

Lived experiences of teachers in the implementation of flexible learning: a descriptive phenomenological study

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ABSTRACT

Flexible learning (FL) is a method that allows learners to have freedom in how, what, when, and where they learn. For teachers, implementing various teaching strategies and approaches is essential to overcome educational challenges and effectively meet the needs of learners. This research study was conducted to explore teachers lived experiences during FL at Visayas State University (VSU) in Baybay City, Leyte. A descriptive phenomenological method was used to investigate the richness and depth of the informants' lived experiences. The seven participants were interviewed: five from the VSU Main Campus and two from the satellite campuses. The participants shared their experiences through in-depth interviews. The findings revealed that during the pandemic, teachers faced challenges due to the abrupt changes in the learning management system (LMS). However, with the administrative support, the participants managed to adjust and learn new learning modalities. The study suggests the need to strengthen and continue the professional development of teachers in using LMSs for sustainability. It also recommends exploring the development and adaptation of interactive online modules to keep up with digitalization as part of 21st-century skills.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The paradigm of flexible learning (FL) has emerged as a critical pedagogical approach in contemporary higher education, emphasizing learner autonomy in time, place, and mode of study. This shift has been significantly catalyzed by advancements in digital technologies, enabling educators to design diverse learning environments tailored to the individual needs of learners. FL modalities, encompassing online, blended, and self-paced learning, offer opportunities for personalized and responsive educational experiences [1].

In the Philippines, higher education institutions (HEIs) underwent a rapid transition to emergency flexible teaching in response to the COVID-19 pandemic [2]. This transition, mandated to ensure educational continuity amidst widespread closures [3], involved the adoption of modified online learning strategies [4]. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) promptly issued guidelines for HEIs to implement FL, prioritizing the safety of learners [5], [6]. This abrupt shift presented significant challenges for teachers and teacher educators, impacting both their professional and personal lives. Studies indicate a substantial increase in teacher workload as they adapted content and resources for online delivery [7]. Despite facing obstacles, educators demonstrated remarkable adaptability, mastering new technologies and pedagogical approaches to facilitate distance learning [8].

While existing research on FL has predominantly focused on student experiences, including self-regulated learning and technological self-efficacy [4], [9] and anecdotal accounts of teacher adaptation [10], [11], a comprehensive understanding of teachers' lived experiences remains limited. To address this gap, this study employs a descriptive phenomenological approach, which aims to elucidate the essence of teachers' perceptions and experiences with FL [12], [13]. By bracketing preconceptions and focusing on firsthand accounts, this methodology facilitates a comprehensive examination of how FL impacts teachers' educational journeys.

This research distinguishes itself by providing an in-depth analysis of the implementation of FL in Philippine HEIs during the pandemic, encompassing modular, synchronous, and asynchronous modalities. It offers a novel framework for evaluating institutional readiness, faculty adaptability, and student engagement, thus contributing to the development of resilient and inclusive higher education systems. By documenting the lived experiences of teacher educators through a descriptive phenomenological lens, this study offers unique insights into the challenges and adaptations encountered during this critical period.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research design

A phenomenological research design was used in this investigation. This descriptive phenomenological method aims to describe the essence of experiences and their underlying structures (constituents) and commonalities in meanings to be understood. The descriptive phenomenological method was chosen to discover the meanings constituting the essential teaching structure using FL modalities [14].

2.2. Research participants

In compliance with the data-gathering strategies of the descriptive phenomenological method [15], seven informants from Visayas State University (VSU) agreed to participate in the study. A set of criteria was made to select participants, as in Table 1. Participants should be working as teachers during the new normal, utilizing FL approaches. Maximum variation was observed, specifically in terms of sex, years of service, and workload units, when selecting informants.

Table 1. Criteria of participants

Criteria of participants	Inclusion/exclusion
Sex	Male and female
Years in service	Entry level (5 to 10 years); (10 to 20 years); 20 years above
Workload units	Minimum workload 18 units teaching load (with no admin function) 12 units teaching load (with an admin function/ research) above minimum workload

2.3. Research locale

This study was conducted among teacher educators from VSU's main and satellite campuses, utilizing both video conferencing and face-to-face interactions.

