

**NEW STUDENT LITERACIES
AMID COVID-19**

INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING AND LEARNING

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**NEW STUDENT LITERACIES AMID
COVID-19: INTERNATIONAL
CASE STUDIES**

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SERIES EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING AND LEARNING

The purpose of this series is to publish current research and scholarship on innovative teaching and learning practices in higher education. The series is developed around the premise that teaching and learning is more effective when instructors and students are actively and meaningfully engaged in the teaching–learning process.

The main objectives of this series are to:

- (1) present how innovative teaching and learning practices are being used in higher education institutions around the world across a wide variety of disciplines and countries,
- (2) present the latest models, theories, concepts, paradigms, and frameworks that educators should consider when adopting, implementing, assessing, and evaluating innovative teaching and learning practices, and
- (3) consider the implications of theory and practice on policy, strategy, and leadership.

This series will appeal to anyone in higher education who is involved in the teaching and learning process from any discipline, institutional type, or nationality. The volumes in this series will focus on a variety of authentic case studies and other empirical research that illustrates how educators from around the world are using innovative approaches to create more effective and meaningful learning environments.

Innovation in teaching and learning is any approach, strategy, method, practice, or means that has been shown to improve, enhance, or transform the teaching–learning environment. Innovation involves doing things differently or in a novel way in order to improve outcomes. In short, innovation is positive change. With respect to teaching and learning, innovation is the implementation of new or improved educational practices that result in improved educational and learning outcomes. This innovation can be any positive change related to teaching, curriculum, assessment, technology, or other tools, programs, policies, or processes that leads to improved educational and learning outcomes. Innovation can occur in institutional development, program development, professional development, or learning development.

The volumes in this series will not only highlight the benefits and theoretical frameworks of such innovations through authentic case studies and other empirical research but also look at the challenges and contexts associated with

implementing and assessing innovative teaching and learning practices. The volumes represent all disciplines from a wide range of national, cultural, and organizational contexts. The volumes in this series will explore a wide variety of teaching and learning topics such as active learning, integrative learning, transformative learning, inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, meaningful learning, blended learning, creative learning, experiential learning, lifelong and lifewide learning, global learning, learning assessment and analytics, student research, faculty and student learning communities, as well as other topics.

This series brings together distinguished scholars and educational practitioners from around the world to disseminate the latest knowledge on innovative teaching and learning scholarship and practices. The authors offer a range of disciplinary perspectives from different cultural contexts. This series provides a unique and valuable resource for instructors, administrators, and anyone interested in improving and transforming teaching and learning.

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PART I

SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO NEW STUDENT LITERACIES AMID COVID-19 – INTERNATIONAL CASE STUDIES

Enakshi Sengupta and Patrick Blessinger

ABSTRACT

The world has seen a lot of disasters which have affected some part of the globe and healed in due course but rarely has any health disaster affected the entire world like COVID-19. It not only affected the health sector but caused a downward spiral of the world economy. The world was not prepared to face such a magnitude of the disaster. Overnight, schools and universities declared a lockdown affecting 1.57 billion students in 191 countries (UN, 2020). The sudden closure of educational institutions negatively impacted education around the world and much of the education sector shifted to remote learning. This exacerbated the shortcomings of those institutions who were unprepared for the sudden shift to remote learning. The global pandemic triggered the need to reconceptualize how educational institutions provision teaching and learning. Universities resorted to intensive use of different technology platforms and resources to achieve their learning outcomes. This volume explores how educational institutions needed to rethink teaching, learning, research and innovation, and implement innovative approaches to address such complexities. International case studies have been compiled that highlight the issues related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education and how different countries tried to cope with the sudden shift of remote learning and tried to resolve challenges around the issues of digital pedagogy.

