 2017). This is an example of progressive stacking. Like EdX, Udemy partners with different universities and industry leaders to develop and offer nanodegrees.

Microcredentials and the labor market

The workplace is continuously changing, and the gap in skills and knowledge of the labor force continues to grow. Thus, upskilling and reskilling are crucial to career progression. Thomas Gauthier's (2020) study showed that employers are not satisfied with the skills of their employees who recently acquired their bachelor's degrees. The participants of the study reported that these employees have knowledge of their fields but find its application on the job difficult. Therefore, employers do not see traditional degrees as indicators whether an individual is prepared for the job and will be productive in employment

Employers look for a combination of soft and hard skills that are necessary for the job. Soft skills refer to the habits and personality that shape a person's work dynamics such as effective communication skills, critical thinking, and adaptability among others (Birt 2022). Employers in 2021 look for employees who are eager to learn continuously and with a growth mindset. They need to proactively collaborate with people and possess a coaching mindset. They must also be flexible and adapt to changes and technological advancements. Finally, they need to think critically, be dedicated, and thrive in a virtual environment (Forbes Human Resource Council 2020). On the other hand, hard skills are technical skills

a person gained throughout their career and are job-specific—machine and software operation and programming languages to name a few (Birt 2022). Industry-specific skills are "always at risk of expiry" (Ralston 2021, 86). The expiration of skills certifications results in greater gaps in skills and knowledge if not renewed and updated. For some HEI leaders and policymakers, microcredentials can somehow address this gap (Buckwalter 2017).

The current generation of students who are pursuing their university degrees are aware of the skills that industries demand As the internet makes information more accessible, they continuously discover and learn these skills. They earn microcredentials to augment their degrees to be more competitive in the labor market (Edalex, n.d.).

According to an article by U.S. News in 2017, these stackable credentials allow employees to gain new skills as they seek to advance in their professional careers (Fuster 2017). They also let employees personalize their learning pathways. They can choose courses that are in line with their career goals and responsibilities (Edalex, n.d.).

As the pandemic has caused global economic shifts, digital transformation, and automation, companies must strengthen their learning and development (L&D) initiatives for their employees. The top areas of focus of L&D programs this year are upskilling and reskilling, leadership and management, and virtual onboarding (LinkedIn Learning 2021). Equipping employees with appropriate skills and knowledge increases the company's competitiveness in the market. Microcredentialing aligns with the demands of the industries. They can personalize the courses based on their work practices and business goals, and these courses can be developed as a rapid response to market changes (Edalex, n.d.). Investing in these courses may lead to the productivity and professional growth of employees. Companies like IBM, Google, and Amazon encourage their employees to take micro-credentials to boost their competencies and for their organization to achieve its objective (University of Canada West 2020). Microcredentials are also a good tool for employee motivation and engagement (Ralston 2021).

Microcredentials and the future of higher education

There are claims that the value of the traditional degree is slowly declining as microcredentials enter the scene and offer more flexible

learning pathways. As mentioned earlier, employers perceive traditional degrees, as well as high grades, as not indicative of one's preparedness for the job. Even though companies perceive the traditional degree as such, degrees still matter, as reflected in the employment rates. In the United States in 2020, the employment rate of those with a bachelor's or advanced degree was higher (86 percent) than those with some college units (78 percent), those with a high school diploma (68 percent), and those with less than a high school diploma (57 percent) (National Center for Education Statistics 2021). The same trend applies to OECD member countries. On average, the employment rate of adults with tertiary education (85 percent) is greater than those with upper secondary education (76 percent) and those who have not completed an upper secondary education (59 percent) (Kato, Galán-Muros, and Weko 2020).

The traditional degree is at risk of being outdated by other learning pathways. According to the survey conducted by Strada (2020), aspiring students, whose ages range from 25 to 44 and who "do not have a two- or four-year college degree" but are "considering" enrolling in additional education, shifted their interest from pursuing a degree to taking a nondegree program. In 2019, 50 percent were interested in getting a degree, but it decreased to 32 percent in 2020.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution greatly affects the current job market. Technological advancements, such as digital technology and artificial intelligence, change the skills required in jobs. With the economic demands of this industrial revolution, skills required in the future will definitely be different from what the HEIs are capacitating the students today (Times Higher Education 2021). HEIs should be able to adapt quickly to support the lifelong learning of students and workers. Lifelong learning refers to all activities throughout life which aim to improve one's knowledge, skills, and competencies. London and Smitter (2012) would define it as continuous learning through formal and informal activities for the benefit of their career development.

As the HEIs continue to transition to a competency-based education system, they should reexamine the skills and knowledge they identified as important but are rarely captured in a degree, and take into consideration the knowledge and training required by local industries (D'Orio 2019). Microcredentials "allow flexibility and responsiveness" to the needs of learners and industries (Government of Ontario 2020 quoted in Wheelahan and Moodie 2021, 214). Thus, they address the mismatch between the

supply and demand for skills in jobs. In addition, it can augment the skills learned in the traditional degree and/or become a tool for people looking to improve their skills at any stage of their career.

However, unbundling degrees to smaller credentials does not always constitute accessibility, affordability, and equality. Short courses (i.e., MOOCs) offered by online platforms are only accessible to anyone who has an internet connection and computer, and they require participants to pay for the issuance of a certificate. Without a certificate, it would be hard for the participants to validate the skills acquired in the course and include them in their résumés. In addition to that, these online courses may lead to a further stratification of the higher education system, in which only those students who can afford to enroll in these courses can develop new skills or improve current skills and advance in their careers.