2.4. Research procedures

The in-depth interview was administered for 45 minutes to 1 hour [16]. The interviews were transcribed. The structure of the interview questions helped tease out the 'richness of the informants' personal experience' during their study. The structure of the themes explored was explicitly related to teachers lived experiences in implementing FL. A preliminary meeting is an "opportunity to establish trust with participants, review ethical considerations, and complete consent forms". At this meeting, permission was sought to assure anonymity and confidentiality before proceeding to a recorded interview [16].

2.5. Data analysis

The descriptive phenomenological method was used in the study. In Giorgi's method of phenomenological analysis, four steps were considered: i) reading the interview transcripts several times in order to get the overall meaning of the experience, ii) discerning the meaning units from the text read, iii) expressing the constituents of these meaning units, and iv) synthesizing the meaning units together with their constituents by making a general structure of the experience. In this study, the term "constituents" was preferred over "themes" to clarify how meaning units interact with each other in forming the general structure. To be coherent within this approach, the analysis requires a strategy that is mindful of a "back and forth" movement between particular meanings and the overall sense of the text or experience. A "part meaning" is thus not given more value simply because it occurs more frequently. This is why the term

“content analysis” is avoided, and the term “constituent” is often used in order to indicate a concern with how the ‘part meanings’ function together and interactively make up the whole [17].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the informants’ narratives, four constituents: i) abrupt challenges encountered, ii) transition to FL, iii) support availability, and iv) acquire new skills. These were identified, describing the lived experiences of VSU teachers on implementing FL during the pandemic. Each constituent is represented as follows:

3.1. Constituent 1: abrupt challenges encountered

The onset of the pandemic necessitated the implementation of FL, which presented several challenges, including difficulties with using the learning management system (LMS), uncertainty in creating modules, unstable internet connectivity for students and colleagues, and limited communication with students, as in Table 2. Using the LMS is like “groping in the dark” [Informant 1]. One reason was that it was a new learning system, and teachers were unprepared to manipulate the LMS [Informants 1 and 3]. On the other hand, Informant 3 mentioned that using the VSU Electronic Environment (VSUEE) as a new LMS was challenging because he missed the orientation. While teachers were challenged by using the LMS, students experienced the same. Informant 6 observed that some learners were not digitally literate using LMS. They have to explore the LMS to assist the learner, for example, enrolling in the LMS. Informant 2, who had prior experience with other LMSs, had used and adopted other LMSs before the pandemic at the university, where students could answer questions on their computer, and an automated result would appear afterward. They found using the new LMS to be somewhat helpful.

Table 2. Abrupt challenges encountered

Meaning units	Description
Difficulty in the usage of LMS	<p>Informant 1 was groping in the dark to navigate the LMS.</p> <p>Informant 2 found using FL to be challenging due to the new learning system and not being prepared to manipulate the LMS.</p> <p>Informant 3 lacked the training to use VSUEE.</p> <p>Informant 6 noticed some students are not digitally literate.</p> <p>Informants 2 and 6 questioned the authenticity of the students’ outputs.</p> <p>Informant 2 had used and adopted other LMS before the pandemic at the university, where students could answer questions on their computers, and an automated result would appear afterward.</p>
Uncertainty about crafting the modules	<p>Informant 1, who was not exposed to craft modules, felt that crafting the modules (both print and online) was very tedious due to the limited time available.</p> <p>Informant 5 stated that they were allowed to include only limited content in the learning assessment due to the academic ease policy.</p> <p>Informant 5 mentioned that they experienced missing out on the submission of the students/did not receive some students’ submissions.</p> <p>Informant 5 mentioned that faculty members were also assigned to deliver printed copies of the modules.</p> <p>Informant 2 stated that the printing of modules was very fast in the department. No faculty member was behind, as they were helping each other.</p>
Unstable internet connectivity with students and colleagues	<p>Informant 2 stated that not all faculty members and students had a good internet connection to do online and digital modular modes of learning.</p> <p>Informant 3 mentioned that there is a delay in submission and that only a few of her students have attended her online class due to poor internet connections.</p> <p>Informant 6 mentioned that it was difficult to communicate with students due to a lack of internet connectivity.</p> <p>Informant 5 said it was tiring to upload learning materials and enroll students in a virtual classroom.</p>
Limited communication with students	<p>Informant 4 stated that it’s difficult to provide direct feedback on their laboratory outputs due to limited access to communication.</p> <p>Informant 3 mentioned that in the conduct of the exam, she could not properly observe if her students were able to answer it with all honesty since the exam was online. No direct feedback was made.</p> <p>Informant 1 mentioned that there was no immediate feedback on students’ output due to their big class size. Not all students responded to online announcements regarding posted tasks.</p> <p>Informant 5 stated that students frequently requested deadline extensions.</p> <p>Informant 6 stated that communication with students was impersonal because she did not have the opportunity to see the students’ reactions.</p> <p>Informant 2 stated that although the students had the option to submit their learning tasks on the designated drop-box in the university, Informant 2 encouraged her students to submit the requirements via Gmail.</p>

