Academic Experiences in Philosophy Among STEM- Grade 11 Students in the Online Mode of Instruction

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the academic experiences of STEM Grade 11 students in Philosophy under an online mode of instruction. Given the challenges of distance learning, particularly in a subject that requires critical thinking and deep reasoning, the study examines the factors that impact student engagement, comprehension, and performance. Using a narrative research design, qualitative data were collected and analyzed to assess students' study habits, learning challenges, and instructional delivery effectiveness. The findings indicate that students struggle with the conceptual and abstract nature of Philosophy, particularly in developing reasoning skills and applying philosophical concepts to real-world situations. The modular learning system, lack of interactive discussions, and limited teacher feedback further compound these difficulties. The research highlights the importance of fostering an interactive and inquiry-based learning environment that promotes questioning and deeper understanding. Drawing on theoretical insights from Heidegger and Kant, the study underscores the need to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application through innovative teaching strategies. To address these challenges, the paper recommends enhancement programs such as webinars, online debates, and interactive student conferences to improve engagement and comprehension. The study contributes to the broader discourse on online learning in the humanities, emphasizing the necessity of tailored instructional designs that support student-centered learning. The findings serve as a valuable resource for educators, school administrators, and policymakers in refining teaching methodologies to enhance students' philosophical reasoning and overall academic performance.

INTRODUCTION

Instructional design is an effective way to alleviate many pressing problems in education. Instructional design is a linking science– a body of knowledge that prescribes instructional actions to optimize desired instructional outcomes, such as achievement and effect. This research is chosen for the Philosophy Teachers to become aware of the reasons that affect the academic experience of Grade 11 STEM in learning Philosophy because most of them have difficulty with the act of human reasons. It is against this the paper seeks to analyze some reasons affecting their academic experiences in Philosophy. Most of the problems that exist were the act of human reason and its applications to reality. In this research, we had found out the reasons that existed in the failure of the respondents in Philosophy, not just failing but rather in the difficulty of the subject matter.

It is therefore an irrefutable fact that the success of learning the subject is contingent on a myriad of reasons. School, students, and teacher factors all impinge on the learning of Philosophy. Educators, trainers, philosophers, and researchers have long been interested in exploring such reasons contributing effectively to the quality of performance of learners. Students envisioned their 'use' of knowledge in daily scenarios, in contrast to their teachers' goals of fostering learners' English language academic experiences (Zhou, Jiming, Zhao, et. al., 2019).

The researchers observed that students are having difficulty in their art of reasoning and that there may be a lack of comprehension given the mode of learning. Module design, nature of assessment, and submissions delimit the scope of this study. This research evaluates their academic experiences in Philosophy of STEM– Grade 11 Class in their Midterm and Final Period in their first semester and gives analysis on the effectiveness in learning philosophy as part of human exploration.

This paper recommends a solution to solve the gap in the difficulty in the art of reasoning through conducting enhancement programs that allow the students to engage and apprehend Philosophy to reality. These enhancement programs may include webinars, online debates, and student conferences.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to evaluate their academic experiences in Philosophy of STEM– Grade 11 Class in their Midterm and Final Period in their first semester and gives analysis on the effectiveness in learning philosophy as part of human exploration. Specifically, this study answered the following queries:

1. Determine the following in terms of:
   1.1 study habits;
   1.2 learning challenges; and
   1.3 learning delivery.
2. Identify the ways of students' academic experiences:
   2.1 study habits;
   2.2 learning challenges; and
   2.3 learning delivery.
3. Examine the processes of these factors that exist in their respective academic experiences.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the method used in this study. Specifically, the following are included: research design, respondents, instruments, data gathering procedures, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

Design

This study utilized the narrative design using an adapted questionnaire based on the academic experiences in Philosophy of STEM– Grade 11 class. The data that was evaluated will be used as the input of this research and after the processing, interpretation, and analysis of data, the action plan was created. An action plan that will give the readers most especially the Philosophy Teachers to deepen their teaching skills by giving themselves time to adjust their expertise to the students with these kinds of experiences.

Procedure

The researchers collected qualitative data on the academic experiences' evaluation of the students online. The data gathered were collected, evaluated, and analyzed their academic experiences in Philosophy of STEM– Grade 11 Class in their Midterm and Final Period in their first semester and gives analysis on the effectiveness in learning philosophy as part of human exploration.

