

# PECULIARITIES AND VIEWS OF ONLINE PEDAGOGICAL COMMUNITIES ON FLEXIBLE TEACHING-LEARNING IN THE NEW NORMAL: A NETNOGRAPHY EMBEDDED DESIGN

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**ABSTRACT:** *This netnography embedded study aimed to explore the peculiarities and views of online pedagogical communities on flexible teaching-learning in the new normal. This study utilized netnography. The data were collected and analyzed using thematic analysis to extract the themes. The results revealed that the virtual space of the online pedagogical communities in this study is divided into sections namely About, Discussion, Featured, Topics, Members, People, Rooms, Events, Media and Files Sections where its members are divided into clusters namely, professors or teachers, entrepreneurs, school administrators, researchers, training directors and consultants. The cultural behavior of the members are centered on having collaborations in research and extension, discussion on curriculum matters, exchanges of teaching materials, professional development, and reflections about social issues. Further, the results revealed the views of the member of online pedagogical communities on need to exercise flexibility and need for curriculum planning and development. Hence, it is concluded that in the new normal there is need for flexibility in teaching-learning and need for curriculum planning and development. For the participants, these are needed to address the challenges faced by teachers and students. Moreover, these ensure appropriateness of teaching strategies and the curriculum being used in the implementation of flexible teaching-learning modality.*

**Keywords:** flexible teaching-learning, online pedagogical communities, netnography, Philippines

## I. INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of the COVID-19 affected many industries globally, including education. It infected 287,176 people and has a reported mortality rate of 11,890 on March 21, 2020 [1]. This resulted in the closure of educational institutions, which affected 1.2 billion students and more than 63 million teachers around the world [2][3].

During pandemic, it was emphasized that the challenges faced by teachers and students in the country, which are worrying as there seems to be a problem in the implementation of the flexible teaching-learning modality. Moreover, these challenges are access to technology, access to the internet, the capacity of teachers to utilize ICT in teaching-learning, developing a flexible schedule for all courses and programs, developing learning management systems, and not being equipped in utilizing ICT in their classes for some faculty members [4]. On the other hand, it is revealed in a study on difficulties experienced by university students in the Philippines that a few of the many problems encountered by these students are vague learning content, inadequate learning resources, overloaded lesson activities, limited teacher scaffolds, and poor learning environment [5]. It is believed that flexible teaching-learning will continue even after this pandemic [6].

In this study, the researcher focused on tertiary teachers as participants and utilized netnography as it allows the researcher to maximize the reach to relevant community or participants making the study more relevant and comprehensive [7]. Moreover, it focuses on gaining access to an online community gathering significant amount of data, which are shared, freely on the internet [8].

This study was conducted because flexible teaching-learning needs further exploration to understand it more especially in the context of the new normal.

## II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

### Research Design

This study utilized qualitative research design specifically netnography. Netnography is a research method, which adapts ethnographic research techniques to study cultures and communities emerging through electronic networks or online. This was utilized as it allows the researcher to maximize the reach to relevant community or participants making the study more relevant and comprehensive [7]. Moreover, it focuses on gaining access to an online community gathering significant amount of data, which are shared freely on the internet [8]. Likewise, netnography being a naturalistic method can be built from a combination of elicited and oftentimes, non-elicited data.

### Participants

The researcher identified an existing virtual community composed of teachers from HEIs who are teaching under flexible teaching-learning modality where members exchange their thoughts freely on a topic relevant to the study. Moreover, the researcher also created a virtual group or community of higher education teachers teaching in the flexible teaching-learning modality in the new normal from which netnography was applied. Similarly, in this group, participants were allowed to exchange their views and opinions on a topic relevant to the study. The identified existing virtual group of HEI teachers is composed of 2,885 members who are clustered into five groups namely, professors/teachers, entrepreneurs, school administrators, researchers, training directors and consultants while the researcher-run virtual group is composed of 73 members who are divided into three clusters namely professors, entrepreneurs and school administrators, respectively.

### Instrument

To explicate the views of higher education teachers on

flexible teaching-learning in the new normal, the researcher identified an existing virtual group or community of higher education teachers on flexible teaching-learning, and also created a researcher-run virtual group or community of higher education teachers on flexible teaching-learning. Specifically, the first Facebook Group of this study is composed of 2,885 members. These online pedagogical communities are driven to talk and solve issues concerning higher education. Thus, the members are aiming for the development of social, economic, and spiritual aspects of its members. The second Facebook Group in this study is composed of 73 members. These groups of higher education teachers are committed in solving issues in higher education. In these groups, netnography involving active covert participant observation was applied.

