

Innovations in Assessment, Student Experience and Professional Development in Higher Education

CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES



Edited by

GLADSON CHIKWA, JOSEPHINE DEGUARA,
EDWIN RAJAH, AND YANMIN ZHAO

Innovations in Assessment, Student Experience and Professional Development in Higher Education

This volume, *Innovations in Assessment, Student Experience and Professional Development in Higher Education*, offers a compelling and timely collection of global perspectives that speak to the evolving landscape of higher education. The chapters are rich in practice-based insights, critical reflections and innovative approaches that will inspire educators, researchers and policymakers alike. A valuable contribution to ongoing conversations about assessment, student engagement and professional growth in diverse academic contexts.

—*Professor Colin Calleja, Dean Faculty of Education, University of Malta*

In this comprehensive edited volume, the experiences and perspectives of a range of experienced Higher Education (HE) practitioners from across the globe coalesce around the theme of ‘innovation’. The book takes a threefold focus on the value of authentic assessment, formative feedback and assessment literacy in developing student agency and independence; relational approaches for enhancing student experience, sense of belonging and ensuring responsiveness in curricula; and, thirdly, the value of compassionate and person-centred professional development for educators. The book is a must read for all HE educators looking for creative inspiration and fresh ideas for building inclusive and empathic HE curricula and practices.

—*Dr Sophie Bessant, Assistant Head, University Teaching Academy,
Manchester Metropolitan University*

This book is a timely contribution to the increasingly complex higher education sector. It presents a well-curated exploration of how innovation in assessment, student support and professional development can drive meaningful change in teaching and learning. What sets this book apart is its global, practice-informed perspective, drawing on a wide range of institutional and cultural contexts to offer strategies that speak directly to educators, academic developers and policymakers alike. Whether through formative feedback, student voice, or professional learning communities, the book offers inspiration and practical ideas for enhancing teaching and learning in sustainable and impactful ways. A must-read for those seeking to rethink and reenergise learning and teaching in higher education.

—*Sheau-Fen (Crystal) Yap, Professor of Marketing,
Auckland University of Technology*

Innovations in Assessment, Student Experience and Professional Development in Higher Education: Contemporary Global Perspectives

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Catherine Best has been a registered nurse for more than 30 years. Her professional background is in public health nursing, specifically the specialist field of occupational health. She is a published author and an academic blogger; many of her publications reflect the value of quality coaching and nursing leadership. As a visiting nursing Lecturer (eTutor) with Birmingham City University, one of her key interests is supporting masters student nurses to publish. In December 2021, she was awarded, by examination, Fellowship of the Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland [FFNMRCISI], which recognises the significant contribution made by professionals to their profession, society and in the case of nursing/midwifery to patients, service users, colleagues and students. In 2012, she became a Queen's Nurse with the Queen's Institute of Community Nursing, a title which recognises commitment to maintaining the highest standards of practice and person-centred care and a commitment to clinical excellence.

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Susannah Donkor is a Senior Lecturer in academic writing and language education with a background in journalism, having previously worked with organisations such as The Telegraph, BBC Worldwide, and News International. Drawing on more than 15 years of experience in English language teaching, she spent the past decade at a London University, where she supported students of all levels across business, and law through her work in Learning Enhancement. Her teaching career, which also incorporates experience in the Middle East, focuses on English for academic purposes and academic literacies at tertiary level. Susannah has also led curriculum development in this area, helping students strengthen their ability to communicate ideas with clarity and confidence in both academic and professional contexts. She remains particularly interested in how academic literacies evolve across disciplines and how students can best be supported in developing their academic voice. She is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (now Advance HE).

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Conor Mellon graduated with a PGCE and a Master's in Education from Durham University in 2007 and followed this with a Doctorate in Education from Queen's University Belfast in 2016. He began his career in primary education while simultaneously working as an Adjunct Lecturer in teacher education. In 2015, he was seconded to the Irish Teaching Council, where he worked in policy development around professional learning, research with/for teachers and accreditation in initial teacher education. In 2019, Conor was appointed as an Assistant Professor and Programme Director in Educational Practice with the National College of Ireland, where he now works in an adjunct capacity. He has published research on educator identity, reflective practice, lifelong learning and mentoring in teacher education.

