

**EXTENT OF COMPLIANCE OF COVID-RELATED CHED
ADVISORIES OF HEIs IN SURIGAO CITY**

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ABSTRACT

This study determined the extent of compliance of selected Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Surigao City using a mixed research approach, particularly the sequential explanatory as regards the COVID-related CHED advisories as well as the problems encountered associated with it. One selected key informant from each of the five private universities in the study locale was covered. Data were obtained through online interviews. The interviews were pursued, ensuring the compliance to ethical standards. Results reveal that the school partially complied with the COVID-related CHED advisories. This result implies that the schools have the capacities, capabilities, and desires to comply with the COVID-related CHED advisories such as suspension of face-to-face or in-person classes; deployment of available distance learning, e-learning, and other alternative modes of delivery; facilitating alternative activities to complete required practicum or on the job training hours; exercising discretion to postpone graduation ceremonies and prevention of school activities and other mass gathering. Among the emergent problems faced by the schools are the poor capabilities of the instructors and the students relative to the above-mentioned advisories being the direct beneficiaries of the fulfillment of the guidelines for the prevention, control and mitigation of the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Keywords: *CHED advisories, COVID-19, CHED compliance, health protocols*

INTRODUCTION

The world's stream changed in all aspects and has made everyone stay at home. That is how COVID-19 pandemic affected the world, but it has not stopped the world especially in education. It came when classes are on-going, but students need to continue to learn, and teachers need to continue to teach (Vasquez, 2020). All sectors are shattered and people from all walks of life are affected. Despite such, life must go on, education cannot be stopped. Truly, COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus, but it will not hinder learning from continuing.

On January 30, 2020, the Philippine Department of Health reported its first case of COVID-19 in the country, and the first local transmission was confirmed on March 7 of same year. The World Health Organization (WHO) immediately worked closely with the Department of Health (DOH) in responding to the COVID-19 outbreak as, day by day, it affected many, especially the academe. In the global perspective, Witze (2020) argued that the coronavirus crisis is forcing universities to confront long-standing challenges in higher education such as shifting of many classes to online, a trend already under way. The pandemic is speeding up changes in a tremendous way in the educational system (der Zwaan as cited by Witze, 2020). According to the International Association of Universities (IAU, 2020) more than 1.5 billion students across the planet are affected by school and university closures due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The Philippine educational system is not an exemption because it has suffered unforeseen changes to the detriment of the entire school organization.

In response to the crisis, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has issued the CHED COVID Advisories dubbed as Guidelines for the Prevention, Control and Mitigation of the Spread of COVID-19 in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The said advisories contained orders pertaining to HEI operations and work assignments. Surigao City, which, by then, underwent Enhanced General Community Quarantine (EGCQ) has been subjected to some advisories. It was exactly 16 March 2020 when classes in the city were ordered to be suspended.

Hence, this study was conducted to assess whether the selected private HEIs have complied with the specific orders and determine the extent of compliance of the COVID-related CHED advisories.

Statement of the Problem

This study determined the extent of compliance of the selected HEIs in Surigao City as regards to the COVID-related CHED advisories.

Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the extent of compliance of the concerned HEIs on the COVID-related Advisories of CHED as to:
 - 1.1. Suspension of face to face or in-person classes;
 - 1.2. Deployment of available distance learning, e-learning, and other alternative modes of delivery;
 - 1.3. Facilitation of alternative activities to complete required practicum/OJT hours;
 - 1.4. Discretion to postpone graduation ceremonies;
 - 1.5. Prevention of school activities and other mass gatherings?
2. What are the problems encountered in the extent of complying the CHED's COVID-related advisories?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used mixed research approach as it explored and described the extent of compliance of the HEIs in Surigao City on the COVID-related CHED advisories. Specifically, the study utilized the sequential explanatory research design. The quantitative phase sought to assess the HEI's compliance to the CHED advisories while the qualitative phase culled on the reasons for the compliance status survey as well as the problems they encountered in complying with the given advisories.

Participants of the Study

The study included five key participants taken from five (5) private higher education institutions in Surigao City. These participants included the Human Resources Personnel from the universities as they were all concerned with issues and interests related to personnel management.