**Data Analysis**

In this study, 6-step structure was used in analysing the qualitative data. Firstly, the researcher familiarized himself with the gathered data. After which, codes were initially generated. Then, themes were extracted, reviewed, defined and written-up.

**III. RESULTS**

**3.1 Peculiarities of the Online Pedagogical Communities**

The first group is an identified existing online group of higher education teachers and the second group is a researcher-run online group of higher education teachers.

**3.1.1 Virtual Space**

The virtual space of the Facebook Group 1 is divided into eight sections namely About, Discussion, Featured, Topics, Members, Events, Media and Files Sections. The description of the group can be seen in the About section. On the other hand, posts of the members can be seen at the Discussion

section of the group. In addition, featured posts of the group can be seen at the Featured section. Moreover, the number of members and their profiles are seen in the Members section.

**3.1.2 Membership**

As seen from the About Section, Facebook Group 1 was created on February 2, 2016 and has 2,885 members where 63.7 percent are male and 36.3 percent are female as of May 16, 2022. The members of this group are divided into six clusters namely, professors or teachers, entrepreneurs, school administrators, researchers, training directors and consultants. On the other hand, Facebook Group 2 was created on November 19, 2021 and has 73 members where 49 percent are male and 51 percent are female as of May 16, 2022. The members of this group are divided into three clusters namely, professors, entrepreneurs and school administrators.

**3.1.3 Cultural Behavior**

The members of these groups are from diverse backgrounds and these online groups have become their platforms in sharing their thoughts and opinions on current issues especially in the higher education. For the Facebook Group 1, the members of this group share and monitor developments and trends in higher education. Hence, in the context of the group, the members perform these through having collaborations in research and extension, discussion on curriculum matters, exchanges of teaching materials, professional development, and reflections about social issues.

**3.2 Netnographic Views on Flexible Teaching-Learning in the New Normal**

Table 1 shows the careful analysis of the online comments and discussions of the members resulted to ten core ideas, three categories and two emergent themes. The emerging themes were presented and supported by the descriptions of the members' virtual or online comments

**Table 1 Netnographic Views on Flexible Teaching-Learning in the New Normal**

Issues Probed	Core Ideas	Codes/ Categories	Essential Themes
Netnographic Views of the Members of the Online Pedagogical Communities	Sending or posting recorded sessions to LMs or FB Group Employing synchronous and asynchronous classes	Accessibility	Need to Exercise Flexibility
	Exercising leniency Giving students freedom to choose what pace they want to learn	Leniency	
	Fitting curriculum to the current situation Having education management paradigm shift that considers the current situation Redesigning curriculum making it more fit for flexible teaching-learning Revising PSGs and CMOs of academic programs	Aligning Curriculum	Need for Curriculum Planning and Development

	Developing an internal policy for monitoring flexible teaching-learning Crafting guidelines or policies to measure leniency	Establishing relevant guidelines and policies for monitoring	
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**IV. DISCUSSION**

**4.1 Peculiarities of the Online Pedagogical Communities**

The following discussions are presented on the basis of the peculiarities of the online pedagogical communities in this study.

**4.1.1 Virtual Space**

The findings of this study support the claims that Facebook groups are online spaces where people can communicate about shared interests and topics [9][10]. Further, these are popular with educators because of its interaction and sharing features where schools can also use facebook groups for general school news, extra-curricular activities, event organization such as school fair and alumni affairs. Consequently, social media are now considered as important tools for the professional lives of educators and have become more popular resulting to mass teacher groups and communities [9]. These groups and communities are now used by professionals including teachers as a virtual space for professional learning and support [10].

**4.1.2 Membership**

The results of this study conform to the study, which revealed that online communities are becoming more common today because of its relevance in promoting collaboration and engagement. Its popularity today has changed the face of professional development among individuals including teachers. Hence, participation or membership among these online groups is mostly voluntary and this offers opportunities for problem-solving, reflective thinking, knowledge exchanging and socio-emotional sharing [11]. Consequently, teachers join online groups in the hope of forging connections, collaborations and having sustained community of learners [12].

**4.1.3 Cultural Behavior**

The finding confirmed the study, which that Facebook as a space provides teachers opportunities to form sustainable connection where they can share or post, react, comment and reply from others’ posts or engage in a collaborative activity from other members of the group. Moreover, it is said that members in an online group who perform such communicative or collaborative activity share rules and guidelines which form the behavior of the members [12].