Furthermore, a few of the pressing concerns are its recognition, validation, and accreditation. Employers and HEIs are yet to recognize the legitimacy of microcredentials since they are new learning pathways. Because they lack standardized validation and accreditation guidelines, they are not comparable to degrees and certificates. In addition, the quality of these micro-credentials may not be assured (Ralston 2021). Thus, a framework for microcredentials must be developed. This framework should consist of a common definition; a design framework (including quality assurance); and regulation, validation, and accreditation guidelines. In 2019, the European MOOC Consortium (EMC) launched a Common Micro-credential Framework (CMF) fitting into the European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning. The CMF aims to (1) create new higher education and training qualifications that would satisfy learners' and employers' requirements; (2) permit the recognition of microcredential courses as academic requirements; and (3) allow these courses to be made "stackable" between HEIs to support the personalization of learning. It includes specifications of courses under the framework (i.e., study time, EQF level, course design, assessments, etc.). It is also stated that microcredentials should adhere to the same internal quality assurance processes followed by the mainstream courses or degree programs offered in HEIs.

As the demand for lifelong learning becomes higher, more people will seek alternative and flexible learning pathways such as micro-credentials. Thus, governments, HEIs, microcredential providers, and other stakeholders should come together and be at the forefront of developing a

common framework that fits their context. This framework will guide the HEIs and other educational providers in developing more inclusive and high-quality micro-credentials.

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Paano na ang "org culture"?
A microlevel study on reframing Philippine university student organization culture in the New Normal

Iva Melissa Magsalin[1]

Abstract

"Org culture," a term that popularly refers to the cultures and traditions of university organizations, has been a key aspect of university life for Filipino students, serving as a space for extracurricular activities. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent shift to remote learning disrupted long-standing traditions of university organizations, affecting organization membership and the continuity of the organization itself. This chapter analyzes the perspectives of members of a student organization in a private higher education institution, and argues that organization culture is preserved through socialization and genuine relationships among members. It concludes with recommendations for university organizations in adapting to the "next normal."

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In Philippine higher education institutions (HEIs), student organizations have long served as extracurricular activities for students. Each organization possesses a specific set of unique traditions, whether formally acknowledged by the institution, or have long been passed on by members of the organization. These traditions constitute "org culture," or organization culture. Org culture is passed down through practice, with members actively participating in unique traditions in order to keep them alive. However, the shift to the new normal of online learning has led student organizations to adapt to a completely different mode of implementing activities, thereby losing and letting go of some traditions along the way. In this process, student organizations are struggling to maintain org culture and pass this on to members of the organization. At the same time, they are battling with the uncertainty of what the "next normal" may hold, whether it be a shift to onsite implementation or blended onsite and online learning. This study on the perspectives of a student organization and its members in a private HEI (anonymized, and henceforth, "the university") argues that organization culture is preserved through socialization and genuine relationships formed among members. The study analyzes the different strategies that student organizations are employing in order to preserve org culture in the uncertainty of the next normal, while also adapting and transitioning into the new normal.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has blindsided education systems across the globe. From having the space and freedom to explore different avenues of learning inside and outside the classroom to being pushed into the small space of an online setup, education is truly one of the most hard-hit sectors in the pandemic. More than a year into the "new normal," numerous schools all over the world are slowly beginning to resume face-to-face operations with the help of widespread vaccination. However, this is not the case for the Philippine education system. As of 2021, the Philippines remains to be one of two countries that have yet to open schools since the pandemic struck (Magsambol 2021). This pushes the country's education into exploring different ways in which we can navigate the online setting while keeping certain practices alive.

In higher education institutions in the Philippines, one common practice that has lived on for generations is student organizations. In the book, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* by Bolman

and Deal, one of the distinct ways of viewing organizations is through the human resource perspective. According to them, "an organization is like an extended family, made up of individuals with needs, feelings, prejudices, skills, and limitations" (Bolman and Deal 2003, 14). With this definition in mind, organizations are seen as places where socialization takes place. Gert Biesta, a renowned Educational Researcher, defines socialization as "the ways in which we become part of existing orders, traditions and their reproduction, relating to ways of thinking and behaving in a range of contexts" (Carter 2019, 128; see also Biesta 2006). In this regard, we can define organizations as places of human interaction where every individual enters to feel a sense of belongingness and achieve a certain purpose.

Student organizations are built on various foundations and cater to different purposes. They are led and composed by the student body. Some organizations are formed based on degree programs, and they become avenues for furthering knowledge and skills related to their specific degrees. Meanwhile, some of them cater to specific advocacies, which aim to help those in need through various means, such as, but not limited to, teaching, sustainable development, and animal welfare. While student organizations may define the word *organization* differently, the varying definitions comprise organization culture or *org culture*.

Through the lens of anthropologist Edward Tylor (1871, 1), culture is defined as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [individuals] as a member of society." While culture may be intangible, it livers on through practice and continuation. In the university, members of student organizations coined the term *org culture* to refer to each organization's distinct traditions and practices that their members carry from one generation to the other.

