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Transborder Leadership & Weaving Worthiness: Pioneering A New Era in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected educational systems worldwide, compelling academic institutions to reevaluate their methods of providing quality education. Biliran Province State University (BiPSU) encountered similar difficulties when the pandemic emerged. This article outlines how BiPSU, led by its president, Dr. Victor C. Canezo Jr., effectively managed the crisis through creative management strategies and careful planning, creating a framework for educational continuity that prioritized both safety and academic excellence.

KEYWORDS

BiPSU, leadership, , management stategies, pandemic, transborder

Introduction

The unprecedented challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic have transformed higher education, compelling academic institutions to reassess their operational strategies and adapt to the evolving educational landscape. As face-to-face learning was abruptly suspended, Biliran Province State University (BiPSU) developed a Learning Continuity Plan (LCP) that integrated both online and offline learning modalities to accommodate students with varying levels of internet connectivity and access to resources.

Previous research has emphasized the global impact of the pandemic on education. Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) noted that many institutions had to swiftly transition to online learning, but digital inequality and technological barriers made this shift difficult for students, particularly in less developed areas. Bao, W.,(2020) similarly stressed the importance of flexible and innovative approaches to bridge these gaps. While many studies focus on the general difficulties encountered by educational institutions during the pandemic, fewer have examined specific case studies, particularly in the context of developing countries, where institutions faced unique obstacles in ensuring equitable education for all students (UNESCO,2020).

The knowledge gap lies in the limited exploration of how rural state universities, such as BiPSU, addressed these pandemic-related challenges using locally developed strategies. Existing literature tends to highlight more well-funded universities with advanced digital infrastructures, but there is insufficient research on how smaller institutions with fewer resources in remote areas responded to the crisis. BiPSU's strategies, including its combination of digital and non-digital approaches and its emphasis on stakeholder engagement, offer valuable insights into how rural universities can manage educational disruptions during global crises.

This study adopted a case study approach, utilizing data from university-wide surveys, interviews with key stakeholders, and an in-depth analysis of BiPSU's Learning Continuity Plan. The research involved students, faculty, parents, and administrators to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and solutions implemented. By documenting these processes, the study provides a framework for how BiPSU navigated the pandemic, highlighting the innovative strategies employed and the lessons that can be applied to other institutions facing similar challenges.

1. Objectives

The study aimed to identify the management strategies employed by Biliran Province State University to tackle challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It specifically sought to understand how the university adapted its operations to ensure educational continuity and safeguard the well-being of stakeholders.

2. Scope and Methodology

This study focuses on the faculty, staff, and students of BiPSU, comprising 222 faculty members, 307 staff members, and 8,023 students. A mixed-methods approach was employed to gather data, including surveys, interviews, and document analysis to assess the impact of the pandemic on BiPSU and evaluate the effectiveness of the management strategies implemented.The study used a case study approach to document BiPSU's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Data was gathered through university-wide surveys involving students, faculty, staff, and parents. A series of consultations and SWOT analysis sessions were conducted to explore potential solutions. The research also referenced Kotter's eight-step change model and introduced a novel leadership framework, the "Transborder Leadership," to guide decision-making in times of crisis.

3. Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly transformed higher education, compelling academic institutions to reassess their operational strategies and adapt to new educational realities. A literature review by Boston University School of Public Health emphasizes the importance of change management and organizational resilience in crisis response. Scott Galloway, in his book "Post Corona: From Crisis to Opportunity," urges educational institutions to rethink priorities and adopt innovative solutions. Supporting this view, Almetwazia et al. (2020) identify various challenges faced by academic institutions during the pandemic, enhancing understanding of the complex issues in higher education during crises. Research by Aucejo et al. (2020) in the American Economic Review examines the effects of remote learning and digital equity on student success, highlighting the educational hurdles during this period. Ratten and Jones (2020) stress the need for innovative approaches to overcome disruptions in the education sector. Additionally, Toffler's (1970) concept of future shock addresses the impact of technological advancements on societal adaptability, relevant to today's educational environment. Jeffrey Selingo's book "Who Gets In and Why" discusses the necessity for flexibility and innovation in navigating the changing landscape of higher education. Sierpina (2020) shares strategies from medical education to ensure continuity amid uncertainty, while Kim and Maloney (2020) highlight the rapid adoption of digital learning technologies, prompting a reevaluation of traditional teaching models. Overall, the pandemic has accelerated the shift towards more adaptive and technology-driven educational practices.

