

Higher Education Instructors' Self-Assessment of Implementation of Flexible Learning Guidelines

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Abstract. This descriptive quantitative study discusses the instructors' implementation of the flexible learning guidelines during the pandemic as perceived in their self-assessment results. Assessing how the instructors dealt with the flexible learning modality will lead to better curricular planning and implementation in higher education in the new normal. Using a survey rating scale and checklist, the respondents rated their own implementation of the flexible guidelines. A self-assessment process can facilitate curricular and instructional improvements on the part of the instructor, upgrading the professional stance of these teachers and achieving the standard guidelines set along the way. Results showed that the instructors are Always implementing the flexible learning guidelines specifically on the general guidelines, requirements and qualifications for flexible learning, implementing policies and procedures on facilitating online teaching, social-emotional learning, rules and discipline, teacher organization and communication, assessment, support services, and adherence to data privacy. Yet, the instructors had a lower rating on assessment which means a need for support on online assessment. Also, the instructors expressed their concerns on the LMS, virtual synchronous platform, access and connectivity, students' concerns, and general concerns on teachers' coursework and online learning. It is recommended to conduct impact studies on flexible learning and to provide further professional development sessions to enrich the curriculum and instruction needs of instructors.

Keywords: flexible learning, instructor self-assessment, new normal curriculum, online assessment, continuous instructional development

Introduction

In response to the disruptions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) sent Memorandum Order No. 04 Series of 2020 on Guidelines on the Implementation of Flexible Learning applicable to all public and private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the country. The University of San Jose - Recoletos, being a premier university in the Visayas, addresses the needs of its student clientele by being one with CHED in its rationale for flexible learning stating the "urgent need to explore other innovative learning modalities that will facilitate migration from traditional to flexible teaching and learning options" (CMO No. 04 s. 2020). With this, the university published the "USJ-R Guidelines on the Implementation of Flexible Learning Effective Academic Year 2020-2021."

The university's Flexible Learning Guidelines (FLG), which is based from CMO No. 04 s. 2020, banks on emergency remote teaching and learning which addresses 21st century education and UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goals. Highlighting SDG 4: Quality Education, providing new situated learning opportunities promotes inclusion and action through a continuing program in the tertiary level. Reimers and Schleicher (2020) in their OECD report proposes that leaders and organizations must develop plans (i.e. guidelines) for the continuation of education. As such, all stakeholders are called to implement the university's Modified Hybrid Learning program guided by "Caritas et Scientia" to continue to serve the community in a virtual environment.

Higher education instructors are relevant stakeholders at the heart of the implementation of these flexible learning guidelines. Saalman (2009) discussed that because higher education is in a continuous changing condition, teachers' role and actions must meet students' needs in an effective online learning environment and must develop a course design which supports active learning in a flexible setup. To do this, linkages must be established between change management and online teaching-learning processes so that the institution through its teachers can overcome the academic disturbance and ensure resumption of

educational activities (Mishra, Gupta, and Shree, 2020). While guidelines, training, and resources were already supplied to assist the instructors in the implementation, the distance and virtual environment setup make it difficult to monitor teachers. A self-assessment process can facilitate instructional improvements on the part of the instructor, upgrading the professional stance of these teachers and achieving the standard guidelines set along the way. This process is maintained through an open-minded, straightforward dialogue with the instructors and how they and the institution can work together on initiatives that deal with the further success of flexible learning.

It is the purpose of this paper to discuss the self-assessment results of the university instructors in their implementation of the Flexible Learning Guidelines during this pandemic. The perceptions of the instructors in their own implementation of these guidelines will become a gateway for the institution, through the Office of Curriculum and Instruction, to set improvement initiatives on the delivery means and computer-mediated teaching and learning (LMS), teacher and learner issues, online support services, among other concerns.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative descriptive survey method through Microsoft Forms. The online survey questionnaire, which was taken verbatim from the university Flexible Learning Guidelines, was sent to the departments and were given three weeks to access and complete the form.

The respondents are the instructors and non-teaching faculty of the university actively employed in the Second Semester Academic Year 2020-2021. Out of 320+ faculty expected as respondents for the study, 206 respondents or 64.38% answered the self-assessment survey. Figure 1 shows the number of respondents per department. Of the respondents, 47 are full-time probationary, 88 are full-time permanent, and 71 are part-time instructors.