Keywords: COVID-19; digital pedagogy; accessibility; higher education; online; teaching and learning; global pandemic; affordability; preparedness

INTRODUCTION

In December 2019, a virus slowly made its way from the Wuhan District of China and quickly spread throughout the world in less than a month until it was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) on March 11, 2020. The pandemic was not only creating havoc in the health sector when people were dying every day, but was also shattering the economic system of many countries and was having a devastating impact on human lives (Xiang et al., 2020). Social distancing and masking were the main solution left to flatten the curve of this infection which spread rapidly due to human contact.

Governments around the world declared the closure of educational institutions hoping that physical distancing and reducing interpersonal contact will minimize the transmission of this deadly virus mainly in places like universities where the population tends to be dense (Weeden & Cornwell, 2020). The transition was made almost immediately to the online mode of learning. The institutions were not prepared, and students and parents found the system to be alien. At the same time, it exacerbated other issues such as low connectivity, absence of hand-held devices or computers, lack of electricity, and unpreparedness of faculty to align content with online teaching. It also exposed inequalities, marginalization and the plight of disadvantaged students to pursue education.

The global crisis triggered the realigning of resources and educational provisions at all levels. The rapid, global transition to remote learning has been one of the boldest and most daring “experiment” the educational sector has ever implemented. The current crisis required all universities to become the vanguard of change and become more resilient and agile by building more effective teaching and learning platforms.

Dealing with disaster is not new for mankind. Gaus (1947), in his classic *Reflections on Public Administration*, recognized the role that catastrophe plays in reshaping public administration and policy systems. He argued that to be most effective, the government should be viewed as an integral part of an ecological system, which can exist and thrive only in relationship with their environments. He listed several factors useful to explain “the ebb and flow of the functions of government ... people, place, physical technology, social technology, wishes and ideas, catastrophe, and personality” (p. 9).

For Gaus (1947), catastrophe

not only is destructive, so that relief and repair are required on a scale so large that collective action is necessary, but it also disrupts, jostles or challenges views and attitudes, and affords to the inner self as well as to others a respectable and face-saving reason for changing one’s views as to policy. (p. 16–17)

Thus, catastrophic events can be considered as change agents and when introduced into an ecological system, the system will react to achieve a new equilibrium. This note of positive thought as proposed by Gaus (1947) led institutions to seek newfound opportunities even amidst pandemic and chaos.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The current educational situation is unique and one cannot find its precedence in history. The transition to the online mode of education comes with challenges of

providing quality education, adoption of the right mode and the correct platform for delivery, accessibility for all and the role of educators whose traditional form and work has changed drastically, almost overnight. Universities are conducting training modules to equip the faculty members to adapt to the online mode along with the support of the government who aims to boost digital literacy and digitization of educational services (Rashid & Yadav, 2020).

Some academics are also of the opinion that remote learning offers a myriad of advantages for individuals who are unable to attend a traditional full-time face-to-face university due to personal circumstances. The flexibility of asynchronous remote learning may provide wider access to those individuals and provide a chance to them to complete their education. Traditional higher education institutions are also exploring the concept of hybrid or blended forms of learning that may help improve the quality of face-to-face teaching by moving content delivery online and focusing in-person sessions on active learning, post-pandemic (Bowen, 2012; Riffie, 2003).

Higher educational institutions have faced financial losses with cut down on fees and the drop-in enrollment rates for students. Countries that relied on international students saw a dwindling of student mobility and a negligible population willing to pursue their study abroad program online paying a higher amount of fees. “A decline in international student mobility in these countries risks affecting productivity in advanced sectors related to innovation and research in the coming years” (OECD, 2020 p. 11).

The economic disruption has resulted in budget cuts and retrenchment in educational institutions. Departments that were once thriving with international students and their recruitment has been downsized overnight (DePietro, 2020; Friga, 2020). The local governments have announced a significant reduction in the resources allocated to boost higher education (Ferguson, 2020). Declining of the budget is not a recent phenomenon. The last couple of years has seen a cut in expenses, increasing tuition fees, aggressive marketing strategies to enroll more students and innovative method of teaching-learning and the pandemic will only aggravate such situations and defer the growth of the institutions. One tends to apprehend the serious ramifications that this chaotic situation might cause toward social equity.