4. Result and Discussion

The study highlighted Biliran Province State University's (BiPSU) effective implementation of its Learning Continuity Plan (LCP) during the challenging circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. This initiative involved a significant adaptation to flexible, blended, and distance learning methods, aimed at maintaining educational quality and accessibility for all students. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the situation, BiPSU conducted a university-wide survey that revealed substantial challenges faced by students, particularly limited internet access and a lack of necessary devices for online learning.

In response to these findings, the university introduced a hybrid learning model designed to meet the diverse needs of its student population. This model combined online learning through platforms such as Google Classroom with offline resources, including printed modules and phone consultations, ensuring that all students had the opportunity to engage with the curriculum. Additionally, the university implemented a Catch-Up Plan to ensure academic continuity, which included a descriptive grading system that allowed for fair assessment of students despite the disruptions caused by the pandemic. This grading system recognized the unique challenges faced by students and aimed to provide a more equitable evaluation of their performance.

To further support students, BiPSU also extended deadlines for assignments, enabling students to complete their work without the added pressure of strict timelines. This approach underscored the university's commitment to inclusivity and its determination to ensure that no student was left behind during this unprecedented crisis.

Furthermore, the transborder leadership approach played a pivotal role in guiding the decision-making process of the university's management. By leveraging this leadership model, BiPSU was able to navigate the complexities of the pandemic effectively, demonstrating resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity. This comprehensive strategy not only addressed immediate challenges but also laid the groundwork for future enhancements in the university's educational delivery system.

5. Findings

The study highlighted Biliran Province State University's (BiPSU) successful implementation of its Learning Continuity Plan (LCP) during the COVID-19 pandemic, which involved adapting to flexible, blended, and distance learning methods. After conducting a university-wide survey, BiPSU identified significant challenges, including limited internet access and lack of devices for many students. To address these issues, the university introduced a hybrid learning model, providing both online learning through platforms like Google Classroom and offline resources such as printed modules and phone consultations. The university's Catch-Up Plan ensured academic continuity, implementing a descriptive grading system that allowed for fair assessment of students despite disruptions. Students were also given extended deadlines to complete their work, further ensuring that no one was left behind.Additionally, the management utilized the transborder leadership approach as a guiding framework in their decision-making process. This approach facilitated collaborative and informed strategies that addressed the evolving needs of the university community, ensuring effective responses to the challenges posed by the pandemic.

A. Learning Continuity Plan

The results of the study highlight the successful implementation of Biliran Province State University's (BiPSU) Learning Continuity Plan (LCP) in response to the unprecedented challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. When faced with the sudden shift from traditional face-to-face instruction to a more flexible, blended, and distance learning model, BiPSU adapted quickly and strategically. This was achieved through a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process, where the university identified the key challenges, needs, and resources available. The process allowed BiPSU to develop solutions that addressed the unique needs of its students, faculty, and staff.

To initiate the response, BiPSU conducted a university-wide survey that involved over 2,500 students, faculty members, and parents. The survey aimed to assess the stakeholders' capacities and resources, especially regarding access to the technology needed for distance learning. The results indicated that a significant portion of students did not have access to reliable internet connections or appropriate devices for full online learning. This issue was common across various higher education institutions during the pandemic, as evidenced in other studies (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020), which emphasized the digital divide and the unequal access to technology among students from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

B. Hybrid Approach in Teaching

In response to these challenges, BiPSU developed a hybrid approach that combined online and offline learning modalities. This approach was crucial in ensuring that no student was left behind, particularly those in remote areas or with limited access to technology. Online learning was facilitated through platforms such as Google Classroom and Facebook Messenger, which were familiar to most students and required less technical expertise. For students in areas with limited or no internet connectivity, printed modules and telephone consultations were provided. This inclusive strategy aligned with flexible learning practices, which prioritize accessibility and adaptability in education (Collis & Moonen, 2001).

C. Catch- up Plan

The centerpiece of BiPSU's strategy was the Catch-Up Plan, which provided a structured framework for completing the academic semester amidst the disruptions caused by the pandemic. A notable feature of the plan was the adoption of a descriptive grading system. This grading approach ensured that students were assessed based on the work they had completed, without being penalized for circumstances beyond their control, such as lack of access to online platforms or difficulties posed by the pandemic. The introduction of this system was a reflection of the university's commitment to fairness and equity, principles that are widely advocated in educational policy during crises (UNESCO, 2020). Furthermore, students who were unable to meet the initial deadlines were granted extensions, some lasting up to December 2020, to accommodate their needs.

