

# Chapter 3

## Reflections of Faculty Teaching Online During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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### ABSTRACT

*To survive the onslaught of coronavirus pandemic all higher education institutions (HEI)s worldwide had to move their educational services to either a hybrid modality or a completely online platform. This shift in teaching modalities, placed the faculty members under a relentless pressure to adopt and adapt, to transform themselves into proficient online educators. How did this process of adjustment take place? How did the faculty members acclimatize to their new virtual classrooms? What dilemmas and choices were faced by the faculty members? are questions lacking empirical insights. Yet if this lacuna were overcome, it would provide “real life” insights pertaining to LMS systems, technological tools and apps, and psychological and social isolations which could impede the quality of teaching and learning. This chapter integrates autoethnographic narratives of three faculty members to “recreate the new normal” for HEIs worldwide.*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-6533-9.ch003

## **INTRODUCTION**

The global outbreak of COVID-19 at the beginning of spring semester 2020, was not only a major health emergency, but it also had significant impact on the education system, worldwide. As a result, all schools and colleges were forced to suspend campus learning and shift to online modalities and platforms, to continue teaching their students (Zhou, Li, Wu & Zhou, 2020). Online learning, loosely synonymous to e-learning refers to the method of imparting knowledge through application of information technology and internet facilities (Zhou et al., 2020). Online Learning is defined as “learning experiences in synchronous or asynchronous environments using devices with internet access. In these environments, students can be anywhere (independent) to learn and interact with instructors and other students” (Singh & Thurman, 2019, p. 290). E-learning initially originated in United States but by 1998 it had spread worldwide to the continents of Europe and Asia (Zhou et al., 2020). Despite substantial research that suggests collaborative learning techniques as foundational to learning effectiveness, online learning gained popularity (Arbaugh & Benbunan-Finch, 2017). However online education remains secondary to face to face teaching modalities, especially in certain technical areas such as accounting, mathematics, statistics, and science where lab work happens to be an essential component.

Research evinces lack of community, technology glitches, uncoordinated instructional goals, as responsible for making online learning cumbersome for student fraternity (Song, Singleton, Hill, & Koh, 2004). This hints on the significance of teachers, and the need for creative, interactive, and humane instructional design (Partlow & Gibbs, 2003). It is true, technology and its appropriate usage, can positively impact student learning; but technology by itself cannot take up an independent role or even replace teachers. Ultimately it is the teachers, their choices and decisions, their relationships with students which all affect student performances (Yao, Rao, Jiang & Xiong, 2020). How teachers establish this connection with their students virtually, or rather what role should teachers play in online teaching to satisfy program and course objectives and students’ academic performances remains vague and incoherent. Thus, despite the popularity of online courses and academic programs in higher education, there is lacuna in terms of lack of empirical insights on the challenges and opportunities faced by faculty when teaching online—“little is known about online faculty experiences” (Kimmel & Fairchild, 2017, p. 53).

Especially more, during recent times of stress and pressure such as the current scenario of COVID-19 pandemic; when teaching online is no longer an option or a choice but a necessity to continue imparting educational services to student population. Availability of such empirical insights would provide information about the unique challenges faced by online faculty within the institutional context of their university administration, strategic initiatives, economic and social backgrounds of their students and types and levels of courses taught, allowing their counterparts to learn from their experiences and mistakes, so as to assist them when making their choices; thereby optimizing teaching and learning during these demanding times (Perrotta & Bohan, 2019). For instance, some faculty might be confused whether to choose synchronous lecture delivery or asynchronous recorded lectures, or which learning management system (LMS) platform to choose from Google Handouts, WebEx, and Google Classrooms or should one choose a case study or a virtual guest speaker session, are different dilemmas with which online faculty might need to confront without the ability to consult their colleagues etc.

This chapter integrates critical reflexive narratives of three management faculty members who had to shift to online teaching in spring 2020, during COVID-19 shutdown of their campuses. All three faculty members belong to diverse socio-political backgrounds (i.e., age groups, gender, ranks and designations) and are employed in higher education institutions (HEIs) located in different parts of the world. Their

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