Universities are known to be significant contributors to social equity and viewed as institutions that can help provide a conduit for social mobility (Hazelkorn & Gibson, 2019; Hu, 2009; Marginson, 2018). Social mobility can be gained only when one can access higher education and success therein. Budgetary shortfalls may weaken the access to pursuing higher education as a result of increasing costs, diminished scholarships, reduced academic supports, this could have serious ramifications for social equity (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Continuing education for students remains a top priority among academics and policy makers in universities. Efforts have been made in every possible way to

minimize interruption in studies and there has been an urgent need for faculty who are capable of imparting education through online and other modes of long-distance communication. There are short term goals of finishing the semester and the designated curriculum, evaluating the students and assigning grades. Along with it exists a long-term planning process of being prepared in a futuristic manner for any impending crisis and designing an education system that can manage and set up a contingency plan that is capable of dealing with risks in the future.

Assessing and evaluating students remains a challenge and it is difficult to monitor how the online tests are being taken by the students. Lab-tests, practical exams and hands-on demonstration of knowledge can be more difficult to conduct online. In addition, not all students will have access to a computer, laptop or uninterrupted internet supply at home. Mental health and physical well-being of staff and students and ensuring a safe environment is now a top priority of universities. Universities have to ensure that regular communication channels are fully operational and careful attention is given to ensure that all queries and apprehensions are addressed.

This book volume discusses case studies and interventions that has been implemented by academics to ensure high quality, uninterrupted education for students. Strategic plans are explained with different theoretical models and framework which is being currently utilized and benefits gained. The information provided in this book volume is meant to benefit educators, leaders, policy makers, government organizations, faculty members and students.

CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

“Online Teaching, Learning, and Assessment during COVID-19: A Case of a Management Faculty in Sri Lanka” by A. W. Janitha C. Abeygunasekera is about COVID-19 Pandemic that has affected the smooth functioning of all aspects of life, while the education sector is one of the most influenced fields. This chapter presents a case of a faculty in a state university in Sri Lanka which underwent a transformation toward online teaching, learning, and assessment mode with the COVID-19 pandemic. The unexpected conversion to online mode impacted many parties, and among them, the lecturers and students were mostly affected within universities. The author explored the perception of students and lecturers on this unexpected compulsory transformation and identified how they perceive this new normal in teaching, learning, and assessment. In addition, the benefits and challenges faced, and the pre and post views on online experience were also studied. An online survey with students and a series of interviews with lecturers were exercised for data collection. The views that students have on online learning were different among the various study program levels, and the benefits and challenges faced by the different student groups also varied. Further, the lecturers had different perceptions on teaching the different level programs and subjects. These aspects are discussed in detail throughout the chapter, and at the end, suggestions for making the online mode more effective are presented.

“Preparedness of Students for Future Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: A Bangladeshi Perspective” by M. Mahruf C. Shohel, Md. Ashrafuzzaman, Atm Shafiul Alam, Arif Mahmud, Muhammad Shajjad Ahsan and Md Tariqul Islam is about COVID-19 pandemic that has had a significant impact on higher education across the globe, including in Bangladesh. The Bangladeshi higher education system is going through an abrupt transformation to cope with the crisis time. This chapter is based on data collected from teachers and students of Bangladeshi public and private higher education institutions regarding teaching and learning during the COVID-19 lockdown. In Bangladesh, some universities switched to online distance teaching and learning quickly during this period, and others lagged behind in this regard. Teachers and students from both groups participated in the study, including those who attended online teaching and learning activities and those who did not participate. This chapter highlights both teachers’ and students’ perspectives regarding students’ future preparedness for participating fully in the changing landscape of higher education, especially technology-enhanced teaching and learning. Understanding the perspectives of teachers and students is important to address the digital divide and social justice issues in the policy and practice. Within the higher education sector in Bangladesh, it is especially vital while transforming its education system and adapting emerging technologies to address the challenges of education in future emergencies.

