



# Online classes and learning in the Philippines during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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## **Abstract**

*The COVID-19 pandemic brought great disruption to all aspects of life specifically on how classes were conducted both in an offline and online modes. The sudden shift to purely online method of teaching and learning was a result of the lockdowns that were imposed by the Philippine government. While some institutions have dealt with the situation by shutting down operations, others continued to deliver instructions and lessons using the Internet and different applications that support online learning. The continuation of classes online had caused several issues from students and teachers ranging from lack of technology to mental health matters. Finally, recommendations were asserted to mitigate the presented concerns and improve the delivery of the necessary quality education to the intended learners.*

**Keywords:** *online learning, online classes, digital divide, asynchronous learning, synchronous learning, digital tools, learn from home, COVID-19 pandemic*

## **I. Introduction**

### **Background**

The COVID-19 pandemic has been the most challenging dilemma the whole world has experienced in its rich history. Providing education, primarily in its delivery, has never been tested like the way it has been experienced before.

According to UNESCO as of April 13, 2020, around 1.5 billion learners which is more than 90% of total enrolled learners and 60.2 million educators from over 190 countries must remain at home to stop the contagious virus from spreading. There was no different as the case in the Philippines. March 10, 2020 saw several schools in the greater Metropolitan Manila has shut down as the whole area was placed under a community quarantine or popularly known as a “lockdown”. Classes in all levels were suspended together with mass transportation and non-essential establishments or businesses. The whole island of Luzon followed suite after two days as it was placed in a strict enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) for an initial 30 days, subject to extension if it is deemed necessary.

The current pandemic forced the whole country in adapting an online, distance, learning from home method. A certain scheme that most of the institutions around the Philippine archipelago do not have any idea or just starting to comprehend. Issues such as educator’s readiness, technology resources, and geographical situation were needed to be taken into consideration for the delivery of online education to be effective as this is not as a simple shift from the traditional, face-to-face classroom setting to a virtual environment.

## **II. Related Topics**

### *Online Learning Approaches*

Asynchronous online learning is where the instructional delivery where the educator provides all the necessary resources and content in a platform that can be viewed over time at a learner's own pace. Content can come in the form of reading materials, lecture slides, videos, and other learning means (e.g. MOOCs). Assessment is usually conducted through online quizzes and assignments. Online forum and chatgroups usually using a Learning Management System (LMS) provides students and educators interaction in classes.

Synchronous online learning replicates a live class session using video conferencing platforms. As an educator is conducting a lecture in real time while several students can attend the session. Assessments can be conducted using online tools or programs to check on student's understanding immediately while in a session. Assignments can still be completed at a student's own pace and time.

*Table 1. Online learning tools*

	<b>Asynchronous</b>	<b>Synchronous</b>
Lectures	Downloadable / Streaming Video	Live Video Conferencing, screencasting
Reference Materials	Downloadable content	Delivered during Live Video Conferencing
Quizzes	Online quiz	Delivered during Live Video Conferencing
Assignments	Online assignment	
Group Interaction	Message boards	Live Video Conferencing
Consultation	Private messaging, email, online chat	

Currently, education uses a combination of asynchronous and synchronous instructional delivery, this is referred as hybrid or blended learning. Using the hybrid type of conducting classes, educators have the flexibility to work on modules that needs to be instructed in real time and modules that can be learned online. Assessments can be completed asynchronously as homework, projects, and other classroom outputs can be completed asynchronously.

Flipped classroom can also be implemented by recording and uploading live video lectures to comply with the mantra "no student being left behind". Streaming services (e.g. YouTube) has become readily available even being free that uploading of resources a possibility. Facebook and other tools such as Messenger were also being utilized as an immediate technology in communication and other related means in the delivery of content to learners.

### *Digital Divide*

In educating the students of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, being able to humans interact with technology is an important factor in learning. The ability to access technology has become increasingly critical. The digital divide denotes the increasing disparity between the disadvantaged members of the population. These marginalized members are the disabled/handicapped, elderly, and poor segment of the population who have no access to technology most specifically the Internet and computers.

Having to bridge the digital divide is one of the most pertinent objectives of all stakeholders within the society. Governments, private institutions, and civil society organizations have been initiating and collaborating programs to alleviate the current gap. Awareness programs have been created and assistance programs funded to support activities in training the marginalized in using technology.

## I. Methods

Communication through series of interviews with representatives from different institutions were conducted. Subjects were comprised by students, faculty, and administrators and includes personal observations from the researchers. The inputs gathered were obtained from 29 institutions located in different parts of the country. Of the institutions surveyed, 22 are private schools, universities, and colleges; and seven (7) are state colleges and universities (SUCs) and/or local college and universities (LUCs) located in Metro Manila, Cavite, Laguna, Bulacan, Batangas, and Lanao del Norte. About 62% of the respondents were educators and 38% were combined students from across all levels from primary, junior and senior high school, and tertiary.

Issues were gathered and compiled both from institutions who temporarily suspended operations due to different concerns and from the ones who continued conducting classes through the online mode. Feedback was gathered from the encounters experienced by the subjects.