Figure 1
Faculty Respondents per Department

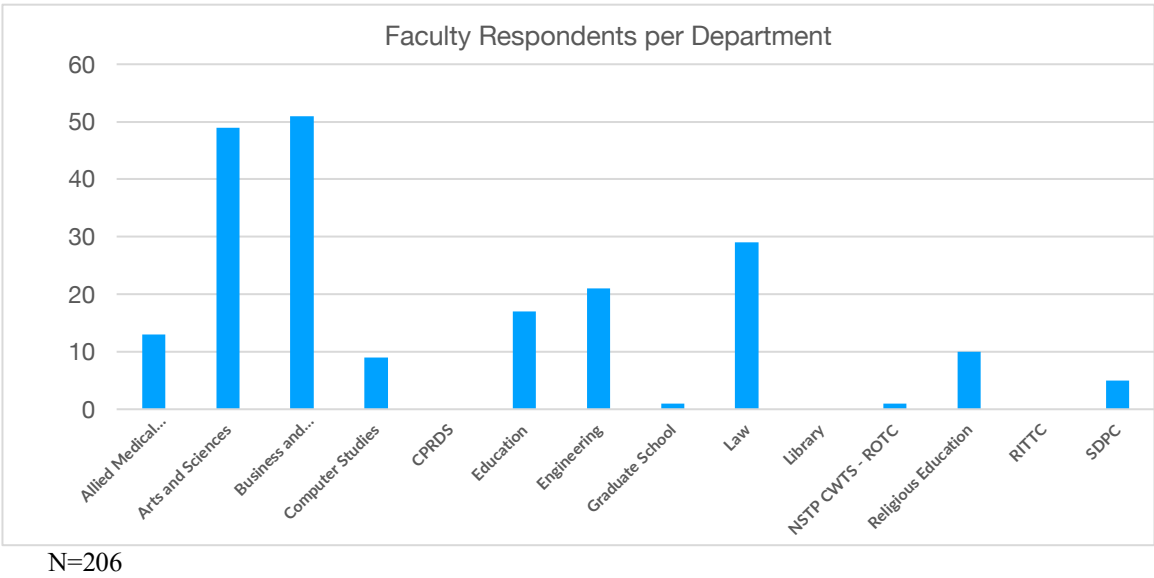
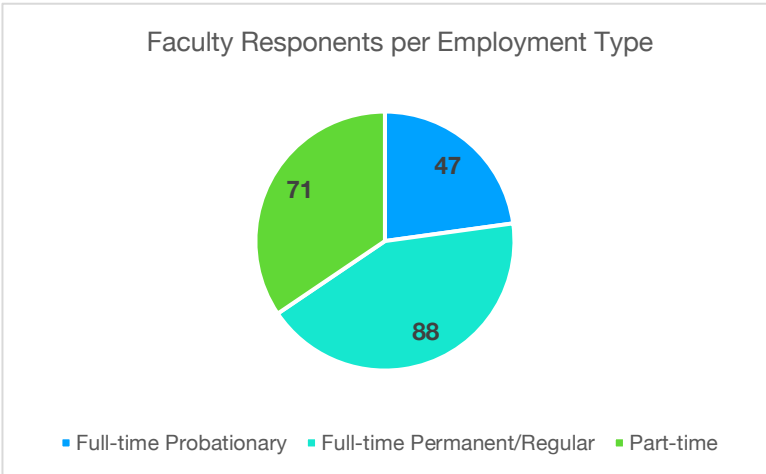


Figure 2
Faculty Respondents per Employment Type



The online questionnaire is composed of six sections. Section 1 is on the demographic profile of the instructor, Section 2 is a rating scale on the FLG General Guidelines taken from III. General Guidelines, Section 3 is a binary choice list on the Requirements and Qualifications for Flexible Learning taken from IV. Implementing Policies and Procedures 1. Requirements and Qualifications, Section 4 is a rating scale on the FLG Implementing Policies and Procedures Items 2-6, Section 5 is a binary choice list on Flexible Learning Support Services for Teachers and Students taken from Items 7-9 and V. Support Services, and Section 6 is an open-ended question asking the respondents on their concerns and suggestions to USJ-R’s implementation of flexible learning. Below are the range scales and their interpretations as applied in this study:

Rating Scale	Binary Choice
5.00 – 4.21 Always implemented	2.00 – 1.51 Yes, Implemented
4.20 – 3.41 Often implemented	1.50 – 1.00 No, Not implemented
3.40 – 2.61 Sometimes implemented	
2.60 – 1.81 Rarely implemented	
1.80 – 1.00 Never implemented	

The results per section were computed through percentages and weighted mean, and were analyzed based on the interpretations of the ranges above. Confidentiality and secure collection of the instructors’ responses were assured as part of data privacy efforts.

Results and Discussion

The following are the results of the survey on the instructors’ self-assessment of the implementation of the Flexible Learning Guidelines.

Figure 3 indicates the survey results on the instructors’ implementation of the FLG general guidelines. All items got an average interpretation of Always implemented with ratings higher than 4.3. The instructors gave a 4.82 mean (highest) on the item “establish means for engagement communication such as SMS, email, chat, instant messaging, and others” which would mean that they see it as their responsibility to communicate well with their students during the flexible learning implementation. On the other hand, the instructors rated their attendance in flexible learning capacity-building or professional development programs as 4.37, the lowest in the items. Mishra, Gupta, and Shree (2020) in their study identified communication as one of the necessary skills instructors have to deal with in online teaching especially in the pandemic. They added that the communication done with learners must be coupled with proficient computer knowledge, clarity of expression, and emotional connection. The researchers also seconded that with ICT tools to better communicate with learners among other needed tasks in teaching and in the university, technical preparedness and online education resources including training programmes must be provided but on a long-term basis. Pokhrel and Chhetri seconded the need for teacher trainings by stating that online and distance learning need a different range of pedagogy and so teachers especially who are technologically backward require proper professional development to reorient themselves and assist students better.