D. Diversification of Learning Modes

One of the key innovations in BiPSU's response was the diversification of learning modes. The university recognized that a one-size-fits-all approach would not be effective, given the varying circumstances of its students. For those with stable internet access, online learning was the primary mode of instruction, while students with limited connectivity were supported through offline resources. This flexibility ensured that learning continued despite the various constraints. The adoption of blended learning, which combines both face-to-face and online methods, has been identified as an effective strategy in maintaining educational continuity during emergencies (Bonk & Graham, 2012). BiPSU's ability to quickly implement this approach speaks to its agility in adapting to the new educational landscape.

Despite the logistical and technological hurdles, BiPSU successfully completed the second semester of Academic Year 2019–2020. The university's effective and thoughtful response to the crisis garnered recognition from the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), further validating the soundness of its approach. BiPSU's Catch-Up Plan became a model for other higher education institutions in the Eastern Visayas region, solidifying the university's leadership in the area of flexible learning. This achievement reflects BiPSU's strategic foresight and commitment to upholding academic standards while prioritizing the safety and well-being of its community.

E. Formation of the Eastern Visayas Higher Education Institutions-Flexible Learning Management System Consortium (EVHEI-FLMSC)

One of the most significant outcomes of BiPSU's efforts was the formation of the Eastern Visayas Higher Education Institutions-Flexible Learning Management System Consortium (EVHEI-FLMSC). This consortium, initiated by BiPSU, aimed to unify flexible learning systems across all state universities and colleges (SUCs) in Region 8. By fostering collaboration among these institutions, the consortium addressed the diverse educational needs of the region. It focused on resource-sharing, joint training programs, and policy development to enhance the delivery of flexible learning. This initiative demonstrated BiPSU's proactive leadership and its role in shaping the future of higher education in the region during the pandemic and beyond.

F. Regular consultations with the stakeholders

BiPSU also ensured that the well-being of its community, especially students, was a top priority. Regular consultations were held with parents and guardians to keep them informed and engaged. These meetings provided an avenue for addressing concerns related to the health and safety of students, as well as their access to learning resources. Parental involvement in education has long been recognized as a critical factor in student success, particularly during times of crisis (Epstein, 2010). By maintaining open lines of communication, BiPSU fostered a sense of security and trust among its stakeholders.

G. ***Training and support to faculty members***

In addition to its focus on students, BiPSU extended its flexibility to faculty members. The university provided training and support to help faculty transition from traditional teaching methods to digital and blended formats. Faculty were encouraged to employ a mix of online and offline techniques, ensuring that they could cater to the diverse needs of their students. This collaborative approach strengthened the university's overall response to the pandemic. By investing in faculty development, BiPSU not only ensured the immediate continuation of learning but also laid the groundwork for a more resilient and adaptive educational system (Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017); Desimone, L. M. (2009); Garet, M. S., Porter, A. C., Desimone, L., Birman, B. F., & Yoon, K. S. (2001); Pellegrino, J. W., & Hilton, M. L. (Eds.), (2012); Roberts, J. M., & Pruitt, L. (2009).

H. Descriptive Grading System

BiPSU's descriptive grading system was another essential element of its pandemic response. The system allowed for the conversion of descriptive marks into numeric equivalents, particularly for students aiming for honors and other academic distinctions. This approach balanced the need for academic rigor with empathy, recognizing the exceptional circumstances faced by students and faculty alike. The flexibility of this grading system is reflective of global trends in education during the pandemic, where institutions have adopted alternative assessment methods

to accommodate students' varied challenges (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020).

I. Implementation of Transborder Leadership Approach

Table 1 outlines the components of the proposed transborder leadership model, while Figure 1 illustrates its framework. This figure identifies key elements of transborder leadership, including context, environment, and leader, with the central focus being the clients—comprising both direct stakeholders and indirect partners. The direct stakeholders operate under the leader's guidance, while the indirect stakeholders are influenced by the leadership style due to their connections with the constituents sharing the same environment and context (Sweeney, D. 2019; Bishop, A., 2020; Hemsley-Brown, J., & Oplatka, I., 2016).

The study employed the transborder leadership approach as a strategic framework to guide decision-making at Biliran Province State University (BiPSU) amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This model prioritizes collaboration, adaptability, and shared accountability among various stakeholders, making it particularly effective for navigating complex and rapidly evolving situations (Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D., 2000; Bishop, A., 2020; Hemsley-Brown, J., & Oplatka, I., 2016).

At BiPSU, transborder leadership fostered open lines of communication and collaboration among faculty, students, administrators, and other stakeholders. This inclusive strategy enabled the university to draw on a range of perspectives and expertise, leading to the formulation of comprehensive strategies that effectively tackled the challenges associated with the shift to remote learning. For example, engaging diverse stakeholders in discussions helped the university pinpoint critical issues such as limited internet access and insufficient devices, which ultimately informed the development of a hybrid learning model that merged online education with offline resources.