Crafting a module is a crucial teacher activity, as it involves tedious preparations, including integrating all necessary lessons and teaching strategies that align with each lesson and its corresponding assessment. However, the informants shared that they needed more exposure to craft modules (both print and online) and felt it was tedious due to the limited time [Informants 1, 3, and 7]. Given the urgency of delivering the needed competency despite the lockdown, creating the modules was urgent. However, they were tasked with creating a module that required computations and worksheets. Informant 5 challenges the need to simplify modules, especially in accounting subjects.

To complicate matters, some teachers may be teaching new subjects as the institution transitions to a new curriculum. Informant 1 felt that developing a module was demanding, considering that teaching 4 new subjects and supplying the necessary materials needed to be increased. Additionally, Informant 1 converted the physical module into an online one. Printed modules were prepared as part of the early implementation of FL. Informant 5 mentioned that faculty were also assigned to deliver copies of the modules; they were helping hands to make the work handy despite uncertainty. Informant 2 stated that the printing of modules was fast in her department. No faculty was behind since they were helping each other.

Apart from the difficulty in using the LMS and the uncertainty of crafting the modules, the informants faced the daunting problem of unstable internet connectivity with students and colleagues. As teachers scrambled to perform their tasks, they observed that not all faculty members and students had a good internet connection to online and digital modular learning modes [Informants 1-7]. In effect, some teachers felt tired of uploading the learning materials [Informant 5], submissions were delayed [Informant 3], and participation in online classes was limited [Informants 1-7]. While it was understandable, Informant 2 felt disrespected by the few students during online classes. She compares it to face-to-face, where students are fully required to be physically present [Informant 2].

The abrupt challenges also included limited communication with students. The informants were compared to those in face-to-face, where it was easier to communicate and provide feedback [Informants 3, 4, and 7]. Class size matters during communication. Giving feedback on students' output was challenging due to their big class size (around 50). Informant 5 observed less interaction among students during online classes. Students could have been more responsive during online classes, but some students always requested to extend deadlines. Informant 6 said communication with students was impersonal because she did not see the students' reactions.

On the other hand, when a teacher is exposed to a variety of teaching tools, they tend to be more resourceful. Informant 2, an educational technology teacher, resorted to using different means of communication. She said that although students could submit their learning tasks to the designated drop-box at the university, Informant 2 encouraged her students to submit the requirements via Gmail.

3.2. Constituent 2: transition to flexible learning

As the teaching and learning of teachers and students continued despite the onset of the pandemic, the transition to FL and education was also evident. This includes adjusting university course policies, regaining mental health and self-confidence, and adapting the LMS in the teaching process, as in Table 3. Teachers can adjust to implementing FL by creating schemes to check online outputs, particularly in laboratory classes and online examinations. However, Informants 2 and 3 noted that students often took advantage of course policies that allowed them extended deadlines, leading to leniency in submitting and complying. This situation required teachers to wait patiently for final submissions. Despite all these, Informants 2 and 3 overcame the mental struggles they faced at the onset of the pandemic through teaching and checking outputs online. Informant 7 expressed happiness in learning new modalities and innovative teaching strategies despite facing mental and emotional constraints such as lack of motivation and fatigue, as noted by Informants 7 and 1. Informant 6 added concerns about the effectiveness of lesson delivery, and Informant 5 worried about potentially low ratings on the teacher's performance evaluation by students (TPES) due to the imbalance caused by family duties and work-from-home issues. Despite these challenges, teachers gradually healed and gained confidence in handling online classes, leading to improved demonstrations for new students in subsequent semesters.

