

Flexible or Stretched-Out: The Plight of the New Normal Researchers

¹Evangeline H. Alvarez, ²Alvin O. Cayogyog, ³Roxan R. Remorosa, ⁴Angelie F. Tomas, ⁵Airyn M. Arbuliente

1Agusan del Sur State University, Philippines, PhD; Orcid ID 804-1267-804-1267 2Agusan del Sur State University, Philippines, PhD; Orcid ID 804-1267-804-1267 3Agusan del Sur State University, Philippines, PhD; ORCID ID 804-1267-804-1267

4Agusan del Sur State University, Philippines, MAEd : ORCID ID 804-1267-804-1267X

5Agusan del Sur State University, Philippines, MST.: ORCID: 0009- 804-1267-4287

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ABSTRACT:

This qualitative phenomenological research study provides a comprehensive exploration of the experiences of educators and researchers navigating the implementation of the Flexible Teaching-Learning Approach (FTLA) within the context of the new normal. The study unravels the complexities of FTLA, where educators face challenges in integrating research-based and hands-on learning, especially in fields requiring practical experience due to connectivity issues that disrupt synchronous online classes and hinder learning opportunities. The absence of laboratory work and experimental research compromises teaching quality and timely outcomes. The study reveals that students' heightened demands and expectations impact teaching quality and educators' productivity, underscoring the need for infrastructure improvements to promote equitable access to digital education and mitigate disparities in online learning. Additionally, it explores educators' physical, mental, and emotional well-being challenges, including stress-related issues such as hair loss, headaches, eye problems due to prolonged screen time, disrupted sleep patterns, reduced focus, irritability, and emotional strain necessitating breaks for composure. The study also highlights faculty members' struggle to balance instructional and research roles, with faculty loading being a primary concern. Educators seek incentives and recognition to boost research motivation, but the lack of flexibility in research and time management often results in prioritizing teaching over research. This implies that the study's multifaceted findings underscore the need for infrastructure improvements, enhanced support for educators and students, and adjustments to faculty workloads and incentives to promote a balanced and effective approach to education in the evolving digital learning landscape, ensuring equitable, accessible, and high-quality education in the new normal.

Keywords: researchers, flexible, New normal, experiences, stretched-out,

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Introduction

The years 2020 and 2021 stand out as a time of unparalleled challenges for researchers in academic institutions worldwide. The pandemic coronavirus illness 2019 (COVID-19) has caused unparalleled social devastation. Higher education institutions are no exception. Universities and colleges throughout the world have quickly shifted to totally online teaching and learning models, introduced remote work for the majority of staff, and closed innumerable public venues and programs to protect the safety of their communities and conform to public health recommendations (Wigginton, Cunningham, Katz, Lidstrom, Moler, Wirtz, & Zuber, 2020).

In this extraordinary period, researchers were confronted with a host of issues that extended well beyond their academic endeavors. The pandemic prompted a radical shift in the way research was conducted, with implications for work-life balance, productivity, and well-being. While the academic community has generated a significant body of literature examining the impact of the pandemic on higher education, a notable research gap persists in our understanding of the nuanced experiences of researchers during these tumultuous times. The necessity, urgency, and relevance of this research become evident when considering the pandemic's profound implications on individual researchers' lives and the broader research landscape.

The disruption to research activities directly impacted scholarly productivity and publication timelines. The closure of physical libraries, archives, and laboratories, as highlighted by Hernandez and Li (2021), hindered the progress of ongoing research projects, leaving researchers to find innovative solutions for accessing necessary resources and continuing their work. The pandemic also disrupted fieldwork, delaying data collection and analysis for many, which had cascading effects on research timelines and grant-funded projects. This interruption to the normal research cycle had implications for academic career progression and the dissemination of scholarly work, making it imperative to investigate the pandemic's influence on research productivity and the strategies employed by researchers to

mitigate these disruptions.

Furthermore, it is crucial to address these challenges within the framework of appropriate Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the context of the discussed research disruptions, SDGs such as Quality Education (Goal 4) and Decent Work and Economic Growth (Goal 8) become particularly relevant. Understanding and mitigating the impact of the pandemic on academic research aligns with the broader objectives of fostering resilient and inclusive educational systems and promoting sustained, inclusive economic growth. Additionally, the accessibility and dissemination of research findings contribute to the fulfillment of Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities). By anchoring the investigation within the SDGs, this study not only addresses immediate concerns but also contributes to the broader global agenda for sustainable development.