Data Analysis

Week 1: Orientation experience extract

In the first week of lectures, we gave students an online exercise which required them to write a reflective piece on their experiences on transitioning from school to university. "In the comments box provided below, write a reflective piece sharing your experiences at UCT so far, based on the reading on Transitions in your course reader and the video."

In Thembi's response she provides a partially constructed narrative of her identity. She notes that her transition from school to university brought with it 'anxiety', 'fear for failure', 'lack of confidence to participate' and a shyness to engage with people who did not speak isiXhosa. Here she sees language, specifically English, as a barrier for her when it comes to engaging with her peers and lecturers. This is captured in the following words: 'I am developing hatred for English because it seems to be a barrier to my comfort zone so that I can be able to perform to the maximum of my ability when chances are available.' Although she views English as a barrier to her learning, she is able to articulate quite clearly, 'I have a potential inside me' and 'I know that I also have an answer'. For Thembi, however, the performative nature of speaking in class does not always reflect the potential that she believes she has, because when speaking there is 'no chance to edit'. Here, the online environment is seen as a safer space than the traditional tutorial because students have a chance to think through their responses. Very often, the traditional tutorial interactions require immediate verbal responses, which in turn require immediate evaluation by both tutor and student.

Sandra, on the other hand, has mixed feelings, excitement, anxiety, and a number of questions about whether she will succeed and make her family proud, 'Will I succeed? What if I become very mediocre? Will I fail my family?' Like Thembi and many other first year students trying to adjust to the new university environment, Sandra initially feels overwhelmed, but soon this sentiment morphs into excitement, particularly when 'meeting new people and encountering diversity in its rawest form'. We can infer from her statement that she comes from a homogeneous schooling background. This diversity for her is an eye-opening experience. She then reflects on her goals and where she would like to see herself academically and as a person: 'I look forward to keep on carrying on in this journey to see how I grow academically, how I grow as a person, and to finally find my feet and know who I am and where I want to be in this world and how I can contribute in making this university, country and world into a better place!'

As we can see, Sandra's sense of personhood is tied with her ability to make or drive social changes. Her phrase, 'how I grow as a person' suggests that she sees identity as fluid and constantly evolving. The online task enables Sandra to project herself into the future and set goals to contribute nationally but also globally. At this point, we do not know much about Sandra's socio-academic background and how that informs her perceptions of self, her context and her aspirations.

Week 2: Reflection on English

In Week 2, students were given the online exercises below. That week they had been introduced to Ngugi Thiong'o (1986) and George Makubalo's (2007) writings. The questions required them to apply their understanding of these two readings to authentic cases and their own experiences.

1. In light of the above statements [from Ngugi's (1986) chapter], how would you interpret his statement that the English language and literature 'takes us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds'?
2. Makubalo (2007) argues that English is a 'commodity in great demand' (p.21 of course reader). However, from the two graphs, it is evident that English is not the most spoken language both globally and locally. In your opinion, what then accounts for its dominance? Secondly, how would Makubalo respond to Ngugi's statement that the English language is taking one away from one's ethno linguistic identity? Provide a response to the two questions in the comment box below.
3. Activity: In Makubalo's article, we are introduced to four learners: Thabo, Teboho, Anna and Sello. They each position themselves differently in terms of their language practices. Which one of these learners do you closely associate with and why? What would Makubalo's response be to the way you construct YOUR identity?

Thembi's response to the questions is interesting as it differs from her construction of her identity as disadvantaged in Week 1's exercise. In this exercise Thembi foregrounds, asserts and celebrates her Xhosa identity with the statement, 'I am Xhosa and proud to be'. Although the metaphor of English as an enabler endures in her response when she states, 'it will help me in things that it will help me in', it is tempered with a protective discourse of her 'Xhosa identity' in the words, 'if a person values his culture he should not allow the advantages of English to colonize his mind'. Here Thembi views English, like Ngugi does, as possessing the ability to colonise the second-language speaker's mind but also as a vehicle for success in contexts where English is dominant and a marker of success. Judging from her assertion of her Xhosa identity, coupled with her recognition of the dominance of English in a post-apartheid South Africa, it comes as no surprise that she identifies with Sello, a learner in Makubalo's paper, who values code-switching between languages.