When classes have been traditionally held in person, organizations have successfully handed down traditions from one generation to the next. Some of them span decades of practice. With the COVID-19 pandemic altering the dynamics of traditional face-to-face learning into online settings, student organizations had to abruptly attempt to channel the different practices and traditions into a remote setup. While there are traditions that remain alive, much has been lost in the process of transitioning to an online means, especially those traditions that have continuously been done on-site.

Org culture is kept alive and passed down through practice. This paper analyzes how students in the university strive to keep org culture alive in the online setup while attempting to navigate the challenges and threats to it. By engaging in discourse with student leaders and members of different organizations in the university, this study explores the various ways in which student organizations' cultures are changed by the new normal, and what this may possibly mean for their fate in the next normal.

Review of related literature

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, much has been observed regarding its impact on Higher Education and the changes it has brought about to student interaction and organization building. However, while these changes have been significantly observed, there are still very few studies done on the topic of student organizations during the pandemic, given that some changes in org culture are only beginning to emerge. Hence, the review of related literature focuses on organizations, socialization, and changes that the pandemic brought to higher education institutions.

In the book *Reframing Organizations*, Bolman and Deal attempt to dive into the experience of being leaders and members of organizations, in order to better understand what makes a good organization work. Bolman and Deal (2003) argue that organizations are very much structured, and therefore must strive to be humanitarian-focused in order to further the advocacies that they strive for. Additionally, they point out that organizations need consistency and routine in order to thrive and build a strong sense of self. In this regard, the book may be helpful to the current study because it provides a framework on how organizations work and a different perspective in understanding how an organization is built to achieve certain goals. This information sheds light on how org culture is built, and more importantly, what keeps it alive. In doing so, the book aids in examining the qualities that an organization needs in order to remain intact amidst the challenges faced in online learning, and possibly, as organizations venture into the next normal.

Cahapay (2021), meanwhile, discusses the impact of COVID-19 on Philippine Higher Education, and how it has reshaped the frontiers of Higher Education. Furthermore, the study dives into the concept of the "Next Normal," which Cahapay defines by citing Sneader and Singhal

(2020), as "looking forward." The "next normal" implies that while there are current practices that may work as we continue to adapt to the challenges brought about by distance learning, these may quickly evolve once the current learning setup changes as well. Cahapay argues that the "next normal" must be examined with many nuances—there is no single definition for it, as the experience of the "new normal" varies from one student to the other. This paper serves as a relevant work to accompany the current study as it provides a framework for analyzing the different ways in which the "new normal" has shaped Philippine higher education, and how it could shape the "next normal" for higher education.

Given Cahapay's argument on the need to adapt to the changes brought about by the pandemic, this article will also help probe into the different possibilities that await student organizations as they try to weather through the next normal whilst attempting to preserve organizations' culture and tradition. Furthermore, Cahapay provides a definition of the "next normal," which can be used as an operational definition in this study.

Pokhrel et al. (2020) discuss the different innovations and challenges that have emerged from the shift to online teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. They argue that the shift to online learning has given rise to new advances in modern-day learning. This transition brought opportunities in exploring mixed methods of navigating education during the pandemic, and these approaches are not simply limited to on-site and online classes. Furthermore, they emphasized that while there are many opportunities arising from the experience that the new normal in education has brought about, many parts of the world continue to face challenges in adapting to these changes. The study provides a perspective on the different ways in which online education continues to evolve through the perspectives of various nations that have discovered their own opportunities and challenges to online learning. This paper can aid the current study by providing existing data on possible patterns to look out for when it comes to eliciting and analyzing responses regarding various experiences in organization leadership and participation online. The paper also gives a guide on how to assess the different challenges and opportunities that student organizations may come across, accounting for the different contexts that may affect these outcomes.

Sandifer (2021) examines how student organizations are challenged and how they continue to adapt and thrive in the middle of a pandemic. This qualitative study involved in-depth interviews and conversations

with student organization leaders and members in order to understand the different methods they employ to keep their organizations' cultures, traditions, and advocacies alive while navigating a new setup. Sandifer finds that organizations that have successfully transitioned into communicating with their members and stakeholders online, such as through online conferencing and communication websites and applications, are those that successfully thrive and remain resilient in the midst of the new normal. Thus, the study provides a potential framework for analyzing the different qualities that an organization may need in order to get through the "new normal" and carry on to the "next normal." Additionally, the study offers patterns to look out for and may determine an organization's readiness for sustaining and possibly transforming org culture in the new normal.

Shalskiy (2016) argues that organizations are paramount to the higher education experience. The research explores the various ways an organization contributes not only to general academic knowledge but also to allow them to experience different opportunities and learn more about themselves as they find organizations in line with their personal interests and advocacies. This article is relevant to the current study because it gives a glimpse into students' reasons for joining various organizations in college. Furthermore, the article emphasizes student organizations not as mere extracurriculars but as concrete spaces where students in higher education can learn and grow. While the article was written in the context of student organizations pre-pandemic, it is relevant to the current study as it strengthens the claim of them being places where college students further their passions, interests, and opportunities. This article aids in conducting the data gathering of the study, which will also touch on students' reasons for joining and staying in their respective organizations.