Adaptation to the LMS of VSU has been a significant aspect of the FL experience. Informants, such as Informant 2, initially felt stressed due to the need to develop expertise in manipulating the VSUEE platform. However, Informants 5 and 2 eventually felt like tech-savvy teachers, having learned to navigate and utilize many features beneficial for teaching various subjects. Informant 7 highlighted that his assessments for clinical and laboratory activities were successfully transitioned online, including online demonstrations and patient-learner demonstrations. Informant 2 conducted class orientations on navigating the VSUEE at the beginning of the class to aid students in adjusting to the new LMS. This initiative helped make the system more user-friendly and supported smoother student transitions. Informant 2 noted that she showed extra patience and understanding regarding extended submission deadlines. However, Informants 2 and 3 occasionally felt offended when students missed online classes without proper notice.

Thus, Informant 2 realized that FL, whether face-to-face or online, facilitates continuous learning. This adaptability underscores the resilience and commitment of both teachers and students in maintaining educational progress under new and often challenging circumstances.

Table 3. Transition to FL

Meaning units	Description
Adjustment of course policies	Informant 2 believes the grading policy discourages students from submitting their outputs, as they will not receive a failing grade but rather a deferred status. Informant 3 initially evaluated his students' laboratory reports in an essay format, then in an encoded form. Still, later, it was adjusted to upload a handwritten one to avoid using AI apps. Informant 3 added that students were lenient in submitting their outputs because of the adjusted policy with the academic ease policy. Informant 4 created a scheme in the class on how she would evaluate the students; instead of 1 minute of taking the online exam, it was modified to 10 seconds.
Regaining mental health and self confidence	Informant 2 surpassed and overcame the mental struggle she initially faced at the onset of teaching online and checking outputs. Informant 7 felt happy since he learned new learning modalities in teaching and innovative teaching strategies. Informant 1 unmotivated to work and felt tired slowly underwent healing the following year of handling the same subject as it built confidence in demonstrating again online classes for a new set of students. Informant 5 believes that she will receive a lower TPES-teacher performance evaluation system score during the FL mode of teaching compared to face-to-face classes.
Adapting to LMS	Informant 2 felt the effect of stress during FL due to her expertise in manipulating the VSU e-learning system. Informant 7 conducted a virtual assessment of a patient-learner online. Informant 7 assessed laboratory and clinical duties that were converted from face-to-face to online status. Informants 5 and 2 utilized the VSUEE, which features many tools useful in teaching subjects such as Educational Technology, and described themselves as tech-savvy. Informant 2 added that extra patience and understanding must be extended to students regarding their submission of outputs, as this was a policy implemented by the university. Informant 2 conducted an orientation among her students on navigating the VSUEE at the beginning of the class to make it more user-friendly for them. Informants 2 and 3 were offended when their students could not attend online classes without proper notice.

3.3. Constituent 3: support availability

Due to the new working scheme brought by the new LMS, the informants received some support while adjusting to FL. The university has provided numerous training sessions, orientations, and seminars on crafting modules and effectively navigating various LMSs, including VSUEE and Google Classroom. The university also provided the informants with LAN wires and a more secure internet connection to enhance internet connectivity. Moreover, colleagues have also been supportive by helping fix technical issues encountered in virtual classrooms. Colleagues were also a dwelling place where they could share their experiences with each other, which improved their relationships. Informants also expressed that their support system affected them positively, allowing them to get through mental stress. One of them is their family, who makes them enjoy their work, as in Table 4.