Thembi also shows an awareness of the contradictions of supporting Ngugi's critical views on English in a university where English offers certain affordances– something that she is acutely aware of. In an attempt to resolve these contradictions, she states that 'we are different people of different cultures, and surely there is a need for us to communicate with each other, and here is English enabling us but we abuse it'. She uses the word 'abuse' to speak about the use of English (it is likely she meant 'overuse') as if she acts on the English language, but she goes on to refer to how English destroys local languages. Although her response does present the reader with some binaries, namely that of the isiXhosa speaker versus English speakers, we start seeing a move towards a more complex and nuanced understanding of identity. In Sandra's response, she views the English language not only as a dominant language, but also as a product of the West. She links everything that is westernized with what is modernized, and sees English as a language that gives one access to status and prestige, which she refers to as a place of 'high value'. Her choice of words implies that the use of language, in this case English, is linked to one's self-worth, or that ascribed by others in society. She elaborates by explaining that English has such currency and power because it is a universal language. In that way, she suggests that while English may have emerged from the West, it has been appropriated by the rest.

She goes on to make a comparison between Makubalo and Ngugi's views on the English language, and explains that while the former believes that languages can be appropriated, the latter sees English 'taking away from African-ness'. Her use of 'Africanness' suggests firstly that she has taken the liberty to coin a new word to capture the essence of what it is to be African, and by the same token, the inverted commas suggest that she is challenging the assumption that there is a single way of being African, or at least that she is wrestling with the idea. At this point though, she does not openly state her own position. It is only in the next task that she uses her personal history to explain why English does not destroy one's 'African-ness' and that it is 'up to us to decide whether or not it will'. In this instance, we see a strong assertion of agency when she writes her own personal reflection with respect to the English language, using English, and despite English. Like Thembi, she describes herself as an 'isiXhosa girl'. She views a Xhosa identity as not being restricted to an ability to speak isiXhosa, but also encompassing a way of life. Then, she begins to share the contradictions, 'born in Transkei but grew up in the suburbs speaking English'. She claims that she cannot speak isiXhosa; however, she notes that fluency in the language is not an essential marker of being an 'isiXhosa girl'. In this way, she can reconcile the fact that she self-identifies as an isiXhosa girl who speaks English. She does admit that she speaks isiXhosa to her mother. She goes on to share the socio-economic situation in the household, 'living with my mother who was a domestic worker and my white guardians', but is quick to add that, 'from an early age I knew that I belonged to a different culture than the 'white people'.

Like Thembi, she is positioning herself strongly with those who are Xhosa, even though she comes from a household where she benefits from her guardians' financial support and speaks both languages. This is Sandra's way of challenging the traditional markers of language and class to define her Xhosa identity.

In the next paragraph, while she starts off saying that English has not influenced her identity, she goes on to contradict herself by acknowledging that, 'maybe English has shaped only minor things in my identity'. At this point, we find her hedging with the use of adverbs such as 'maybe', and vague terms such as 'things' which she does not qualify. Nonetheless, she still sees culture as something that one is 'born into' versus 'born with', to suggest that culture is a product of the earliest phases of socialization. However, this view is also contradicted when she states that her Xhosa culture is 'embedded in my DNA'. She ends off on a philosophic note with 'English has given me a step up in the world, but my isiXhosa roots have

given me a step up in this life'. Once again, she makes the distinction between the upward social mobility enabled through knowledge of English, and the inner growth enabled through her Xhosa identity. Like Thembi, she presents these influences as being distinct and mutually exclusive.

When asked which of Makubalo's research participants she would most relate to, she chooses Anna purely because both share the same 'origin and background'. Like Anna, we find that Sandra is romanticizing her 'Xhosa' roots but goes on to state that, unlike Anna, she does not experience the same 'sense of loss' when speaking English. Even as she recalls her schooling, she firmly asserts that the other languages, 'including English', molded her sense of self. What is significant here is that at the end of her reflection, when she sees herself through Makubalo's theoretical lens, she begins to see 'one big contradiction of culture and identity'.