Methodology

We have chosen a phenomenological inquiry as the research design for this study, recognizing its suitability to explore the lived experiences of the new normal researchers engaging with the Flexible Teaching-Learning Approach (FTLA) amid the challenges of the New Normal in education (Vagle, 2018). Through the focus group discussion and in-depth interviews, we encourage researchers to freely express their encounters with FTLA, providing rich narratives essential for subsequent thematic analysis (Berkey, et al., 2023). Emphasizing the uniqueness of each individual's experience, we contextualize the study within diverse academic sectors (Wyatt, 2015). By adopting this phenomenological lens, we aim to comprehensively explore the deeper meanings and shared essences embedded in researchers' experiences with FTLA, thereby offering valuable insights that can inform the development of educational policies and practices in the ever-evolving landscape of the New Normal (Sato, et al., 2023; Eslit, 2023).

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the new normal academic landscape, we included Five (5) participants in Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

and Three (3) Key Informant Interviewees, thus including a total of 8 participants. The sampling technique that we employed for this study is purposive sampling. According to Creswell (2012), purposeful sampling means investigators use personal judgment, based on people and place of central phenomenon. This method was chosen in this study because it allows for the selection of participants based on their experience and expertise in the field, ensuring that the chosen individuals can provide valuable insights into the research questions.

We conducted this study at Agusan del Sur State College of Agriculture and Technology (ASSCAT) which underwent a rich history of evolution and growth. It was initially established in 1908 as the Manobo Industrial School. Over the years, it underwent several transformations, including becoming the Bunawan Agricultural School, Bunawan Junior Agricultural High School (BJAHS), Bunawan National Agricultural School (BUNAS), and Southern Agusan National Agricultural College (SANAC), with each change accompanied by corresponding legislative actions. Finally, on March 1, 1995, RA No. 7932 was signed by President Fidel V. Ramos, officially converting SANAC into Agusan del Sur State College of Agriculture and Technology (ASSCAT). Since then, ASSCAT has continually expanded its academic programs, infrastructure, and institutional excellence, with ongoing efforts to attain university status, while maintaining a strong focus on providing quality education and services to its stakeholders. Today, it offers a range of graduate and undergraduate programs and has been converted by law into Agusan del Sur State University (AdSU) in 2021 by Republic Act 11586 (History of Agusan del Sur Website, <https://asscat.edu.ph/history/>).

We followed a systematic data-gathering procedure to ensure the accuracy, rigor, and validity of the collected qualitative data. We first secured formal permission from the appropriate authorities at the Agusan del Sur State College of Agriculture and Technology, aligning with the ethical principles advocated by Denscombe (2014) as it ensured both access to the research site and established trust and credibility. We

administered the informed consent forms, based on the guidelines provided by Creswell and Creswell (2017), to all study participants, emphasizing the significance of informed consent in qualitative research ethics. We conducted the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) for administrators, faculty, researchers, and extensionists using a structured interview guide adhering to the best practices outlined by Krueger and Casey (2015), and all FGDs were audio recorded to ensure comprehensive data collection. Additionally, we conducted key informant interviews (KIIs) with selected participants following the methodology described by Rubin and Rubin (2012) to delve into in-depth insights. We transcribed into text format the audio recordings from both FGDs and KIIs, aligning with the transcription procedures outlined by Saldana (2013) to ensure the reliability of subsequent data analysis. By adhering to these methodical steps and drawing on the insights of prominent authors in qualitative research, this data-gathering procedure guaranteed the collection of robust, valid, and reliable qualitative data.

The research instrument, which included the interview guide for Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), played a crucial role in the success of this phenomenological inquiry. We carefully designed each instrument component anchored on insights from renowned authors in qualitative

research. Creswell and Creswell's (2017) work on research design highlighted the importance of a well-structured instrument. Based on the best practices outlined by Krueger and Casey (2015), the interview guide ensured that the questions were clear, comprehensive, and designed to elicit in-depth responses from participants in FGDs and KIIs. Rubin and Rubin (2012) emphasized the art of qualitative interviewing, underscoring the significance of open-ended questions, active listening, and rapport-building techniques. The coding manual for qualitative researchers by Saldana (2013) is invaluable during the subsequent analysis phase. It guides how to systematically code and categorize the rich data generated during the interviews. Therefore, our research instrument is not just a tool but a well-considered framework

that aligns with established methodologies, ensuring that the data collected is both reliable and rich, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the multiple case studies.

