PERCEPTIONS AND READINESS OF USL STAKEHOLDERS ON FLEXIBLE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to assess students', parents' and faculty members' perceptions and readiness regarding the use of flexible learning. The study made use of a descriptive survey method. An online survey was conducted among students, parents and faculty members of the different departments: Elementary, Junior High School, Senior High School, College Departments and Graduate School. Three sets of questionnaires were prepared by the URDC to measure students', parents' and faculty members' perceptions and readiness regarding the implementation of Flexible Learning in the university for the incoming academic year 2020-2021. . The results of this study indicate that parents and teachers are in favor of adopting flexible learning for the incoming academic year 2020-2021. The students and faculty members were also found to possess the basic tools that are needed for the adoption of flexible learning in the university. These tools include available devices or gadgets that have internet connectivity, available learning areas at home for flexible learning activities, basic ICT skills, and previous experience with online learning.

Keywords: *Flexible learning, flexible learning modalities, flexible learning readiness*

INTRODUCTION

The advancements in technology and internet access and the adoption of 21st century learning principles have pushed educators to utilize other means of content delivery or instruction (Hill, 2006; McQuiggan, 2012); hence, the adoption of flexible learning modalities by Higher Education Institutions. There are varying definitions of flexible learning (Casey & Wilson, 2005). Some common terms that are associated with it include distance learning, online or e-learning and blended learning. Flexible learning refers to pedagogical approaches that allow flexibility in terms of how, when and where learning occurs and is aimed at increasing access to higher education (Andrade & Alden-Rivers, 2019; Cassidy et al., 2016; Hill, 2006; Joan, 2013). The flexibility described in this context may either be in terms of pedagogy; i.e., in terms of the implementation of teaching-learning, assessment, interaction and media of instruction; or flexibility in terms of logistics; i.e., in terms of the location, time and pacing of learning (Cassidy et al., 2016). Moreover, it may include the use of a variety of technologies that do not limit learning to the traditional face-to-face set up (Cassidy et al., 2016). Online and blended learning are the most common approaches or forms of flexible learning; and these describe primarily how learning content is delivered to students (Andrade & Alden-Rivers, 2019). Online learning therefore involves delivery of learning content, which allows students to gain new knowledge and skills through the use of an online delivery system or an application which requires internet access (Andrade & Alden-Rivers, 2019; Demir Kaymak & Horzum, 2013). Online learning can either be synchronous or asynchronous. Synchronous online learning involves the production and consumption of learning materials by students at the same time while in asynchronous

learning, students are provided with learning materials that can be accessed at any time (Hilt, 1999). Blended learning, on the other hand, consists of both online learning and face-to-face components wherein students and teachers meet occasionally (Andrade & Alden-Rivers, 2019).

Flexible learning involves a shift from a traditional teacher-centered approach to learning into a more student-centered and technology-based approach (Cassidy et al., 2016; Hill, 2006; Joan, 2013). Learners are more autonomous and are given more control and responsibility over their learning. This allows the learner to follow his/her own pace making learning more personalized (Cassidy et al., 2016; Hill, 2006; Joan, 2013). This also encourages learners to be more engaged in the teaching-learning process (Hill, 2006). One of the most important benefits of flexible learning is that it makes education more accessible to learners (Andrade & Alden-Rivers, 2019; Casey & Wilson, 2005; Gordon, 2014). This may be employed in circumstances where traditional face-to-face learning is not possible or is limited. Moreover, flexible learning has also been found to promote quality of education received by students (Andrade & Alden-Rivers, 2019; Joan, 2013); and it increases teachers' self-efficacy and competence (Woodcock, Sisco & Eady, 2015).

