

Chapter 1

COVID-19: Overview of Current and Future Online University Teaching

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has disrupted university education and stirred all aspects of university life. Universities shifted to online teaching, learning, and assessments and were generally successful, but governments and societies became skeptical about the outcomes and the creditability of the degrees. This chapter presents the challenges faced by online education and weighs them against the benefits. The chapter also discusses the assumptions made during this transformation phase and their impact. The last part of the chapter presents a vision model of the future of online education and the newly created competitions between rich and poor universities and the move towards new opportunities of multiple-sourced degrees, virtual campuses, and virtual professors.

INTRODUCTION

Face to Face-F2F teaching has been around for generations (Haskins, 1957). F2F teaching has been conducted through the well-known traditional methods with minimal variations between one university and the other, one faculty and the other, or one specialisation or another. (Aldulaimi, 2021). Universities throughout the world have conducted a great deal of research, mainly by educationalists in order to identify the best methods for teaching and student classroom engagement and involvement which empowers the faculty to impart knowledge to the students as well as conduct research (Hamdan, 2015; Olsen, 2007; Shattock, 2013).

COVID-19 has taken the world by surprise. It inflicted sudden and necessary changes and disruptions to F2F teaching and hastened up online teaching without any previous experience or guidance. The universities of the world had to face up to realities, either to suspend all teaching or to teach online and

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almost all went online with different speeds and quality (QS, 2020; Chertof et al., 2020; Livari et al., 2020; Balhareth et al., 2020). To some universities this presented an opportunity to venture out from the traditional F2F to a new world of opportunities (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Manzoor & Al mahmud, 2020; Qiang, 2020; Trinidad, 2020).

Although online teaching has been around for a number of years, especially in the USA where around 20% of all American university students have taken some form of distance/online learning courses during their academic career (Dos Santos, 2020a; Dos Santos, 2020b; Dos Santos, 2020c; Moorhouse, 2020; Duffin, 2020), but to the rest of the world, universities online teaching was a sudden inflicted demand with no prior experience or training, although some have tried blended learning (Hrastinski, 2019).

The swift transformation from F2F to online was made without any prior guidelines or experience (Nassr et al., 2020; Vaz & Williams, 2021). In order not to suspend studies, universities quickly switched to current technological tools to deliver lectures. In this process, a lot of assumptions were made, such as the impact on assessments, quality of teaching, students and faculty well-being, trust and confidence in the learning process and accreditation issues (Almarzooq et al., 2020; Almuhaideb & Saeed, 2020; Arumugam, 2020; Petrovica et al., 2017; Marchand & Gutierrez, 2020; Sanchez-Rada & Iglesias, 2016). An example of a major challenge had to be faced by universities teaching online and that is the issue of internships conducted outside the university. Faculty visiting, monitoring and evaluating students doing their internships posed a challenge. Not only companies would not accept intruders during COVID, but also would not allow faculty visits, and here serious concerns must be considered when it comes to measuring the quality of training and the internship Intended Learning Outcomes – ILOs measurement. Another challenge to be confronted was the issue of international students who could not re-enter to continue their studies (Bamberger et al., 2020; Daley & Mackey, 2020; Hurley, 2020).

It is obvious now that COVID-19 is a reality which has impacted and disrupted university F2F education and that universities will continue to struggle with the transformation challenges from F2F to online teaching. Universities will also struggle with challenges relating to online teaching in terms of quality of education, credibility of assessments and confidence and trust from external stakeholders in their graduates (Camilleri, 2021; AlDhaen & Mahmood, 2020).

This chapter will present an overview of the experience of Ahlia university handling of the pandemic. Ahlia university went through a number of milestones which tackled challenges such as technology use, revised policies and processes, misled assumptions through a COVID steering committee especially created and chaired by the university President. This chapter discusses the assumptions made by almost all universities in the transformation phase; assumptions which if handled and resolved appropriately would enhance the teaching, learning and assessments. The last part of the chapter presents a model of the expected future implications of switching to online teaching, learning and assessments. Serious challenges are anticipated for universities which threatens their future and the future of education.

COVID-19 CONSECUTIVE EVENTS AND CORRESPONDING RESPONSES

COVID-19 took the whole world by surprise and Ahlia University in Bahrain was no exception. On 21 February 2020, the first COVID-19 case was reported in Bahrain. Four days later, the government took the decision to suspend on campus F2F learning in schools, universities and other educational and training institutions in the Kingdom. Ahlia immediately effectuated its online teaching and learning tools

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