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Paulinian Remote Flexible Learning Experience (ReFLEx): Perceptions among Junior High School Students

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a rapid shift to remote learning, posing unprecedented challenges for educational institutions worldwide. This study investigates the Paulinian Remote Flexible Learning Experience (ReFLEx) at St. Paul University Surigao, a program distinguished by its adaptive combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning, designed to maintain educational continuity and enhance student engagement. Employing an embedded mixed-methods approach, the research prioritizes quantitative data from 116 Grade 9 students while integrating qualitative insights from interviews with 10 purposefully selected informants. Findings indicate an overall very satisfactory assessment of ReFLEx, with teacher competence emerging as a particularly strong point (M=3.58, SD=0.56). However, the study reveals a statistically significant difference in ReFLEx assessment based on the respondent's sex (z=-2.329, p = .020), suggesting nuanced gender-related experiences within the program. These results underscore the critical role of teacher training and sensitivity in blended learning environments and highlight the importance of considering demographic factors in program design. Practically, the study suggests targeted interventions to address disparities in student experiences and further enhance teacher support. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on remote learning effectiveness, offering insights into the design and implementation of flexible educational models. The findings inform future planning and program development, supporting the refinement of ReFLEx and similar initiatives to optimize student learning outcomes in evolving educational landscapes.

Keywords: *remote learning, flexible learning experience (ReFLEx), synchronous and asynchronous learning, teacher competence, gender differences in education.*

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally transformed various facets of life globally, with education being one of the most significantly impacted sectors.[1] As governments implemented strict measures to curb the virus's spread, educational institutions faced unprecedented challenges. In the Philippines, for instance, a community quarantine was enforced on March 14, 2020, leading to the suspension of classes across the nation[2]. Following this, Proclamation No. 929 declared a state of calamity due to COVID-19 on March 16, 2020, further complicating educational continuity.[3]

The abrupt shift to remote learning necessitated immediate adaptations by educators and students alike. Globally, over 1.2 billion learners were affected as schools closed their doors to minimize health risks[4]. In the Philippines alone, approximately 28 million students found themselves without traditional classroom instruction.[5] The Department of Education urged educational institutions to respond proactively to these challenges. Education Secretary Briones emphasized that "Education must continue even in times of crisis," highlighting the need for continuity despite the pandemic's disruptions.

To facilitate ongoing education during this crisis, the Department issued DepEd Order No. 12 series of 2020. This order outlined a Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan that incorporated various learning modalities such as limited face-to-face interactions, distance learning through online platforms and modular approaches, blended learning, and homeschooling.[6] The transition to these new methods posed significant challenges for educators accustomed to traditional face-to-face teaching methods. However, many private institutions capitalized on existing e-learning strategies to maintain educational delivery during these trying times.

St. Paul University Surigao (SPUS) exemplified a proactive response to these challenges by implementing Online Distance Learning Education. The university's commitment to academic excellence and faith formation remained steadfast despite the pandemic's

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[1] James Louis-Jean and Kenney Cenat, "Beyond the Face-to-Face Learning: A Contextual Analysis," *Pedagogical Research* 5, no. 4 (August 6, 2020): em0077, https://doi.org/10.29333/pr/8466.

[2] Philippines Department of Education, "DO 012, 2020 – Adoption of the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan for School Year 2020-2021 in the Light of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency | Department of Education," 2020, https://www.deped.gov.ph/2020/06/19/june-19-2020-do-012-2020-adoption-of-the-basic-education-learning-continuity-plan-for-school-year-2020-2021-in-the-light-of-the-covid-19-public-health-emergency/.

[3] Maria Ela L. Atienza et al., "Constitutional Performance Assessment of the 1987 Philippne Constitution: Summary of Findings," *Constitutional Performance Assessment of the 1987 Philippne Constitution: Summary of Findings*, February 10, 2020, https://doi.org/10.31752/IDEA.2020.2.

[4] UNESCO, "Education: From COVID-19 School Closures to Recovery," 2020, https://www.unesco.org/en/covid-19/education-response.

[5] Russell M Viner et al., "School Closure and Management Practices during Coronavirus Outbreaks Including COVID-19: A Rapid Systematic Review," *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health* 4, no. 5 (May 2020): 397–404, https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(20)30095-X.