Figure 3
FLG General Guidelines

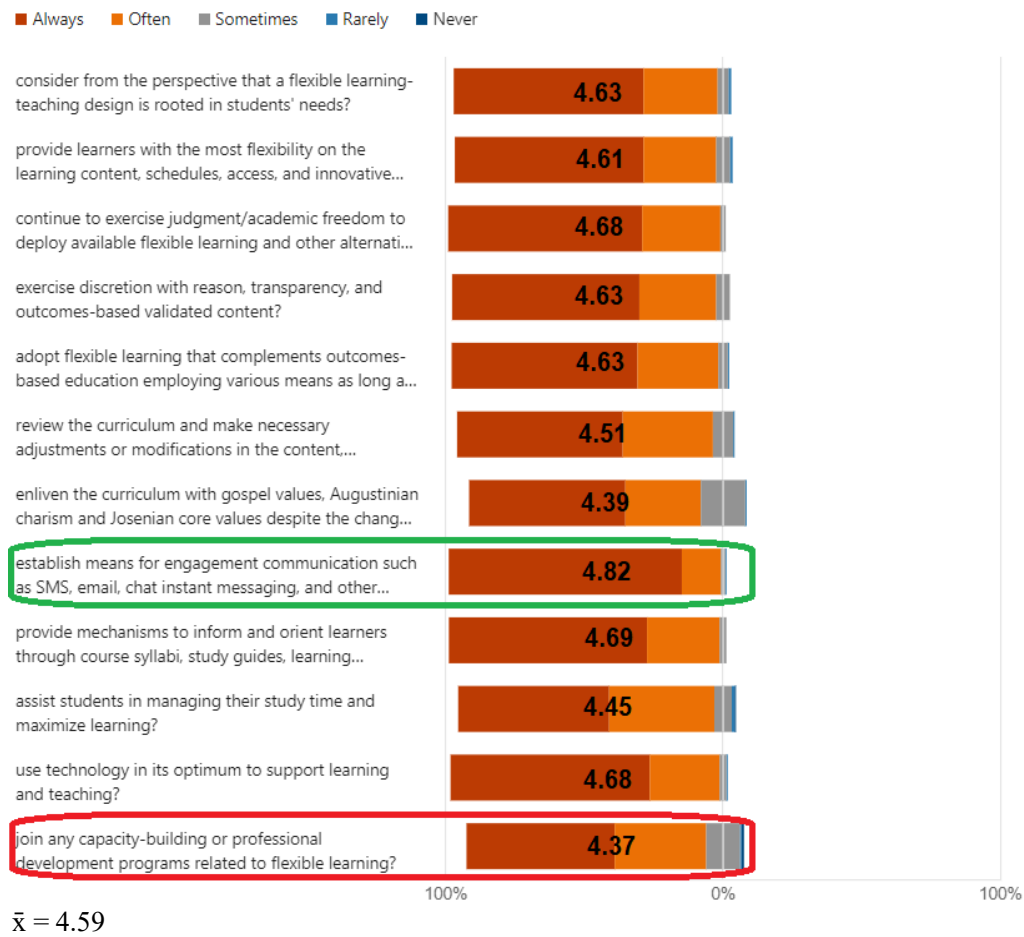


Figure 4 shows the instructors' implementation of the FLG requirements and qualifications. All items got an average interpretation of Yes (Implemented) with ratings very near to 2.0. All instructors rated 'Yes' on the items "have a desktop/laptop as hardware technology requirement" and "become mindful of the ethical standards in virtual learning environments". All USJ-R instructors therefore are able to hold their online classes using a desktop/laptop at home while being mindful of online ethical considerations for themselves and their students. Yet, some teachers said 'No' on having the data allocation of 30 gigabytes/month. In the comments, some instructors suggested for a possible rental of gadgets from school and to increase the monthly allowance instructors receive to cover data allocation and electricity. FutureLearn (2020) in its survey identified that to some extent majority of the stakeholders already possessed smartphones and laptops which are needed resources to implement online teaching-learning. Pokhrel and Chhetri (2020) acknowledged that data packages are costly and internet access is relatively low especially in developing countries. Therefore, policy-level intervention is required which is achieved by the flexible learning guidelines set by the university this academic year.

Figure 4
Requirements and Qualifications for Flexible Learning

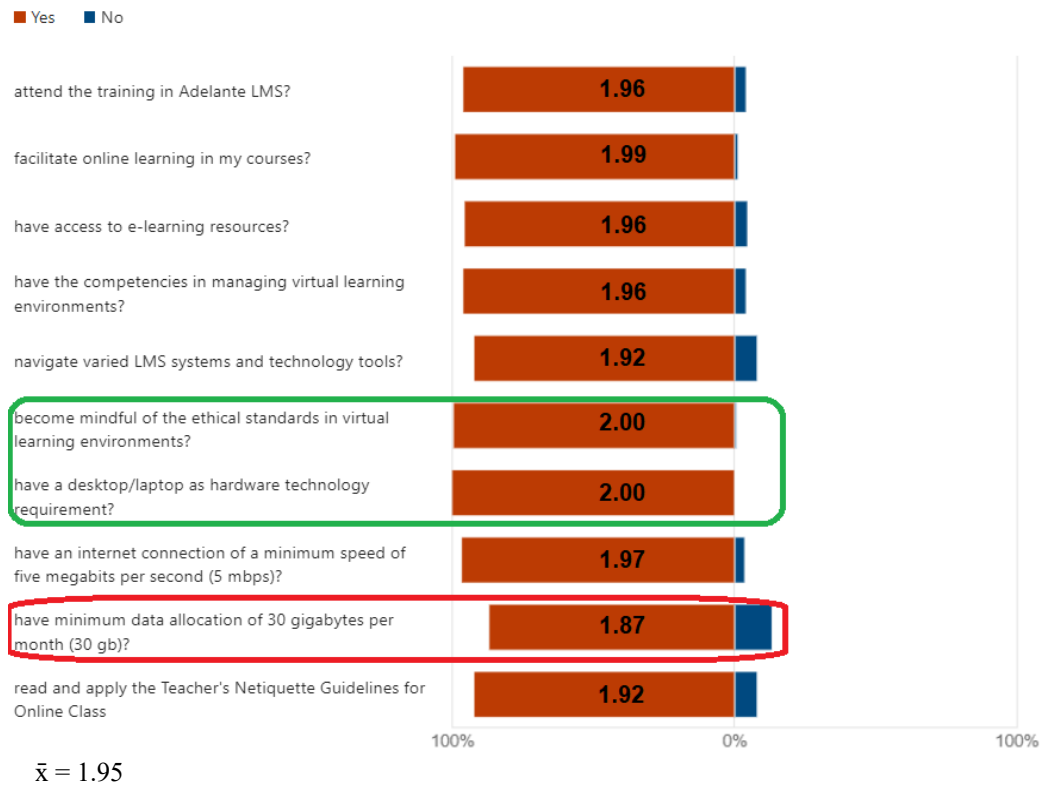


Figure 5
Facilitating Effective Online Teaching to Asynchronous Virtual Learning Arrangement