We ensured trustworthiness in our study to establish the validity and reliability of its findings, particularly in the context of a phenomenological inquiry. We did this by adhering to the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as advocated by contemporary authors in qualitative research. Credibility, according to Nowell et al. (2017), underscores the importance of rigorous data collection and analysis methods. In this study, we maintained the credibility criterion by employing robust research designs and data-gathering techniques, such as FGDs and KIIs, as well as meticulous transcription and systematic coding of data. Transferability, as proposed by Morse (2015), suggests that the findings should apply to similar contexts. In the case of new normal researchers, we believe that offering a clear and comprehensive description of the research context and the characteristics of the participants can enhance transferability. Dependability, according to Maxwell (2013), necessitates that the research process be consistent and reliable over time. In this study, we documented the research procedures, the evolution of the research design, and any changes made during the research process.

Finally, confirmability, as discussed by Daniel (2019), implies that the findings are verifiable and not influenced by the researcher's biases. In this phenomenological analysis, confirmability was ensured by providing an audit trail of the research process, offering transparency in the analysis, and employing member checking, where participants were invited to validate the study's findings. Thus, trustworthiness, as viewed through these lenses, is vital in assuring the credibility and reliability of the study's findings concerning the challenges and experiences of new normal academicians.

We believe that ethical considerations in research, as emphasized by established authors, are essential to uphold the integrity of this study, particularly in the context of a

phenomenological analysis focusing on the plight of the new normal researchers. As such, we upheld confidentiality and anonymity, as advocated by Guest et al. (2018), as crucial in safeguarding the privacy and identities of participants. Likewise, in obtaining informed consent guided by the principles discussed by Creswell and Creswell (2017), we ensured that participants were well-informed about the research's purpose, procedures, and potential risks, thereby upholding their autonomy and right to make voluntary decisions to participate.

We also adhered to the idea of non-maleficence and beneficence, as emphasized by Beauchamp and Childress (2019), underscoring our ethical obligation to minimize harm and contribute positively to knowledge in the field. This aligned with the study's intent to shed light on the challenges faced by new normal researchers. Throughout the research process, we ensured justice in the treatment of participants and their data, as highlighted by Guest et al. (2018), emphasizing equitable and fair treatment, free from discrimination or bias. Thus, in this phenomenological analysis, ethical considerations served as the cornerstone of the research process, fostering a climate of trust, respect, and ethical responsibility toward the participants and the data gathered.

Presentation of Results and Discussion

This part presents the results and discussions of the study based on how the research questions are presented.

Results

1) The trying experiences of the researchers in implementing FTLA.

Table 1. The experiences of researchers

Main Theme	Core Ideas	Issues
Challenges Experiences and the of FTLA	Unfavorable Aspects of FTLA	1. Limited ability to incorporate research-based instruction and hands-on activities into the curriculum.
		2. Flexible scheduling and intermittent face-to-face classes for hands-on activities and discussions.
		3. Absence of laboratory work and experimental research affecting certain research projects.
		4. compromised quality of teaching and timeliness of output.
		5. High Demands and Challenges with Student expectations
		6. Challenges of Adaptation and Interpersonal Skills
	Favorable Aspects of FTLA	1. Convenience for faculty and students, reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission, and saving time and effort.
		2. Flexible scheduling and intermittent face-to-face classes for hands-on activities and discussions.

This table summarizes the main theme and the core ideas that emerged associated with the challenges and experiences in

Challenges and Experiences in the Implementation of FTLA

Unfavorable Aspects of FTLA

FTLA was considered unfavorable for the interviewee as it limited the ability to incorporate research-based instruction and hands-on activities into the curriculum. Due to the online nature of FTLA, certain subjects such as agriculture that require practical experience suffer. Connectivity issues, particularly for students from remote areas, made it challenging to conduct and participate in synchronous online

classes, resulting in limited learning opportunities as KII-1 expressed his sentiments that he cannot let the students

do hands-on, and cannot elucidate what might happen because it is Agriculture.

the implementation of the Flexible Teaching and Learning Approach (FTLA)

The interviewee highlighted the distinctive nature of agricultural education and the need for practical experiences in the field. The initial statement, "No, you cannot do hands-on; you cannot elucidate what is happening because it's Agriculture," underscores the essential role of hands-on learning in agriculture. Unlike some theoretical subjects, agriculture demands direct involvement to understand the intricacies of the field. This is because agricultural practices often involve tangible, real-world processes that cannot be comprehended solely through theory or imagination.

The reference to Jose Rizal's death in the second statement serves as a

powerful analogy to emphasize the importance of practical experience in agriculture. It suggests that while historical events like Jose Rizal's death might be well-documented and known, agricultural processes are distinct and require a different approach to learning. This contrast emphasizes that agricultural education cannot rely on imagination alone but must actively engage students in real, hands-on experiences.

