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Analysis of Student Readiness for Online Learning at the University of Nueva Caceres, Philippines

A Case Study at the College of Arts and Sciences during The Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The educational sector has been one of the most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The unexpected change from a brick-and-mortar school setting to an online platform became mandatory. Universities and colleges, as the central part of Higher Education Institutions, are considered essential sectors that involve a different level of students who represent the future potential human labor force. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the online learning readiness of the students in this current set-up. This investigation aimed to examine the students' readiness for online learning of the College of Arts and Sciences students during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research also acknowledged that preparedness for online learning would vary according to the student's characteristics. The respondents were 163 CAS students. The Student Readiness in Online Learning (SROL) was used to measure student readiness in online learning. It was found that students are ready in communication and online student attributes and in approaching technical and time management readiness. Strong associations were found between time management and technical subscales along with the demographic factors' year level of the students and learning modality. Overall, online learning readiness had a strong association with the learning modality of the students. It was concluded that students have limited skills and knowledge to apply a given task independently, which limits effective and successful learning outcomes that are apparent in managing their time well. It is recommended that these skill gaps be addressed to reduce concerns of students from falling behind.

Keywords
COVID-19
Higher Education
Online Learning
Readiness

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Introduction

The unfavorable epidemiological situation caused by COVID-19 forced the world to stop to prevent COVID-19 transmission. The educational sector was one of the most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The unexpected change from a brick-and-mortar school setting to an online platform became mandatory. One of the ways by which educational programs can be provided to potential stakeholders is through online learning platforms [1].

Online learning refers to programs or courses delivered fully or partially through web technology [2]. It is a well-designed, planned approach to storyboarding and creates profound virtual learning experiences with no physical interaction in a physical classroom environment. Online learning differentiates between blended and hybrid learning. Blended learning is a combination of synchronous and asynchronous classes. In contrast, hybrid learning combines various percentages of on-ground and online instruction that offers flexibility to students in online and physical interactions [3].

In the Philippines, the implementation of the new regular educational system among higher education institutions was responded to by the Commission of Higher Education (CHED) through the CHED Memorandum Order No. 04, Guidelines on the Implementation of Flexible Learning. The memorandum defines flexible learning as "a pedagogical approach allowing flexibility of time, place, and audience including, but not solely focused on, the use of technology. Although it commonly uses the delivery methods of distance education and facilities of education technology, this may vary depending on the levels of digital literacy and approaches" [4].

At the University of Nueva Caceres, various preparations were carried out to prepare the teachers and students for the new learning modalities. The courses were delivered remotely, so there was a combination of generally asynchronous (on-demand but time-bound tasks UNC LMS, Facebook Messenger) and strategically planned synchronous sessions (live online meetings through ZOOM/Google Meet). The learning modalities were classified into Flexi-kit and Flexi-tech. Students under Flexi-kit were provided with printed-out modules or study guides, and consultations were done through emails, chats, or mobile messaging. In contrast, students under Flexi-tech used the Blackboard as the learning management system. Regular once-a-week synchronous sessions were also done via Zoom or Google Meet.

These actions certainly have an impact on education, particularly students' growth. Many problems emerge from the students, teachers, and parents [5]. Universities face more challenges as the central part of Higher Education Institutions and one of the most critical service sectors that involve a different level of students who represent the future potential human labor force. Difficulties reported by university students in the Philippines include unstable internet, inadequate learning resources, electric power interruptions, vague learning contents, overloaded lesson activities, limited teacher scaffolds, poor peer communication, conflict with home responsibilities, poor learning environment, financial-related problems, physical health compromise, and mental health struggles [6].

Ref. [7] stated that students consider technical competence essential. However, the students' technical skills were the most challenging among the online learning challenges. It is worth emphasizing that millennial students think technology is a critical aspect of their day-to-day existence rather than a tool. They prefer digital technology in the teaching-learning process because they see it as an integral part of their digital selves. Thus, they would choose class materials to be accessible online [8].

Ref. [9] cited that one of the reasons for online course dropouts was technology-related, such as a depersonalized learning environment or lack of support from technical staff, which may discourage students from taking online courses. In addition, Ref. [10] also proved that technical support is an essential service that should be provided to teachers and students for service improvement and to provide more help options. Learning management systems should also be easy to navigate and user-friendly [11].

The research study by Ref. [1] found that online learning readiness was not significantly different among the student characteristics in terms of gender, type of school graduated, frequency of Internet access, and the number of digital devices owned by the students. However, it significantly differed in academic disciplines (engineering, health sciences, arts and sciences, business education, criminology, teacher education, and information technology).