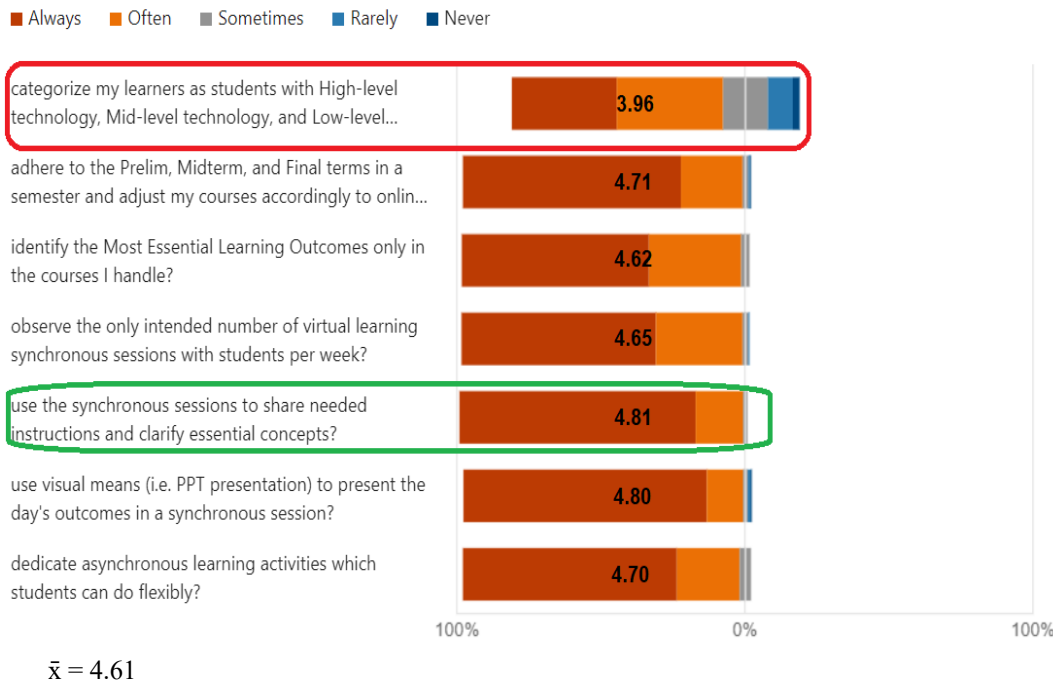


Figure 5 displays the ratings of the instructors in terms facilitating online teaching in both synchronous and asynchronous virtual environments. This set of items got a mean of 4.61 which interprets to “Always implemented.” The item “use the synchronous sessions to share needed instructions and clarify essential concepts” got the highest rating among the instructors with 4.81 while the item “categorize my learners as students with High-level technology, Mid-level technology, and Low-level technology” was rated lowest in all items of this survey with 3.96 (Often implemented). With this we can say that the instructors see the relevance of synchronous session for clarification of instructions and concepts after students read asynchronous resources. On categorizing learners into high, mid, and low levels on technology use, the instructors rated this low as they were not aware of this guideline yet. In all fairness to the university, there was a survey given to students on their capacity for online classes but the results were not shared to the departments and faculty for appropriate action. Section IV Item 10 of CHED Memorandum Order No. 04 Series of 2020 encourages HEIs to determine the level of technology of learners so that the appropriate approaches for flexible learning will be utilized. As to online teaching, OECD (2020) reiterates that despite online teaching and learning being the dominant mode this pandemic, the role of teachers do not diminish but in fact teachers must be providing guidance in students’ self-learning. So if synchronous sessions are done well to clarify only essential concepts and the asynchronous activities assist students’ potentials to achieve outcomes, then facilitating flexible online learning would be easier.