The final statement, "In Agriculture, you will do laboratory work, and students need to really experience agriculture," succinctly encapsulates the core message. It stresses that agricultural education entails laboratory work and practical experiences as vital components, emphasizing that students must immerse themselves in the field to truly grasp its complexities. These statements collectively emphasize the unique nature of agricultural education and the imperative for students to actively participate in real agricultural experiences for a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

During FTLA, the lack of laboratory work and experimental research was a disadvantage that hindered research-based teaching and hands-on learning. This resulted in some research projects not being completed, posing challenges for researchers. Despite these significant challenges faced by researchers and educators, they were able to adjust and adapt, ultimately meeting their research targets within the constraints of FTLA.

Moreover, connectivity issues also add to the burden of learning and teaching among students. Writing and researching as well are greatly affected as KII 1 expressed: No learning at all, why? Of the 50 students enrolled, only six attended.

The provided statements show concerning issues surrounding education and accessibility. The fact that only six out of the fifty enrolled students attended the class is a clear indication of a significant learning gap. The excuse of a lack of signal leading to most students disengaging from the learning process

underscores the challenges of digital education in areas with unreliable or inadequate infrastructure. It raises questions about the

equitable distribution of educational resources and the need for solutions that can bridge these disparities. While technology offers great learning potential, these statements shed light on the importance of addressing infrastructure issues to ensure that education remains accessible to all, regardless of their geographical location or socio-economic background.

Another challenge is the quality of teaching which resulted due to document overload, constant meetings, and high demands from students. This issue is closely linked to a compromise in the quality and timeliness of output. The data supports the issue with statements that highlight the challenges associated with document overload. The interviewee expresses concerns about tasks being simultaneous and documents overflowing, ultimately leading to compromised output. This issue points to how the volume of documents and tasks can affect productivity and the ability to meet deadlines. The inability to manage documents effectively can result in a delayed start for research and an impact on the quality of output. KII 3 emphasizes the unfavorable situation as he said: Yes, it's quite challenging. You cannot follow along, and there are constant document requests, and it affects your work. There are simultaneous webinars and meetings, and all these documents keep piling up, compromising the output. Your productivity as a researcher and faculty member is affected (L 804-1267).

The statements provided shed light on the challenges faced by researchers and faculty members in a context where managing multiple tasks and a constant influx of documents affect their productivity. The phrase "Yes, it's quite challenging" immediately conveys the acknowledgment of the difficulties in this situation. It sets the

tone for what follows, indicating that the challenges are significant and noteworthy. The subsequent lines point out some specific challenges faced, including the inability to follow along with the simultaneous webinars, constant document requests, and constant meetings.

The mention of "constant document requests" and the accumulation of documents impacting work highlights the administrative burdens that researchers and faculty members encounter. These administrative tasks can divert their time and attention from their primary research work, ultimately compromising their productivity. The statement underscores the interconnectedness of these challenges and their cumulative impact, culminating in reduced research output. It brings to light the broader issue that, in a research and faculty role, one's capacity to generate valuable research contributions can be severely hindered when inundated with administrative tasks and distractions. These lines effectively convey the frustration and limitations faced by those in academia dealing with these challenges. Another significant issue that emerged is the high demands and expectations placed on Individuals involved in FTLA, particularly by students. The interviewee highlights that students have become demanding and somewhat overindulged. This issue is substantiated by the statements regarding the demanding nature of students. The interviewee expresses concern about the high demands made by students, making it challenging for educators to balance their work effectively. This issue can impact the quality of teaching and faculty members' work. The increased demands from students have the potential to lower teaching standards and affect the overall teaching quality, which highlights the challenges educators face in meeting student expectations as KII-3 said: They have high demands, and we've facilitated and given them so much consideration that it feels like

we've lost our teaching effectiveness and quality because we've lowered our standards. (Lines 804-1267)

The provided statement highlights a common dilemma faced by educators when dealing with students who have high demands and expectations. The phrase "These students have high demands" signifies that there's a considerable level of pressure from students to meet certain requirements or expectations. The subsequent line points out that educators have made efforts to accommodate these demands, which, on the surface, seems like a considerate approach. However, it also raises a critical concern that the quest to meet these high demands might have led to a compromise in teaching effectiveness and a potential decline in educational quality. This statement underscores the delicate balance that educators must strike between accommodating student needs and maintaining the standards and quality of education. It resonates with the broader discussion about the challenges in contemporary education, where maintaining rigor and quality can sometimes conflict with addressing increasing student expectations.

Similarly, KII 2 shares the same sentiments as he said: An additional challenge was the pressure of students who submitted work late (KII 2, L804-1267).