However, despite the various preparations of the University, there were still many obstacles faced by both the students and teachers in implementing online learning. Students have difficulty understanding the lesson, and others are unfamiliar with online learning [12]. As a result, online learning does not run well since it lacks preparation and planning.

Therefore, understanding how ready the students are for online learning in this current set-up is essential. This research is based on the premise that the students are at the level of readiness where they have developed skills and knowledge and, therefore, can apply it to

online learning. It is also acknowledged in this research that preparedness for online learning would vary according to the student's characteristics.

This study examined student readiness in online learning of the College of Arts and Sciences students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specific Questions:

1) What is the student readiness in online learning along with the subscales of student attributes, time management, communication, and technical?
2) Are there associations between the demographic factors of students and their online learning readiness?

Material and Methods

This study is quantitative descriptive research that utilized the survey method using a self-report questionnaire. The respondents were 163 College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) of the University of Nueva Caceres. Student demographic characteristics are reported in Table 2. Most of the students were female (122, 74.85%), with an average age of respondents of 21 years old. The majority of the students were Psychology majors (111, 68.10%), and not half were in first-year (54, 33.13%) and fourth-year (49, 30.06%) levels. Almost all were full-time students (127, 77.91%), and more than half were under the learning modality of Flexi-tech (110, 67.48%).

Table 1. Frequency and percentage of the respondents by profile

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	122	74.85
Male	41	25.15
Age (M = 21 years old)		
18 – 19 years old	56	34.36
20 – 21 years old	60	36.81
22 – 23 years old	38	23.31
24 years old and above	9	5.52
Programs		
Psychology	111	68.10
Political Science	34	20.86
Biology	18	11.04
Year Level		
First Year	54	33.13
Second Year	35	21.47
Third Year	25	15.34
Fourth Year	49	30.06
Student Classification		
Full-Time Student	127	77.91
Working Student	36	22.09
Learning Modality		
Flexi-Kit	53	32.52
Flexi-Tech	110	67.48
Total	163	100.00

The Student Readiness in Online Learning (SROL) was designed to measure student readiness online by Ref. [13]. The instrument is a 20-item organized into four subscales: (a)

online student attributes (5 items), (b) time management (5 items), (c) communication (5 items), and (d) technical (5 items). The Student Readiness in Online Learning tool has an excellent internal consistency (α = .789). The 4-point Likert scale was utilized with the following quantification of responses: 1 (not very proper of me), 2 (not true of me), 3 (somewhat true of me), 4 (very true of me).

The data gathered were reported using descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) in each item of subscales and the overall student online learning readiness. The chi-square test of association was used to conclude whether there were significant associations between the demographic factors of students and their online learning readiness. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 was used to analyze the data gathered.

Results and Discussion

A. Student Readiness in Online Learning

The student readiness in online learning was measured in terms of the four subscales of the Student Readiness in Online Learning (SROL): online student attributes, time management, communication, and technical competence. The weighted mean was employed to calculate the responses of the students. The student's readiness for online learning in terms of online attributes is shown in Table 4 shows.

Table 2. Student readiness in online learning in terms of online student attributes

Items		Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
1)	capable of following instructions in various formats (written, video, audio, etc.).	3.50	.560	Ready
2)	learn from a variety of formats (lectures, videos, podcasts, online discussion/conferencing)	3.39	.632	Ready
3)	utilize additional resources to answer course-related questions (course content, assignments, etc.)	3.36	.665	Ready
4)	set goals with deadlines.	3.19	.646	Approaching Readiness
5)	be self-disciplined with studies.	3.04	.632	Approaching Readiness
	Overall Mean Score	3.30		Ready

Legend: Level of Readiness - 3.26–4.00 Ready; 2.51 – 3.25 Approaching Readiness; 1.76 – 2.50 Developing Readiness; 1.00 – 1.75 Little Readiness

As can be seen, the students are mostly equipped to set goals with deadlines (M = 3.50), utilize additional resources (M = 3.39), and be self-disciplined with studies (M = 3.36). However, they may be less receptive to following instructions in various formats (M = 3.19) and learning from multiple formats (M = 3.04).