Methodology

Given the need to assess the perspective of college students who are involved in organizations, the research will take a qualitative approach. This study will involve conducting focused group discussions, individual interviews, and participant observation. Thirty students who belong to different organizations in the university were interviewed in order to assess their experiences in transitioning to and preserving org culture in the online setup. Participants were selected through convenience sampling, according to their availability and willingness to take part in the study. The qualifications for participation were as follows:

(1.) At least 18 years of age

(2.) Currently enrolled in the university

(3.) Has been involved in an organization prepandemic and is still involved the same organization during the pandemic and the online learning setup

(4.) Willing and able to participate in an interview method of their choice through the online platform

Due to the risk of COVID-19, all interviews were done online. Participants were free to choose any of the following options for their interview:

(1.) Online Call Interview. The online call interview took place on Zoom, Google Meet, or an online meeting platform of the participant's choice.

(2.) Phone Call Interview. The phone call interview was conducted via mobile phone call with the participant. The call was initiated by the researcher.

(3.) Email Interview. An email interview took place through an email correspondence between the researcher and the participant. The researcher sent the questions through email, and the participant replied with their corresponding answers. Where needed, the researcher asked follow-up questions. Responding to these follow-up questions was at the participant's discretion.

(4.) Focused Group Discussion. Should a number of participants be familiar with each other prior to being selected, they could have opted for a focused group discussion, provided that they were willing and comfortable to share their answers with each other. Focused group discussions were conducted through an online meeting platform of the participants' choice.

The interview revolved around their current experiences and personal accounts in the distance learning setup. Participants were asked follow-up questions if the researcher saw the need to expound on and clarify some points they may have raised. The data were examined through textual analysis, wherein patterns in the participants' answers were identified in order to come to a conclusion on the different ways for org culture to stay alive in the new normal, and its future in the next normal.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed accordingly. Only the researcher had access to the participants' personal information, and participants gave their full informed consent prior to participating in the study. Participants' identities were ensured confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Lastly, all participants were informed they could withdraw consent at any time in the study, with no questions asked and no consequences unto them.

Scope and limitation

The study seeks to examine the state of org culture in the "new normal," and how this may affect the transition into the next normal. In doing so, the study also attempts to identify the challenges faced by org culture and how these may persist to permanently change organizations post-pandemic. Analysis of the next normal is bound by the three categories, namely: continued online learning, blended learning, and on-site learning.

Data gathering for this study occurred for three weeks, considering participants' availability and willingness to become involved in the study. This period included all interview preferences, as well as follow-up questions through email interviews. Qualified interviewees were college students, at least 18 years of age, and had been involved in at least one student organization for more than two years. Therefore, the study only covered the narratives of those who had experienced org culture both onsite and online.

The study solely focused on student organization members in the community of the university. Since recruitment of participants were done online, there was a chance that recruitment materials did not reach all students in all the organizations. The sample size of the study was also limited to 30 participants. Hence, the results to be gathered are reflective of a small percentage of student organization members in the university and would not be representative of all org members.

Results and discussion

The process of participant observation and discourse with members of different organizations have yielded information that is crucial in determining what lies beyond for org culture in the next normal. First, participants were asked to describe their initial impressions of the term

"org culture." One participant stated that to them, org culture meant the systems upon which an organization is built upon. Another stated that org culture is the way for members to interact with each other. Some pointed out the fluidity of the term. As org culture tends to vary from one organization to another, the relationships built in one organization will surely be different from that of another. Among the diverse meanings org culture held for members of a student organization, there was one common thread among their answers: community. For all respondents, org culture was the sense of community that a student organization cultivated through unique traditions and day-to-day interactions with other members. Unlike organizational constitutions and other formal documents, org culture was intangible. It was passed on through practice: as organizations continued to exist and retain traditions that had been long done, org culture would remain alive.

Sofia, a member of an organization that helps children in underprivileged communities gain access to quality education, described how their org culture had always revolved around the genuine relationships formed among the student members and the community which the org served. "Whenever we welcome new members into [our organization], most people always note the welcoming atmosphere they get. It was always more than just an org, it was always about human relationships and meaningful friendships," she said. They emphasized that these relationships had been formed and fostered throughout the time when the organization conducted onsite activities at the university and with their partner community in Marikina City. However, the human relationships and meaningful friendships the organization fostered throughout the years began to deteriorate during the transition to an online mode of learning and org activities.

Being a member of the organization for four years (three years on-site and one year online), Sofia began to notice the initial changes to her organization's culture during the first few months of online implementation. "There's a very clear change," she said. "Being unable to see each other at any given time has done a lot to the kind of kinship that we knew during the first three years," she added. They stated that while there had been new online spaces made to simulate the everyday interactions inside the physical org room, the lack of a physical space made it almost impossible to build genuine trust among members. They further emphasized that the organization became heavily compartmentalized, creating more of a formal working environment.

Joseph, the organization's current president, shared Sofia's sentiments. He stated that while online interactions had been more intentional, given the need to set a definite time to meet, they had become less spontaneous, and therefore less genuine. "Back then you could just walk into the org room and immediately start a conversation with whoever was there," he said, "But now it feels so different. We have our online org room on Discord (an online space dedicated to group interactions), but people rarely *tambay* because they're too busy or too tired." While he said that the organization is trying to bridge the connection between the members of the organization, there is only so much that they can offer, especially when members are passionate but demotivated due to the demands of the online set-up.