Instrumentation

The study utilized an interview protocol to assess the compliance of the schools to the CHED advisories associated with COVID-19 pandemic. This interview protocol generated both quantitative and qualitative data from the participants. The quantitative data asked the participants to assess their compliance to the COVID-19 related CHED advisories. The qualitative data sought explanations to the assessment results and at the same time generated data about the problems they encountered relative to the implementation of the CHED advisories.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before the data gathering phase, the researchers underwent the following procedure:

1. Sought permission and endorsement from the school heads for the conduct of the study.
2. Secured informed consent from the participants. Before obtaining the participants' consent, the researchers gave a brief presentation of the purpose of the study as well as the benefits derived from it.
3. The researchers conducted interviews from the participants to obtain their assessment of the status of compliance of the school to the CHED advisories and to have a follow up question to obtain explanation for the compliance status. The interview was conducted via Facebook messenger as the researchers are fully cognizant of the health protocols as to social and physical distancing to prevent, control and mitigate the spread of Corona virus.

The researchers ensured that the data gathering process complied with the standard of ethics. This is evidenced by the following protocols observed:

1. The researchers refrained from positing a static sense of objective reality for oneself and the informants whose experiences are being studied. By this method, the researchers only listened and attended to the descriptions of the informants without forcing the meaning of the descriptive units into pre-defined categories. Therefore, the key results were presented either qualitatively or quantitatively in narrative or tabular forms.
2. To preserve and protect the anonymity of the informants, code names are assigned to them using big/capital and in italic letter *I* which represents, *Informant* and the assigned numbers in subscript from _{1,2,3,4} and ₅ representing the five (5) informants who have participated in the online interviews.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using mean and thematic analysis. The means were further interpreted based on the following Likert scale.

Mean Range	Descriptive Interpretation
3.25 – 4.00	Exceeded Requirements
2.50 – 3.24	Complied
1.75 – 2.49	Partially Complied
1.00 – 1.74	Not Complied

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I. Extent of Compliance of the Concerned HEIS on the COVID-Related Advisories of CHED

Table 1

Extent of Compliance of the COVID-related CHED Advisories

COVID-related CHED ADVISORIES	Mean	SD	Descriptive Interpretation
1. Suspension of face-to-face or in-person classes.	2.40	0.73	Partially Complied
2. Deployment of available distance learning, e-learning, and other alternative modes of delivery.	2.45	0.71	Partially Complied
3. Facilitating alternative activities to complete required practicum/OJT hours.	2.40	0.64	Partially Complied
4. Exercise discretion to postpone graduation ceremonies.	2.20	0.65	Partially Complied
5. Prevention of school activities and other mass gathering.	2.00	0.65	Partially Complied
Mean	2.29	0.67	Partially Complied

Table 1 presents the extent of compliance of the COVID-related CHED advisories by the selected HEIs in Surigao City such as St. Paul University Surigao (SPUS), Northeastern Mindanao Colleges (NEMCO), Surigao Education Center (SEC), St. Jude Thaddeus Institute of Technology (SJTIT), and STI Surigao.

Among these HEIs, only St. Paul University Surigao has the edge as far as online education is concerned because it already applied such system a year ago prior to the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic. Surigao Education Center, as well as St. Jude Thaddeus Institute of Technology, started their online operation only in the middle of March. The Northeastern Mindanao Colleges, as of this writing, is on the process of

getting their system connected online for easy access to their clients and stakeholders.

Some HEIs have not fully followed the directives or advisories because of some considerations. According to Cuaton (2020) central leadership and guidance is important to provide general steps for HEIs in the Philippines in response to a serious health threat such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In other words, it would solely depend on the leadership capabilities of the school administrators, whether such advisories shall be implemented or not. The guidelines provided by the Commission gave relative freedom and flexibility to schools in terms of implementing them based on the contextual realities and differences they face.

Meanwhile, Table 1 also presents the extent of compliance of the COVID-related CHED advisories applicable in all the private HEIs in Surigao City. These are guidelines and advisories for those areas under Enhanced General Community Quarantine (EGCQ) and General Community Quarantine (GCQ).

As shown in the table, the five basic COVID-related CHED advisories have been partially complied with the respective Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Surigao City based on the average mean of 2.29 and standard deviation of 0.67. This means that the concerned HEIs somewhat applied and implemented what are prescribed in the said advisories. These schools incompletely followed the advisories upon considering some factors affecting the compliance of the guidelines for the prevention, control and mitigation of the spread of the Corona Virus 2019.

Furthermore, it can be seen in the table that selected private HEIs in Surigao City partially complied with *“deploying of available distance learning, e-learning and other alternative modes of delivery”* based on the highest mean of 2.45 and standard deviation of 0.71. During the time of COVID-19 pandemic, the global education system is in the process of transforming and adapting to new and challenging situations which tested the conventional learning process of human interaction inside a classroom and capitalize in virtual and online education through the help

of technology (Cuaton, 2020). But not all schools can directly comply with the advisory.