Although flexible learning was proven to be beneficial, there are factors that can challenge its outcomes. Readiness of faculty members and students in the adoption of technology-based education is a strong determinant of the success of flexible learning (Demir Kaymak &Horzum, 2013; Haron, Abbas & Abd Rahman, 2012; Rohayani, 2015; Schreurs, Ehler, & Moreau, 2008). Schreurs et al. (2008) described different types of readiness in line with technology-based education which are technological, economic and human readiness. Technological readiness refers to the availability of technological systems (e.g. internet connectivity and devices) and the capability to use such which is applicable for both learner and teacher (Schreurs et al., 2008). Economic readiness pertains to the availability of ICT infrastructure and institutional support for the adoption of technology-based education (Schreurs et al., 2008). Human readiness refers to the knowledge, skills or competencies and attitudes of the learner and teacher relevant to the use of technology-based education (Rohayani, 2015; Schreurs et al., 2008). Faculty members' and students' acceptance, understanding of the benefits and perceived need for technology-based education are also important in ensuring readiness and successful implementation (Haron et al., 2012; Rohayani, 2015). Readiness of all forms has been found to be positively correlated with successful adoption and outcomes of technology-based education (Demir Kaymak &Horzum, 2013; Haron, Abbas & Abd Rahman, 2012; Rohayani, 2015; Schreurs, Ehler, & Moreau, 2008). Readiness was also found to improve students' interaction and engagement in the online learning environment (Demir Kaymak& Horzum, 2013). Better interaction and engagement ensures successful outcomes in the online learning environment. It is therefore crucial to assess readiness for the use of flexible learning to ensure its successful implementation.

In the midst of the current health situation around the world brought about by the 2019 novel Corona Virus (COVID-19) where access to the traditional face-to-face teaching and learning poses a great risk on health and safety of learners and teachers, educational institutions are finding alternative means of lesson delivery that will ensure quality education without compromising the safety of both students and faculty members. USL with its commitment to quality education and in consideration of the safety of its stakeholders is exploring the feasibility of implementing flexible learning modalities for the incoming school year (2020-2021) in all academic levels. To guide decision making relevant to the formulation of

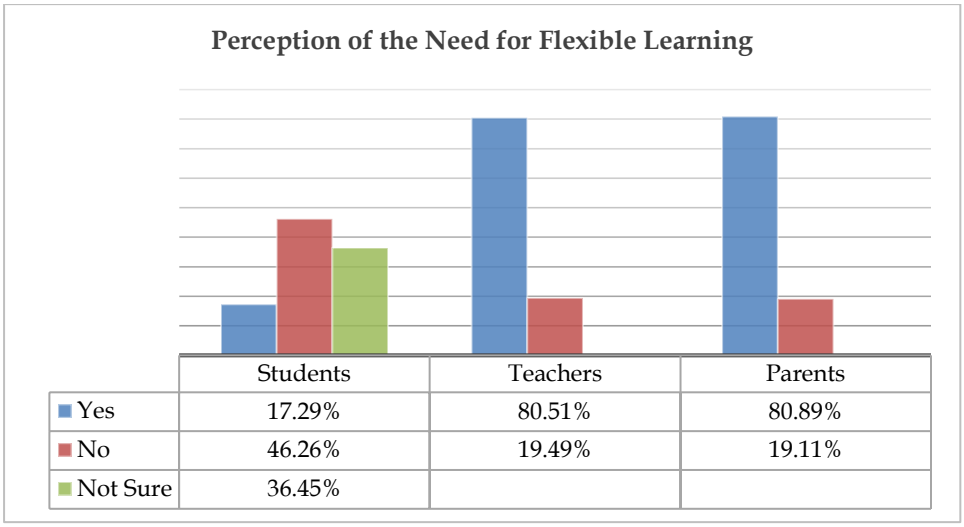
policies about the implementation of flexible learning by the university, this study was conducted to assess students', parents' and faculty members' perceptions and readiness regarding the use of flexible learning.

METHODS

The study made use of a descriptive survey method. An online survey was conducted among students, parents and faculty members of the different departments: Elementary, Junior High School, Senior High School, College Departments and Graduate School. Three sets of questionnaires were prepared by the URDC to measure students', parents' and faculty members' perceptions and readiness regarding the implementation of Flexible Learning in the university for the incoming academic year 2020-2021. The questionnaires consisted of 7 items for the faculty survey, 11 items for the students' survey and 9 items for the parents' survey. The questionnaires were validated by the URDC staff and the members of the Extended Advisory Board (EAB). Descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage was utilized to analyze the data.