Lucas, a member of the organization's human resources department, expressed his fears about the gradually diminishing org culture as school years online go by. He said:

> '*Yung pag*-diminish *ng* org culture *hindi biglaan*. *Sa* start *ng* year, *maayos, pero* because of acads *nabu*-burnout *mga tao* and they don't want to participate in orgs anymore. '*Di katulad sa* face-to-face, excited *pa mga tao mag-org. Lalo na 'yung complaints na may ibang* department *na hindi nag-uusap puro pagawa lang*. [The diminishing of org culture did not happen suddenly. It was fine in the beginning of the year, but because of academics, people become burnt out, and they don't want to participate in orgs anymore, unlike with a face-to-face setup where people were still excited to have orgs. There are additional complaints that some departments no longer talk but just assign tasks.]

He emphasized that participating in orgs, which used to be a way for people to relax and unwind after a long day of classes, became a burden to most in the online setup. With the lack of time, students were forced to trade one for the other. Lucas feared that the organization's traditions, such as *tambay* in the org room, going out after class, and area engagements with their partner communities, would likely fade if members were more focused on getting work done rather than forming genuine connections with each other and with the partner community. He also discussed how fears of org culture diminishing had led to officers scrambling to document the organization's activities and traditions in an onsite and online setting as preparation for what the next normal may hold.

Nina, a member of an organization focused on developing a deeper appreciation of Filipino-Chinese culture, said their org had been at a

disadvantage to begin with, when the time came to transition to an online setup. "Org culture in Celadon has always been about the interactions during projects and unwinding after," she said. She added:

> *Pero dahil sobrang daming tao sa org, nung nag pandemic* it was a struggle to maintain communication with everyone. I felt *na parang nawala na 'yung* spirit *ng mga usual na ginagawa namin* onsite." [But because the org had too many people, when the pandemic came, it was a struggle to maintain communication with everyone. I felt that the spirit of what we usually did onsite disappeared.]

She also emphasized that this caused a lot of members to leave. While new members entered the org, some were active on-site but chose to leave during the shift to an online mode of learning. She described how these members had felt as if the org had changed drastically, especially concerning org culture. "The reason most people stay is for the friendships and physical interaction. Without those, some members no longer felt the need to stay in the org," she said.

Many of the respondents expressed the same concerns. Some respondents, especially those actively involved as leaders in their organizations, stated that they had activities lined up for the online year, but low member participation. They feared that if the new normal did not consider the possibility of going back to the school's physical space, there would be no members to carry on their long-standing traditions.

Observing members of an organization in their online spaces was consistent in the interviews. Being a former member of one of the organizations I examined for this study, I was given the chance to observe the organization both onsite and online. In the online setup, it was clear that org culture gradually diminishes due to a lack of member participation. After observing three consecutive organization events that were open to all members, it was notable that the same members would consistently attend, despite the organization's efforts to reach out to the rest of their member pool on different social media platforms. While it was good for organizations to build consistency in member participation, it was alarming that most, if not all, who attended these events were the organizers and officers of the organization itself.

From the stories and experiences shared by the members of the organization, it can be said that there is a common thread at the core of org culture, and that is socialization. Organizations are built on people;

the traditions and cultures of an organization grow through practice. They allow people to build relationships, and these relationships grow through various means: whether it be hanging out in the org room every so often, visiting partner communities on weekends, or late nights and early mornings planning and executing projects. With the shift to an online setup and the potential for hybrid interactions in the next normal, each organization's culture threatens to change drastically.

As this threat looms, student organizations are taking various measures in order to maintain and preserve org culture. Frank, who at the time of the interview held an executive position in the organization, discussed how it was currently working on a catalog of various projects and traditions that had been held onsite and online. Through this, the organization hoped to have tangible documentation to pass on to future generations of members who had yet to experience organization life on campus.

For Claire, a member of multiple student organizations for four years of her college life, maintaining connections with the alumni of the organization was the best way to keep org culture alive. "They [the alumni] have first-hand experience of what it's like to be in the org all throughout. They're the best people to stay connected to if we want to genuinely keep our traditions alive." Five respondents also mentioned how their publication organization tried as much as possible to keep onsite projects in the online setup. According to the respondents, this helped in keeping org culture alive since introducing fewer changes to systems allowed for a greater focus on member engagement and member bonding. The methods discussed by these participants show that they envisioned the next normal to be one in which their org remained intact and almost unchanged as it was before the transition to an online mode of organization activities had happened.

While many organizations aimed to preserve org culture, some chose a more unconventional path. Three respondents (who preferred to leave their organization name anonymous), discussed how their org chose to go with the changes brought about by the current setup. "We really don't have a clear picture of what the next normal is yet. So for now, we choose to just change the org up in whatever way is needed," said one of the members. While this may not be the typical path for most organizations, focusing on the current situation instead of the transition to the next normal may also have its advantages. This gave organizations a chance to fix systems that

may have been ineffective in the onsite implementation of org activities. This was especially beneficial to organizations that had recently just been created and were still finding their footing amidst the uncertainty of the new normal and the next normal.

Org culture remains alive in the new normal of online learning and organizational activities. However, the degree to which it does varies within the structures and dynamics that organizations have built in the new normal. With socialization being the main factor that drives organizational culture forward, it is paramount that organizations focus on creating dynamic relationships with members to ensure continuity not just of projects, but of long-standing traditions.