**4.2 Netnographic Views on Flexible Teaching-Learning in the New Normal**

The first idea that was explored in the conduct of the study was the netnographic views of the members of the online pedagogical communities who are higher education teachers teaching in the flexible teaching-learning

modality. In it, two essential themes emerged, namely, need to exercise flexibility and need for curriculum planning and development. There were two identified online pedagogical communities used in this study. The members of these groups are teachers from public and private HEIs. The following sections present the discussion of the themes that emerged from exploring the netnographic views of the members.

**4.2.1 Need to Exercise Flexibility**

These netnographic views agree with the findings of several studies cited below about flexible teaching-learning. Due to the limitations of the pandemic and several factors such as network issues, adopting these modes of deliveries in flexible learning is affected [13]. Hence, the importance of giving the students choices, control and responsibility over their learning in terms of time, pace, space or location, technology use, communication media and resources is emphasized [14]. Moreover, it is highlighted that teachers are responsible in customizing a given course to meet the varied needs of the students. Thus, these made the possibility of providing flexibility crucial and essential in the educational environment.

On the other hand, these findings are also apparent to the claims, which highlighted the importance of having a flexible learning environment as this ensures the continuity of the learning process [15]. Additionally, the importance of giving students choices into how to go about in learning their lessons was emphasized as this increases their participation [16]. Providing more options for students in terms of learning space and equipment used will also provide them with more learning opportunities that encourage them to participate. Moreover, it was accentuated that this will increase the students’ accessibility to having their lessons.

**4.2.2 Need for Curriculum Planning and Development**

These netnographic views are also seen from the findings of several studies in the literature. In order to make teaching and learning more effective, there should be meaningful curriculum changes. Since the needs and our context changed with the pandemic in the picture, this will make the curriculum more responsive and relevant. In this study, as the academe proceeds to revising the curriculum, the members of the online pedagogical communities suggested the need to reduce teachers’ workload because of the extended efforts teachers need to exert today [17]. Moreover, to ensure the continuity of teaching and learning in crisis like the pandemic, higher education institutions need to recalibrate their curriculum. Additionally, it is emphasized that this should be

continuously done to consider the recent scenarios, which will make it more relevant and responsive to the needs of the students [18]. Similarly, it is reported that teachers had to adapt many conditions and challenges of the teaching profession especially in the conduct of synchronous and asynchronous classes. Moreover, teachers are also struggling in establishing connections with their students, co-teachers and their families [19].

The current curriculum we follow is designed for traditional set-up and to fully move into a more flexible learning, reforms required in flexible teaching-learning start with reimagining the curriculum. Hence, the problems experienced by students and teachers, which are not limited to the things mentioned above, necessitate all HEIs to restructure its curriculum [4].

On the other hand, it was identified that the quality of education is one of the many things educators need to address in flexible learning. However, there are several issues that need to be addressed in order to ensure the quality of our education today [4]. This is confirmed by the study, which revealed that online education is difficult to manage because of many reasons including academic dishonesty such as cheating and plagiarism [20]. Similarly, it was revealed in the study conducted, which states that academic dishonesty is prevalent in Senior High School and College Levels. Moreover, they reported that one of the reasons why students engage in this behavior is the teachers' maximum tolerance or leniency [21]. Consequently, the use of plagiarism detection system is seen to be a viable means in discouraging plagiarism among students [22]. On the other hand, strengthening the policies regarding academic dishonesty is suggested [23].

## V. CONCLUSIONS

As revealed in the results, peculiarities of the online pedagogical communities were revealed in terms of virtual space, membership, cultural behavior and with their shared perspectives. It can be concluded that these Facebook groups were used for connections and collaborations in different field such as in solving issues in higher education, exchanging of teaching materials, research and extension projects. The virtual space of the online pedagogical communities in the study are divided into different sections namely, About, Discussion, Featured, Topics, Members, People, Events, Rooms, Media and Files Sections. These sections provided the members and spectators of these online pedagogical communities about the description of the group and ways to connect with each other better. Hence, these perspectives of the members of the online pedagogical communities in this study are directed towards solving the challenges and issues of flexible teaching-learning modality especially in the new normal set up.

On the netnographic views of the online pedagogical communities in this study, the following themes emerged namely, need for flexibility in teaching-learning and need

for curriculum planning and development. For the participants, these are needed to address the challenges faced by teachers and students. Moreover, these ensure appropriateness of teaching strategies and the curriculum being used in the implementation of flexible teaching-learning modality.

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