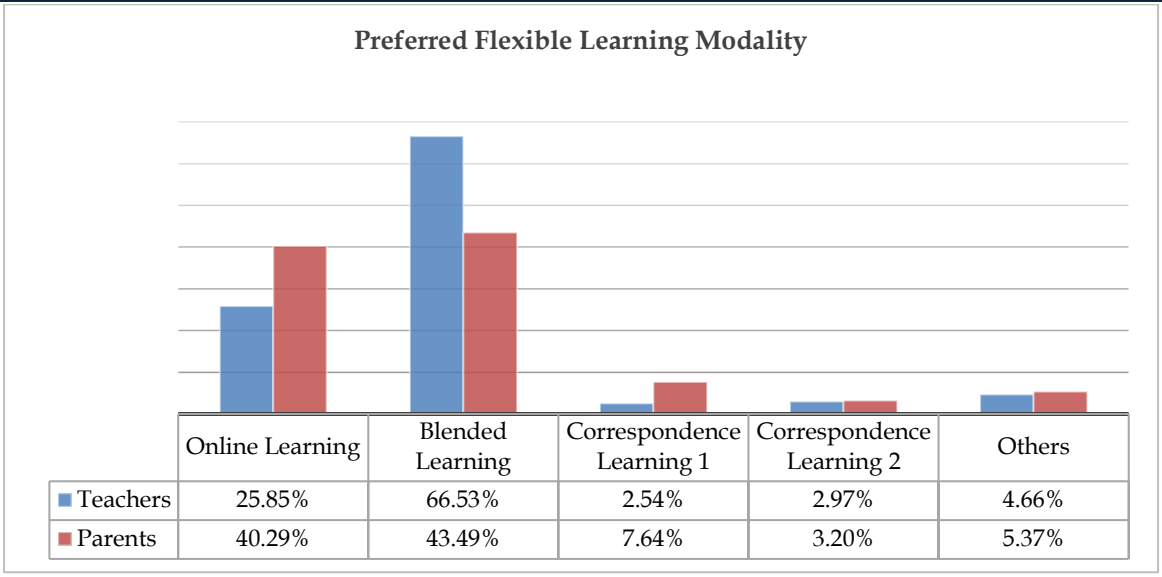
RESULTS

A. Perceptions and Readiness for Flexible Learning



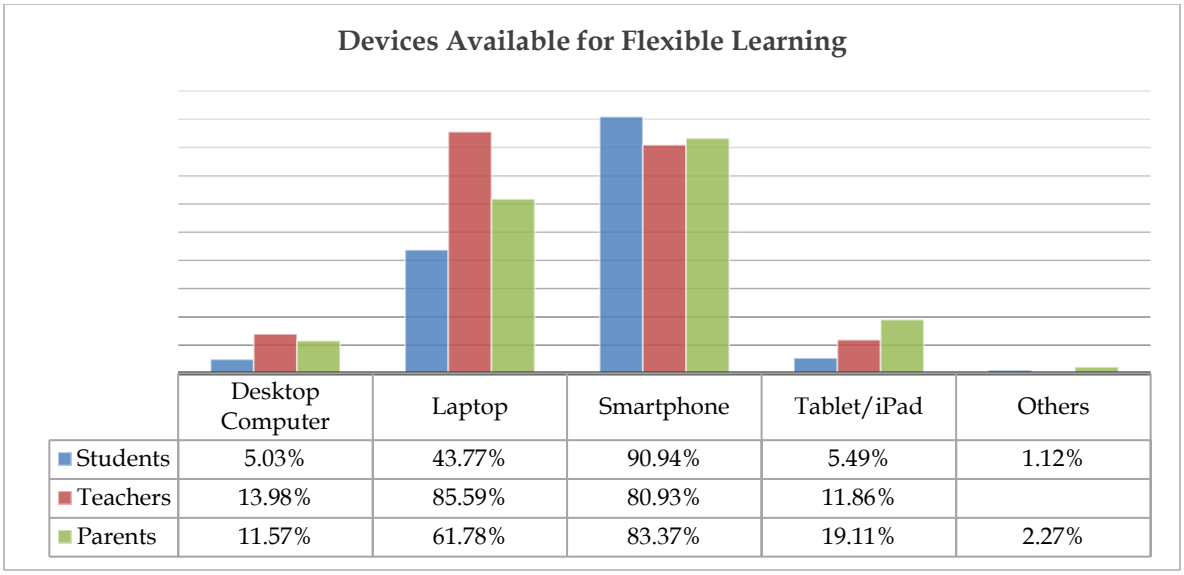
	Students	Teachers	Parents
Yes	17.29%	80.51%	80.89%
No	46.26%	19.49%	19.11%
Not Sure	36.45%		

The figure above shows that majority of the parents (80.89%) and faculty members (80.51%) are in favor of adopting flexible learning as mode of instruction for the incoming academic year. However, students are either not in favor (46.26%) or are not sure (36.45%) of the use of flexible learning.