Conclusion

Organizational culture is kept alive through conscious action, and the results of this study have proven so. Based on the results of this study, it is clear that socialization and the everyday interactions of members in an organization play an important role in ensuring that an organization continues to serve its purpose and also creates a dynamic environment that ensures the continuity of traditions in an organization. With the need to transition into the new normal of online learning brought about by the pandemic and the looming possibility of a "next normal," organizations are forced to reevaluate and reassess current systems, thereby putting org culture at risk. Hence, the challenge for student organizations in the next normal is not just to simply return to the way things have been before the pandemic, but to adapt to the changes and possibilities the next normal may bring. While there is no certainty as to what this may be, organizations must employ strategies that will ensure member participation and commitment rooted in the organization's purpose and advocacy.

The narratives also show that while certain traditions may no longer exist in the next normal for most organizations, org culture will not completely diminish. As long as there are members in the organization, it will continue to grow and will be rebuilt. Hence, student organizations that have transitioned to the new normal and confronting the next normal should best consider member development and aligning all plans with their core values. By doing so, they will establish meaningful connections with current members and ensure commitment no matter what the next normal may be. Student organization culture will definitely take on a different form for all of them.

While each organization's current strategies for preserving org culture may have their advantages and disadvantages, it is important to consider that each organization is working around different circumstances. Collectively, the actions that each organization takes right now will determine the course not just of projects, but of cultures they have built and traditions they share.

Recommendations

Throughout this study, valuable insights were gained on the current state of student organizations in the new normal, as well as what the next normal may hold for their org culture. As a future recommendation, it may be beneficial to conduct a study with the same set of participants once the university has transitioned to the next normal, whether it be fully onsite classes or blended learning for students. This study may give real-world data on the state of org culture in a concrete experience of the next normal for organization members. In addition, the data gathered may be used to help organizations track their progress within the transition from the new normal to a completely new setup once again in the next normal.

A bigger sample size may also be considered for future studies, as well as focusing on a specific organization. These two methods may help in streamlining the data gathered in order to fit to the specific context of an organization, such as aligning the transition to the next normal with an organization's goals, advocacies, and values. A larger sample size may also help in getting diverse feedback from different student organizations. It also opens up the possibility of exploring a quantitative method of analysis in order to statistically determine the frequency of challenges encountered among organizations in the transition to the next normal.

Finally, it is recommended that the study take on a wider scale in the future, such as reaching out to student organizations in various universities across the country. While student organizations have been around for decades, it is surprising that there are very few discussions in the academe regarding student organizational structures and benefits to students. As this study has shown, while student organization work is purely voluntary, members and leaders alike pour in a great deal of time and effort to ensure that an organization runs smoothly despite the challenges faced. By initiating discourse with organizations in various universities, new perspectives may be gained not just regarding organizational culture but of students' purposes in engaging in their activities. Doing so may pave

the way for a more structured discourse on student organizations in the Philippine academe, as well as making space for acknowledging the role of student organizations in higher education in the country.

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Understanding the Self under lockdown:
Teaching UNDSELF at the De La Salle-College of St. Benilde during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic

Lorenzo Ereñeta[1]

Abstract

This chapter presents a case study of teaching the course "Understanding the Self" in the De La Salle-College of St. Benilde during the COVID-19 pandemic. Reflecting on the value of higher education, particularly in times of social crises, this chapter provides insights into the significance of transformational subjects in shaping and sharpening learners.

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Philippine higher education amidst the pandemic

There have been many moments in history that have caused the institution of higher education to come under scrutiny. Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has been one of them—especially in the Philippines.

According to Mateo (2020), 44,000 college students might not enroll due to economic reasons worsened by the pandemic. Moreover, many university students have been dissatisfied with how the government directed the implementation of remote learning (Magsambol 2020). The dissatisfaction with higher education in the country became more prevalent. For instance, students of the University of Santo Tomas conducted a protest on 30 November 2021, alongside many calls for an "academic break" that would relieve students and teachers from tasks in classes.

Amid these ever-increasing challenges and with the complexities of COVID-19 as the recent backdrop, one may begin to question the value of higher education—starting with its curriculum.

This paper provides some insight into this question through the lens of a case study—teaching the subject "Understanding the Self" (UNDSELF) in the De La Salle–College of St. Benilde (DLS–CSB) during the pandemic. Particularly, this paper aims to provide insights into the value of transformational subjects in general and in the context of higher education.

Figuratively, the pursuit of understanding the Self

There is great value in understanding oneself. From common sense, ancient philosophies, religious teachings, and especially in academic research, its value is widely understood. And of all the stages in a person's life, one can argue that people crucially pursue an understanding of themselves in adolescence.

Though one gains "the ability to narrate specific events or stories between early and mid-childhood," the ability to turn those events into one's life story is gained only in adolescence (Habermas and Hatiboğlu 2014, 31). Moreover, during adolescence, one begins to mature enough to understand social, historical, and cultural contexts and to be able to integrate these into the understanding of their self. And crucially, these beginnings set the direction for one's adulthood and old age.

Moreover, the pursuit of understanding oneself necessitates certain experiences. Half of it is about self-oriented developments, such as developing one's identity and inhibiting selfish impulses (Crone 2020). But the other half of it concerns other-oriented developments such as being empathetic and being happy for the gains of others. Altogether, it is not a simple endeavor.