The online student attributes pertain to how the students develop and follow goals to complete assigned tasks. This also refers to being self-disciplined with their coursework, how

they learn new technologies, and utilizing them when questions arise. Based on the results, it can be inferred that the students can do the mentioned tasks adequately. However, although the students are eager to complete the tasks in online learning, they only have the foundational skills to set deadlines and the ability to pursue the tasks assigned to them. This may limit the students' practical and successful learning outcomes.

Students must be self-directed and independent with the present set-up as they "consider new ways to prepare, organize, engage, and complete requirements" [13]. This finding is also explained by Ref. [3], who advances the idea that the online environment controls technical tools where students must take responsibility for their learning.

More so, transitioning to online learning has hampered students who must possess a range of skill competencies. According to Ref. [14], an online student's challenge is the self-discipline required to devote adequate time to asynchronous sessions. It is, therefore, important that students establish specific reading and study times. Ref. [14] also suggested that it may help if students create a schedule with manageable flexibility.

The students' time management readiness in online learning, as presented in Table 5, revealed approaching readiness level on devoting hours regularly for the online class (M = 3.16), utilizing course schedules for due dates (M = 2.76), meeting multiple deadlines (M = 3.04), complete activities/assignments on time (M = 3.06), and avoiding distractions while working on learning tasks (M = 3.16).

Table 3. Student readiness in online learning in terms of time management

Items	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
1) Devote hours per week regularly for the online class.	3.16	.800	Approaching Readiness
2) Meeting multiple deadlines for course activities.	3.08	.801	Approaching Readiness
3) Complete course activities/assignments on time.	3.06	.826	Approaching Readiness
4) Utilize the course schedule for due dates.	3.04	.756	Approaching Readiness
5) Stay on task and avoid distractions while studying.	2.75	.794	Approaching Readiness
Overall Mean Score	3.02		Approaching Readiness

Legend: Level of Readiness - 3.26–4.00 Ready; 2.51 – 3.25 Approaching Readiness; 1.76 – 2.50 Developing Readiness; 1.00 – 1.75 Little Readiness

Time management readiness, in the context of the present study, refers to the measures of whether the students can keep up with course assignments and whether they complete the assigned work on time. Based on the results, it is apparent that the students may need help managing their time well. Although results show that they dedicate time to online classes, they may have needed assistance while studying, limiting the students' practical and successful learning outcomes.

Ref. [1] explained that millennials' desire to multitask affects concentration. They usually review their notes while listening to music and chatting on social media with friends. Modern technology has provided today's learners the tools to engage in multiple tasks, which may negatively affect their focus on studying.

The communication readiness of the students shown in Table 6 revealed that they are ready to use asynchronous technologies such as discussion boards, emails, etc. (M = 3.63). They have the lowest score on discussing feedback received with the instructor (M = 2.80), which is in the approaching readiness level. Overall, the students are ready to connect via computer-mediated communication (M = 3.31).

Table 4. Student readiness in online learning in terms of communication

Items	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
1) Use asynchronous technologies (discussion boards, email, etc.)	3.63	.567	Ready
2) Use synchronous technologies (Zoom, Google Meet, etc.)	3.56	.619	Ready
3) Ask classmates for support (accessing the course, clarification on a topic).	3.42	.736	Ready
4) Ask the instructor for help via email, discussion board, chat, or SMS.	3.16	.792	Approaching Readiness
5) Discuss feedback received (assignments, quizzes, discussion, etc.) with the instructor.	2.80	.852	Approaching Readiness
Overall Mean Score	3.31		Ready

Legend: Level of Readiness - 3.26–4.00 Ready; 2.51 – 3.25 Approaching Readiness; 1.76 – 2.50 Developing Readiness; 1.00 – 1.75 Little Readiness

Communication readiness is the student's ability to access and willingness to connect and communicate with others via computer-mediated communication such as emails, discussion boards, and chats. From the results presented in the table, it is apparent that students are already geared up in these skills and the ability to willingly access, connect, and communicate with others via computer-mediated communications. However, it is noteworthy that they mainly access communication through asynchronous technologies such as email, discussion, etc., rather than synchronous, which is the online class sessions via Zoom or Google Meet. Notably, they have declined to discuss feedback received with their instructor.

The technical readiness in online learning of the students of CAS shown in Table 7 indicates that students are ready to complete basic computer operations such as creating and managing documents, files, and folders (M = 3.48). They are approaching readiness level when accessing online help desk or technical support assistance (M = 2.72). Overall, the students are coming to a readiness level in the technical aspect (M = 3.24).