The result revealed that compliance was partial because not all HEIs in Surigao City are internet-ready or have crafted learning modules electronically. It was gathered that not all students have laptops and internet connections in their homes. In a global perspective, the Journal Staff (2020) revealed that right at the COVID outbreak classroom, connectivity was closed and there are about millions of children worldwide in homes without broadband connection or access while an independent research group reports that the actual number may be twice as high in the process (Diallo, 2020). In the Philippines, Vasquez (2020) averred that the challenge lies in the students' access to the Internet, because not all of them own computers. Thus, there are some speculations on whether this trend of online classes would prosper.

Likewise, the lowest mean score of 2.00 and standard deviation of 0.65 revealed that the concerned selected HEIs in Surigao City have partially complied in preventing school activities and other mass gatherings. There were occasions that mass gatherings occurred especially during complying and submission of clearances and other paper works. On the part of the school employees, queuing when claiming salaries and other monthly benefits from the finance office has caused a bit of mass gathering and even that of processing papers by the students in relation to virtual graduation.

In fact, the concerned HEIs also partially complied as to suspension or postponement of graduation ceremonies as some of these HEIs in Surigao City hold their virtual graduation where members of the family of the graduates cannot avoid but come in throngs just to witness the virtual graduation. In other words, the continuing need for social distancing is violated.

However, the same table revealed that HEIs have partially complied regarding the suspension of face-to-face and in-person classes, considering that not all students have computers and laptops. There are some instructors who clandestinely met their students in two or three

just to give some instructions and other related discussion of subject matters or a sort of consultation. This holds true with those working their undergrad theses and even those of the postgraduate who are working with their theses and dissertations. According to Abad (2020), in the University of the Philippines (UP) and Ateneo de Manila University (AdMU), these schools conducted remote lessons such as holding online classes on the same schedules as appointed course periods, uploading learning materials or links to them in existing platforms, and conducting thesis defenses online.

As far as facilitating alternative activities to complete required practicum hours, some of these concerned HEIs cannot avoid allowing their students to finish the remaining required hours of duty provided they follow the health protocols of wearing face masks, social distancing, constant washing of hands, using alcohol and other hand sanitizers.

It can be inferred that complying with the given advisories is not so problematic to some schools as they are already equipped with corresponding materials relative to full compliance. However, most of them hardly follow to the highest level because of some discrepancies and the unavailability of needed materials for the compliance. In this connection, the chair of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), De Vera (2020), has clarified that as the pandemic situation is very fluid; HEIs are hereby advised to refer and continue to observe the instructions stipulated in CHED Advisories Nos. 1 to 5.

II. Problems Encountered in the Compliance of COVID-related CHED Advisories

In collecting data under this problem, online interviews were conducted to five (5) reliable informants of every concerned and selected private higher education institutions in Surigao City.

Informant 1 was grateful for the said advisories as these served as appropriate guidelines to follow so that COVID virus may be barred from mitigating. Nonetheless, he shared that *“the problem lies on the part of the individual student, employee or teacher.”* What he wanted to

emphasize is the readiness of the students and teachers about online class as face-to-face and in-person classes are suspended. The school has long been ready and even already applied online class, but the students and teachers are the ones who can hardly adjust. They need to have more exposures to this type of learning platform. So that, in the words of Agoncillo et al. (2020) teachers were instructed to conduct a dry run of online learning and work which means of transitioning to “virtual classrooms,” such as Moodle, Schoology, Google Meets and Google Classroom.

Informant 1 also said that *“it is a problem for those schools which are not practically and financially ready.”* In other words, those which cannot afford to finance the needed installation of the system and the said platform is really a problem. It is really an edge for the financially capacitated school. This has been supported by the argument of Saavedra (2020) who emphasized that richer schools are better prepared to move to online learning strategies, although with a lot of efforts and challenges for teachers and parents. Lastly, Informant 1 said *“having no laptops or computers for the students can be a hindrance to the compliance of the CHED advisory of making online classes.”* It really takes two to be equipped technologically so that these online classes would become a reality. However, the problem lies on the fact that many children do not have a desk, books, internet connectivity, a laptop at home, or supportive parents. Others do. What is needed to be avoided and minimized is for those differences in opportunities to expand and cause the crisis to have an even larger negative effect on poor children’s learning, Saavedra (2020) explained.

