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Challenges and Opportunities in an Alternative Approach for Academic Workload in the New Normal

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A B S T R A C T

COVID-19 challenged the delivery of quality education as it abruptly altered in-person schooling in all educational institutions across the globe. College administrators were compelled to design and adopt a scheme that suits the environment of remote learning but safeguards quality teaching and learning. This quantitative-descriptive research evaluates the alternative approach to academic workload adopted by a local college in Batangas City, during the pandemic, when in-person classes were called-off. The adopted workload scheme aimed to ensure effective and efficient delivery of remote instruction so that quality learning will be sustained. The evaluation focused on the challenges and opportunities of the adopted system called the "two-term academic workload scheme." Data were gathered through a content-validated questionnaire distributed to two hundred and seventy-seven (277) respondents via Google form. The respondents were full-time teachers and students in the College of Education. Data gathering happened in the first quarter of 2022, a year and a half after the adopted scheme was implemented. It was found that teachers and students shared similar views, especially on the opportunities that resulted from the scheme but slight contrasting views on the challenges were observed. This, however, did not result to a significant difference in responses. The study revealed that the adopted scheme created more opportunities than challenges and hence has served the purpose of sustaining excellent delivery of instruction and the expected quality output was achieved.

RESUMO

A COVID-19 desafiou a oferta de uma educação de qualidade, uma vez que alterou abruptamente o ensino presencial em todas as instituições educativas em todo o mundo. Os administradores universitários foram obrigados a conceber e adotar um esquema que se adaptasse ao ambiente de aprendizagem à distância, mas que salvaguardasse o ensino e a aprendizagem de qualidade. Esta pesquisa quantitativa-descritiva avalia a abordagem alternativa de carga horária acadêmica adotada por uma faculdade local na cidade de Batangas, durante a pandemia, quando as aulas presenciais foram suspensas. O esquema de carga de trabalho adotado visava assegurar a prestação eficaz e eficiente de ensino à distância, para que a aprendizagem de qualidade fosse sustentada. A avaliação centrou-se nos desafios e oportunidades do sistema adotado denominado "esquema de carga horária acadêmica de dois períodos". Os dados foram coletados por meio de questionário com validação de conteúdo distribuído a duzentos e setenta e sete (277) entrevistados via formulário Google. Os entrevistados eram professores em tempo integral e estudantes da Faculdade de Educação. A recolha de dados ocorreu no primeiro trimestre de 2022, um ano e meio após a implementação do regime adotado. Verificou-se que professores e alunos partilhavam opiniões semelhantes, especialmente sobre as oportunidades que resultaram do programa, mas foram observadas opiniões ligeiramente contrastantes sobre os desafios. Isso, no entanto, não resultou em uma diferença significativa nas respostas. O estudo revelou que o esquema adoptado criou mais oportunidades do que desafios e, portanto, serviu o propósito de sustentar uma excelente prestação de instrução e a qualidade esperada foi alcançada.

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Introduction

Staying optimistic during hard times opens the door to resilience. Difficult times always come. It is in the normal cycle of life. However, hard times do not only challenge people's lives, but they also bring out the best in them. When people adjust their vision, they will realize that advantage is always present in every challenge. This fact is again established when the COVID-19 pandemic stirred up the world in 2020. The challenges it caused impelled people to step outside their comfort zones and discover the other strengths they did not recognize in the normal situation.

The typical activities of people across the globe suddenly changed by the unprecedented spread of COVID-19. It started in the last month of 2021, from Wuhan, China, and like the wind, it speedily spread out worldwide. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared the outbreak pandemic (WHO, 2020). The pandemic placed all nations in a great quandary as this contagious and deadly disease immediately altered people's usual activities. While the situation has been currently improving, the last two years – early 2020 to early 2022 – have brought so much chaos to what people normally do. All sectors need to come up with plans and immediately put them into action to counter the effects of the plague.

One of the sectors that was greatly challenged during the COVID-19 pandemic is education. This is experienced worldwide – from the richest to the poorest county – the whip of the pandemic was felt. The noisy and lively schools immediately closed their gates and refrained from conducting in-person activities. Learners and teachers were advised to stay home for safety, but teaching and learning must not be interrupted. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reported that schools for more than 168 million children globally have wholly closed at the height of the pandemic – from March 2020 to February 2021 (UNICEF Press Release, 2021). All classes were done remotely through technology. In the Philippines, it was reported that by the end of March 2020, all public schools which house 25 million students were closed due to the pandemic (Fund Life International cited in reliefweb, 2021). The delivery of instruction was changed to alternative modes – distance, modular, home study, and the like – which do not require the physical presence of teachers and learners in one place. Only in the Academic Year 2022-2023 did the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) announce the gradual re-opening of schools – from limited face-to-face to total in-person by November 2022 (Manila Bulletin, n.d.)