Figure 6
Social and Emotional Online Learning Climate

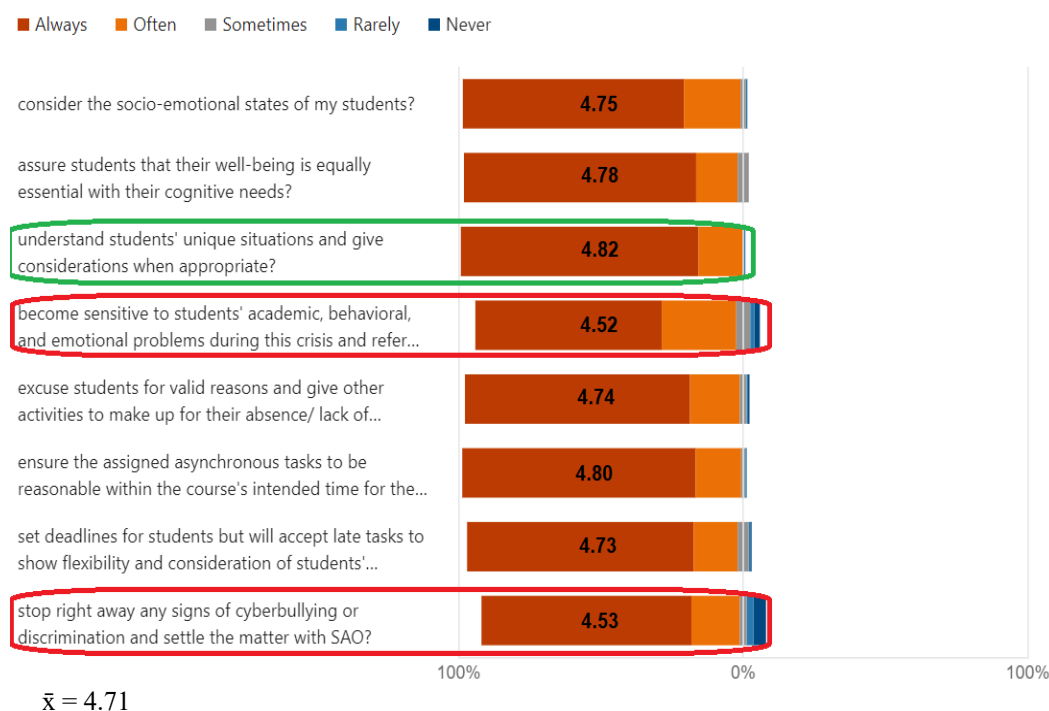


Figure 6 is the instructors’ ratings on their implementation of guidelines related to the social and emotional learning climate in flexible learning. The set received a mean of 4.71 (Always implemented). The instructors got 4.82 on the item “understand students’ unique situations and give considerations when appropriate.” This could mean that teachers showed empathy and understanding towards the students’ situations especially that the pandemic is still on-going. The teachers, however, got lower ratings in the items “become sensitive to students’ academic, behavioral, and emotional problems during this crisis and refer them to SDPC” and “stop right away any signs of cyberbullying or discrimination and settle the matter with SAO” in which both items identify the need for collaboration between support service units within the university. The teacher must then seek assistance from student development offices like SDPC and SAO to cater to varying needs of these learners. Instructors must then be reminded of focusing beyond the academic needs of their students. OECD (2020) identified addressing student emotional health as an important domain to consider as an education response this pandemic. This can be done by addressing the right balance of virtual and off-screen tasks and achieving equity especially with socio-economically disadvantaged students. Philippines, in a recent PISA 2018 survey, got a figure beyond 30% on the number of students dealing with study challenges like having a quiet place, no computer and resources, and unstable internet connection. This would mean that

positive educational outcomes will result from innovative technologies which will manage students’ academic and social needs, as both needs must be met.

Figure 7
Rules and Discipline



Figure 7 presents the instructors’ ratings in their implementation of FLG guidelines on rules and discipline for flexible learning. The set of items got an overall mean of 4.88 (Always implemented). The instructors rated high on the items “observe proper conduct during online classes as stipulated in the faculty manual” and “maintain a positive and respectful learning climate in an online setting” with a 4.92 (Always implemented) rating. This means that the instructors remain professional in their coursework and sees the need to maintain discipline with students despite the difference of modality. The items “decide on rules on when to speak or engage, turn on and off of microphones and videos, and when internet connectivity is low” and “decide on rules on in-class chat, group/individual work, submissions, and examinations” got the lowest ratings in this set, although not that low. This situation implies that some teachers have not identified a set of rules in beginning the semester with students which could assist them in maintaining discipline in online settings. Amir et al. (2020) identified in their study that students’ attitudes and acceptance towards e-learning are more positive and favorable although the success of online learning depends on students’ commitment. Therefore, rules help facilitate students’ coursework, but this will all still depend on their dedication. The researchers even added that factors such as students’ personality types can affect learning as students with an accepting attitude towards the change tend to become more self-regulated and thus rules and discipline become the responsibility of the students ‘themselves. With this, instructors who were reported to bring an uplifting spirit and confidence towards the new modality can help attain a more positive reception and perception to flexible learning.

Figure 8 gives us the results of the instructors’ self-assessment of their implementation of guidelines on teacher organization and communication. The items got an average of 4.62 (Always implemented). The item “observe appropriate and organized setup in online classes” got the highest rating with 4.90 while “post my syllabi in the LMS for students to check on outcomes regularly” item had the lowest rating with 4.27. The instructors therefore implemented an organized and appropriate setup in their online classes both in synchronous and asynchronous modes through a web conferencing tool and the learning management system. However, some instructors have not posted their syllabi in the LMS. Posting the syllabi is a good practice in flexible learning for students to identify the description, outcomes, and intended instructional plan for the course which they will implement themselves independently. Amir et al. (2020) mention that self-efficacy is not only demanded from students but also from instructors as the quality of teaching stimulates students’ satisfaction. OECD (2020) reminds educational institutions to create mechanisms and revise frameworks to make online education feasible while supporting teacher autonomy and collaboration.