The statements highlight the complexities of teaching in an online environment, particularly when dealing with students who tend to submit work late and rely on last-minute efforts. The phrase "pressure on students being pampered" suggests that these students may have grown accustomed to lenient approaches and thus feel a sense of entitlement. This behavior not only places additional burdens on instructors but also signifies a need for students to develop better time management skills. The necessity for instructors to adjust to this challenging situation is emphasized, indicating their adaptability in the face of student behaviors that can hinder the teaching and learning process. Moreover, the mentioned technical issues, including internet connectivity

problems and students' punctuality, add another layer of complications to online teaching, underlining the need for comprehensive support and clear guidelines to navigate these challenges effectively and ensure a more seamless learning experience for both educators and students.

Further, challenges in adaptation and interpersonal skills also arise from the shift to FTLA. It underscores the need to adjust to a new teaching environment and adapt to students' varying needs. The statements from lines KII 3 lines 804-1267 emphasize the importance of adaptation to the new online teaching environment. The interviewee points out the need to adjust to students' demands, especially as many are not adaptable to the new online learning situation. Additionally, this issue touches upon the emotional and interpersonal challenges associated with the abrupt shift to online teaching. The need to adapt to different types of interactions and transactions in an online setting can impact educators' social and interpersonal skills as these lines suggest: And the time you have to consider for facilitating the students' needs in teaching. Then imagine we still answer them at night (KII 3,804-1267).

The statements highlight the significant challenges educators face in the context of shifting from face-to-face teaching to online education. The first part discusses the time and effort required to facilitate students' needs in the online teaching environment, suggesting a heightened demand for educators' time and attention. The mention of answering students at night underlines the additional workload and perhaps blurred boundaries between personal and professional life. These factors, in turn, impact the ability to produce meaningful educational outputs. The abrupt shift from face- to-face to online teaching is noted, and

it's evident that this transition has had a substantial impact on both educators and students, potentially affecting their adaptability to the new learning environment. This emphasizes the broader challenge of adapting to an online teaching environment, particularly when it occurs suddenly, and the need for support and resources to ensure a smooth transition while maintaining educational quality and effectiveness.

Favorable Aspects of FTLA

FTLA provided the advantage of convenience for both faculty and students, allowing them to stay at home, reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission, and saving time and effort. Flexible scheduling and the ability to hold some face-to-face classes intermittently provided an opportunity for hands-on activities and discussions.

FTLA offers the significant benefit of convenience for both faculty and students, allowing them to learn from the comfort of their homes. This not only mitigates the risk of COVID-19 transmission but also conserves valuable time and effort as KII 1 said: Just staying at home, you also avoid getting infected with COVID, right? Even for the students, it's convenient for them, and it saves time and money (L804-1267). The statements underscore the dual advantages of staying at home and the increasing prevalence of online resources, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, staying at home has been a crucial strategy to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission, making it a responsible choice.

2. The trying experiences of researchers that shape the researchers' conditions physically, mentally, emotionally, interpersonally, spiritually, and professionally

Table 2. Impact of FTLA on Researchers' Well-being

Themes	Issues
Physical Impact	- Gradual Reduction
	- insufficient rest
	- Laptop Strain
	- Extended work at home
Mental Impact	- Disrupted Sleep
	- Struggles with Concentration
	- Disturbed thoughts
	-Compromised thinking

Themes	Issues
Emotional Impact	- Quick Temper
	- Emotional Sensitivity
Professional Impact	Active engagement
	Multiple tasking
	Delayed research writing
	Intellectual growth due to Webinar Participation
	Contributed in planning

Impact of FTLA on Researchers' Well-being

The main theme of the data is the exploration of how the implementation of Flexible Teaching and Learning Arrangements (FTLA) has impacted the physical, mental, emotional, interpersonal, spiritual, and professional aspects of the well-being of the researchers.

Physical Impact

In response to the interviewer's question regarding physical struggles, FGD 4 described a gradual reduction of a physical burden. He mentioned that the stress had lightened, possibly due to effective time management and the opportunity to work from home. He also noted experiencing hair loss, which could be attributed to the stress associated with FTLA.

FGD 1 reported that the FTLA had caused physical issues like headaches and affected their eyesight due to multitasking and reduced

sleep. The stress had led to the need for relaxation, which sometimes led to age-related sleeping problems. This suggests that the physical health of the researchers was negatively impacted.

FGD 5 highlighted physical manifestations, including headaches and eye pain, primarily due to extended periods spent in front of a laptop for online classes. The impact of radiation and eye strain was emphasized, underlining the challenges posed by FTLA on their physical well-being. P18-L804-1267 complained as he said: I've had headaches and eye pain. Unlike before, when we weren't mandated to be on the laptop all the time.

FGD 3 revealed that the FTLA led to significant damage to their eyesight, ultimately requiring the use of glasses. This indicates a tangible and direct physical impact on one's eyesight due to the demands of online teaching and research.