[6] Department of Education, "Division Memorandum No .341 s .2020 on the Implementation of Modular Distance Learning with Television as Supplement," 2020, accessed October 2, 2020, https://baybaycitydivision-deped.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/341-s.-2020-Implementation-of-Modular-Distance-Learning-with-Television-as-Supplement-MDL-TS.pdf.

obstacles. SPUS had gradually integrated digital learning tools since 2012, which eased the transition to full online distance learning in 2020 for students and faculty alike.

While numerous studies have explored the general shift to remote learning during the pandemic, there remains a notable research gap concerning the effectiveness of specific remote flexible learning models within the Philippine context. Existing research often overlooks the nuances of blended learning environments and the unique challenges faced by educational institutions in developing countries. This study addresses this gap by focusing specifically on the Paulinian Remote Flexible Learning Experience (ReFLEx) at St. Paul University Surigao.

In light of these developments, SPUS introduced the Remote Flexible Learning Experience (ReFLEx), an adaptive instructional approach that combined synchronous and asynchronous learning through various online platforms.[7] This innovative model aimed to enhance student engagement and ensure continuity in education amidst ongoing uncertainties. The theoretical justification for ReFLEx lies in the principles of constructivism and social learning theory, which emphasize active student engagement, collaborative learning, and personalized instruction. As SPUS navigated these transitions, it became imperative to assess the effectiveness of ReFLEx over the past three years. While regular surveys provided some insights into student experiences with online learning, a formal research study was necessary to evaluate its implementation comprehensively.[8]

This research stands in relation to other studies on blended learning by providing a context-specific analysis of a remote flexible learning model. While there are studies that examined the impact of technology on student learning, only a limited studies have focused on the perceptions and experiences of junior high school students in a blended learning environment. Furthermore, this study contributes to the literature by exploring the role of demographic factors, teacher's competence, class program / class schedule, Quipper – learning management system, and teaching - learning engagement (ReFLEx Stations) in shaping student outcomes in remote flexible learning.

Given this context, this study seeks to assess the Paulinian Remote Flexible Learning Experience (ReFLEx) within St. Paul University Surigao's Basic Education Department during the transition to blended learning in the current academic year. As Junior High School Assistant Principal, I recognize that understanding ReFLEx's strengths and areas for improvement will be crucial for future planning and program development within the department.

[7] Maila D. H. Rahiem, "The Emergency Remote Learning Experience of University Students in Indonesia amidst the COVID-19 Crisis," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 19, no. 6 (June 30, 2020): 1–26, https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.19.6.1.

[8] Katharina E. Kariippanon et al., "School Flexible Learning Spaces, Student Movement Behavior and Educational Outcomes among Adolescents: A Mixed-Methods Systematic Review," *Journal of School Health* 91, no. 2 (February 27, 2021): 133–45, https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12984.

METHOD

The researcher utilized an Embedded Mixed Method approach,[9] specifically the Concurrent Nested Design, to assess the Paulinian Remote Flexible Learning Experience (ReFLEx) in St. Paul University Surigao's Junior High School. This design allows for simultaneous collection of both qualitative and quantitative data, with one method taking precedence over the other. In this study, quantitative data was prioritized, while qualitative data served a supportive role.[10]

For the quantitative component, a descriptive research design was employed to systematically describe the assessment of ReFLEx. This involved collecting data to test specific hypotheses and validate findings through qualitative responses.[11] The study focused on Grade 9 students who experienced ReFLEx in both online and blended learning formats. The quantitative sample comprised 116 Grade 9 students. Ten informants were interviewed to gather qualitative insights, selected purposefully from survey participants based on their diverse responses to the quantitative survey. The goal was to gain a deeper understanding of the range of experiences with ReFLEx.

Two primary instruments were used: an adapted questionnaire developed by the Basic Education Academic Council in 2020, which included demographic information and assessment criteria for ReFLEx such as teacher competence and learning engagement. The questionnaire was adapted for this study through a review of existing literature on blended learning and remote education. Modifications were made to ensure the questions were relevant and understandable to the Grade 9 student population. To ensure validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of experts in education and research methodology. A pilot test was conducted with a small group of students to identify any potential issues with clarity or comprehension. The feedback from the pilot test was used to further refine the questionnaire before its final administration. The questionnaire demonstrated excellent internal consistency with a Cronbach alpha of 0.98.