Week 3: Reflective component

In Week 3, we designed an exercise to track shifts in conceptual understanding of identity as shown below. Students were expected to engage with the concept of identity reflexively, by writing in the online space about their autobiographical self in relation to new ways of understanding identity, as influenced by course readings and classroom discussions.

Task: Reflect on your notion of language and identity. Write a paragraph using the following phrases:

1. Before I came to UCT, I used to think of identity as …
2. Then I read Ngugi who defines identity as …
3. I also read Makubalo who argues that identity is …
4. Now, I think of identity as … because … OR I still think of identity as … because…
5. I have the following questions which I would like to ask Ngugi and/or Makubalo and the class …

(Note: your paragraph should be in continuous prose without the numbers 1–5.)

The Week 3 task can be seen as a pivotal moment, when students get to revisit their views on identity in light of Ngugi and Makubalo's ideas around language and identity. Here they are asked to look back on their understanding of identity before they came to study at the institution, and revisit their views on identity in light of Ngugi and Makubalo's ideas around language and identity. The task offers students the option to resist, challenge or acknowledge and agree with the authors' positions. This becomes a critical moment for AcLit lecturers to track how students' views on identity, often essentialist ones like in the case of Thembi and Sandra, have been transformed based on their understandings of theorists who hold post-structuralist views on identity.

In Thembi's response, we see that although she still agrees with Ngugi, she starts to understand identity as constructed and fluid. This is a view held by Makubalo who draws on post-structuralism to theories' identity and its construction. Her words, 'I still think of identity as the way you do things' (referring to 'Xhosa culture'), coupled with 'I cannot say that identity is fixed', reflect an understanding of identity as constructed out of past experiences that can endure across contexts, and identity construction as a continual process. Therefore, there is a recognition that identity is also influenced by social contexts, because she states that 'as time goes on my surroundings change of which I cannot be able to socialize with

them if I don't want to adapt to change'. By juxtaposing the two authors, we see that she agrees with aspects of Ngugi and Makubalo's arguments. For us, her response reflects a complex and nuanced understanding of identity and also signals a shift in her conceptual understanding of identity when compared to her responses in Week 1.

Sandra's response to this exercise shows similar shifts in her understanding of identity. In her response she notes that before she came to the academy, she defined her identity along racial lines and identified herself as 'Black'. This comes as no surprise as the racial categories of the apartheid era, which drew on essentialist notions, still have currency in contemporary South Africa. While one would expect Sandra to align herself with Ngugi, based on her responses in Week 1 and 2, she actually introduces the notion of choice. She states, 'Now I think of identity as your characteristics and how you define yourself as a person, things like race, culture and language help form your identity but I think it all boils down to your beliefs, dreams and who you want to be in life. I don't believe you are defined by your ethnicity but by who you define to be.' She still sees ethnicity as playing a significant part in her self-definition, but she emphasizes that she decides how these characteristics will be used to define her. In a sense then, she begins to understand that individuals have agency in the way their identities are constructed and therefore we might find that she will even reconsider her previous statement that culture is an inescapable part of her DNA.

So, while our roles as online mentors and facilitators in the computer lab seek to guide and promote student's agency in terms of developing their critical and analytical thinking and writing skills, our roles as lecturers is to discern the extent to which students' understanding and conceptualizing of the identity construction theory, taught in the face to-face space, is developing and being employed in their online writing. It is in this sense that the continued interaction between our online mentoring roles and our lecturer roles contributes towards creating a holistic learning context.

Week 4 Essay

In Week 4, students submitted an essay in response to the following essay question: "Ngugi (1986) argues that the dominance of English takes us "further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds". Drawing on the readings, argue for or against this statement."

Here is Thembi's introduction to the essay, "I am a young girl who can write infinite scriptures if I can be asked about how my identity has been built, because there are many bricks that I and my surroundings have utilized to construct it. In addition to that, as I am still growing, I cannot position myself in a fixed spot or environment because I am continuously reconstructing it. For me the fact that we are different means that we have to live in different ways in order to be united or socialize with others. This is to say that I strongly disagree with Ngugi's argument that English alters our ethnic identity into other identities and relocates us from our region to other regions, as we cannot have unwavering identity. Beliefs and actions will continue influence our creation of identity as long we live also our surroundings will always influence our actions. Bear in mind that language is one of the bricks used in identity construction because language is the carrier of culture and culture also forms up your identity."

