Chapter 4
Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Blended Learning Experiences at University of Technology, Mauritius in the Lockdown/ Post-Lockdown Period of COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic led to an unprecedented crisis for most people and

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organizations. The UTM, its staff and students were no exception. UTM chose a combination of face-to-face delivery of courses and learning, and other methods of online delivery and learning in its blended learning approach. Preliminary findings and focus groups with students and staff have undoubtedly revealed some areas requiring improvement or change in UTM's approach of blended learning which has informed the new semester in the post-lockdown period which started on 5 October 2020. Evaluation of the outgoing semester of March 2020 and extended to August 2020 has provided evidence that UTM was largely up to the mark in adapting to a crisis situation through a strategy of building databases, controlled inclusiveness, flexibility, adaptability, capacity building, speed of decision-making, co-operation and teamwork between administration and academic staff, open and swift communications with stakeholders.

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many universities around the world to shift from traditional face-to-face classes to complete or partial online learning systems in their attempts to adapt to sanitary protocols as a result of the pandemic. It was found important for the education sector to move towards a post-pandemic pedagogy as it is difficult to predict what the educational landscape will be like after COVID-19 (Weeden and Cornwell, 2020). Mirroring the global trends, the University of Technology, Mauritius has not been immune to this change and also reacted to the challenges of the time by considering alternatives to the traditional 'bricks and mortar' teaching approach. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges requiring the University of Technology, Mauritius (UTM) to adopt the blended learning approach. The UTM had to adjust its teaching and assessment mode in order to ensure the continuity of the semester which started in the first week of March 2020 and originally planned up to May 2020. The semester which had to be abruptly stopped sometimes around mid-March 2020 after just two weeks of lectures on a face-to-face basis had to continue on a distance basis, using e-mail as the most basic communication means from teaching staff to students to having recourse to zoom, Moodle, Google LMS and other learning management systems in an unplanned manner. Classes could resume on a face to-face basis as from July 2020 and the semester end date was extended to 31 August 2020. Another big challenge was the need to revise the assessment strategies. The UTM opted for the 100% assessment of all its modules as take-home assignments at undergraduate and postgraduate levels so that the social distancing setting as well as other sanitary protocols could be strictly observed all by still reflecting the learning objectives

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