Complete havoc enveloped all schools when in-person teaching and learning were abruptly discontinued. The termination of face-to-face classes happened when the Academic Year 2020-2021 was about to end. DepEd and CHED called for educational institutions to design innovative learning delivery modes to reach the learners while considering their safety

and the teachers'. Both agencies worked doubly and coordinated with other government agencies to craft policies with clear implementing rules and regulations (IRR) to guide all schools in designing their Learning Continuity Plan (LCP). These efforts aimed to ensure that all learners will be provided with quality education despite the absence of the physical presence of teachers and students in a classroom due to a life-threatening situation.

On the one hand, DepEd even released the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs), which served as the primary reference for all elementary and secondary schools in implementing the learning delivery approaches during the pandemic through multiple learning modalities and platforms. MELCs aimed to lighten the burden of learners in acquiring knowledge, understanding, skills, and attitudes that they need to demonstrate in every lesson (Gonzales, 2020). On the other hand, CHED urged all colleges and universities to address the situation by adopting alternative modes of instruction and maximizing technology use. The government ordered that all levels in all educational institutions – public and private – must shift to pure online learning modality. This means that all classes must take place in the online environment through synchronous or asynchronous sessions, or a combination of the two.

Several pure online instruction models were creatively designed. Distance or remote learning became word of mouth; online or virtual classes became popular; modular approach came out in the big picture, and blended or hybrid instruction found its significance. Even the mass media – radio and television – were utilized to deliver instruction. All these were designed and adopted to ensure that the quality of learning will not be curtailed. Subsequently, parents became teachers at home as they guided their children in completing their modules and other academic activities. They invested in technology, internet connection, and gadgets for their child's online classes. Teachers prepared modules to augment remote teaching. They underwent training on technology, the conduct of virtual courses, and the use of a learning management system. Emboldened by the desire to contribute to students' learning, they searched for learning materials online and downloaded applications that were useful for remote teaching. Schools redirected their investment in technology; realigned their processes and procedures to online operations and work-from-home scheme.

While these adjustments seemed to address the situation, they certainly created problems. Some parents cannot guide their children due to inadequate knowledge and training. They cannot engage their children to learn with them due to a lack of concentration, unwillingness to learn, desire to go to school, inability to understand online, and limited comprehension of the learning materials (Apriyanti, 2020). Teachers faced problems related to network and internet use, technical barriers, planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning, collaboration with parents, students conditioning, and students' participation online (Fauzi & Khusuma, 2020; Rasmitadila et al., 2020). Hayat et al. (2021) in their study, categorized the main challenges in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic into (1)

noncompliance with virtual classroom etiquette; (2) inadequate interactions; (3) time limitations; and (4) infrastructure defects and problems.

The Colegio ng Lungsod ng Batangas (CLB) was not relieved by the same concerns. Consequently, the community felt anxious about the situation. Over the years, teachers and students have been used to in-person classroom interaction where discussion is not hampered by technological issues, unlike in pure online classes. They are comfortable with face-to-face classes where teachers can immediately explain, elaborate, and address questions for better understanding. They even spend time coaching after class, where students can open up about academic and personal concerns with their teachers. But these situations have become unworkable due to the pandemic. Moreover, they have other problems that add up to the complexity of the case – the life-threatening disease; safety of their family; finances; readiness of teachers and students to remote learning; adequacy of technological facilities; and preparedness in technology utilization; among others. How can CLB live the goal of providing quality education to students in this situation in a pure online learning modality?

With the big picture in mind, the CLB administration placed teachers' and students' welfare at the core of the situation – minimizing the pandemic's worries, fears, and uncertainties without sacrificing the quality of teaching and learning. As an educational institution, CLB's prime concern is the continuous delivery of quality education, but teachers and students must be safe, thus embracing the pure online learning modality at all costs. The challenge was unearthed. It lies between sustaining the efficiency and effectiveness of instruction to guarantee the quality of learning while safeguarding the well-being of teachers and students. These must all be done remotely. Since CHED gave the colleges and universities the freedom to adopt an instructional model that would ensure excellent learning, CLB thought of one that would benefit both teachers and students who are directly affected by the abrupt shift of the teaching-learning process. To balance the two concerns, CLB finally considered the decongestion of the academic workload of teachers and students to keep their focus despite varied environmental problems. It was also believed that relieving the teachers and students from preparing for several courses may provide them ample time to work on excellent delivery of instruction and quality learning outputs. While doing these, CLB ensures teachers' and students' mental and physical well-being.

