*Section: Research Paper*

# CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN NORTHERN SAMAR AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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**ABSTRACT**

*Findings showed that among the nine (9) administrators, there are more administrators who are male, 50–59 years old, married, have doctoral degrees, and have 31–40 years of work experience, according to the administrator's demographic profile. Additionally, the administrators' total technological proficiency is at the basic level. The Local Government Unit was ranked first in terms of frequency counts for linkages with other agencies, while HEI-7 had the most linkages out of the nine (9) institutions.*

*The difficulties faced by HEIs during the epidemic revealed that the top technology-related issue was sluggish internet connectivity. Financial issues came in second place under issues with materials and support. Limited laboratory and field/real-world experience came in third (on-the-job training).*

**Keywords:** *Administrator, financial issues, Local Government Unit (LGU), difficulties*

## INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the industries that has been most impacted by this pandemic. The academic calendar is disrupted by school and university closures, which also stresses out parents and students. According to UNESCO, as of April 6, 2020, 188 nations and 1, 576, 021, 818 pupils, or 91.3% of all enrolled students at all levels of education, were affected. 2020 (UNESCO).

The transmission of the 2019 coronavirus illness (COVID-19) in higher education institutions is being prevented, controlled, and mitigated according to a number of memorandum orders, advisories, and guidelines established by the Commission of Higher Education. This resulted in the cancellation of classes, extracurricular activities, board exams, and several graduations. The majority, if not all, institutional goals were not achieved, and university research and extension projects have also been delayed. The fight to put an end to this pandemic is still far from where it should be. (CHED,2020)

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Generally, this study is aimed to identify the challenges encountered by Higher Education institutions amidst COVID-19 pandemic.

## SCOPE AND LIMITATION

This study was only intended to serve as a formative review because the COVID-19 outbreak barely began last year. The researcher created an instrument based on CHED issuances in the lack of a standardized one. To sum up, one of the study's flaws is the health protocol that was used during its execution.

The process variables include institutional responses such as health front, calendar setting, research and development contribution, and technological resources as well as organizational responses of higher education institutions in Northern Samar to policy responses such as administrative measures, financial resources, and support for teaching-learning continuity. The institutional continuity framework for the higher education institutions in Northern Samar will be able to use the information from these findings.

## METHODOLOGY

One of the three provinces that make up Samar Island is Northern Samar. The Samar Sea, the San Bernardino Strait, the provinces of Eastern and Western Samar, and the Pacific Ocean define its eastern, northern, western, and southern borders, respectively. With a total size of 349,800 hectares, it is a province of second-class. It has 569 barangays and 24 municipalities. In Northern Samar, there are significant amounts of coral, salt, adobe, gravel, mud, boulders, and cobbles, as well as valuable minerals like bauxite and chromite. A plantation with 16.8 million coconut trees is also present. Northern Samar is unexpectedly one of the poorest regions in the Philippines despite having so many natural riches. Northern Samar in the Visayas ranks third in terms of the prevalence of poverty with a proportion of 56.17 percent. 2018 (Fiestada, et al.).

The head of the offices of several higher education institutions in Northern Samar was first approached for permission to undertake this study. Following approval of the request, the researcher began sending the academics' groups on Facebook Messenger and direct messages with the survey form attached. The researcher also physically distributed the survey to many higher education institutions in Northern Samar.

In this study, frequency counts, percentages, weighted averages, and ranks were used as statistical criteria. In order to examine the relationship between the variables, the researcher used both descriptive analysis with a 0.05 threshold of significance and Pearson R coefficient correlation.

## PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

### Program and Materials

The item on HEI received the highest mean of 3.51, which was evaluated as "moderately prepared," and discusses how material support may promote morale and build a common good. The item with the lowest score, 1.18, which is defined as "slightly prepared," was that the emergency preparedness facilities and materials are easily available before a pandemic. The weighted average score of 3.32 was regarded as "fairly prepared."

### Challenges Encountered by Higher Education Institutions Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic

The difficulties HEIs are facing due to the pandemic. With a frequency of 192 or 87.27%, slow internet connectivity ranked first in the category of technological issues. Financial difficulties came in second place beneath issues with materials and support, occurring 147 times or 66.82 percent of the time.

Limited laboratory and field/actual experiences (on-the-job training), which occurred 132 times or 60% of the time, came in third place. Management-related issues such as adjusting to new management, deadlines and learning modalities using modules and on-time activities of the subjects, delayed process of procurement, delayed response to written communications sent that need immediate action from the main campus, lack of autonomy in decision-making in external campuses, and micro-managing were other issues that ranked 35.5 with the lowest frequency of one (1) or 0.45%, as reported by the respondents.

Unskilled students for online/flexible learning, technology used in flexible learning for instructional management, lack of management support for strong internet connection/unavailability of internet infrastructure signal problem, LMS that is too complex, not user-friendly, and not fully functional, Smart Campus Plan remaining a "plan," and faculty provision of technological resources are some other technology-related issues.

Other issues with materials and support included the slow delivery of necessary goods, late load allowances, and a lack of university data bases. Other work- and health-related issues included an excessive number of students, a heavy workload for teachers, a large number of preparations, stress from no signal, some insensitive employers and employees, some key incompetent personnel, failure to follow written policies and instructions, and, aside from alcohol, the absence of a clear plan for the academic community's health and safety.

It is implied that the slow internet connectivity during the pandemic was the biggest issue that administration, staff, and students encountered. This is one of the reasons that HEIs do not primarily rely on online learning and instead provide a variety of flexible learning modes. In Northern Samar, there are certain municipalities and barangays without signal. To send their schoolwork, students continue to go to locations with internet or networks. The difficulties with money and the materials required for online study were another issue. Although the faculty at the state university receives load allowance to cover internet connectivity and mobile load, other resources like thermal scanners and similar equipment are provided by the institutions to ensure academic continuity.

The findings of this study support those of Haider and Al-Salman (2020), who found that the most common difficulties were technical and Internet issues (33%), workload- and course-related problems (23%), a lack of adequate tools for student assessment (17%), student commitment, awareness, and psychology (15%), and a lack of regulations by decision- and policy-makers (12%).

## SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Summary

With the exception of the state university and its three campuses, which are certified at levels 2 and 3, all private institutions were CHED recognized but lacked any level of accreditation, according to the results for accreditation level. According to institutional criteria, most HEIs had budgets that were just somewhat adequate.

Additionally, it demonstrated that the HEIs were "moderately equipped" in terms of preparing teachers and students for cognitive skills. The HEIs in Northern Samar were "moderately equipped" organizationally.

### Conclusions and Implications

The main problem facing administrators, staff, and students during the outbreak was slow internet connectivity.

Budgets for HEIs are simply adequate. All six (6) private colleges were not only unaccredited but also CHED-recognized. It suggests that there could be a number of factors, including possible financial ones, why they cannot submit to accreditation. Additionally, it might be concluded that students' poor performance on the licensure examination is due to some private institutions' inferior educational offers.

Aside from that, HEIs are undoubtedly responding to the pandemic with speedy institutional and governmental actions despite their restricted technological capabilities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Doctoral degrees and faculty development should be pursued by faculty members. Private universities should hire more faculty to lessen the teaching load of those faculty members who already have an excessive teaching load and should improve faculty competence by encouraging further higher education.

2) ICT education and skill development should be provided for administrators and academic members.
3) A request for the financial support necessary for the timely release of academic continuity plans.
4) Plans for institutional continuity should be covered by an adequate budget.
5) To improve the standard of education at their school, private higher education institutions should voluntarily submit themselves for accreditation.

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