Table 5. Student readiness in online learning in terms of technical

Technical		Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
1)	Complete basic computer operations (e.g., creating and editing documents, managing files and folders)	3.48	.688	Ready
2)	Navigate through the course in the Learning Management System (e.g., Blackboard)	3.42	.784	Ready
3)	Participate in course activities (discussions, quizzes, assignments, synchronous sessions).	3.29	.768	Ready
4)	Access the online grade book for feedback on performance.	3.27	.854	Ready
5)	Access online help desk/tech support for assistance.	2.72	.879	Approaching Readiness
	Overall Mean Score	3.24		Approaching Readiness

Legend: Level of Readiness - 3.26–4.00 Ready; 2.51 – 3.25 Approaching Readiness; 1.76 – 2.50 Developing Readiness; 1.00 – 1.75 Little Readiness

Technical readiness is the students' computer skills (such as sending and receiving emails, researching and downloading information online, installing software, etc.) and information-seeking skills. Students need more computer and information-seeking skills, although they have developed skills and knowledge in complete basic computer operations. Their limited information-seeking skills are apparent in their need for more ability to access the online help desk or tech support for assistance whenever these challenges hamper them.

Digital technology is embedded in the day-to-day lived experiences of college students. Ref. [15] claimed that due to the use of computers in the everyday lives of every individual, such as in communication and work, computer skills and the ability to work with word processing, data management, data sheeting, and data analysis had become essential requirements for students.

This age group, the millennials, digital natives, or the net generation [16], grew up surrounded by the Internet and various digital technologies. It is said that the advent of advanced educational technologies is a vast array of resources and content in learning. But then, it is interesting to note that in the technical readiness of online learning, the students only have the basic skills and still have to acquire more knowledge on the other digital aspects. Therefore, students who want to succeed in online learning should also have general computer skills and knowledge of online learning platforms.

The overall student readiness in online learning in Table 8 revealed that the CAS students are ready in communication (M = 3.31) and online student attributes (M = 3.30). However, they are approaching readiness levels in technical (M=3.24) and time management (M=3.02). Overall, the students are approaching the online learning readiness level (M = 3.22). Based on the findings presented, there are readiness gaps in some areas of online learning for the students. These are transparent on technical and time management readiness, specifically

accessing online help support options, staying on task, and avoiding distractions while studying.

Table 6. Overall student readiness in online learning

Student Readiness in Online Learning	Mean Score	Interpretation
1) Communication	3.31	Ready
2) Online Student Attributes	3.30	Ready
3) Technical	3.24	Approaching Readiness
4) Time Management	3.02	Approaching Readiness
Overall Mean Score	3.22	Approaching Readiness

Legend: Level of Readiness - 3.26–4.00 Ready; 2.51 – 3.25 Approaching Readiness; 1.76 – 2.50 Developing Readiness; 1.00 – 1.75 Little Readiness

The study by Ref supports this finding. [7], who reported that lack of technical skills was the most challenging among the online learning competencies. Technical competence is considered essential in online learning competency. It may be true that students think of technology as a critical aspect of their day-to-day existence. They use technology because it is more accessible to them and as a fundamental part of their digital lives rather than as a tool for learning. Students who lack Internet access to take advantage of the new learning environment are disadvantaged in the present set-up. This issue could differentially impact the population of students whose access to technology is already limited.

B. Associations Among the Demographic Factors of Students and Their Online Learning Readiness

The inferential analysis of the student's online learning readiness was done utilizing the chi-square association test. The succeeding tables show the demographic factors significantly associated with the subscales of online learning readiness.

Table 9 presents the chi-square test results for the student time management readiness and the associated demographic factors. As shown in the table, the relation between the year level of the students and time management readiness was significant, $\chi 2$ (3, N = 163) = 18.324, p = .001. This means first-year students were likelier to show time management readiness than the other year levels. The strength of the relationship, as indicated by the Cramer's V (φc = .335), is vital. On the other hand, the relation between the learning modality of the students and time management readiness was significant, $\chi 2$ (1, N = 163) = 8.758, p = .003. This indicates that students under Flexi-tech show more time management readiness than those under Flexi-kit. The strength of the relationship, as noted in the Phi (ϕ = .232), is vital.