And for the institution of higher education, there is also a widespread notion that it should be involved in this pursuit—aside from just producing workers. Many scholars and historical documents have, in fact, argued for this as one of the purposes of higher education (Chan 2016). Furthermore, since higher education fosters environments that encourage students to think proactively, see various perspectives, engage in dialogue, and construct knowledge, it is especially positioned to foster this pursuit (Glisczinski 2007).

But in reality, this pursuit seems to not be fostered well in higher education. According to Glisczinski (2007), higher education today seems to be only teaching students patterns and frames of reference rather than teaching them perspective, empathy, and self-knowledge. Glisczinski (2007) notes, "The opportunity to consume, compartmentalize, and regurgitate information is, in many cases, all that learners have been taught to expect from school."

Literally, the subject of understanding the self (UNDSELF)

As prescribed by the Commission on Higher Education

The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) mandated UNDSELF in 2017. The curriculum they released describes UNDSELF this way: "[T]he course deals with the nature of identity, as well as the factors and forces that affect the development and maintenance of personal identity." It has the overarching goal of teaching students about the theoretical underpinnings of oneself, while also providing them with new skills for a better quality of life.

CHED divided the curriculum into three topics:

(1.) "*The self from various perspectives*." It discusses the self through the four well-established disciplines of psychology, anthropology, sociology, and philosophy.

(2.) "*Unpacking the self.*" It discusses the self through six specific lenses: physical, sexual, material, spiritual, political, and digital.

(3.) "*Managing and caring for the self.*" It provides guidance in certain aspects of studenthood, such as being a better student, setting goals, and managing one's health.

In delivering this curriculum, there were a few notable prescriptions:

- The subject is to be taught for three hours every week for 18 weeks, or for at least 54 hours in a semester in any arrangement.
- That there would be references to various highly academic social science readings.
- The teaching methods would mostly be lectures followed by class or group discussions. For a few other topics, class surveys were also recommended. Notably, the third part of the curriculum prescribed "guided lectures" as a methodology.
- After every subtopic, students would be assessed through sharing-type outputs like essays or reports. Also, two "long examinations" and a "final integrative paper" should be required.
- And as a small aside, students should be encouraged to practice journaling.

In the context of De La Salle–College of St. Benilde during the pandemic

During the height of the pandemic, the DLS–CSB administration allowed instructors to modify CHED's curriculum, provided that it maintained the topics prescribed by CHED. Likewise, the administration also instructed teachers to modify the teaching methods and assessment tasks to be more appropriate for distance learning. And based on conversations with instructors and observations from their teaching materials, it can be said that the instructors made adjustments. Aside from modifying the activities and assessment tasks, they also varied the depth of discussions and used nonprescribed references.

Varying the depth of discussions

It is evident that some topics have incorporated points of discussion not originally prescribed. Conversely, some prescribed points of discussion

were not included. No evident pattern has appeared for which topics are added or removed since it varies per topic and per instructor. But what can be observed is that there are more topics added rather than subtracted. A likely cause of these adaptations was the instructors' vision of the topic, likely seeing some information as significant despite not being prescribed, while some as negligible despite being prescribed.

Using nonprescribed references

This can be observed in a wide range of cases; from as simple as citing a definition, to as broad as citing other literature as a whole. This can also be observed in how their teaching materials included media, most commonly YouTube videos. An immediate reason for this was that many of CHED's prescribed references were not accessible online. Relatedly, there is a clear lack of multimedia in the prescribed references of CHED. Hence, any media cited would be categorized as nonprescribed.

Modifying the teaching methods

It is evident that the teaching methods still mostly consisted of lectures, but instructors often did not make use of group discussions and instead used activities they constructed. Notably, their constructed activities would often be accomplished individually rather than in groups, and these activities would also connect to their assessment tasks. Aside from the administration's directive, another reason for these changes could be instructors' desire to increase student engagement with activities they deemed more effective.

Modifying the assessment tasks

It was evident that sharing-type outputs were still the preferred requirement, but similar to the previous aspect, instructors completely overhauled the prompts in lieu of something they originally constructed. Aside from the administration's advice, the immediate reason for these changes is that instructors saw the need to match their assessment tasks to the changes they made to the depth of discussion and activities.

But overall, many of the prescribed methods were still upheld. Materials still referenced various highly academic readings. Teaching methods still mostly consisted of lectures. Assessment tasks were still required after every subtopic. Although the prescribed two "long examinations" and "final integrative paper" were implemented in essence,

they were replaced with other assessment tasks with the same weights as exams and a final output.

Also, it should be noted that during the height of the pandemic, the subject was delivered online. And with this setting came some notable circumstances which can be described using the four areas of learner interaction as defined by Moore and Kearsley (1996): (1) learner–content interaction, (2) learner–instructor interaction, (3) learner–learner interaction, and (4) learner-technology interaction.

Interactions

Learner–content interaction

Most interaction occurred through students' attendance of classes. However, the online setting allowed students to rewatch the class proceedings. For some modules, students could just watch recorded lectures instead of attending classes. This benefited students by allowing them to engage with the content whenever they preferred, which instructors reported being true based on the analytics provided by the DLS-CSB's learning management system (LMS).