Before the pandemic outbreak, CLB's academic operation was fluid. Its curricular programs are offered on a semestral basis. Eight (8) to nine (9) courses, equivalent to twenty-four (24) to twenty-seven (27) units/hours, are offered per semester with a minimum duration of eighteen (18) weeks or four and a half months. The major examinations are within eighteen (18) weeks – Midterm and Finals. Each course has allocated three (3) hours per week, hence is equivalent to 54 hours per semester. Balance in the scheduling of courses is always observed - four (4) courses on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays and another four (4) on Tuesdays and Thursdays; thus, students come to school every day to attend classes with their teachers. While

this scheduling scheme could also be applied in remote classes, CLB clearly recognized the difference between in-person and pure online classes; thus, the College came up with an alternative workload scheme, called the two-term academic workload scheme.

In the adopted scheme, a semester is divided into two terms – each term to last for two and a half months or twelve weeks. Courses were split almost evenly per term, where each course was scheduled for a two-day meeting and allotted 3 hours per meeting. The 1.5 hours must be spent for synchronous online classes and the remaining 1.5 hours must be allotted for asynchronous activities. This academic workload scheme is almost similar to the trimestral academic workload model where courses are offered for a period or term of three (3) months.

The trimestral model was opined to improve student achievements as it provides flexibility in the students' learning process (Williamson, 2011). In this model, students take fewer courses, have less homework, and have fewer materials to organize (Eineder & Bishop, cited in Sy, 2012). Teachers are provided with enough time to plan and teach more effectively (Johnson, 2005); and have more time to focus on individual student needs. It also afforded the teachers more flexibility in monitoring students' performance and fostering better relationships with them (Cromwell, 2005). More importantly, this approach to school scheduling focuses not on its mechanics but instead on the educational and emotional impact of the school curriculum on the lives of the students and teachers (Sy, 2012). The CLB two-term workload academic scheme focused on its educational impact – the quality of teaching and learning.

On the one hand, the purpose of CLB in adopting the two-term academic workload scheme is to ensure a focus on teaching and learning. Fewer courses would mean fewer requirements and paperwork, more time to prepare and submit outputs, and more opportunities to organize tasks. This condition is believed to help maintain a healthy mind and a sound body. On the other hand, the scheme may also prevent cramming or jampacking due to work overload as distance or online learning environments are far different from the in-person learning environment. Ultimately, the scheme was believed to sustain the quality of teaching and learning despite environmental concerns and health and safety issues through a workable teaching-learning experience.

Since the two-term academic workload scheme is a new practice to CLB, questions about its alignment with the prime purpose of sustaining quality teaching and learning were thought about. Does the model, specifically its design of decongesting the courses with more extended time allotment per term, provide students with a quality learning experience? Are the students not deprived of exposure to other activities that support content-based instruction? As the answers to these questions are sought, what challenges and opportunities can be drawn from the implementation of the two-term academic workload so that appropriate adjustments may be made?

It is for these queries that the researchers opted to conduct this study. It focused on the challenges and opportunities identified through the design of learning experiences of the two-term academic workload scheme. It aimed to determine the challenges of the two-term academic workload scheme as assessed by teachers and students; identify the opportunities of the two-term academic workload scheme as assessed by teachers and students; evaluate the effect of the two-term academic workload scheme on the delivery of instruction; and analyze if the difference between the responses of the teachers and the students exist. Challenges are the problematic situations faced by the respondents during the scheme implementation, which can also be converted into opportunities for enhancement. Opportunities are the unexpected remarkable outcomes that stemmed from the system that unpacked the unseen strength of students and teachers.

Methodological Procedure

Research Design

The descriptive-quantitative research design was utilized in this study. This design facilitates the description of the characteristics of a phenomenon, situation, or population. Through the quantitative approach, a problem is described with relevant information. Descriptive research accurately describes a research problem without asking why a particular event happened. It is a research design that collects quantifiable information for statistical analysis of a sample (Creswell, 2003). The descriptive-quantitative design is the most appropriate for this study as it described a situation by collecting information through a questionnaire with items that are answerable with exact measures.

