

THE FUTURE OF FLEXIBLE LEARNING IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

by:

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Pandemic times served as an open gate for flexibility in education as it embraced distance learning. Different approaches were outlined in various memoranda, guidelines on Alternative Delivery Modes (ADM), Learning Continuity Plans (LCP), and other reports. Though Flexible Learning Arrangements (FLA) are common in higher education, they represent a new setup to adopt in elementary classrooms.

Flexible learning provides students with various options to learn at their own pace (He & Liu, 2024) and is often associated with online and blended learning design (Müller et al., 2023).

The Department of Education (DepEd) offers various methods of instruction, including online learning, modular learning, blended learning, face-to-face learning, and TV and radio-based instruction. While DepEd provides accessible education, each method faces challenges related to access, engagement, and teacher support. The effectiveness of these methods varies depending on available resources and context.

In modular learning, students have an option to choose between printed and digital modules to study at a given time. It is self-paced and requires minimal internet connectivity since digital copies can be provided through OTG or USB. However, engagement and feedback could be an issue.

In online learning, virtual classes are held to deliver the lessons. Different references could be searched online. Interactive activities can also be uploaded for

students to work on. But, internet connectivity and distractions during the scheduled class could be a problem.

In blended learning, educators adopted traditional face-to-face classes with online classes. Teachers can conduct lessons in regular classrooms, and students can work on activities online. Though it balances traditional methods with modern technology, it requires planning, and internet access could also pose a problem.

In TV and radio-based instruction, educators deliver lessons through broadcasting. Students can listen to or watch the lesson with the regular appliances in their homes. But, it has assigned time for broadcasting. Flexibility can be an issue, and interaction is limited. Problems with electricity and signal interruptions can arise.

In face-to-face learning, teachers can direct interaction with students, foster engagement through the process, and offer feedback and regular monitoring. However, there is a fixed class schedule.

The commonly used face-to-face learning in elementary schools opted to move into modular, online, blended, TV, and radio instruction during the pandemic. Even post-pandemic, natural disasters in the country hinder the continuity of face-to-face instruction and boost the implementation of other distance learning types. Since it is a new practice to adopt, the whole department adjusts to the changes and provides the requirements to offer quality education even in FLA. We must admit that this is the future of education in classrooms. Adopting flexible learning is necessary since not only pandemics and natural disasters can hinder traditional face-to-face learning. Lack of resources, economic constraints, health and safety concerns, teacher shortages, strikes, unstable politics, challenges with transportation, and weather conditions that impact school operations and attendance are some of the factors preventing student learning in person.

The future of flexible learning in today's elementary education is inevitable. A study by Kilag et al. (2023) shows that adopting ADMs and LCP can improve student performance. However, we must ensure proper implementation. Personal support of the teacher to assist the student's progress is still vital to effectively facilitate learning (Fitzgerald, 2022). To prepare for the future of elementary education classroom setups, we must resolve challenges such as content comprehension, engagement, connectivity, planning, resource provision, and teacher training (Tarrayo et al., 2023).

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