FGD 2 and FGD 5 shared their struggles with disrupted sleep patterns due to work-related stress, highlighting the challenge of

Mental Impact

Concerning the mental impact of FTLA,

unwinding and quieting the mind. FGD 1 expressed difficulties in focusing and managing tasks due to the mental strain of FTLA. This impacted their emotional state, and they mentioned needing breaks to regain focus.

FGD 3 discussed irritability, particularly when dealing with a high workload and time management issues. This interviewee conveyed that such struggles had also disrupted their sleep and ability to rest.

Emotional Impact

The emotional impact of FTLA was examined in the data. FGD 2 reported quick temper and emotional sensitivity, leading to the need for occasional days off to escape disturbances and calm the mind. FGD 3 disclosed heightened emotional sensitivity, particularly in times of increased workload and time constraints. The emotional aspect was affected by difficulties in managing tasks and the inability to leave work-related concerns behind.

The mental impact of the Flexible Teaching and Learning Approach (FTLA) is evident through various challenges that researchers and educators face (Shepherd, 2018). Disrupted sleep patterns emerge as a prominent issue, as the transition to FTLA often brings about heightened stress and increased workload (Lee, 2017). The demands of adapting to online teaching, managing multiple tasks, and navigating virtual interactions can lead to difficulties in achieving restful sleep, affecting both the quantity and quality of rest researchers obtain. This, in turn, contributes to struggles with concentration, as inadequate sleep impairs cognitive functions, making it challenging for educators to maintain focus and productivity during their professional tasks. Disturbed thoughts become a consequence, reflecting the mental toll of balancing teaching responsibilities in a dynamic and evolving educational landscape. The overall result is compromised thinking, as the cumulative effects of disrupted sleep, concentration struggles, and disturbed thoughts impact the cognitive processes essential for effective teaching and learning within the flexible framework. Addressing these mental

challenges becomes crucial for fostering a supportive environment that ensures the well-being and sustained effectiveness of educators engaged in flexible teaching and learning practices.

Professional Impact

The flexible teaching-learning approach has profoundly impacted the professional journey of researchers, fostering active engagement with various critical issues. Embracing this approach has necessitated the development of multitasking skills, challenging them to manage diverse responsibilities concurrently. Although it has led to delayed research writing at times, the process has been invaluable in cultivating intellectual growth, particularly through active participation in webinars. The dynamic nature of this approach has also provided opportunities to contribute significantly to planning initiatives, allowing them to shape the learning experience proactively. In navigating the complexities of flexible teaching and learning, they have not only honed their professional skills but also played a vital role in collaborative planning, contributing positively to the educational landscape.

3. Assessment of school researchers in their conditions during the implementation of FTLA as to be flexible and/or stretched-out

Table 3. Flexible and/or stretched-out

Main Theme	Issues
Challenges faced by faculty in balancing duties in the new normal.	1. need for incentives
	2. Lack of flexibility in research due to workloads
	3. The need for guidance and seminars on research

Challenges faced by faculty in balancing duties

The main theme that emerges from this data is the struggle of faculty members to balance their instructional responsibilities with their research duties, particularly in the context of the new normal. This theme highlights the challenge of maintaining flexibility, increased workloads, limited resources, and the constraints imposed by the pandemic.

In lines 804-1267 of KII 2, the faculty member expressed their need to enhance faculty loading. They raised concerns about the number of hours spent on teaching compared to other institutions. The lack of incentives and recognition for their research efforts was highlighted. They called for incentives beyond monetary rewards to motivate teachers to engage in research activities (lines 804-1267).

The issue of flexibility in research is prominent throughout the data (lines 804-1267). Faculty members mentioned the challenges they face in balancing their roles as instructors and researchers. The data indicates that instructional responsibilities take precedence over research, leaving little room for flexibility. They often struggle with time management and the pressure to meet targets.

In FGD 2, faculty members offered recommendations for addressing the challenges posed by the new normal (lines 804-1267). Suggestions included continuing to use of online platforms for instruction and improving equipment and technology for students as participants.

This statement from FGD 3 L804-1267, p10) emphasizes the possible benefits of attending webinars and online seminars while simultaneously arguing for the ongoing use of data-collecting technologies such as Google Forms despite their shortcomings. It highlights usability as a key advantage, meaning that, despite the limitations, these technologies remain useful tools for engagement and data collection in a variety of cases.

In addition, the succeeding statement by FGD 1((L804-1267, p10) emphasizes the need to align research activities with a program's objectives.