Table 7. Results of chi-square test and descriptive statistics for student time management readiness and demographic factors

Demographic Factors	Reported Readiness Level		Chi-Square Test of Association
	Less Ready	Ready	
Year Level			
First Year	21	33	χ^2 (3) = 18.324
Second Year	29	6	*p* = .001
Third Year	17	8	df = 3
Fourth Year	26	23	φc = .335
Total	93	70	
Learning Modality			χ^2 (3) = 8.758
Flexi-Kit	39	14	*p* = .003
Flexi-Tech	54	56	df = 1
Total	93	70	ϕ = .232

The chi-square test results for student technical readiness and the associated demographic factors are shown in Table 10. It was found that the relation between the year level of the students and technical readiness was significant, χ2 (3, N = 163) = 12.678, p = .005. First-year students were likelier to show technological readiness than the other year levels. The strength of the relationship, as indicated by the Cramer's V (φc = .279), is vital. Meanwhile, the relation between the learning modality of the students and technical readiness was significant, χ2 (1, N = 163) = 11.160, p = .001. This indicates that students who are under Flexi-tech show more technical readiness than those who are under Flexi-kit. The strength of the relationship, as noted in the Phi (ϕ = .262), is also vital.

Table 8. Results of chi-square test and descriptive statistics for student technical readiness and demographic factors

Demographic Factors	Reported Readiness Level		Chi-Square Test of Association
	Less Ready	Ready	
Year Level			
First Year	22	32	χ^2 (3) = 12.678
Second Year	25	10	*p* = .005
Third Year	15	10	df = 3
Fourth Year	18	31	φc = .279
Total	80	83	
Learning Modality			χ^2 (3) = 11.160
Flexi-Kit	36	17	*p* = .001
Flexi-Tech	44	66	df = 1
Total	80	83	ϕ = .262

Table 11 shows the chi-square test results for overall student readiness and the associated demographic factor. It was found that among the demographic characteristics, the relation between the learning modality of the students and overall online readiness was significant, χ2 (1, N = 163) = 9.693, p = .002. This indicates that students under Flexi-tech show overall readiness in online learning than those under Flexi-kit. The strength of the relationship, as noted in the Phi (ϕ = .244), is also vital.

Table 9. Results of chi-square test and descriptive statistics for overall student online readiness and demographic factors

Demographic Factors	Reported Readiness Level		Chi-Square Test of Association
	Less Ready	Ready	
Learning Modality			χ^2 (3) = 9.693
Flexi-Kit	34	19	p = .002
Flexi-Tech	42	68	df = 1
Total	76	87	Phi = .244

One possible reason first-year students are more ready for online learning, specifically in time management and technology, is that they have become adept with online learning because the current setup gained prominence even in senior high school. Various advances in instructional technology, including video blended and online learning, were adopted even before the pandemic. Considering the complexities involved in understanding the skills and support students need during the 2020 COVID-19 emergency remote learning. For example, students often need help anticipating or articulating what they need before they need it, or they are unfamiliar with the terminology, forethought, and planning involved in learning across modalities, e.g., synchronous and asynchronous. Students should be encouraged to reflect on their attributes as online learners and their time management, communication, and technical skills. Students must be prepared in all these four areas" [13].

Conclusion

Although UNC is in the third semester of online learning modality, the College of Arts and Sciences students still master the tasks specific to online learning. They need to improve their skills and knowledge to apply a given task independently, which limits the students' practical and successful learning outcomes. This is specifically evident in managing their time well. Moreover, the first-year students and those under Flexi-tech were more likely to demonstrate time management and technical readiness than the other year levels and those under Flexi-kit. Hence, students in the different year levels and those under Flexi-kit may have some challenges and difficulty keeping up with course assignments and completing assigned work on time, especially those under the Flexi-kit modality. Therefore, that is the skill gap the college needs to address to reduce concerns about students falling behind.

Recommendations

Based on the results, students training in the coming semesters should target the necessary skills for time management during online learning and learning habits in addition to other online learning requirements. Activities such as webinars may be embedded in Guidance Office Program activities and departmental individual coaching to students at risk of failing. Moreover, recommendations such as the development of activities to enhance the students'

time management skills may be provided in General Education subjects. These recommended activities may be further investigated to effectively address the students' skill gaps. The student's academic performance may also be analyzed to determine whether a significant relationship exists with student readiness for online learning. It may further be tested when interventions or activities are implemented. The student readiness in online learning presented in this research may contribute to discussions about online expansion and students' performance in their online classes.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of the study is the use of self-reporting measures. Students' perceptions of their readiness for online learning may have generated bias, such as leniency or severity in their judgment. This may have either over or underestimated the results. The number of samples may also have influenced the results, especially in the inferential analysis.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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