Chapter 98

Institutional Policies and Online Education in Developing Countries:
Challenges for a Globalizing Education/University

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to examine the effectiveness of institutional policies regarding online teaching and learning in some developing countries in the Southern African region. The study is informed by online teaching and learning principles, and it adopts qualitative and quantitative approaches. The data comprises answers of 231 students to the question: Did your institution encourage online learning before the lockdown? The sample was collected through a survey between the 1st July 2020 and the 11th March 2021, a period in which students were undertaking an online learning process as a strategy to overcome the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 67% of respondents confirm that their universities did not implement nor encourage online learning before the lockdown due to the pandemic. In this context, the study shows that aversive policies against online learning and lack of adequate equipment jeopardize the education goals to provide integrated and globalizing learning.

INTRODUCTION

In the last 20 years, there has been significant development in science and technology, triggering the massification of digital and online gadgets, tools, and platforms for a variety of daily activities, including communication, administration, business, educations, among others. In the education sector, two scenarios were witnessed. Some countries and institutions early adopted and legitimized teaching and

learning processes based on digital and online platforms, shifting from the traditional face-to-face modality. However, due to various circumstances (economic challenges and sociocultural practices), other countries and institutes did not easily adhere to the online teaching and learning processes, especially in developing countries. The significant hindrances include financial difficulties – parents do not afford to provide gadgets and Internet services – and adverse/negative perception and worldviews about the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for education purposes.

Nevertheless, theorists of online education believe that the use of ICT for educational purposes in this era of technology and Internet is irreversible (Bates, 2017). Some institutions, especially in Higher and Tertiary Education, offer exclusively online programs, meaning they use online modalities to conduct teaching and learning processes. Other institutions combine face-to-face teaching and learning activities and online strategies (*blended learning*). In these cases, traditional and new modalities of education complement each other. On the one hand, most of the lecturers and teachers salute the relevance of presential teaching and learning processes, particularly in early education levels, to efficiently play their affective role (as instructors) (Quiang, 2018) and positively contribute to inculcate and build an individual's *ubuntu*[1].

On the other hand, they underscore the need to adapt themselves and their learners to use online teaching and learning strategies to facilitate and maximize the benefits of the educational process (Ally, 2008). In addition to this, online learning is the global and irreversible trend to develop and meet nowadays.

Teachers, learners, institutions, societies, and countries are to benefit from the online education process. It allows enrollment, participation, and instruction of large numbers of students and, simultaneously, it permits instructors to easily consider the needs of each student as an individual; it is ideal for each student to learn regardless of his particular style of learning: activists, theorists, reflectors and pragmatics (Fry et al. 2009, p. 18); it is based on relevant and up-to-date material, triggering relevant, consistent and integrated learning. Nevertheless, effective designing and implementation (including social and moral education of communities about online education functionality) are the keys to fascinating results (Mattar et al. 2020).

The benefits of online learning are well captured in Ally (2008). According to Ally, the advantage of online learning for learners is its flexibility in terms of time and space; they can learn any time, from anywhere, and with a myriad of resources to choose from for learning. Online material allows for smooth and relevant asynchronous online learning using up-to-date books and articles, while synchronous online learning allows the interaction between learners and their instructors. For teachers, in turn, teaching is flexible in terms of time and place as well. Teachers can easily guide students to achieve their needs in online education, recommending appropriate information and material. All these benefits make this modality of education a reliable strategy to use in human pandemics like the Covid-19 and a relevant and adequate approach to education in this more and more globalized online society.

In turn, alongside financial challenges in society and countries that did not promptly adopt online learning (mostly in developing countries), collective perceptions and preconceptions about digital and online learning influenced adverse attitudes of parents and students in the social and familiar sphere/context. Consequently, later attempts by Institutions to adopt the online modality of teaching and learning faced challenges and resistance of different entities, including the majority of teachers – who were specialized in face-to-face education and not prepared to conduct the online learning process – learners and family members – who already believed that online learning does not promote quality of education. In this scenario, most of the learners and parents would misplay their roles, leading to frustration, dis-

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