Respondents of the Study

The researchers intended to involve the total population of full-time faculty members of the College of Education (CEDUC) and all students from the three (3) programs – Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED), Bachelor of Physical Education (BPED), and Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education (BTLED). However, only two hundred and seventy-seven (277) responded. This sample represents 56% of full-time faculty members and 53% of the students.

Survey Instrument

The researchers constructed a twenty-five (25) item questionnaire. Items were based on the observations and experiences of the researchers, from the shared experiences of students enrolled in colleges and universities that offer trimestral scheduling, and from the varied studies and references. Items were carefully constructed to ensure that both the teachers and the students can answer them accurately without disparity. A four-point rating scale was used to measure the respondents' answers as follows: 4 – strongly agree; 3 – agree; 2 – disagree, and 1 – strongly disagree. The items underwent content validation. The process of validation involved teachers and students from other colleges and universities that offer trimester scheme. To test the internal consistency of the items, the questionnaire was pilot-

tested and the data was analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha. The computed reliability index was 0.89 reliability index which means that the items have good internal consistency hence, reliable.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers uploaded the questionnaire in Google Forms and made the necessary communication to the faculty members and students of the College of Education. The target respondents were assured of confidentiality and data privacy. To encourage more students to answer the questionnaire, the assistance of the adviser was sought. The questionnaire was uploaded from February 1 to 18, 2022. The responses were generated on February 20, 2022, and were tabulated in Microsoft Excel. Meanwhile, weighted mean was used to determine the average of the responses per item and independent t-test of two sample means was used to determine the difference between the response of the two groups of respondents.

Results and Discussion

Students were exposed to a new system of class scheduling and workload – the two-term academic workload scheme – which might have affected their learning experience and their academic performance. From these experiences, students may reveal some challenges encountered and opportunities that emanated from the adopted scheme. Table 1 presents the students' assessment of the effects of the two-term workload scheme on teaching and learning.

Table 1.

Students' Assessment on the Effects of the Two-Term Academic Workload Scheme on Teaching and Learning

Indicators	WM	VI	R
The two-term academic workload scheme…			
1. enables teachers and students to focus on fewer classes at a time.	3.48	A	2
2. provides greater collaboration and interaction between students and teachers.	3.36	A	14
3. provides increased instructional time.	3.33	A	15
4. allows teachers and students to effectively manage load requirements.	3.42	A	4.5
5. allows fewer load requirements that are less stressful.	3.38	A	10.5
6. offers greater opportunity for in-depth learning.	3.37	A	13
7. promotes more focus on completion and submission of requirements on time.	3.38	A	10.5
8. develops self-directed or independent learners.	3.42	A	4.5
9. is fast-paced and puts pressure on the completion and submission of requirements.	3.15	A	25
10. allows teachers and students to cover more topics per meeting.	3.38	A	10.5
11. promotes flexibility for teachers and students to cover the content of the syllabus in a shorter period.	3.39	A	7.5
12. lessens the conduct of extracurricular and co-curricular activities to avoid class disruption.	3.19	A	24
13. requires more rigorous instruction to ensure mastery of content.	3.24	A	22
14. enables for a more structured embedded academic intervention within the time allotted per course.	3.27	A	17.5
15. tempts teachers to stick to straight lectures as a teaching strategy.	3.25	A	20.5
16. lessens the time for conducting library research.	3.39	A	7.5

17. develops time management skills.	3.58	SA	1
18. encourages resourcefulness to cope with and deliver within time limit.	3.38	A	10.5
19. heightens teachers' creativity in class discussions to avoid students' boredom.	3.43	A	3
20. reduces opportunities for hands-on learning experiences.	3.21	A	23
21. stifles opportunities for collaborative learning activities.	3.25	A	20.5
22. limits the chance for friendly relationship between students and teachers to avoid class disruptions.	3.41	A	6
23. decreases skill-based activities as instruction centers on content learning.	3.29	A	16
24. encourages utilization of varied classroom activities to address different learning styles.	3.27	A	17.5
25. lessens students' interest to participate in the discussion as the long contact hours is dragging.	3.26	A	19
Composite Mean	**3.33**	**A**	

Note: WM – Weighted Mean; VI – Verbal Interpretation; SA – Strongly Agree; A – Agree; R – Rank

It can be noted from Table 1 that the development of time management skills as an effect of the two-term academic workload scheme received the highest weighted mean of 3.58 and was verbally interpreted as strongly agree. Ranked second with the weighted mean of 3.48 expressed that the scheme enabled teachers and students to focus on fewer classes at a time while ranked third with the weighted mean of 3.43 stated that the scheme heightened teachers' creativity in class discussion to avoid students' boredom. Two items have the same weighted mean of 3.42 which occupied ranks 4 and 5. These items articulated that the two-term academic workload scheme allowed teachers and students to effectively manage load requirements and it also developed self-directed or independent learners. Items ranked 2nd to 5th have a verbal interpretation of agree.