Figure 8
Teacher Organization and Communication

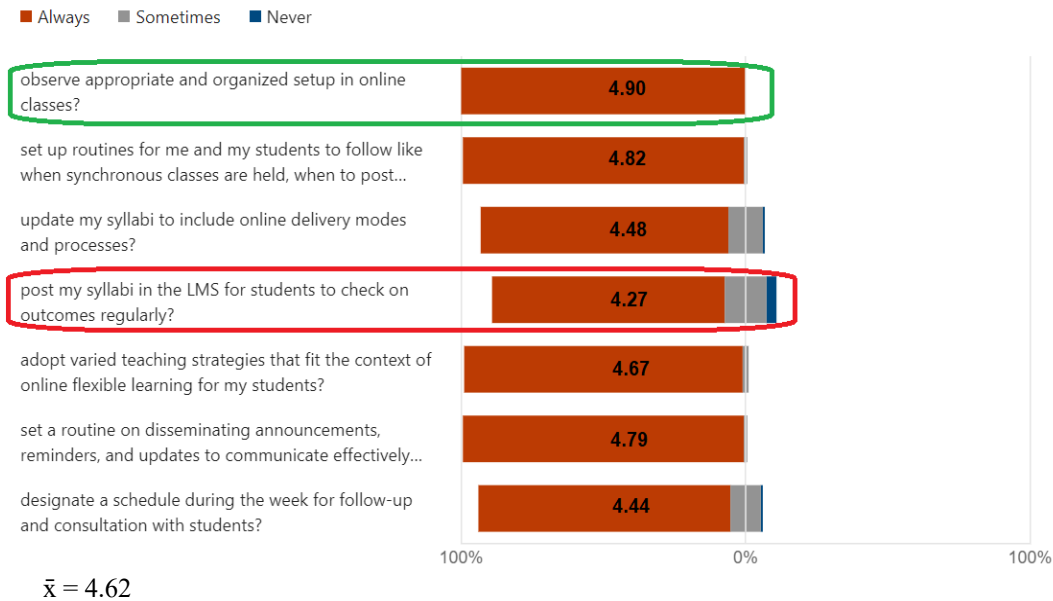


Figure 9
Assessment

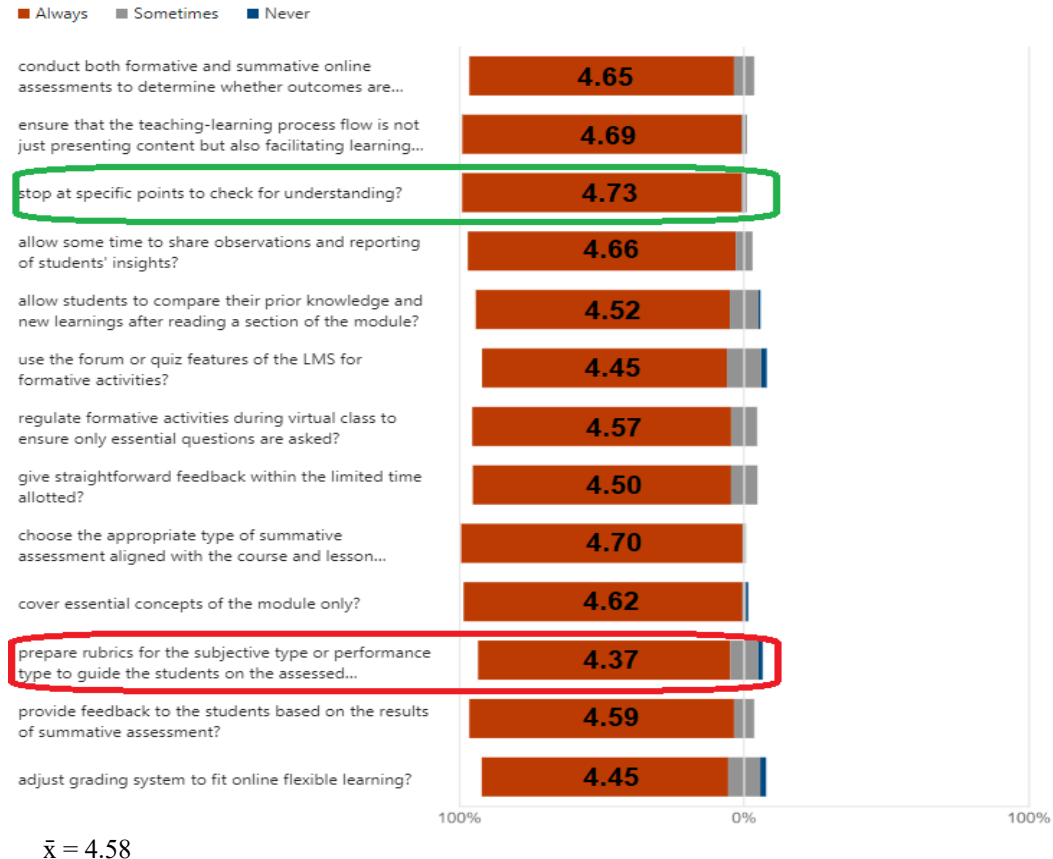
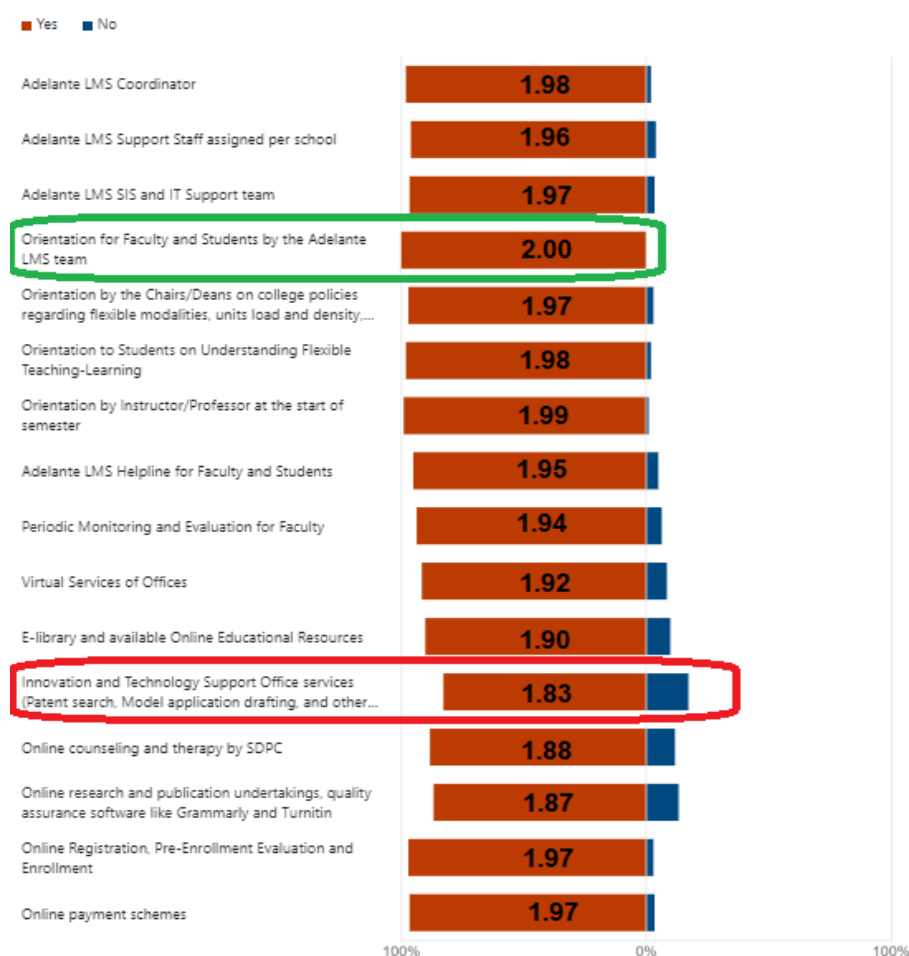