## II. Results and Discussion

The interviews and consultations were able to produce common observations on how online classes have been delivered across institutions. There were several tools begin utilized by institutions which are summarized in the table below:

*Table 2. Tools being used by institutions*

<b>Learning management systems (mostly the free version)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Google Classroom</li><li>○ Moodle</li><li>○ Edmodo</li><li>○ Blackboard LMS</li><li>○ Schoology</li></ul>
<b>Video conferencing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Zoom</li><li>○ Google Meet</li><li>○ Collaborate</li></ul>
<b>Communication platforms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Facebook</li><li>○ Facebook Messenger</li><li>○ Google Hangouts</li><li>○ Viber</li><li>○ WhatsApp</li></ul>

Student references and outputs such as activities, quizzes, learning/reading materials were uploaded and/or submitted using an LMS to keep up with the times that classes were not in session.

Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) were also utilized and integrated as part or an alternative to the lectures and lessons.

Some of the institutions have opted to continue conducting classes through a virtual face-to-face using video conferencing tools mimicking the environment of an offline mode of learning. Feedback was collected and summarized regarding the issues concerning delivery of online classes and learning. The following concerns were acknowledged digital divide challenges experienced by students and educators:

- Poor to no Internet connectivity at current location.
- None or shared suitable technology (laptop or desktop) for attending online classes or creating and submitting outputs.



- Insufficient knowledge in using digital technologies.
- Insufficient knowledge on modes of conducting and/or attending online classes.

Issues were not only directed to utilization of technology. Students and educators also encountered concerns and problems not related to technology. These non-technology related issues were addressed by students and educators alike:

*Table 3. Non-technology related issues*

<b>Students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to go out of the house to purchase data load in order to attend classes</li> <li>• Heavy workload and requirements of online classes</li> <li>• Personal reasons that relates to family, anxiety, and depression</li> </ul>
<b>Teachers/ instructors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional time and effort needed, as communication with students tend to extend beyond regular class hours</li> <li>• Additional work in monitoring students coming to class and submitting requirements online</li> <li>• Tiring and stressful for teachers who are not used to being glued to their seats while teaching, compared to the classroom setup</li> </ul>

As of this writing, many of the institutions are preparing and laying out plans for scenarios after the lifting of the community quarantine. This is aiming to provide quality education to students despite the rigors and academic requirements and the instability of the situation moving forward.

## V. Conclusion and Recommendations

Learning in the new normal or conducting online classes has been a challenge especially to institutions, more particularly to students and educators. Given the methods schools have conducted and the concerns students and educators have addressed, the following have been realized and recommended in the implementation of the following online learning in classes:

- Not all institutions have the capability to deliver online learning/classes maybe due to the lack of equipment, technical know-how, and other issues not mentioned.
- All institutions have a way of communicating with educators and students through various platforms that are available especially if it is free.
- Institutions should have a program to train educators in conducting online learning and classes that will not diminish the quality that needs to be delivered,
- Institutions should be ready in delivering online learning and classes in case of situations such as pandemics, national and global conflicts, and others that are beyond control. Hard and soft copies of modules, delivery of instruction through radio, TV, or implementing last mile solutions to hard-to-reach areas of the country can be employed.
- The Department of Education (DepEd) and Commission on Higher Education (CHED) should start laying the foundation on how online learning and classes should be delivered where institutions can follow. The plans can be setting a standard in the delivery of education.
- In cooperation of the Department of Information and Communication Technology and private telecommunication providers, enabling an affordable and reliable internet connection which is available for all regardless of location will be an enormous assist in the objective of proving quality online education.

- Support from all stakeholders that has a hand on the conceptualization, implementation, delivery, and cooperation from the ones who will undergo the programs at hand.
- Teaching methods and modules need to be redesigned where one cannot simply translate traditional lecture-based content to video conferencing sessions.
- Adaptation of more appropriate assessment tools.
- Workload, pacing of lessons, and the type of learning materials needs to be adjusted taking into consideration the mental health of educators and learners.
- Finally, a mental health program should be instituted by schools to assist students and educators to cope with the ongoing pandemic amidst online classes.

The COVID-19 situation created a scenario when all have been said and done, will not to look at the world the same way again. Same goes for education, as through these experiences, institutions will explore the possibility of improving environments towards the delivery of online learning and classes. It is seen that a hybrid (blended) learning being implemented even face-to-face classes resumes. Readiness will be the key towards the success of any institutional program relating to delivery of online education in taking advantage of the different digital tools to hone better individuals of tomorrow.

### **Acknowledgement**

The researcher would like to send its deepest appreciation to the Internet Society-Philippines Chapter (ISOC-PH) to its valuable contribution to the completion of this research. Also sending gratitude to the 29 institutions who participated in obtaining information on the current issues and actions regarding the situation at hand. This will not be possible without the support of people both from the internet governance sphere, from SISC, and the inspiration provided by families, friends, and peers alike.

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