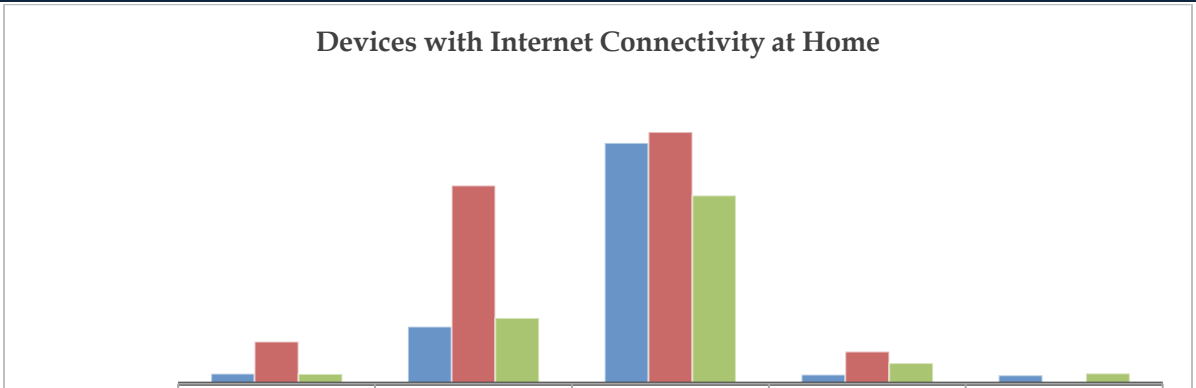
	Online Learning	Blended Learning	Correspondence Learning 1	Correspondence Learning 2	Others
Teachers	25.85%	66.53%	2.54%	2.97%	4.66%
Parents	40.29%	43.49%	7.64%	3.20%	5.37%

It can be gleaned from the table above that parents and faculty members are most in favor of the use of Blended Learning (43.49% and 66.53% respectively) followed by Online Learning (40.29% and 25.85%, respectively). No data is presented for the students' response as this question was not included in the students' survey.



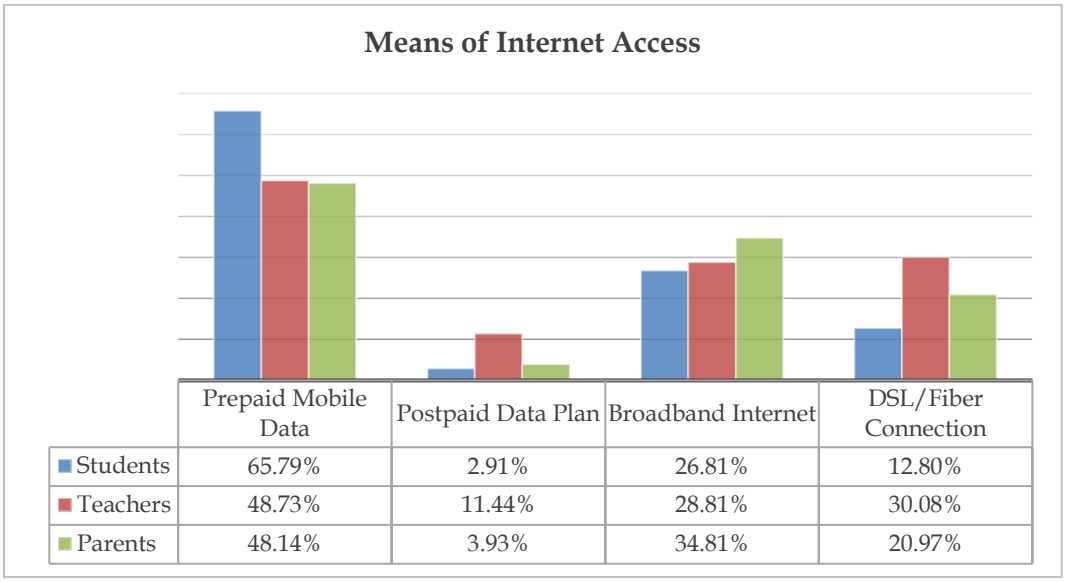
	Desktop Computer	Laptop	Smartphone	Tablet/iPad	Others
Students	5.03%	43.77%	90.94%	5.49%	1.12%
Teachers	13.98%	85.59%	80.93%	11.86%	
Parents	11.57%	61.78%	83.37%	19.11%	2.27%

The figure above shows that smartphone is the predominant device available for use in Flexible Learning as reported by students (90.94%) and parents (83.37%) while faculty members reported that laptop (85.59%) is the most available device for flexible learning.