Meanwhile, student-respondents unanimously agreed on the 5 items that were ranked lowest based on weighted mean. At the bottom of the list of items, students revealed that the scheme is fast-paced that put pressure on the completion and submission of requirements. It got the lowest weighted mean of 3.15. The second lowest mean of 3.19 was given to the item which stated that the scheme lessened the conduct of extracurricular and co-curricular activities to avoid class disruption. Ranked third lowest declared that the scheme reduced opportunities for hands-on learning experiences with the weighted mean of 3.21; while two items with the same weighted mean of 3.25 took the ranks 4th and 5th. These statements expressed that the scheme tempted teachers to stick to straight lectures as a teaching strategy and stifled opportunities for collaborative learning activities.

Using the same instrument, teachers were also asked to assess the effects of the two-term academic workload scheme on teaching and learning. Comparable to students, the adopted system was also a new experience for them. Being used to face-to-face classroom encounters with the students, following the regular class schedule, the change in class schedule may have resulted in some challenges and opportunities. Table 2 shows the result of teachers'

assessment on the effects of the two-term academic workload scheme on teaching and learning.

Table 2.

Teachers' Assessment on the Effects of the Two-Term Academic Workload Scheme on Teaching and Learning

Indicators	WM	VI	R
The two-term academic workload scheme…			
1. enables teachers and students to focus on fewer classes at a time.	3.6	SA	3
2. provides greater collaboration and interaction between students and teachers.	3.3	A	17.5
3. provides increased instructional time.	3.5	SA	6
4. allows teachers and students to effectively manage load requirements.	3.2	A	21.5
5. allows fewer load requirements that are less stressful.	3.5	SA	6
6. offers greater opportunity for in-depth learning.	3.3	A	17.5
7. promotes more focus on completion and submission of requirements on time.	3.3	A	17.5
8. develops self-directed or independent learners.	3.5	SA	6
9. is fast-paced and puts pressure on the completion and submission of requirements.	3.3	A	17.5
10. allows teachers and students to cover more topics per meeting.	3.1	A	24
11. promotes flexibility for teachers and students to cover the content of the syllabus in a shorter period.	3.4	A	11.5
12. lessens the conduct of extracurricular and co-curricular activities to avoid class disruption.	3.8	SA	1
13. requires more rigorous instruction to ensure mastery of content.	3.5	SA	6
14. enables for a more structured embedded academic intervention within the time allotted per course.	3.4	A	11.5
15. tempts teachers to stick to straight lectures as a teaching strategy.	3.2	A	21.5
16. lessens the time for conducting library research.	3.1	A	24
17. develops time management skills.	3.7	SA	2
18. encourages resourcefulness to cope with and deliver within time limit.	3.5	SA	6
19. heightens teachers' creativity in class discussions to avoid students' boredom.	3.4	A	11.5
20. reduces opportunities for hands-on learning experiences.	3.4	A	11.5
21. stifles opportunities for collaborative learning activities.	3.1	A	24
22. limits the chance for friendly relationship between students and teachers to avoid class disruptions.	3.3	A	17.5
23. decreases skill-based activities as instruction centers on content learning.	3.3	A	17.5
24. encourages utilization of varied classroom activities to address different learning styles.	3.4	A	11.5
25. lessens students' interest to participate in the discussion as the long contact hours is dragging.	3.4	A	11.5
Composite Mean	**3.38**	**A**	

Note: WM – Weighted Mean; VI – Verbal Interpretation; SA – Strongly Agree; A – Agree; R – Rank

It can be observed that the teachers strongly agreed on the first 5 items that got the highest weighted mean. Ranked first with 3.8 weighted mean disclosed that the two-term academic workload scheme lessened the conduct of extracurricular and co-curricular activities to avoid class disruption. It was seconded by the item which stated that the scheme developed time management skills, with 3.7 weighted mean. Ranked third with 3.6 declared that the

scheme enabled teachers and students to focus on fewer classes at a time. Three items with the same weighted mean of 3.5 tanked 4th to 6th. The items asserted that the two-term workload academic scheme provided increased instructional time; allowed fewer load requirements that are less stressful; and developed self-directed or independent learners.