Additionally, qualitative interviews provided context to the quantitative results. Specifically, the qualitative data was used to explore and explain the statistical findings. For instance, if the quantitative data revealed a significant difference in ReFLEx assessment based on gender, the qualitative interviews were used to understand the reasons behind these differences, providing rich, descriptive accounts of the lived experiences of male and female students within the ReFLEx program. In some cases, the qualitative data highlighted nuances that were not captured in the quantitative data, such as the emotional and social challenges

[9] Scott F. Turner, Laura B. Cardinal, and Richard M. Burton, "Research Design for Mixed Methods," *Organizational Research Methods* 20, no. 2 (April 8, 2017): 243–67, https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428115610808.

[10] Thilo Kroll and Melinda Neri, "Designs for Mixed Methods Research," in *Mixed Methods Research for Nursing and the Health Sciences* (Wiley, 2009), 31–49, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444316490.ch3.

[11] Steven C. Currall et al., "Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Methodologies to Study Group Processes:An Illustrative Study of Acorporate Board of Directors," *Organizational Research Methods* 2, no. 1 (January 1, 1999): 5–36, https://doi.org/10.1177/109442819921002.

students faced during remote learning. The qualitative data added depth to the quantitative findings, providing a more holistic understanding of the ReFLEx experience.

To analyze the quantitative data, various statistical tools were employed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 22, including frequency counts and percentage distributions for respondent profiles, as well as mean and standard deviation calculations for assessment levels. Nonparametric tests like the Kruskal-Wallis H test and Mann-Whitney U test were also utilized to explore differences based on age and sex among respondents.

Ethical principles guided the research process, ensuring confidentiality, voluntary participation, and minimal risk to respondents. The study aimed for trustworthiness through established criteria such as credibility, applicability, consistency, and neutrality.[12]

DISCUSSION

Result

The majority of respondents were 14 years old, with a slightly higher percentage of females than males. Most students relied on a single mobile/handheld device for learning, while a smaller proportion used a combination of devices.

The overall assessment of ReFLEx was very satisfactory, with teacher competence receiving the highest mean rating. Quipper – Learning Management System received the lowest mean rating, though still within the "very satisfactory" range.

There was no statistically significant difference in the level of assessment of ReFLEx based on the respondent's age or device used. However, a statistically significant difference was found based on the respondent's sex.

Discussion

Profile of the respondents

Table 1 shows the profile of the respondents in terms of *age, sex,* and *device used for learning.*

Table 1. Profile of the respondents

Profile Variables	f (n=116)	%
Age		
13 years old	6	5.17
14 years old	92	79.31
15 years old	18	15.52
Sex		
Male	52	44.83
Female	64	55.17
Device Used		
One (1) Device (Mobile/Handheld Device)	99	85.34
Two (2) Devices (Mobile/Handheld Devices, Computers/ Laptops)	17	14.66

[12] Egon G. Guba, "Criteria for Assessing the Trustworthiness of Naturalistic Inquiries," *ECTJ* 29, no. 2 (June 1981): 75, https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02766777.

In terms of *age*, 92 (79.31%) respondents are 14 years old, then 15 years old with 18 (15.52%), and 13 years old with 6 (5.17%). In terms of *sex,* most of the respondents are females, with 64 (55.17%), while 52 (44.83%) are males. In terms of *devices used for learning,* most of the respondents used one device (mobile/ handheld device) only, with 99 (85.34%), while 17 (14.66%) used a combination of different devices (mobile/handheld device, computers/ laptops).

Assessment of the Paulinian Remote Flexible Learning Experience

Table 2 shows the respondents' assessment of the Paulinian Remote Flexible Learning Experience. As presented, the overall assessment of ReFLEx is *very satisfactory,* with a mean rating of 3.52.