Figure 9 illustrates the instructors' implementation of Assessment guidelines cited in the USJ-R FLG. This set of items got an 'Always implemented' rating with 4.58. The highest rating is 4.73 on the item "stop at specific points to check for understanding" while the lowest rating is 4.37 on the item "prepare rubrics for the subjective type or performance type to guide the students on the assessed criteria." This would mean that the instructors do formative tasks during actual learning sessions like stopping to check students' understanding to assess students online. But some instructors have not prepared rubrics in their subjective and performance assessment tasks. Pokhrel and Chhetri (2020) acknowledges that student assessments this pandemic are carried out online with a lot of trial and error, uncertainty, and confusion. With this, instructors approach assessment based on convenience and expertise and that is why we can see a dependence to objective tests especially through their comments. Measures on plagiarism check and a system on assessing products and performances through assessment tools or rubrics should be in place as assessment must match self-directed learning. With standardized examinations halted, doing authentic assessments can assure the attainment of the intended outcomes of the different programs.

Figure 10
Support Services for Teachers and Students



$$\bar{x} = 1.93$$

Figure 10 shows the instructors' awareness to the implementation of the different support units and services this flexible learning setup as stipulated in the university's FLG. All items in this section got an interpretation of 'Implemented' with the item "Orientation for Faculty and Students by the Adelante LMS Team" having 100% marked 'Yes' by the respondents. The lowest percentage with an 'Implemented' mark is in the support service "Innovation and Technology Support Office services (patent search, model application drafting, and others)". This means that the instructors have attended the orientation set by the LMS team and had identified its relevance especially in the implementation of flexible learning this academic year. The

instructors, however, are not quite aware with ITSO services under the Research Center. Joaquin et al. (2020) in their study on Philippine HEIs and COVID 19 concluded that for us to move forward with the changes brought by the pandemic, we need to step back and design strategies that will engage all stakeholders - stressing the “spirit of *bayanihan*.”

Figure 11
Adherence to Data Privacy Act of 2012

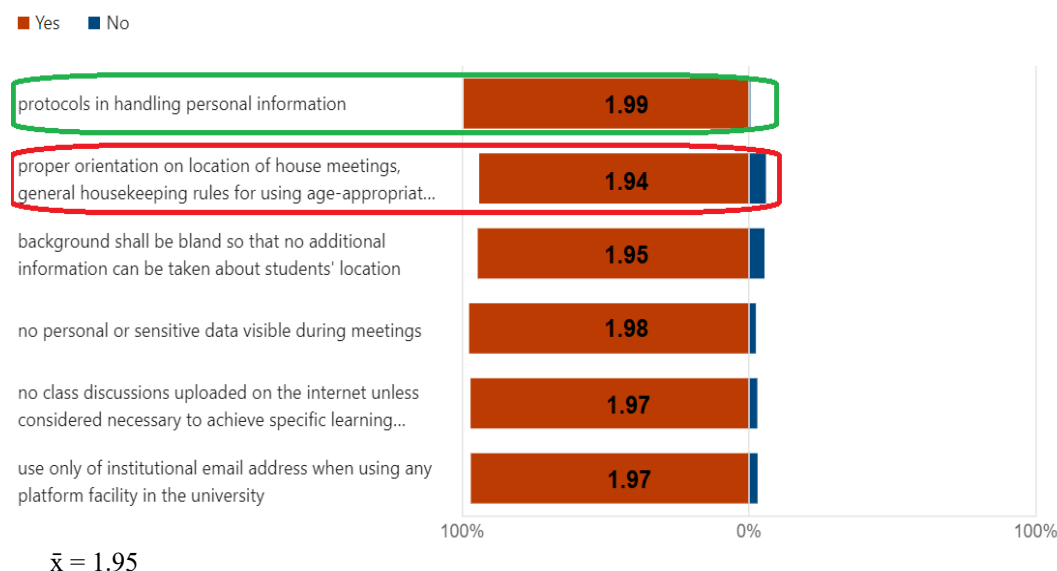


Figure 11 identifies the instructors' implementation of Data Privacy guidelines especially in an online learning environment. All instructors answered “Implemented” in these items with a mean of 1.95. “Protocols in handling personal information” is the highest item with 1.99 while “proper orientation on location of house meetings, general housekeeping rules for using age-appropriate security” is the lowest item with 1.93. This means that the instructors are fully aware of data privacy and apply these guidelines for the students' interest. But, they might be needing orientation on how to apply data privacy procedures especially for online conferencing which uses video and synchronous means.