Conversely, the teacher-respondents ended up agreeing on the 5 items that were ranked lowest based on weighted mean. Three items with the lowest weighted mean of 3.1 expressed that the two-term academic workload scheme stifled opportunities for collaborative learning activities; lessened the time for conducting library research; and allowed teachers and students to cover more topics per meeting. Similarly, two items received the second lowest mean of 3.2. The statements revealed that the adopted scheme allowed teachers and students to effectively manage load requirements, and tempted teachers to stick to straight lecture as teaching strategy.

The data gathered implied that the two-term academic workload scheme brought challenges and opportunities in teaching and learning. This is a natural phenomenon as there is no structure that perfectly fits a situation. No matter how things are carefully planned or organized for a particular situation, there will always be benefits and drawbacks. The benefits provide useful new practices, while drawbacks are the best opportunities for improvements and further exploration.

The development of time management skills was identified to be one of the most significant opportunities created by the two-term academic workload load scheme for both students and teachers. Wigmor (2015) described time management as the coordination of tasks and activities to maximize the effectiveness of an individual's efforts. Time management aims to enable people to accomplish more work in less time. It can be assumed that since the workload was reduced, teachers and students managed to focus on tasks. They probably have more time to identify what tasks should be prioritized, how to organize and delegate them, and strategically move to the next plan since there are lesser academic concerns to pay attention to. This assumption was even affirmed in the teachers' and students' observations that the scheme enabled them to focus on fewer classes at a time. Students also said that the scheme allowed teachers and students to effectively manage load requirements while teachers added that the scheme allowed fewer load requirements that are less stressful and provided increased instructional time. It can be assumed that both teachers and students have effectively designed a timetable and have allotted sufficient time for each task, thus, cramming was not experienced, and quality performance was guaranteed.

Alyami et al. (2021) underscored the positive impact of time management on students' academic achievement. They found in their study that when students are able to use and control their time, their academic output improves. In similar views, Scherer et al. (2017) revealed in their study that time management effectively predicts academic outcomes. They said that when time is effectively allocated and spent on varied academic tasks, students can

excel in class and produce excellent outputs. Similarly, Humpherys e Lazrig (2021) ascertained a clear association between student performance and their ability to manage time effectively. Students' poor time management is related to adverse examination outcomes. They further concluded that time management is critical to students' academic success. Meanwhile, on the part of the teachers, Gul et al. (2021) ascertained in their study that the heavy workload of teachers causes anxiety and that increase in teachers' workload decreases their time management skills. Therefore, giving teachers a lesser workload is one effective way of providing them the opportunity to perform well in teaching. On the same note, Olivo (2021) concluded that the time management strategies of the teachers were related to their teaching performance. His study revealed that when teachers allot more time for classroom teaching which is considered the most important among their numerous tasks, they become more effective and successful teachers. It was also unearthed in his study that longer time spent in preparation for teaching made them more effective in delivering instruction.

Another opportunity that the scheme offered as identified by the students was the heightened teachers' creativity in class discussion to avoid students' boredom. It could be inferred that students noticed that teachers have gone the extra mile to keep the class discussion interesting to students not only because classes are done remotely but also because classes are held for a straight one and a-half hours on screen. Creative teaching is the teacher's independent ability to conceive novel ideas or adapt the ideas of others into their context (Kanter cited in Chen & Yuan, 2021). Creativity in teaching is personalistic – unique for each teacher – shaped by his imagination and resourcefulness. Often, students appreciate creative teachers. They influence the academic performance of students. Ruth et al. (2021) emphasized that teachers' creativity creates learning with fun, enhances students' thinking capability, boosts their problem-solving skills, and improves focus and attention. Thus, teachers have to be imaginative to effectively and efficiently present the lesson comprised of several concepts – bringing them together into a big picture without losing the connections of ideas vis-à-vis sustained students' attention who have varied abilities, prior knowledge, and backgrounds. They must apply several skills and competencies to maximize learning outcomes and students' learning (Asiegbu & Okpala, 2019).

In addition to the opportunities that came out of the two-term academic workload scheme was it enabled students to become self-directed and independent. Both teachers and students recognized this benefit. Self-directed and independent students have control and ownership of their learning. They systemize the process of their own learning, evaluate its effectiveness, and make decisions about how to meet their learning needs (Tekkol & Demirel, 2018). It can be presumed that the students became more self-directed and independent due to the absence of teachers' physical presence in class. More so, some students may have thought raising more questions during virtual class may disrupt the flow of discussion which irritate other students. It may also cause the failure to cover the intended lesson for the particular

meeting. Most likely, in students' desire to learn more, to be clarified of the lesson, and to enrich their understanding of concepts without causing any class disruption, they took the initiative to look for more references and to strategize how they can be more informed. It could be said that this opportunity has a life-long effect on students since being a self-directed and independent learner may lead to a more successful life. Tekkol e Demirel (2018) established the relationship between self-directed learning and lifelong learning. They concluded that students with high self-directed learning skills tend to be more logical in their approach to solving problems, have higher knowledge of the importance of wise decision-making; and are more flexible and innovative in dealing with difficult situations. Thus, most likely, they become more successful in life.

