Chapter 16
The Readiness of Higher Education Academic Staff in Cyprus for Shifting the Instructional Delivery Mode From Face-to-Face to Emergency Remote Teaching

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak is considered one of the most serious crises. It affected the education industry causing huge complications and high levels of uncertainty. The pandemic crisis led governments worldwide to rapidly proceed into mandatory emergency measures to restrict physical interactions between people and prevent the virus from spreading extensively. One of the measures was the immediate closure of universities. This unpleasant action hit hard and interrupted education at every rank. To maintain its educational continuity, the Cyprus Government responded immediately to the emerging educational needs, driving higher education institutions to terminate all conventional courses and turn to online education. This chapter aims to evaluate the readiness of the academic staff in high education institutions in Cyprus for shifting the instructional mode from face-to-face to emergency remote teaching (ERT). Methodologically, the research adopted the quantitative approach, collecting data from academics (n=146) in the higher education institutions in Cyprus.

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INTRODUCTION

Currently, higher education institutions are struggling to adapt to the digital era of the 21st century, creating new innovative ways to transfer knowledge to their students with the support of technology and online learning systems. Within this new digital educational environment, academics are required to gain or improve a variety of digital competencies (Traxler, 2018). The Covid-19 pandemic outbreak unexpectedly forced universities around the world to entirely cancel face-to-face teaching and deliver online lectures and services (Schneider and Council, 2021; Barbierato et al., 2021). This led the higher education sector into adopting immediate online learning strategies and implementing an emergency remote teaching strategy to maintain continuity (Danchikov et al., 2021; Shohel, 2022). Remote education became the only alternative (Hodges et al., 2020). This new scenario, and driven transition from traditional face-to-face teaching to remote teaching, caught numerous institutions and their personnel unprepared and lacking digital competence (Schneider and Council, 2021; Subekti, 2021).

In an attempt to "*flatten the curve*" of the Covid-19 pandemic, educators were required to rapidly readjust and adapt their pedagogy, teaching methods and techniques to a remote learning environment (Mohmmed et al., 2020; Tackie, 2022). Additionally, the gap in digital awareness and effective usage of online tools, given that academics largely use technology as an auxiliary and optional learning instrument, generated an extra challenge in their effort to overcome this crisis (Liguori and Winkler, 2020; Anthony and Noel, 2021).

Several studies have been conducted, examining the Covid-19 pandemic impact on the educational system in various countries, however, limited knowledge exists related to the higher education in Cyprus, and how they managed to respond to this challenge. This research provides a critical reflection of Cyprus higher education institutions academics' digital experiences and delineates the challenges they experienced during the Covid-19 crisis, due to the transition from on-campus teaching to emergency remote teaching, forcing them to develop effective online classes (Nisiforou, Kosmas and Vrasidas, 2021; Barbierato et al., 2021). Consequently, this chapter aims to examine their experiences, competencies, and attitudes toward emergency remote teaching during the Covid-19 outbreak. Additionally, it analyses their experience and perception regarding their overall personal development in the new digital environment.

Research Aim

Flowing from the above, the aim of this book chapter is to evaluate the readiness of the academic staff in high education institutions in Cyprus for shifting the instructional mode from face-to-face to emergency remote teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak and recognise whether they obtained new digital skills and pedagogy strategies to overcome these challenges.

Significance of the Study

The paradigm of Cyprus as a particular field of study, due to its unique characteristics, can be used as a pilot study for countries aiming to acquire precise and reliable data consistently. Throughout this study, one can acknowledge the challenging elements that academic staff in higher education institutions in Cyprus had to confront during the transition towards the online teaching environment due to the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. Furthermore, the different types of online education techniques and strategies may be evaluated, to delineate their pros and cons, which may allow a deeper viewpoint on this type of