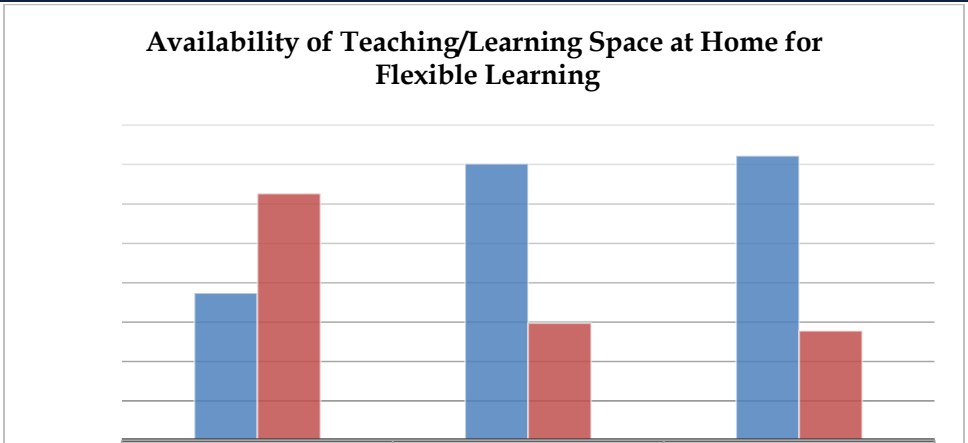
	Desktop Computer	Laptop	Smartphone	Tablet/iPad	Others
Students	3.37%	19.49%	82.34%	3.08%	2.87%
Teachers	14.41%	67.80%	86.02%	11.02%	
Parents	3.31%	22.52%	64.36%	7.02%	3.51%

The figure above shows that students (82.34%), parents (64.36%) and faculty members (86.02%) report that internet is accessed most commonly through the use of smartphones.



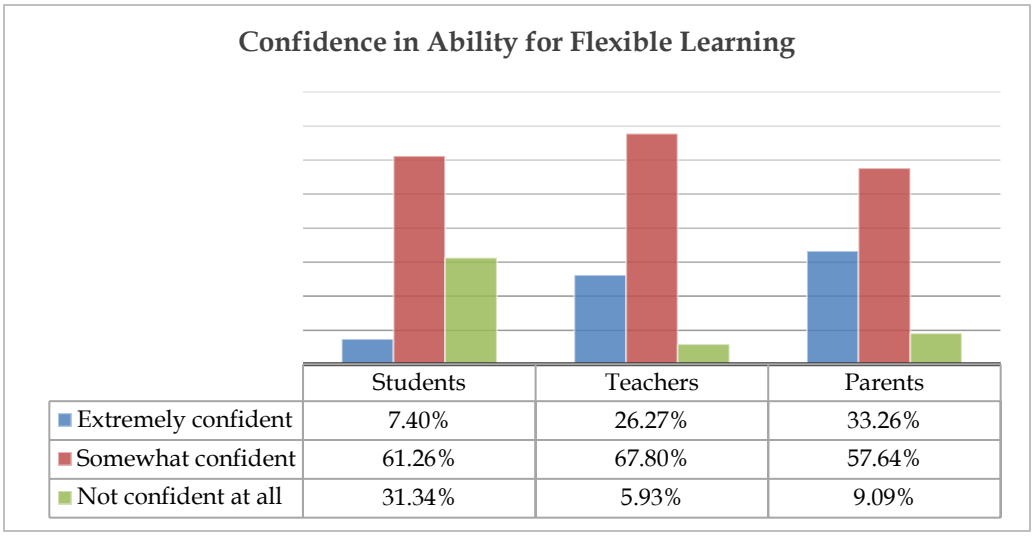
	Prepaid Mobile Data	Postpaid Data Plan	Broadband Internet	DSL/Fiber Connection
Students	65.79%	2.91%	26.81%	12.80%
Teachers	48.73%	11.44%	28.81%	30.08%
Parents	48.14%	3.93%	34.81%	20.97%

Internet connectivity of students as reported by the students (65.79%) and by the parents (48.14%) is most commonly done via the use of Prepaid Mobile data followed by Broadband access and DSL/Fiber connection. This trend is likewise observed for faculty members.