“The Impact of Online Education on the Learning Experiences of Tertiary Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Indian Case Study” by Nandita Mishra talks about COVID-19 that has shown its pandemic powers to the whole world. At times when many countries are forced to go for total lockdown of its economic activities, unusual economic crisis is inevitable. Amid all the crisis, the impact on education sector was also massive. In India also COVID-19 has resulted in a country-wide lockdown, which led to closure of schools and colleges. University Grant Commission, an apex educational body has come up with several guidelines for Higher Education Institution. This study is an attempt to understand the perceptions of Indian tertiary students toward online teaching which has become the no-other-choice method of instruction for educational institutes during the pandemic. An online survey was conducted in October 2020, to collect information from the students through Google form about their perceptions and experiences with online learning. A total of 248 students completed the survey. Factor analysis has been applied on the collected data to understand the factors which most impacted the students. Results showed that “less effectiveness,” “stress and boredom” and “connectivity challenges” were among the major challenges faced by these students in their online learning experience. This study urges the need for an educational strategy to be set by policy makers to respond to the challenges encountered during online learning.

“Uncertainty in an Uncertain Land – Battling of COVID-19 in Afghan Educational System” by Enakshi Sengupta, Mohammed Gul Sahibzada, Madina Ibrahim, Nelab Haidari and Elaha Yousufi highlights about the battle to fight and resist the COVID-19 virus which continues worldwide and even the vaccination drive is failing to control the new strains of viruses which are

resulting in death and disruption of a normal life. The higher education sector, like others, has been affected by billions of students unable to return to their campus life. Universities have been forced to scale up their online learning ability, try out new and effective learning management systems and train their faculty and staff members to teach and operate remotely. This has led to a financial strain on the higher education institution with dwindling enrollment and student mobility. Afghanistan's vulnerable and fragile higher education system, fraught with war and internal strife, has suffered a huge setback. Electricity and access to the internet is a perilous problem and with the additional burden of students studying online, both providers of utility services and educational institutions are finding it increasingly difficult to face the unprecedented demand. This chapter aims to highlight such issues that are plaguing the already uncertain future of this country – even when the presence of the COVID-19 virus was unheard of. Qualitative interview method was used to gather data from the officials from the Ministry of Higher Education, faculty members from different universities and students from various provinces who voiced their opinion and hardships that they are facing in the current pandemic situation. The data were analyzed to suggest possible outcomes and recommendations were based on the data collected.

“University Preparedness for Online Teaching and Learning Amid COVID-19 in Kenya” written by Stanislaus Agava, Sahaya G. Selvam and Judith Pete writes about how globally, the COVID-19 pandemic took institutions of learning and the workplaces by surprise. Offering online learning was an alternative for institutions of higher learning. Were the Kenyan institutions adequately prepared for this? The present study had three specific objectives: (a) to establish the status of policy-preparedness of online teaching and learning in Kenyan universities; (b) to explore the infrastructural-preparedness of the universities; and (c) to find out the level of competency-preparedness of lecturers and students in embracing the facilities for online teaching and learning. The study had an embedded mixed method research design. Data was gathered using an online questionnaire, from 112 lecturers and 372 students, who were conveniently sampled, representing 34 universities and university colleges. Findings suggest that almost all represented institutions have a policy on online teaching and learning, though 50% of participants' report that the policy did not exist prior to the onset of COVID-19. On the level of infrastructural preparedness, the personal ownership of digital devices among participants is very impressive, though 50% of institutions do not provide any device. Thirdly, the level of competency in the use of the three sets of online platforms for teaching and learning is far below the expected average, but this is improving since the onset of COVID-19. Lecturers have statistically more perceived competence than students ($p < 0.01$). The implication of these results is discussed. And we conclude that the period of forced online teaching and learning need not be considered as a stop-gap measure during COVID-19, but as a way forward for improved self-learning and lifelong learning.

“Transitioning from Physical Classroom to Distance Education during the COVID-19 Crisis: A Lebanese Case Study in Higher Education” by Ahmad Samarji explains that distance Education (DE) is neither a new concept nor