Moreover, transborder leadership promoted a flexible and responsive decision-making process, allowing the university to swiftly adapt to emerging challenges. This adaptability was vital for implementing innovative solutions, including extending assignment deadlines and introducing a descriptive grading system that accommodated the unique situations faced by students during the pandemic. The approach also fostered ongoing stakeholder engagement, ensuring that the perspectives of students and faculty were incorporated into the development of educational policies (Fowler, F. C., 2013; Gunter, H. M., & Ribbins, P., 2002; Kirkman, B. L., & Rosen, B., 1999).

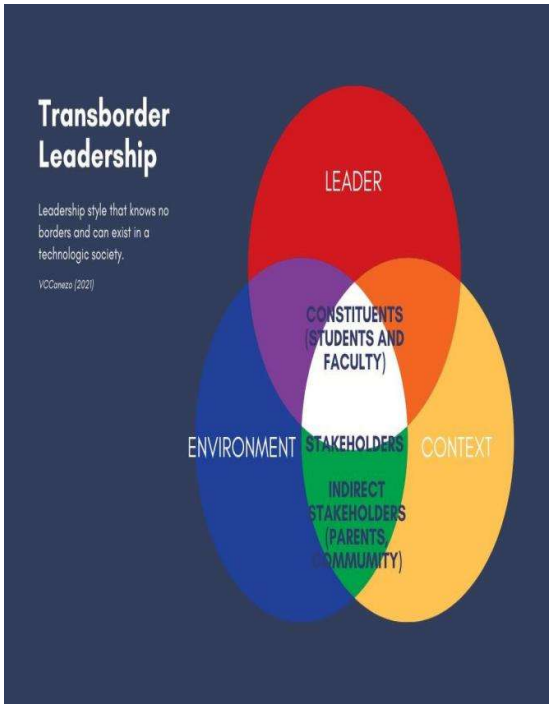
The effectiveness of transborder leadership in this scenario is consistent with existing literature highlighting its significance in promoting resilience and collaborative problem-solving within educational contexts (Bishop, 2020; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2016). By leveraging this leadership model, BiPSU successfully maintained educational continuity and supported the well-being of its stakeholders during a period of unprecedented disruption.

Table 1. Components of the proposed Transborder Leadership Model

Context:	The transborder leadership style surfaces in situations such as in a pandemic where measures like strict social distancing and border restrictions abound, and where the leader and followers cannot exist in the same place and space.
Environment:	The transborder type of leadership as the term implies thrives in an environment of the 4IR, a borderless society where all technology tools abound making the world a smaller place.

Constituents/Followers:	The clients or followers of the transborder leader are technologically savvy and can transact business anywhere and anytime.
Leader:	The transborder leader is time- and resource-efficient such that he or she can transact with his or her constituents as the need arises without the walls of bureaucracy to weigh down but can still retain the degree of formality and control needed to ensure smooth operations and structure. He/she must be charismatic without being physically present; his or her personality transcends borders and he/ she can command the constituents no matter how enormous or difficult the task is.

Figure 3. Key Elements of Transborder Leadership



6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study highlights Biliran Province State University's (BiPSU) effective adaptation and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic through its implementation of the Learning Continuity Plan (LCP). By leveraging flexible, blended, and distance learning methods, the university not only maintained educational continuity but also addressed significant challenges such as limited internet access and lack of devices for students. The introduction of a hybrid learning model, coupled with supportive measures like extended deadlines and a descriptive grading system, ensured that all students were accommodated and assessed fairly. Furthermore, the application of the transborder leadership approach fostered collaboration and inclusivity, enabling effective decision-making that engaged various stakeholders in the process. Overall, BiPSU's comprehensive strategies

exemplify a commitment to educational excellence and equity, demonstrating how institutions can successfully navigate crises while prioritizing the needs of their communities.

Based from the results gathered the following recommendations are forwarded:

Biliran Province State University (BiPSU) should focus on refining and integrating flexible learning models into its educational system to promote accessibility and inclusivity, even beyond the pandemic. Strengthening digital infrastructure is crucial to support online education, ensuring reliable internet access and providing devices for students and faculty. Additionally, the university should explore the "Transborder Leadership" model to enhance crisis management and leadership effectiveness in similar educational contexts. Lastly, ongoing engagement with stakeholders during the planning and implementation of future educational policies is essential to ensure their voices are heard and considered in decision-making.

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