In Thembi's introduction to the essay we see a significant shift in how she views identity conceptually and how she views herself as compared to her initial responses in the extracts discussed above. In Week 2, for example, she not only expressed a loyalty to her 'Xhosaness' when she stated, 'I am Xhosa and proud to be', she also made it clear that English can colonize the minds of those who do not have English as a home language. However, in her introduction above she states, 'I am a young girl who can

write infinite scriptures if I can be asked about how my identity has been built, because there are many bricks that I and my surroundings have utilized to construct it.' This sentence is significant as it suggests that she has shifted from an essentialist notion of identity to one where identity is understood as fluid and continuously under construction. We also see this conceptual shift when she writes, 'I am still growing I cannot position myself in a fixed spot or environment because I am continuously reconstructing it [referring to her identity].

Unlike in previous exercises where she agreed with Ngugi's views, we now see that she states, 'I strongly disagree with Ngugi's argument.' For us, this emphatic statement in her introduction, signals a clear shift from an essentialist, towards a post-structuralist view on identity. Her introduction also shows that she now understands that social contexts and others have a direct impact on identity construction when she writes, 'as long we live also our surroundings will always influence our actions'. In her essay, it is apparent that she now views identity as multifaceted and that speaking a second language such as English is not the main marker of her identity or any person's identity. However, she does articulate the idea that she has an 'original' identity or core identity which underscores the identities forged when she moves from one context to the next. Furthermore, she constructs her identity as someone who is 'striving to discover' herself, which suggests a fluidity in her conceptual understanding of her identity. Again, this is a marked shift from her conceptual understanding of identity in Week 1 of the course (before they had read the Ngugi and Makubalo texts). It is our contention that the freedom of expression created by the online space, coupled with online mentoring prompts and feedback, has made such conceptual shifts much more visible and has not only added to the students' understanding of their own experiences, but also our understanding as mentors and lecturers of our students.

In Sandra's essay, she puts forward an understanding of identity similar to that of Thembi. She reinforces the point that she constructs and re-constructs her identity, hence steering away from the essentialist notions she expressed in the first two weeks. She states, 'I adapt in different environments as Makubalo (2007) would say, I construct and reconstruct my identity.' In this way, she perceives herself as the author of her personal narrative, rather than a passive filter through which the environment encodes meaning onto her. Like Thembi, who made mention of an original identity, Sandra adds a new element in her understanding of identity, namely that of a 'core identity'. She explains, 'I believe that as I grow I add on to my core identity. My world experiences change how I think and see things.' This 'core identity' perhaps refers to the values and beliefs she mentions in the Week 3 task. It seems to be a bedrock onto which she adds new layers of self-definition and self-expression. One of those layers is her use of English, as she mentions, 'Learning other languages and cultures is part of that long endless journey of identity. English is the key to all of this.' As such, she begins to see identity construction as a fluid and evolving process, rather than a product. Surprisingly, she now finds English to be 'key' to her self-definition, a statement which is in stark contrast with her previous views that she is a 'Xhosa girl' and that English does not define her but only gives her 'a step up in the world'. To support her argument, she refers to Makubalo who 'argues that there is no such thing as a fixed identity'. Her strategic foregrounding of Makubalo over Ngugi again signals a shift in her position and her alignment with a constructionist view of identity. In addition, she begins to distance herself from the view that language is the only aspect defining identity. This contrasts with her previous work, where she not only saw language as a determinant of identity, but also conflated language, identity and racial belonging. At this point, we see her disentangling the different aspects of identity construction in order to take more agency in appropriating the aspects that are congruent with her personal narrative.

Affordances of the online language module as a mentoring or tutoring space as mentioned, we understand the analytical mode to be a mode of thinking where students can grapple critically with texts

and concepts in a low-stakes collaborative safe space. This collaboration between online student engagement, online mentoring and face-to-face teaching serves as an important vehicle for making sense of what and how students learn. It is an example of good innovative teaching and learning practice, as echoed by Sheridan (1992, p. 90) who defines this type of collaboration as 'an overarching framework…a conceptual umbrella' that acknowledges alternative ways for the realization of educational goals. As we analyzed Thembi and Sandra's responses, it is evident that through the reflective tasks, the online space is activating different modalities of thought and being.