It underlines the need to adhere to criteria that align with the program's goals, ensuring that research activities stay purposeful and directly contribute to the desired outcomes. It hopes to avoid wasting resources and time on research projects that do not correspond with or enhance the program's objectives.

To end, this analysis underscores the complex situation faced by faculty members as they strive to balance teaching and research responsibilities in the new normal. The lack of flexibility in research, the need for incentives, and the importance of guidance and seminars were highlighted as critical issues. Recommendations for addressing these challenges in the current educational landscape were also provided. Despite these challenges, the faculty members remain committed to enhancing their research activities and adapting to the changing circumstances.

4. Recommendations on how to address their trying situations in this new normal time

Table 4. Recommendations on how to address their trying situations

Theme	Issues
Faculty Loading and Time Management Challenges During the New Normal	Faculty Loading
	Lack of Hands-On Research
	Inadequate Preparation and Communication

These issues collectively highlight the challenges researchers face in managing faculty loads, conducting hands-on research, and addressing communication and preparation deficiencies during the new normal. Adaptation and comprehensive strategies are needed to overcome these challenges. The primary theme emerging from the interviews and group discussion is the significant impact of faculty loading and time management on researchers during the new normal. Three key issues within this theme can be identified:

Faculty Loading

Interviewee 1 in KII 1 points out that the faculty's workload has dramatically increased in the new normal, primarily due to the transition to online teaching and additional activities. This heavy faculty load restricts researchers from dedicating time to their research activities. The suggestion is that institutions should take this into account and perhaps adjust faculty loads accordingly.

Lack of Hands-On Research

In KII 1, Interviewee 1 laments the difficulty of conducting hands-on research during the new normal. They emphasize that most of the work is now virtual, limiting opportunities for fieldwork or practical research. This issue significantly hinders research output and is exacerbated by the online environment.

Inadequate Preparation and Communication

In KII, Interviewee 3 (L804-1267, p5) brings attention to the lack of preparation and effective communication in managing online courses. They stress that both faculty and students are affected by the absence of

proper guidance, leading to difficulties in adapting to the new normal. The interviewee calls for better management and communication strategies, especially in addressing the challenges presented by online education. In the FGD, similar concerns are echoed, further emphasizing the importance of reducing workloads and considering the number of students for better management in the new normal.

The common thread across the interviews and group discussion is the critical role faculty loading plays in researchers' struggles during the new normal. It is evident that the increased workload, particularly in an online environment, limits researchers' time and ability to engage in meaningful research activities. The transition to virtual work has also hindered hands-on research, which is vital for many fields.

Furthermore, the lack of adequate preparation, communication, and guidance in the online learning environment is a shared concern. This issue not only affects the faculty but also has repercussions on students' learning experiences. To address these challenges, recommendations include adjusting faculty loads, enhancing time management, and providing better support for online learning. Additionally, there is a call for more effective communication, management, and preparation from the administrative side.

In summary, the theme of faculty loading and time management stands out as a significant challenge for researchers in the new normal, along with issues related to hands-on research and the need for improved communication and support. These issues point to the importance of adaptability and comprehensive

strategies in addressing the difficulties faced by researchers during these times.

Discussions

The trying experiences of the researchers in implementing the Flexible Teaching-Learning Approach

The implementation of the Flexible Teaching and Learning Approach (FTLA) presented several unfavorable aspects that challenged both educators and students. These challenges were multifaceted, impacting research-based instruction, hands-on activities, and connectivity for students in remote areas. The lack of laboratory work and experimental research hindered research-based teaching, posing difficulties for educators and students. Additionally, the quality of teaching suffered due to document overload and increased demands from students, affecting productivity and the ability to meet deadlines. These issues underscore the need for effective document management and the challenges educators face in meeting student expectations (Kodua-Ntim, Akussah, & Adjai, 2021).

Despite these challenges, educators and researchers adapted to the constraints of FTLA, demonstrating resilience and innovation in their approach. The shift to online teaching required adjustments in interpersonal skills and the ability to adapt

Interpersonally, the shift to online teaching and learning affected researchers' social and interpersonal skills. It required them to adapt to different types of interactions and

Assessment of school researchers in their conditions during the implementation of FTLA as to be flexible and/or stretched-out

The challenges faced by faculty members during the implementation of FTLA primarily revolve around the struggle to balance teaching and research responsibilities in the new normal. These challenges result from a lack of flexibility in research, increased workloads, limited resources, and the constraints imposed by the pandemic (Vakkai, Harris, Chaplin, Crabbe, & Reynolds, 2020).

to different types of interactions in a virtual environment. This highlighted the emotional and interpersonal challenges associated with the abrupt transition to online teaching and learning (Besser, Flett, & Zeigler-Hill, 2022).

