

Chapter 8

From Face-to-Face Education to Online Education: Challenges at a Business School in Peru

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ABSTRACT

Currently, traditional formal education has taken an unexpected turn due to the events caused by the pandemic as a consequence of COVID-19 and social distancing, leading to educational institutions changing the way of imparting knowledge and skills, study modalities, by strengthening and prioritizing virtual education and distance education (e-learning). Under this scenario, new challenges arise and adaptation and/or creation of new processes, which the different higher education institutions are forced to adapt to remain competitive in the market. The case of a higher education institution in Lima is presented, which, from the global crisis presented by COVID-19, had to adapt to a one hundred percent virtual education. The strategy defined by the business school and the monitoring of the implemented measures is favorably influencing the student experience.

BACKGROUND

The way higher education is administered has been evolving in recent years, shifting from face-to-face learning to blended learning to 100% virtual classes, as are offered today. Nowadays, thanks to modernity and technological progress, learning is aided by many tools: intranets, the Internet, virtual classrooms, audiovisual media, documentaries, and more. At first, these tools were used to complement face-to-face learning, but now they form the core of the value proposal.

Even more in the context created by the COVID-19 pandemic, the digital transformation has forced institutions of higher learning to offer their programs online, via remote learning.

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According to the United Nations (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has affected a great number of students in approximately 190 countries worldwide. This has caused the largest educational destabilization of all time due to the way that it has universally affected students and teachers at every academic level, from preschool to graduate programs. The pandemic has brought total closure to many campuses, disrupting the studies of 94% of the students around the world: approximately 1.58 billion students.

Additionally, the crisis has aggravated preexisting inequality in education: students living in poorer and more vulnerable areas now have drastically fewer opportunities for a good education. Indeed, in the most severe cases, many have had to completely abandon their studies, and this has affected the dropout rate. This loss of learning is currently erasing decades of progress that had been achieved in terms of world educational access (United Nations, 2020).

Also, although there are no hard figures on pandemic-inspired school dropout rates in Latin America, BBC Mundo carried out different interviews with schools and institutions located in poor, rural areas, and these indicated that many students have had to drop out because of the pandemic in order to work longer hours, or, in the case of many families, in order to help support the home and take care of younger siblings (Barría, 2020).

As for Peruvian business schools, student dropout rates have surpassed 60%, although it must be taken into account that there are two types of dropouts: those who drop out temporarily, returning the following year, and those who drop out permanently. For the good of the country, it is hoped that those students who have dropped out have done so only temporarily. Indeed, the rapid and effective progress of vaccination plans should be prioritized to reverse this trend (Neira, 2020).

One challenge related to the pandemic-inspired implementation of virtual education is a lack of training in the usage of digital tools, such as Google Meet, Zoom, and Google Classroom. In countries like Brazil and Mexico, universities have opted to train not only professors but also administrative staff through courses and certificate programs. This type of across-the-board training allows a whole team to be formed, a team that is cohesive and that seeks out a single purpose: to make virtual education work (Coutinho & Buttros, 2021).

A second challenge has been professor performance, as many professors have argued that virtual education makes it difficult to evaluate their students effectively. Some of the specific problems have had to do with how evaluations are corrected and the viability of keeping exams online when not all of them can be unique: despite the fact that the students are working adults, high rates of plagiarism have been identified (Coutinho & Buttros, 2021).

This chapter contains an analysis of the implementation of distance education and the opportunities and challenges facing executive education, programs tailored for students who work and need to deepen their knowledge about specialized academic and professional topics. Several cases from Latin American countries are mentioned, and a long case study from a Peruvian business school is given.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Implementing virtual education means dealing with different concepts that must first be analyzed in order to understand the most relevant characteristics of educational institutions' transition from a face-to-face format to a virtual modality.

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