Expressing the inexpressible: 'I know that I have an answer' In traditional face-to-face teaching environments such as tutorials, there is limited time and scope to hear each and every student's views on the theme under discussion. Students remain silent for various reasons, including their perception of a lack of fluency in English. Thembi, for instance, in Week 1, views English as a 'disabler', a barrier to communication, seeing herself as being more fluent in isiXhosa. Yet she admits that, 'I have potential inside me', and 'I know that I also have an answer'

Due to the self's uneasy location in an unfamiliar academic setting, many ideas remain hidden in the deep recesses of one's intellectual black box (Pinker, 1995, p. 137), unless articulated through words. This poses a problem if we seek to identify shifts in the 'authorial self' (Clark & Ivanič, 1998) in the classroom setting. Assuming that voice is a measure of one's critical thinking, and that it becomes manifest through speech or writing, how does one tap into the thoughts evoked in the silent moments? Can critical thinking be present in the moments of silence? The first time we hear Thembi's views about the disjuncture between her perceived competence and her performance in the classroom, is in the online space where we take on the roles of mentors and tutors, and where she is asked to share her orientation experience. This is when she steps back or steps out of the confines of the formal lecturer-led classroom to reflect critically on where she situates herself as she navigates through the institutional spaces. The online space hence takes the shape of a confessional where students can silently share ideas for which they will not be held accountable.

In the same vein, the online space is seen to open up possibilities for the articulation of deep-seated emotions and autobiographical aspects of one's identity, rare to find in a physical tutorial. Students can share feelings of anxiety, fear of failure, lack of confidence, which are common to both Thembi and Sandra as they encounter the overwhelming aspects of the university environment. The fact that 'everyday talk' is permissible on online spaces such as this one, allows for a more personal engagement with the academic theories and concepts, which in turn allows students to reflect on what the knowledge means to them, how it relates to, or jars with their lived reality. Our roles as mentors and tutors allow for a different type of interaction with students, and it is through these roles that we enable students to articulate their thoughts in a more relaxed mode of writing. It is not surprising that Lea and Stierer (2009) therefore see 'everyday talk' as encouraged by social networking sites, as central to academic activities.

In Sandra's case, she also uses the online task to project herself in the future, and share her aspirations of making a contribution locally and globally. The online space allows students to look back, but also transcend the frontiers of time to project themselves forward. These autobiographical strands are seldom acknowledged in academia, for they get misread as bias. Even in academic essays, students' authorial self often takes precedence over their lived experiences. However, through these online tutoring exercises, students on the course are able to use themselves as case studies and track their shifting sense of self over time to make powerful arguments about the fluidity of the very subject matter under examination.

Here, we note a strong overlap between students' autobiographical selves and their authorial selves (Clark & Ivanič, 1998), where the autobiographical elements get recruited to assert a strong authorial

presence. Sharing dissident views While students are able to try out new subjectivities, we note that over time it provides them with a subject position to articulate their stance towards the texts and concepts introduced in class. As such, they begin to operate at a metacognitive level, sharing their comfort or discomfort vis-a-vis the knowledge being shared, and how it may challenge their preconceived views on identity and other themes covered on the course (Zembylas & Boler, 2002). For instance, Thembi and Sandra feel the urge to express their deep-rooted 'core' Xhosa identity, even as they encounter new ways of defining their emerging identity and acknowledging its fluidity.

By the same token, they also express their views about the language through which knowledge gets exchanged in the academic space, namely English. Both Thembi and Sandra start off by stating that English can be an enabler but can also 'colonize minds', that it is a Western product, but also one that enables upward mobility. Thembi warns against 'abusing' English, in other words, overusing it in ways that begin to erode one's self-definition. On the other hand, Sandra is able to reconcile the contradictions of being a 'Xhosa girl', while speaking English, by extending the definition of Xhosa-ness beyond its linguistic attributes. Even so, both seem to romanticize a Xhosa culture that they are 'born with' or is in their DNA. At that point, it is noteworthy that lecturers on the course do not intervene on the site to weed out the contradictions, but allow them to be juxtaposed in students' messy attempts at meaning making.