The trying experiences of researchers that shape the researchers' conditions physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and professionally

The impact of FTLA on researchers' well-being is multi-dimensional, affecting their physical, mental, emotional, and interpersonal aspects. Physically, researchers experienced both positive and negative effects. While some reported reduced physical burdens and stress due to effective time management, others faced issues like headaches, eye strain, and even hair loss attributed to the stress associated with FTLA (Marshall, 2016).

Mentally, the stress of FTLA disrupted sleep patterns and led to difficulties in focusing and managing tasks. Researchers reported emotional sensitivity, irritability, and quick temper, impacting their overall emotional well-being. These emotional challenges were exacerbated by the high workload and time management issues related to FTLA (Shepherd, 2018).

transactions in a virtual setting, which posed challenges related to communication and collaboration (Hargie, 2021).

Faculty members voiced concerns about the need to enhance faculty loading and the lack of incentives and recognition for their research efforts (Vakkai, Harris, Chaplin, Crabbe, & Reynolds, 2020). They called for institutions to adjust faculty loads, offer incentives beyond monetary rewards, and provide better guidance and seminars to help them balance their roles as instructors and researchers (Chalmers, 2011).

With the presented results, faculty members face a complex situation as they strive to balance teaching and research responsibilities in the new normal. The lack of flexibility in

research, the need for incentives, and the importance of guidance and seminars were highlighted as critical issues that need to be addressed in order not to demotivate them due to being stretched out.

Conclusion

The findings of this qualitative phenomenological study provide light on the complex problems and benefits experienced by instructors who also function as researchers in the context of the Flexible Teaching-Learning Approach (FTLA) within the new education norm. The discussions on the implementation of the Flexible Teaching and Learning Approach (FTLA) reveal a landscape marked by significant challenges affecting both educators research-based instruction, hands-on activities, and connectivity underscored the pressing need for addressing issues such as document overload and the challenges educators face in meeting student expectations. Despite these formidable challenges, educators and researchers displayed remarkable adaptability and resilience in navigating the constraints of FTLA. The shift to online teaching highlighted the importance of adjusting interpersonal skills and adapting to diverse interactions in a virtual environment, shedding light on the emotional and interpersonal challenges associated with the abrupt transition to online education.

Furthermore, the impact of FTLA on researchers extended beyond the professional realm, influencing their physical, mental, emotional, and interpersonal well-being. The dual nature of physical effects, both positive and negative, emphasizes the complexity of the experiences faced by researchers. The mental toll of disrupted sleep patterns, difficulty focusing, and emotional challenges revealed the intricate interplay between workload, time management, and researchers' overall well-being. These findings collectively stress the urgency of holistic support systems and strategies to address the diverse challenges posed by FTLA, ensuring the well-being and effectiveness of both educators and researchers in the evolving landscape of education.

Implication to Educational Practice

To support researchers in managing the challenges associated with the Flexible Teaching and Learning Approach (FTLA), a comprehensive support system can be implemented. Here are several recommendations:

Mental Health Resources. Provide access to mental health resources, including counseling services or workshops that focus on stress management, coping strategies, and maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Establish confidential channels for researchers to discuss mental health concerns, ensuring that they feel supported and encouraged to seek help.

Professional Development. Offer training sessions and workshops on effective time management, organization skills, and strategies and researchers. The multifaceted impact on for handling the increased workload associated with FTLA. Provide resources for enhancing research and teaching skills in an online environment, ensuring that researchers feel adequately prepared for the challenges they may encounter.

Communication and Collaboration Tools. Implement efficient communication and collaboration tools to facilitate seamless interaction among researchers, promoting effective teamwork and reducing feelings of isolation. Provide training on the use of virtual collaboration tools to enhance interpersonal skills in online teaching and learning environments.

Flexible Work Policies. Establish flexible work policies that allow researchers to adapt their schedules to accommodate personal needs and challenges, fostering a supportive and understanding work environment. Encourage open communication between researchers and supervisors regarding work expectations and deadlines.

Peer Support Networks. Foster peer support networks where researchers can share experiences, exchange advice, and provide emotional support to one another. Create virtual communities or discussion forums to

facilitate collaboration and the sharing of resources among researchers facing similar challenges.

Regular Check-ins and Feedback, Schedule regular check-ins between researchers and supervisors to discuss progress, address concerns, and provide constructive feedback.

Encourage an open feedback culture where

researchers feel comfortable expressing their needs and concerns.

By implementing these support measures, institutions can create a nurturing environment that addresses the holistic well-being of researchers and enhances their ability to navigate the challenges posed by the Flexible Teaching and Learning Approach.

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