However, when watching recordings, opportunities for learner–instructor and learner–learner interactions are typically lost. Unlike classes, recordings do not offer space for people to engage and interact with one another. Notably, the administration did advise instructors to have at least five classes for the term. And typically, instructors held an average of at least seven classes.

Another significant aspect of this interaction is students' engagement with the assigned tasks and materials. But given the previous discussion on how instructors designed their classes, the circumstances of the online setting did not seem to significantly affect how students performed these tasks and used these materials; most of the work required still revolved around their individual reflections and analysis. Their success with these tasks was not necessarily contingent on them taking advantage of the online setting. Compared to a typical face-to-face delivery, the online setting did not appear to significantly affect the frequency of this type of interaction as students still generally attended to their responsibilities

Relatedly, instructors did not report any notable difference in their grading compared to face-to-face settings. Also, there was a general sense

among instructors that the students were quite capable of providing good outputs. This can mean that this type of interaction was also not hindered.

Learner–instructor interaction

Most interaction occurred through online conferencing tools like Zoom, as this is where classes were conducted. Instructors were reportedly generous in their communication by constantly providing feedback and class announcements, even making themselves available past working hours. However, interaction rarely transpired as the communication was often one-way.

Particularly, in using these online conferencing tools, it would be common for students to have their cameras and microphones turned off due to social reasons (e.g., being shy to talk or show one's face, or personal space), technical reasons affecting classroom dynamics (e.g., microphones are muted during lectures to avoid overlapping sounds), or simply convenience. Altogether, these circumstances seemed to hinder this type of interaction during class.

And in a few instances, the instructors often initiated online interactions, typically for class participation. Moreover, the frequency of this type of interaction is dramatically less compared to a typical face-to-face setting. In a typical classroom, even if an instructor were not conversing with their students, they would be provided the affordance of seeing students' body language and facial cues, which are important forms of indirect communication, at the bare minimum.

Learner–learner interaction

Most of this type of interaction occurred during group discussions, which instructors would organize during class. Notably, instructors noticed that students were quite engaged. However, given that the most frequent modes of delivery were lectures, and the most frequent type of tasks were done individually, this interaction was not as frequent.

While there were other avenues for learner-learner interaction (e.g., LMS for discussion boards or peer-to-peer commenting on work) and reasons for out-of-class interaction, learners rarely interacted through these platforms. And if they did, the level of interaction was not very substantive. Notably, some students mentioned that the main reason for not interacting in these avenues was because of social issues (i.e., being too shy to let their peers see their comments).

Overall, it can be said that the online setting did not significantly affect this type of interaction even when compared to a typical face-to-face setting. Instead, class design was the most impactful. However, if non-education-related interaction is concerned, it can be said that it occurred to a high degree as students did seem to grow in rapport over the course of the subject. This type of interaction probably occurred outside of class hours through students' various personal social networking accounts.

Learner–technology interaction

This occurred with a wide range of technologies as there were many mediums necessary for remote learning. Students had to use online conferencing tools to attend their classes, office tools and various multimedia tools to accomplish their assessment tasks, and the internet in general for other miscellaneous activities. However, students would naturally have to spend the most time with office and multimedia tools as these were the technologies needed to accomplish tasks. Assessment tasks take more time to accomplish compared to finishing a lecture or interacting with one's peers. Notably, the administration did advise instructors to create tasks that would take three to five hours per week to accomplish. Given these circumstances, this type of interaction was quite frequent. In fact, it was necessary.

Moreover, students were seemingly adept at using various types of programs as there were comments about this being an issue. Students did not interact with these tools to a shallow degree. Instructors reported that several students had impressive outputs in terms of utilizing the tools. Generally, instructors were pleased with their creative ability.

Recommendations

A balanced approach

Given the findings of Crone (2020) and their alignment with the definitions of Moore and Kearsley (1996), it is recommended that teaching methods balance learner–learner interactions (e.g., class discussions and discussion boards) and learner–content interactions (e.g., by-individual reflection papers and reports) to facilitate an equal number of self-oriented and other-oriented developments.

For higher education policymakers and institutions, perhaps this simply is made as an explicit guideline if ever adaptations are to be made. Additionally, curriculum designers could design two options for activities

for each module, each corresponding to a specific type of interaction so that instructors may be further guided with options.

Moreover, understanding that learner–learner interaction is not as prevalent in the online setting, instructors should also make adaptations that specifically address this. This can be done by fostering a class environment that is open to discussion and by designing activities that will engage students.

Simulate the real world

Given that Crone (2020) finds that the pursuit of self-understanding requires certain difficult experiences, it can be recommended that subjects like this forgo much of the academic side and focus only on the transformational aspect or, the time allotted for them be increased. This is because such experiences take time to be simulated meaningfully. Secondly, the selected materials and designed methods associated with these types of subjects should be expertly designed and curated to provide reflections and interactions which simulate the difficulties necessary for self-understanding.

Implementing the first recommendation is simply a matter of adjusting the expectations of such subjects. However, it is understandable that coming to such decisions is not so simple. And for the second recommendation, instructors should be well-equipped to curate materials and design activities that are transformational in nature. Moreover, as it has been noted that learner–technology interaction has not been significant, this can be a potential avenue for improving activities. Instructors should find creative ways of utilizing technology to simulate the necessary experiences. Possible avenues could be games and social networking sites as these technologies allow one to interface in ways that are not necessarily available in other avenues.

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