Informant 2 (I₂). The COVID-related CHED advisory as to deploying available distance learning, e-learning and other alternative modes of delivery is *“very hard on our part.”* It is hard because not all teachers or instructors are technologically skilled. She further said that *“teachers lack training on how to conduct online class; an ibankuyangsa experience sanan way karajaw exposure sa ing-ani na style sa pag-klase [some do not have enough experience and exposure to this style of conducting classes].”* With this, it is very hard for her school to completely comply with the advisory. This calls therefore for training for the teachers.

Agoncillo et al. (2020) opined that teacher need to be sent for training and seminar-workshop on open and distant eLearning (ODeL) which offers a special set of online classes for teachers who wish to shift to the online mode of instruction. However, similar with Informant 1, connectivity to the Internet has been seen as a problem in the compliance.

Informant 3 (I₃). For this informant, shifting class from traditional to online has made her excited of its implementation because “I know that there is a promise of making our job easier and faster.” True enough, complying with the advisory has freed the instructor from voluminous and heaving types of work. However, the shifting from face-to-face to online classes, though exciting, has caused some problems as to the capacity of the students to procure their own gadgets, laptops, and computer. Sahu (2020) has said that many teachers and students have been excited by the move to the online delivery mode. The faculty members have already begun preparing lesson plans to deliver online teaching to their students.

“The problem now lies on the instructor...are they ready? Are all of them knowledgeable?” As it was earlier said, not all teachers are techno-savvy. Sahu (2020) pointed out that there is always a chance that some faculty who are not techno-savvy will not be able to cope up with this mode. The transition to online mode has raised questions for the faculty about their capability to deal with the existing technology. Thus, working at home is going to be a difficult task for the faculty. Also, many universities do not have enough infrastructure or resources to facilitate online teaching with immediate effect.

Meanwhile, Informant 4 (I₄) and Informant 5 (I₅) shared the same problems they encountered in complying CHED advisories particularly on shifting from face-to-face classes with online. “What about those students who do not have access to laptops and internet facilities at home? What will happen to those students whose courses cannot be taught online? These are the sentiments of Informant 4. In the same way, Informant 5 has said that forcing HEIs to comply with online class or of deploying available distance learning, e-learning, and other alternative

modes of delivery can be tasking and too ambitious not unless “*andam ug kumpleto an pasilidad nan concerned schools* [the concerned schools are ready and have complete facilities]. In other words, being ready and capable are key attributes to certain schools to comply the directives. But these things need strategic planning. According to Bagayas (2020) the quality of online education is a critical issue that needs proper attention. With these in mind, the students of ADMU, UP Diliman, DLSU Manila, and UST are prompted to lodge petition to the Commission on Higher Education saying: “while we understand the need for learning to continue, the different circumstances of students across universities are not ideal and conducive for such.”

All informants shared the same sentiments because those students having no Internet connection at home without desk- or laptops will opt to go out and look for computer shops and it is not safe for them considering that the country grapples with the COVID pandemic. Informant 4 echoed that most families are adjusting to life under quarantine because of fear of the virus. This is supported by the contention of Bagayas (2020) who raised: “how access to internet connection and learning devices continued to be a ‘privilege up to this day,’ placing those with poor internet access at a disadvantage when it comes to online classes.” This goes to say that the advisory is very unique, but the problem lies on the capability of schools and students as well as teachers.

CONCLUSION

Based from the results of the study, it can be safely deduced that selected private higher education institutions (HEIs) in Surigao City have the capacities, capabilities and desires to comply with the COVID-related CHED advisories such as suspension of face-to-face or in-person classes; deployment of available distance learning, e-learning, and other alternative modes of delivery; facilitating alternative activities to complete required practicum hours; discretion to postpone graduation ceremonies and prevention of school activities and other mass gathering but equally halted or bombarded with emergent problems as to the poor capacities, capabilities and readiness of the teachers/instructors and the

students relative to the above-mentioned advisories being the direct beneficiaries of the fulfillment of the guidelines for the prevention, control and mitigation of the spread of corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the study, the following are hereby recommended:

1. School heads or faculty may conduct consultation with the concerned families of the students for the effective and full compliance of the given CHED advisories to prevent, control, and mitigate the spread of COVID-19 while classes are on-going in all levels in the higher education institutions.
2. School administrators or the Human Resource officers may instigate an effective means to promoting awareness of the CHED advisories to ensure its compliance and to keep every member of the academic community abreast of the guidelines, protocols, and other necessary skills and knowledge in the full utilization of the given advisories.
3. School heads may plan for measures to address the problems and challenges that bar the schools to comply with the CHED advisories.
4. Future researchers may consider the results of the study in the conduct of relevant research.

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