Interestingly, the teachers' claim that the scheme lessened the conduct of extracurricular and co-curricular activities to avoid class disruption belonged to the top five items based on the weighted mean. This sounded more like a challenge rather than an opportunity. Apparently, while teachers intend to hold extracurricular or even co-curricular activities, their consciousness of time allotment and the concern that the scope of the course may not be covered within the term, have prevented them to do so. However, students must be given the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities for a lot of benefits - higher grades and better test scores, higher educational achievements, more regularity in class attendance, and higher self-confidence (Tariq et al., 2022). With this premise, it appeared that teachers were challenged to balance the content-based discussion which can be enriched through extracurricular and co-curricular activities.

Moving on to the items with the lowest weighted mean and were found at the bottom of the list of items about the challenges and opportunities of the two-term academic workload scheme, the items suggesting that the scheme stifled opportunities for collaborative learning activities, and it tempted the teachers to stick to straight lecture as teaching strategy were common to both teachers and students. A closer look at the response revealed that the scheme never halted either the opportunity for collaborative learning activities or sticking to straight lecture as a teaching strategy. It implied that collaborative learning was still employed and practiced and that teachers have adopted varied teaching strategies. These assumptions were previously established when the students claimed that teachers' creativity in class discussion to avoid students' boredom was heightened in the adopted scheme. More so, teachers may have designed collaborative learning activities in performance-based assessment or even in assigned group topics for discussion. This too, is a manifestation of teachers' creativity.

Linked to the aforementioned was the students' assessment that the scheme reduced opportunities for hands-on learning which also received a lower weighted mean. This implied that it did not happen and therefore, students were still given ample opportunities for hands-on learning. Arnholz (2019) described hands-on learning as an approach that gives students both the freedom and responsibility to learn through real experience, rather than through

simply reading or listening to somebody else like teachers' lecture. Similarly, it was noted that the scheme lessened the time for conducting library research was assessed low by the teachers. This suggested that there was ample time given to students for library research. These two items seemed interrelated since library research may lead students to better understand the world outside as explored by various researchers and as studied by field experts. Library research could have triggered the curiosity of the students to try and apply some concepts in their actual situation since they were given academic exercises and activities that are anchored on real-life situation. Such a process promotes authentic learning that has been advocated in higher education institutions (HEIs). Ekwueme e Ezenwa-Nebife (2015) emphasized that one of the teachers' significant skills is the ability to adopt varied teaching strategies and to design diverse activities that promote hands-on learning. They concluded that hands-on activities were not only fun and engaging but were also proven to be more effective at helping students grasp what was being taught.

Another remarkable interrelated assessment of students found at the bottom of the list recommended that the scheme has kept the normal pacing of academic activities, similar to the usual practice. For them, although there was observed rigorous instruction to ensure mastery of content, the said practice was not really demanded by the scheme. It can be inferred that rigorous instruction also happens in normal class schedule since the goal of the teachers whenever they teach, is to ensure that students will be able to master the lesson. Furthermore, it can be assumed that the severity of instruction was not felt because teachers became creative in their teaching style as what was previously established. Very much related to this was the teachers' modest agreement that the scheme allowed teachers and students to cover more topics per meeting. This implied that teachers stick to the planned content coverage of the course which was carefully chunked before the term opened. It can also be said that the teachers were guided by their awareness that jam-packed discussion does not result in mastery of concepts. Several studies concluded that a crowded curriculum, rigid academic requirements, and teaching strategies are among the many factors that contribute to students' underperformance (Pajares & Schunk; Rahil et al. cited in Abdullah et al., 2012). In the same vein, students also agreed that the scheme is fast-paced, however, there was no immense pressure in the completion and submission of requirements. It can be presumed, therefore, that despite the shortened timetable for each term, the longer time allotted for each course has provided the students with enough time to complete and submit the requirements without any pressure. Seemingly, there was a time balance in the design of the scheme. This assumption was supported by the previous findings that the students developed their time management skills as a result of the scheme.