	Students	Teachers	Parents
Yes	37.36%	70.21%	72.21%
No	62.64%	29.79%	27.79%

The figure above shows that majority of students (62.64%) reported that they do not have a learning space at home that is free of distractions which can be used for performing and completing Flexible Learning tasks; however, majority of parents (72.21%) reported that their children have such learning space available. Moreover, majority of faculty members (70.21%) also reported that space at home for Flexible Learning activities is available.



	Students	Teachers	Parents
Extremely confident	7.40%	26.27%	33.26%
Somewhat confident	61.26%	67.80%	57.64%
Not confident at all	31.34%	5.93%	9.09%

It can be gleaned from the figure above that majority of parents (57.64%) and students (61.26%) reported that they are somewhat confident in the students' ICT skills and capabilities needed for Flexible Learning. Majority of faculty members (67.80%) are also somewhat confident in their ICT skills and capabilities needed for Flexible teaching. Basic ICT skills are very important in determining human readiness for technology-based education.

B. Students Online Learning Experience

Category	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Students' experience with Online Learning	Yes	1793	74.52
	No	613	25.48
Time spent on online learning	Less than 3 hours	424	17.62
	3-5 hours	725	30.13
	6-8 hours	597	24.81
	More than 8 hours	660	27.43
Satisfaction with online learning experience	Satisfied	123	6.47
	Somewhat satisfied	857	45.08
	Not satisfied	921	48.45
Preference mode of lesson delivery in LMS	Downloadable Video Lectures	1319	29.09
	Downloadable Documents	1879	41.44
	Lessons and Learning Tasks in the Learning Platform	1228	27.08
	Others	108	2.38

The table above shows that majority of students (74.52%) have experienced online learning. The student survey was answered by all students of the university; however, only Senior High School, College and Graduate School students have used the university's Learning Management System (LMS) which is a platform used by the university for online learning. Most students who have experienced online learning have spent an average of about 3-5 hours (30.13%) for their online learning tasks. Meanwhile, nearly half of the students claim that they are not satisfied (48.45%) with their online learning experience and prefer lessons posted online to be done via downloadable documents (41.44%).

C. Parents Participation in Flexible Learning

Category	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Periodic monitoring of child's progress in Flexible Learning	Yes	760	79.08
	No	201	20.92
Provision of assistance to child for Flexible Learning activities	Yes	669	69.61
	No	43	4.47
	Not Sure	249	25.91

The table shows that majority of parents are willing to do periodic monitoring of their children's progress in Flexible Learning (79.08%) and will ensure that children who are doing Flexible Learning activities are provided assistance (69.61%).

CONCLUSION

The university is looking into flexible learning, an alternative mode of delivering lesson content to students, as a means of adapting to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic on education. The results of this study indicate that parents and teachers are in favor of adopting flexible learning for the incoming academic year 2020-2021. The students and faculty members were also found to possess the basic tools that are needed for the adoption of flexible learning in the university. These tools include available devices or gadgets that have internet connectivity, available learning areas at home for flexible learning activities, basic ICT skills, and previous experience with online learning. Moreover, parents have shown support for the use of flexible learning which is crucial in ensuring success of any educational endeavor. However, certain issues must also be addressed in order to ensure the success of flexible learning implementation by the university. These issues include the use of prepaid mobile data for internet connectivity, lack of satisfaction with existing online learning strategies by students, and average level confidence in ICT skills and capabilities of students and faculty members.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following are recommended:

1. An exploration of the students' issues and concerns with flexible learning must be done to better accommodate their needs regarding its implementation;
2. The administration should consider implementing blended learning in which face-to-face interactions must be done when possible to supplement lesson content delivered via online platforms;
3. In-service trainings and seminars must be implemented to enhance faculty members' ICT skills and capabilities and make them more confident in the use of technology-based education environments;
4. As internet connectivity is essential in flexible learning, ways to assist both faculty members and students to have better and more stable internet access must be considered;
5. Orientations about flexible learning must be done to make students and parents better understand it and foster acceptance of this teaching-learning strategy;

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