Even in Week 3, when students are asked to present their previous understandings of identity and their current one, they are offered two routes into the exercise: 'Now I think of identity as…', which would signal a shift in their conceptual understanding of identity, and 'I still think of identity as…', which would allow them to resist the influence of readings that often offer a constructionist view of identity. In that way, the online task demonstrates that the course is not trying to brainwash students into shedding their essentialist notions of identity, but rather to interrogate them in light of new perspectives. At that point, the lecturers turn into facilitators or mentors, prodding students with questions, rather than formally teaching content. These strategies of questioning versus overt didactic strategies of imparting knowledge verily form part of the pedagogy of discomfort, which the course privileges in order to enable students on the extended degree program to embark on their own trajectories of meaning making. In this, it moves away from the discourse of 'difference as deficit' to that of 'difference as a resource' (Canagarajah, 1997), to acknowledge students' brought-along experiences as a valuable aspect of learning and knowledge-making.

Slowing Time Down

Spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility. William Wordsworth (1800) From the data analyzed on the online course site, it is evident that one never reaches a point of finality. Rather, time slows down to postpone one's commitment to ideas, and the giving of reasons. Each week, students are editing and conceptually reworking their ideas. As such, the online space seems to be a site where one is not held captive by one's thoughts. It is a space where the present can be paused, where the fear of the unknown, the silencing effects of the English language can be suspended, to express the inexpressible. This is the case when Thembi and Sandra express their angst, fears and insecurities at the start of their academic year.

As mentors and tutors in this space, and through a process of trial and error, we came to the realization that the online space required a very different type of facilitation and participation on our part, in order to accommodate the type of conceptual and analytical learning required by the slowing down of time. In this third space, we also find students revisiting their definitions of self and alignment to concepts. Thembi begins by defining herself as disadvantaged, then as a Xhosa girl, and finally as a young girl who

can write infinite scriptures. It would appear that she explores the reach of these descriptions to present a particular aspect of her identity based on what she perceives will be valued in that instance. Over time, she also revisits her view of identity as fixed to one that can be shaped by one's 'surroundings' and through the choices one makes. It is possible that her transition to the university was a 'critical event' or turning point, making her re-assess the role of the environment on one's identity. We are quite certain that even this moment of stillness or certainty is a temporary one and will be revisited. Conceptually, the online space is one where fleeting thought can be captured and reflected upon to trigger new alterations. In Derrida's (1994) words, it is a moment of stasis, an 'aporia of suspension', where commitment to ideas is not required, and where contradictions are permissible. Thembi and Sandra contradict themselves week after week. Thembi's hatred for English gradually gives way to the strategic use of the language to express her dissenting views and to re shape her personal narrative in a way that is compatible with her core beliefs and the shifts in context.

The online space is therefore a space where 'one can stop and smell the roses', take cognizance of what is happening to one's ideas, how one's thoughts are shaping without being interrupted by other voices. The ability of not interrupting students' voices in the online space while simultaneously creating opportunities and possibilities for intellectual and personal growth through our mentoring interactions with them, are therefore some of the most valuable tools that are needed to promote individual agency and ownership of the learning process. Our roles as facilitators and guides in the online space have led to the realization that a certain amount of awareness, sensitivity, empathy, openness to other ways of being and acknowledgment of the capital that students bring along with them, is needed on our part, in order to create the necessary scaffolding needed for deep and meaningful analytical engagement.

It is therefore important to recognize that learning and becoming are part of an organic and process-generated activity that develops over time. It's how we set up and facilitate the structures for these processes that takes center stage. As such, one could think of the online space as a suspension bridge, a site of incoherence where one can see oscillations of the self. Students' location on that bridge reflects the complex mode of shifting understandings of self and of the concept of identity.