Table 4. Support availability

Meaning units	Description
Training and workshops provided by the university	Informant 2 was thankful to the university for providing seminars on how to craft modules. Informant 1 received a series of training sessions on manipulating the Google Classroom. Informant 3 underwent orientation from the university regarding the navigation of the LMS, which helped her become familiar with the learning system.
Support of colleagues and family	Informant 1 received assistance from younger faculty members in navigating the LMS and resolving some technical issues. Informant 1 overcame challenging experiences by sharing and expressing experiences and struggles concerning work, family matters, and uncertainties about the pandemic. Informant 4 received help and support from family despite the new teaching setup and eventually enjoyed it. Informant 5 relationships with colleagues improved since they had more time to talk with each other. Informants 1-7 support system affected her positively as it allowed P to go through the struggles of mental stress/issues.
Improved internet connectivity	Informant 2 was provided with an internet LAN wire by the university to improve connectivity.

3.4. Constituent 4: acquire new skills

During the FL period, the informants acquired new skills, as in Table 5. Their responses taught them how to properly navigate the LMS, specifically using VSUEE and Google Classroom as e-learning tools. Informant 1 mentioned that they could use educational technology despite needing to be tech-savvy. Also, Informant 1 enhanced the usage of LMS, such as assigning tasks and reading materials to students for asynchronous classes, which they considered a benefit. Moreover, Informant 7 learned new learning modalities and innovative teaching strategies. Informant 6 emphasized that she was still using the e-learning system because it is paperless, and students no longer have to buy printed handouts. It was also convenient since they uploaded asynchronous activities to VSUEE and waited for students to submit their work [Informant 2]. Informants 2 and 3 learned to record discussions and announcements in the VSUEE and to maximize chat usage for announcements.

Table 5. Acquire new skills

Meaning units	Description
Navigation of LMS	<p>Informant 1 was familiar with the manipulation of educational technology despite being a member of a faculty that is not very tech-savvy.</p> <p>Informant 1 enhanced the use of LMS, such as assigning tasks and reading materials to students for asynchronous classes.</p> <p>Informant 7 was pleased with the use of new modalities in teaching and the application of innovative teaching strategies.</p> <p>Informant 6 emphasized that she is still using the e-learning system for paperless transactions among students.</p> <p>Informants 2 and 4 appreciated the use of the VSUEE, finding it convenient in their asynchronous classes. The materials had already been uploaded to the system, and students could wait for their submissions to be reviewed on specific topics discussed.</p> <p>Informants 2 and 3 opted for recorded discussions and announcements in the VSUEE and maximized the use of chat for announcements.</p> <p>Informant 3 made her pre-recording video in advance and uploaded it on VSUEE.</p> <p>Informant 7 crafted modules as a demonstration of their accomplishments at work.</p>
Integration of digital learning materials	<p>Informant 5 started using Google Classroom and VSUEE as virtual classrooms.</p> <p>Informants 1-7 overcame challenges in managing time by looking for resources by modifying or adding to their existing modules.</p> <p>Informant 3 experienced multi-tasking during the FL.</p> <p>Informant 7 expressed happiness about the implementation of limited face-to-face interactions.</p> <p>Informant 7 observed that online/modular learning solved the problem of having an insufficient number of classrooms.</p>
Coping skills	<p>Informant 7 maintains their well-being by having conversations with colleagues.</p> <p>Informant 6 realized that it was beneficial to utilize VSUEE and other technologies, as long as one does not resist.</p>

Another skill informants learned during the FL was integrating digital learning materials into FL. Informant 7 mentioned that they had crafted their learning modules as part of their accomplishments at work. Additionally, Informant 5 specifically utilized Google Classroom and VSUEE as their virtual learning platforms. Informant 3 shared that she could make her own recorded video in advance and then upload it to VSUEE. She added that using these materials enabled her to become tech-savvy and utilize online applications as a learning strategy.