Table 2. Assessment of the Paulinian Remote Flexible Learning Experience

Indicators	Mean	SD	VI	QD
Teacher's Competence	3.58	0.56	SA	VS
Class Program / Class Schedule	3.54	0.63	SA	VS
Quipper – Learning Management System	3.43	0.68	SA	VS
Teaching - Learning Engagement (Reflex Stations)	3.47	0.65	SA	VS
Average:	3.52	0.80	SA	VS

Legend:

Scale	Range	Verbal Interpretation	Qualitative Description
4	3.25 – 4.00	Strongly Agree (SA)	Very Satisfactory (VS)
3	2.50 – 3.24	Agree (A)	Satisfactory (S)
2	1.75 – 2.49	Disagree (D)	Fair (F)
1	1.00 – 1.74	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Poor (P)

Of the four indicators, the *Teacher's Competence* got the highest mean (M=3.58, SD=0.56), which can be verbally interpreted as *strongly agree* and qualitatively described as *very satisfactory.* This means that the respondents experienced the competence of the teachers despite the changes and challenges of the changing times. This is true because the Basic Education Faculty were given various training such as month-long in-service training and continuous faculty development programs to equip themselves with suitable professional qualifications and pedagogical skills and strategies. Teacher's competence talks about how the teachers handle blended learning and other tasks, including feedback and communication with parents and students. It also deals with the teachers' compassion and consideration toward the students. To optimize performance, a teacher must be able to develop all of his competence-related skills and foster a more welcoming and conducive learning environment for his students.[13]

This competence likely encompasses not only technical skills in using online platforms but also pedagogical strategies adapted for remote instruction, such as providing timely

[13] Garry Falloon, "From Digital Literacy to Digital Competence: The Teacher Digital Competency (TDC) Framework," *Educational Technology Research and Development* 68, no. 5 (October 29, 2020): 2449–72, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-020-09767-4.

feedback, fostering student engagement, and creating a supportive learning environment.[14] The positive assessment of teacher competence can be linked to Bandura's social learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of teacher modeling in student learning. When teachers demonstrate competence in using online tools and strategies, students are more likely to perceive the learning environment as effective and engaging.[15]

Meanwhile, the indicator *Quipper – Learning Management System* got the lowest mean (M=3.43, SD=0.68), which can be verbally interpreted as *strongly agree* and qualitatively described as *very satisfactory.* Despite being the lowest indicator, it still yielded a very satisfactory description, which means that the respondents' use of Quipper makes for effective learning amid the situation. The use of LMS is not new to the university since it has been utilized since 2018. It was found that teachers highly utilized Quipper as LMS in teaching[11]. The Junior High School has been using Quipper for four years, Senior High School for three years, and the Grade School for two years. Learning Management System has taken place at the front rows of the developing and changing technologies.[16] The slightly lower rating for Quipper – Learning Management System, while still satisfactory, suggests potential areas for improvement. This could stem from issues related to user-friendliness, technical glitches, or the integration of the platform with other learning activities. Further investigation is needed to identify specific challenges and implement targeted solutions to enhance the LMS experience.

Difference in the Level of Assessment of the Paulinian Remote Flexible Learning Experience based on the Profile Variables

Table 3 shows the difference in the level of assessment of the Paulinian Remote Flexible Learning Experience based on the profile variables.

A Kruskal-Wallis H test showed no statistically significant difference in the level of assessment of the Paulinian Remote Flexible Learning Experience based on the respondent's age, $\chi^2(2) = 2.084$, $p = 0.353$. This means that the respondents' age does not matter how they experience and feel about the implementation of ReFLEx. Any individual child might seem "more" mature in certain areas and "less" mature in others.[17] However, it was reported that students' age and learning preferences have a significant relationship. This could be

[14] Romalyn C. Garcia et al., "Utilization of Quipper Application as Learning Management System in Teaching as Experienced by the Junior High School Teachers of St. Paul University Surigao," *International Journal of Science and Management Studies (IJSMS)*, February 28, 2022, 129–42, https://doi.org/10.51386/25815946/ijsms-v5i1p113.

[15] Nadire Cavus, "Distance Learning and Learning Management Systems," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 191 (June 2015): 872–77, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.04.611; M. Rizal Fuadiy, "Evaluasi Pembelajaran Sebagai Sebuah Studi Literatur," *DIMAR: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 3, no. 1 (December 1, 2021): 173–97, https://doi.org/10.58577/dimar.v3i1.83.

[16] Viktor Shurygin et al., "Learning Management Systems in Academic and Corporate Distance Education," *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (IJET)* 16, no. 11 (June 4, 2021): 121, https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v16i11.20701.