Table 1
Summary of Results

Section from the FLG	Mean	SD	Interpretation
III. General Guidelines	4.59	0.13	Always implemented
IV. Implementing Guidelines (Facilitating Effecting Online Teaching	4.61	0.29	Always implemented
IV. Implementing Guidelines (Social and Emotional Learning Climate)	4.71	0.12	Always implemented
IV. Implementing Guidelines (Rules and Discipline)	4.88	0.05	Always implemented
IV. Implementing Guidelines (Teacher Organization and Communication)	4.62	0.23	Always implemented
IV. Implementing Guidelines (Assessment)	4.58	0.11	Always implemented
Average	4.665	0.15	Always implemented
Section from the FLG	Mean	SD	Interpretation
IV. Requirements and Qualifications	1.95	0.04	Implemented
IV. Online Support Services	1.93	0.06	Implemented
IV. Data Privacy Adherence	1.95	0.02	Implemented
Average	1.94	0.06	Implemented

Table 1 summarizes the means of the ratings of the instructors' self-assessment of their implementation of the FLG. All means are in the ranges of 4.50 above with an interpretation of "Always implemented" for rating scales and 1.90 above with an interpretation of "Implemented" for the binary choice sections. The instructors therefore implemented the flexible learning guidelines this academic year. With proper assistance to instructors on some items not fully implemented by all instructors, we can ensure the appropriate implementation of the FLG.

Table 2
Comments and Suggestions

Themes	Actual Comment/Suggestion
The LMS	<p>"...grades platform must also be fixed..."</p> <p>"...to know the number of hours the students have spent in Adelante LMS..."</p> <p>"...more data is used to access the LMS..."</p> <p>"Prompt assistance when teachers ask for help..."</p> <p>"...too lag compared to Moodle..."</p> <p>"Set another round of webinar for navigating the other features..."</p> <p>"I find it difficult to make a quiz or assignment..."</p> <p>"...safety features for the summative exams against cheating..."</p> <p>*System upgrade."</p> <p>"...to integrate grades from LMS to SIS..."</p> <p>"Test bank be shared to instructors..."</p> <p>"Prompt registration of students' names in the LMS..."</p>
MS Teams	<p>"...maximize utilization"</p> <p>"...students experienced frequent disconnections..."</p> <p>"...Some content materials cannot be viewed..."</p> <p>"...unauthorized recordings done by students..."</p> <p>"...MS Teams is too heavy..."</p> <p>"...if we can also use other online platforms for synchronous sessions..."</p>
Access	<p>"...stability of internet connection. Many discussions are abruptly cut due to no connectivity..."</p> <p>"Laptop/gadget support to students"</p> <p>"...power outage cannot be validated"</p> <p>"Increase data allowance. Add also electricity allowance..."</p>
Students	<p>"...there should only be 20 students because of the sheer amount of individual outputs to read..."</p> <p>"Issues on student absences or non-participation during class virtual meetings..."</p> <p>"...learners survey must be done before the student be enrolled... so that the faculty will not have difficulty on what learning approach be given..."</p> <p>"...We should come up with ways to enforce academic integrity on our students..."</p> <p>"Our students need more support, subsidy, or laboratory/facility privileges as they cope with this new mode of learning..."</p>
Teachers and Online Learning	<p>"Training for teachers should be done before the start of the semester..."</p> <p>"Refresher seminar on these Flexible Learning Guidelines..."</p> <p>"...still hard to assess summative activities..."</p> <p>"...revisit grading system to adjust to flexible learning..."</p> <p>"...Free eye check up or eyeglasses for faculty..."</p> <p>"...flexibility in submitting grades..."</p> <p>"...balanced treatment for students' needs and maintaining integrity in teaching..."</p> <p>"...would be useful if our concerns, inputs, and challenges as teachers will also be solicited..."</p>

The table above lists a summary of concerns on the university's flexible learning guidelines divided into major themes on the LMS, MS Teams, access and connectivity, students' concerns, and general concerns on teachers' coursework and online learning.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The higher education instructors are conscientious in the delivery of online flexible learning modality as shown in their high self-assessment ratings in the flexible learning guidelines of the university. Therefore, flexible learning guidelines were implemented to ensure continuity of quality education despite the education disturbance brought by the pandemic. If guidelines are in place, instructors will be ushered on the expectations of the new modality especially with the limited communication experienced by the entire university. Instructors, through the research, are also perceived to be aware of the rudiments of online distance learning despite the difficulties of the progressive form of education and the pandemic in place. Still, the instructors have several concerns as they see the need for self-improvement especially in instructional delivery while attaining their personal needs. Universities therefore must reach out to instructors and provide the assistance they need whether in personal or professional development.

Immediate recommendations based on the results of this survey report are the following:

- Locate capacity-building/professional development webinars and events for faculty to attend, encourage continuous professional development in online setups whether by professional organizations or initiated by the department/school
- Hold a survey of learners' connectivity before the start of the semester and decide on delivery means appropriate for the students' situations, then disseminate the results to all instructors
- Decide as a department/school on rules for the conduct of synchronous and asynchronous sessions – include issues on attendance, exams, and
- Ask faculty to create a syllabi/course outline and submit it to the Chair/Dean during the first few weeks of classes
- Discuss as a department/school on integrated and comprehensive assessments and have a set of rubrics prepared for them; these assessments must be discussed with the students in the beginning of the semester
- Have an orientation with research and other support units' services, talk on Data Privacy before the start of the semester both for teachers and students
- Have a webinar/training on Online Assessment Strategies
- Review the university flexible learning guidelines with faculty
- Extend assistance to faculty – mental health session, eye checkup, LMS re-orientation, extension of deadlines, data/gadget provision, subscription of safe exam browser apps
- Have an impact study research on the flexible learning modality
- Conduct a research to measure effectiveness of the flexible learning modality in the attainment of outcomes

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