Unexpectedly, extreme result from the students' and teachers' responses was noticed. One of the items at the bottom of students' responses was about the conduct of extracurricular and co-curricular activities which was lessened in the adopted scheme. This means that

students dispelled the statement, and they believed that such activities were still conducted. However, teachers strongly agreed that the conduct of these kinds of activities was lessened in the adopted scheme. On one hand, students may be satisfied with the group activities and other performance-based outputs that their teachers required from them. It is possible that students may have perceived that these are already extra and co-curricular activities. On the other hand, the observation gap may be caused by the teachers' intention to provide more extra and co-activities to students since they know how important these are in enriching students' learning. Most likely, teachers intend to conduct grand activities as they used to provide to students in the regular class schedule. In their lens, holding such activities was given up, thus, enriching content-based learning was lessened. As Tariq et al. (2022) emphasized, students must be given the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities for a lot of benefits - higher grades and better test scores, higher educational achievements, more regularity in class attendance, and higher self-confidence. It can be said that extracurricular and co-curricular activities are not only excellent relief from a hectic academic schedule but also an effective booster of academic performance.

Another contradicting result was the observation that the scheme allowed teachers and students to effectively manage load requirements. Students agreed that this happened while teachers do not fully agree that this occurred since this item was one of those which received a lower weighted mean. Apparently, teachers considered their additional paper works and other requirements which are related to teaching over and above actual teaching or delivery of instruction. In addition, teacher-respondents have non-teaching workloads which somehow intervene with their academic workload, and most likely, this affects teachers' performance of load requirements. The study by Banal e Ortega-Dela Cruz (2022) concluded that the teaching and non-teaching load of teachers affect their performance because of divided focus. Moreover, Magalong e Torreon (2021) also noted that the workload of teachers in the Philippines is often overly demanding since they are given other assignments in school to add up to their teaching workload. This significantly affects teachers' performance and well-being as concluded by the said researchers.

Subsequently, this study also aimed to analyze if a significant difference in the response of the two groups of respondents occurs. This is hypothesized because students may have distinctive experiences compared with the teachers. It was also assumed that the experienced effects of the adopted scheme on teaching and learning may differ from the point of view of the teachers. Hence, the challenges and opportunities brought by the scheme can be extensive.

Table 3.

Significant Difference Between Teachers' and Students' Assessment on the Effects of the Two-Term Academic Workload Scheme on Teaching and Learning

	p-value	t value	Decision	Interpretation
Teachers' Assessment Students' Assessment	2.04	1.96	Do not reject H_o	Not significant

@0.05 level of significance

The computed p-value of 2.04 is higher than the t-value at 0.05 which suggested that there is no significant difference between the assessment of the two groups of respondents. While there are disagreements on the response of the two groups of respondents, statistically, these were found to be not significantly different. They shared similar views on the challenges and opportunities of the two-term academic workload scheme. This further suggested that what appeared to be challenging to teachers also appeared the same to students. The same opportunities offered by the scheme were identified by teachers and students. This happened maybe because their experiences with the new scheme are comparable and both groups have done parallel adjustments.

Conclusions

That the adopted scheme has resulted in the development of time management skills of teachers and students, and has led students to become self-directed and independent in their studies. Teachers and students have discovered that they can do more and can give more value for their time given the timetable of the scheme. The consciousness of time-element has life-long advantages, especially when accomplishing daily tasks. This is confirmed when it was ascertained that students were not pressured in the completion and submission of requirements since they have learned how to spend and allot their time wisely. Likewise, teachers have realized that they can guide students to become independent in their learning and that students have recognized that they are also responsible for their own learning.

Teachers were also given the chance to step out of their usual teaching strategies as their creativity was reinforced by the scheme. They were able to effectively and efficiently combine activities that promote collaborative learning through carefully adopted teaching strategies. They were able to provide their students with authentic learning anchored on real-life situations and were enriched by library research. They

successfully combined content-based teaching and practical learning which speak of their ingenuity. It was also demonstrated that teachers and students can be more flexible in their academic interaction while keeping in mind what lesson or topic has to be covered and focused on. Another purpose for adopting the scheme was achieved – that is, the decongestion of tasks, without losing the quality of expected outputs.

The downside of the scheme, which was gathered from the teachers' views, was on the reduced time to conduct extracurricular and co-curricular activities. It was also discovered that for teachers, the effective management of load requirements was not really achieved. These were the experienced challenges of the two-term academic workload scheme which may be addressed through careful scheduling of deadlines and calendaring of school activities.

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