[17] Mohammad Tri Rizki, Kustiono Kustiono, and Yuli Utanto, "Parent Assistance in The Use of Gadgets for Early Childhood Learning Process," *Innovative Journal of Curriculum and Educational Technology* 10, no. 2 (November 30, 2021): 132–39, https://doi.org/10.15294/IJCET.V10I2.49228.

attributed to the program's flexible design, which allows students to learn at their own pace and engage with materials in ways that suit their individual learning styles.[18]

Table 3. Difference in the Level of Assessment of the Paulinian Remote Flexible Learning Experience based on the Profile Variables

Variables	Z-statistic	Chi-square	p-value	Decision
Age		2.084	0.353	Accept H_o
Sex	-2.329		0.020	Reject H_o
No. of Devices Used	-1.473		0.141	Accept H_o

From the same table, the Mann-Whitney U test showed a statistically significant difference in the level of assessment of the Paulinian Remote Flexible Learning Experience based on the respondent's sex (z=-2.329, p = .020). This means that the sex of the respondents affects their experiences and feelings about the implementation of ReFLEx. This is true because there was a significant difference in student engagement levels based on gender.[19] Furthermore, it was concluded that girls are more likely to benefit from small-group learning than boys because they feel more at ease approaching the teacher for assistance.[20] The completion of assignments, concentration during instruction, planning of learning activities, and relationships with teachers were all better among female students[18]. Contrarily, it was discovered that the respondents' sex had no bearing on how they used Quipper as a learning management system.[21]

Meanwhile, the Mann-Whitney U test showed no statistically significant difference in the level of assessment of the Paulinian Remote Flexible Learning Experience based on the respondent's device used (z=-1.473, p = .141). This means that the device used by the respondents does not affect their experiences and feelings about the implementation of ReFLEx. This means that whether the students used Mobile/ Handheld Devices or Computers/ Laptops, their experience was relatively the same.

CONCLUSION

The assessment of the Paulinian Remote Flexible Learning Experience (ReFLEx) at St. Paul University Surigao reveals a generally positive reception among students, highlighting

[18] Imam Saerozi et al., "Parenting Program in Overcoming the Negative Influence of Information Technology on Students," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Kewirausahaan* 12, no. 1 (December 22, 2023): 311–18, https://doi.org/10.47668/pkwu.v12i1.1116.

[19] Peter Kahn et al., "Understanding Student Engagement in Online Learning Environments: The Role of Reflexivity," *Educational Technology Research and Development* 65, no. 1 (February 20, 2017): 203–18, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-016-9484-z.

[20] Hui-Hua Pai, David A. Sears, and Yukiko Maeda, "Effects of Small-Group Learning on Transfer: A Meta-Analysis," *Educational Psychology Review* 27, no. 1 (March 23, 2015): 79–102, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-014-9260-8.

[21] Mankumari Parajuli and Ajay Thapa, "Gender Differences in the Academic Performance of Students," *Journal of Development and Social Engineering* 3, no. 1 (December 2, 2017): 39–47, https://doi.org/10.3126/jdse.v3i1.27958.

the effectiveness of the program in delivering education through blended learning modalities. Respondents rated their experience as very satisfactory, particularly appreciating the competence of their teachers in managing both face-to-face and online classes. The statistically significant difference in ReFLEx assessment based on the respondent's sex underscores the importance of considering gender-specific needs and preferences in blended learning design. While students expressed strong agreement regarding their teachers' abilities, there was a slight concern about the level of compassion extended to those struggling with blended learning, suggesting an area for potential improvement. These findings affirm the viability of blended learning approaches in maintaining educational continuity and quality during times of disruption. On a broader scale, these insights can inform the development and refinement of similar remote flexible learning programs in other educational institutions, particularly those transitioning to or enhancing their blended learning models.

Based on these findings, actionable strategies for other educational institutions include investing in comprehensive teacher training programs that focus on both technical and pedagogical skills for blended learning, prioritizing the user-friendliness and integration of learning management systems, and implementing targeted interventions to address gender-related disparities in student experiences. Further research should focus on examining the long-term impacts of ReFLEx and similar programs on student academic performance, socio-emotional development, and digital literacy skills. Investigating the effectiveness of different instructional strategies within blended learning environments and exploring the role of parental involvement in supporting student success are also promising avenues for future inquiry.

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