Lastly, the informants demonstrated a high level of coping mechanism during FL. The informants overcame challenges by seeking various resources to enhance the content of their module. [Informant 3] also stated that her experience allowed her to be a multi-tasker. Informant 7 felt happy about the limited face-to-face setup and expressed that FL (online and modular learning) solved the problems of insufficient classrooms. Informant 7 also added that they maintained their well-being despite having mental issues by having conversations with their colleagues. Finally, Informant 6 mentioned that it was challenging, but later on, it was good to use the technologies as long as one accepts learning the new LMS.

3.5. Discussion

All facets of life, including the delivery of education, have been severely disturbed by COVID-19. As a means of containing the pandemic, educational campuses began to close globally in early 2020, adhering to social distance rules [18]. In light of the uncertain future, all extracurricular, academic, and co-curricular activities came to a complete halt. However, learning must continue; hence, VSU ventured into FL.

3.5.1. Abrupt challenges encountered

The implementation of FL has presented significant challenges to teachers, including difficulties with using the LMS, uncertainty in creating modules, unstable internet connectivity with students and

colleagues, and limited communication with students. It is a roadblock when teachers lack the competencies to use LMS. Prior exposure to LMS was helpful in navigating the new system. Research has indicated that issues with FL include inconsistent network access for learning that can happen anytime, anywhere; inadequate blended learning orientation; insufficient experience in creating courses and programs for blended learning; and a scarcity of digital devices for online learning [19]. Developing the modules was challenging; it was even more difficult to convert them into online courses. Institutional and stakeholder support was helpful. In order to maintain teaching and learning during the pandemic, it is necessary to analyze the rules that govern the university's operations from the viewpoints of all parties involved, including the professors, students, curriculum, and outside stakeholders [20]. The suggested support enhancements could take many different forms, like paying for faculty members' subscriptions to well-known social media platforms, offering guidance on plans and decisions as they change, and providing resources for faculty and students who are having trouble making the switch to online learning. A review has shown that it is impractical to anticipate that instructors and students will easily transition to virtual learning environments by replicating behaviors and procedures that were effective in face-to-face instruction [20]. At the very least, institutional support should involve offering suitable assistance for technical problems in online learning, educating instructors and students on how to take advantage of online learning engagement opportunities, and pledging to support the creation of multimedia educational resources that are specifically suited for online environments [21]. A study has shown that teachers' most common strategies for overcoming the difficulties caused by the pandemic were resource management and utilization, help-seeking, improving technical aptitude, time management, and control over the learning environment [22].

3.5.2. Transition to flexible learning

The transition to FL has been a significant shift in educational paradigms, especially accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Part of this involves transitioning the teachers to the new teaching and learning environment. Teachers and teacher educators are transitioning through uncertain periods in their professional work and personal lives, as well [23]–[25]. This study supported the claims of Informant 2 and Informant 3 that teachers were able to adjust to the implementation of FL as they were able to create schemes on how to check outputs and conduct examinations online. Research by [26]–[28] states that teachers also make the appropriate preparation to equip themselves with distance learning as education migrates to a new normal even though they face obstacles that may impede their work, they manage to adapt to the new standard and complete their tasks. This study confirmed the concerns of Informants 5 and 6, who were worried about potentially low ratings on the TPES due to the imbalance caused by family duties and work-from-home issues. However, teachers gradually gained confidence in handling online classes, leading to improved demonstrations for new students in subsequent semesters.

3.5.3. Support availability

Support availability is crucial in educational settings, particularly in the context of FL. As learning environments evolve to incorporate more digital and remote elements, ensuring that students and educators have access to adequate support systems is essential for maintaining educational quality and equity. Moore *et al.* [29] found that those who received timely technical support were more likely to engage positively with online learning platforms and resources. This finding is consistent with the experiences of many educators, who reported receiving extensive support as they adjusted to FL. The university has provided numerous training sessions, orientations, and seminars on crafting modules and navigating various LMSs, including VSUEE and Google Classroom. Platonova *et al.* [30] highlight that academic support structures, such as virtual office hours and discussion forums, can enhance student engagement and academic performance in online and blended learning environments. This underscores the importance of providing technical support as part of a comprehensive support system. Participants noted that colleagues were also supportive in resolving technical issues encountered in virtual classrooms. This finding aligns with Pozas and Letzel-Alt [31], who reported that peer collaboration is associated with higher job satisfaction and professional growth.

Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of emotional support from colleagues, which helped them express their experiences and improve their relationships. Cavioni *et al.* [32] supports this claim, stating that shared activities build stronger bonds and enhance emotional support among friends and family. Emotional support systems are essential for maintaining teachers' well-being, especially during periods of significant change [33], [34]. Participants also expressed that their support systems positively impacted them by helping them cope with mental stress. For instance, family support made them enjoy their work more, highlighting the importance of comprehensive support systems for the success of FL.

3.5.4. Acquired skills

The transition to FL environments has significantly impacted both students and educators, fostering the development of diverse and impactful skills. This shift, largely driven by the necessity to adapt to remote and hybrid learning models, has led to the acquisition of various competencies. According to Informant 3, the new way of teaching has allowed her to become more tech-savvy, utilizing technology applications as a teaching strategy in online learning. She acquired skills in navigating e-learning systems, including VSUEE and Google Classroom. This is supported by Akram *et al.* [35] who found that the shift to online teaching necessitated the rapid acquisition of technical skills. Educators learned to use a variety of digital tools and platforms, such as LMS, video conferencing software, and interactive online resources. These skills enabled them to design and deliver effective online lessons, manage virtual classrooms, and provide timely feedback. [9], [36] highlights those educators developed competencies in creating and curating digital content, significantly enhancing the online learning experience. This is evident in the responses of Informant 7, who expressed that they accomplished their work and developed competencies by crafting content for modules in preparation for FL.

4. CONCLUSION

At the start of the FL implementation, teachers encountered abrupt challenges related to using the LMS. Specifically, the challenges faced were the development of modules, access to connectivity, and communication with students. The participants emphasized that they needed help using the new LMS, crafting modules for subjects assigned to them, internet connectivity, and numerous barriers to communication with students during FL. However, as the implementation progressed, teachers have gradually adapted to the process and adjustment of course policies during FL. Despite the challenges, the teachers appreciated the advantages it brought them in teaching and learning. They regained their mental health and self-confidence as teachers and individuals. Institutional support was significant to the transition to FL. It has enabled teachers to navigate the Moodle-based VSUEE and craft learning modules effectively. In addition, stakeholders and colleagues also provided them with support. They have provided assistance, such as work and a confidant, during the pandemic. Eventually, teachers acquired new skills in navigating the LMS, integrating digital learning materials, and coping with challenges during FL.

The researchers suggest that the new LMS be continued as it demonstrates the benefits it brought to the teachers despite the challenges met during the pandemic. The use of the university's e-learning system, such as VSUEE, can be continued and improved by adding features like developing online interactive modules and including automated feedback where students receive corrections and suggestions for improving their tasks. This helps teachers be more efficient in teaching and learning, as they are not always available. In this way, students will learn immediately through corrections while decoding lesson information. This will save teachers time, allowing them to focus more on designing activities and assessments that measure higher-order thinking skills. The researchers would also recommend that the institution continue its usual support by organizing training and seminars in navigating technologies used as a tool in learning and teaching, especially in the FL method, and to sustain in providing quality internet connection for teachers and students on campus.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

This journal uses the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognize individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes, and facilitate collaboration.

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C : Conceptualization

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R : Resources

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Fu : Funding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to the research, authorship, or publication of this article. They affirm that there are no financial, personal, or institutional relationships that could have inappropriately influenced or biased the content of this work. Additionally, no funding bodies had any role in the study design, data collection, analysis, decision to publish, or manuscript preparation.

INFORMED CONSENT

The authors obtained informed consent from all participants in this study. Prior to their participation, each individual was provided with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. All participants voluntarily agreed to participate and provided their consent, either in written or electronic form, ensuring they had a full understanding and were willing to participate.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The derived data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [CMD], upon request. Interested researchers or individuals may contact the corresponding author to obtain access to the data, subject to any applicable ethical considerations, confidentiality agreements, or institutional regulations. Any request for data will be evaluated to ensure compliance with privacy and research integrity standards.

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