This incoherence is precisely what allows for the emergence of a coherent narrative of self over time. The learner's grappling with her identity through these online academic activities begins to call into question traditional learning contexts, what counts as knowledge, what counts as knowledge, and the thin line between knowing and being. Therefore, as mentioned, Gutiérrez (2008) might describe the online space as a 'third space' for this very reason in that it opens doors for new modes of engagement and critique, like Thembi's use of the space in which she seeks to reconcile her problematic relationship with English, and in the process inserts herself more boldly in the knowledge-making project. Narratives such as these seek to inform mentors', tutors, lecturers' and institutions' understandings of the lived contexts and struggles faced by students. In saying that, we need to acknowledge that we learn as much from our students as they learn from us. It is this type of learning ethos that can develop and grow out of the type of online intervention and facilitation that we have presented in this paper.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers will ensure that they will be guided by the Ethics of Research and will be observed throughout the course of this study. A transmittal letter will be attached to the self-administered questionnaire signed by the research adviser for approval to gather data. A letter of consent will also be

attached separately and will be signed by the respondents expressing their willingness to partake in this study and answer the questionnaire.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Educational System of the Philippines is one of the country's major concerns as the COVID-19 virus hits around the globe. The disruption of COVID-19 is a great magnitude that the school must cope with at the soonest possible time. Schools are being shut down, resulting in a major challenge to education. In line with this, a new set of learning modalities was being emphasized so that learning continues. In this new normal, the Department of Education implemented Blended Learning, giving the student a more upgraded and quality education. Blended learning incorporates direct instruction, indirect instruction, collaborative teaching, and individualized computer-assisted learning.

The implementation of blended learning is not an easy task. There are certain fundamental preparations to achieve it successfully. These factors are (1) Well trained teachers; (2) Teachers with a Scientific attitude; (3) Teachers with a wider outlook and positive approach; (4) Complete facilities like a well-furnished computer lab, internet connection, provision for video chatting; (5) Students have access to the internet at their private computers; (6) Flexibility in the system; (7) Fully aware and agreed parents; and (8) Formative evaluation and continuous internal assessment.

Though blended learning has advantages such as (1) Being part of learning is done thru ICT, online or offline mode, so teachers and students get more time in the classroom for creative and cooperative exercises; and (2) Students become more techno-savvy, and they gain enhanced digital fluency; it has also disadvantaged. The teaching and learning process assumes a different shape in times of crisis. The sudden shift has resulted in many problems, especially for learners without access to the internet or technology as an online learning modality was used during the pandemic, the gap between those students who can access the internet and those who unfortunate widened. Thus, resulting in a challenge for both teachers and students. Considering the limitation on connectivity, flexible learning emerged as an option for online learning, especially in higher institutions in the Philippines. Flexible learning focuses on giving students a choice in the pace, place, and mode of students learning, which can be promoted through appropriate pedagogical practice. The learners are provided with the option of how he/she will continue with/her studies, where and when he/she can proceed, and in what ways they can the learners comply with the requirements and show evidence of learning outcomes. Flexible learning and teaching span a multitude of approaches that can meet the varied needs of diverse learners. These include "independence in terms of time and location of learning and the availability of some degree of choice in the curriculum (including content, learning strategies, and assessment) and the use of current information and communication technology to support a range of learning strategies.

Technology provides innovative and resilient solutions in times of crisis to combat disruption and helps people communicate and even work virtually without face-to-face interaction; this leads to many system changes in organizations as they adopt new technology for interacting and working. However, technological challenges like internet connectivity, especially for places without signals, can be the greatest obstacle to teaching and learning continuity, especially for academic institutions that have opted for online learning as a teaching modality. Thus, the alternative models of learning during the pandemic should be supported by a well-designed technical and logistical implementation plan (Edizon,2020)

To some, internet access is a huge challenge, especially in remote areas. Government agencies do what they can do to help by donating phones, tablets, or gadgets to schools or those needy students. However, some students are so exhausted by the struggle to study remotely that they are calling for breaks between modules. Many parents and pressure groups are going even further, demanding total academic suspension until a clearer post-pandemic education system is ironed out.

Conclusion

Nevertheless, blended learning has a greater potential in improving students' academic performance by integrating both face-to-face and online learning. Likewise, a recent study by Yu et al. (2021) proved that both blended and offline learning was effective educational approaches to improving students' critical thinking ability. In contrast, the use of blended case-centered learning showed promising results in improving students' academic performance.

Overall, each mode has its features and advantages. Nonetheless, the blended teaching mode is more effective than the other two because it capitalizes on the strengths of the two and leads to positive student outcomes. (Ho et al., 2016).

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