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Preface

The HE landscape is ever-changing. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly accelerated the use of online learning, while changes in learner demographics have required higher education institutions (HEIs) to embrace more inclusive learning and teaching practices. Furthermore, the recent evolution of Generative AI appears to have both positive and negative implications for the quality of learning. These ongoing changes make it necessary for HEIs to proactively innovate to adapt to both the opportunities and challenges arising in contemporary times. One approach for HEIs is to focus on innovation as a key driver for the enhancement of teaching and learning approaches to better support learners entering HE.

This book of readings is a collaborative effort of a community of practice (CoP) called the ITLSIG. This professional network consists of members from more than 15 countries, bringing together more than 30 HE Institutions spread across different continents including Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe and North America. The ITLSIG activities are currently supported by Manchester Metropolitan University.

The idea for this book emerged during one of our regular ITLSIG member discussions in 2023. Members of the CoP expressed a desire to showcase and share their research ideas and perspectives with a wider audience. Ongoing discussions led to the concept of an edited book. We put together a book proposal to Emerald Publishers which was subsequently accepted. In our call for book chapters, the network members decided to cast the call beyond our CoP. We received overwhelming responses from 67 authors, resulting in 35 book chapters and 3 case studies contributions. With such a strong interest, and working in conjunction with Emerald Publishers, we decided that the range of topics in the potential book chapter contributions provided enough content for two books instead of the single book we had initially planned. This book is the second instalment for the Innovations in Teaching and Learning in HE project. This second book consists of 13 chapters and 3 case studies focusing on three main themes: Innovations in Assessment and Feedback in HE, Innovations in Student Experience in HE and Innovations in Professional Development in HE.

Our aim for this book publication was to provide an opportunity for contributors to share their ideas on teaching and learning to enhance creativity and innovation for HE practitioners. To attain this aim, the team of editors for the book project sought to capture diverse innovative practices in HE across different parts of the globe. Additionally, we strived to include contributions

from both experienced and emerging authors, as well as contributions from multi-disciplinary perspectives and experiences. We have made every effort to ensure that the chapters and case studies are written in an accessible way, and this edited book benefits a range of HE practitioners, including academics and those who work in third spaces such as educational developers, digital developers and study skills experts.

The book, 'Innovations in Assessment, Student Experience and Professional Development in Higher Education: Contemporary Global Perspectives' is split into four parts: the first part (Chapters 1–5) reports on 'Innovations in Assessment and Feedback', Part 2 (Chapters 6–10) reports on 'Innovations in Student Experience', Part 3 (Chapters 11–13) reports on 'Innovations in Professional Development' and, lastly but not least, Part 4 consists of 3 Scholarly Case Studies.

PART 1: INNOVATIONS IN ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In Chapter 1, Deguara and Milton discuss findings from a study that explored how examiners in a Maltese Initial Teacher Education institution assessed students during their teaching practicum amid COVID-19 restrictions. The findings revealed that while remote assessments were beneficial for continuing education, they were time-consuming and limited, highlighting the need for hybrid assessment modes post-pandemic for greater flexibility and efficiency.

Chapter 2, authored by Dr Wilfrid Flanda, evaluates a challenge-based learning project in a postgraduate course. It highlights Gallagher and Savage's (2023) model, emphasising collaboration among academia, industry and extra-academic actors to address real-world issues. The chapter demonstrates that this approach is flexible, enriching students' learning experiences and preparing them for real-world challenges.

In Chapter 3, Little and Preston report on a new group assessment for second-year student midwives, consisting of two equally weighted elements. It highlights the benefits of this innovative approach, including fostering open discussions about assessment and enhancing digital literacy skills. The assessment provided an authentic experience, closely mirroring the tasks students will encounter in their midwifery careers.

Chapter 4 by Mellon and Emmett explores the impact of authentic assessment on student-teachers in a one-year postgraduate Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programme in Ireland. The chapter highlights that authentic assessment enhances student-teachers' knowledge, skills and competence. Additionally, it also empowers them to recognise their agency and challenge the status quo.

In Chapter 5, Rajah and colleagues explore the reflective experiences of three university teachers in New Zealand who used formative feedback to foster learner autonomy and lifelong learning skills for both undergraduate and postgraduate students. The findings provide specific examples of how each teacher supported independent and self-directed learning through formative feedback. This contribution adds to the guidance for educators on using formative feedback to empower and support learners creatively.

PART 2: INNOVATIONS IN STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In Chapter 6, Shao and Zhao highlight pedagogical innovations in teacher education and professional learning, including new pedagogies, digital tool-based microteaching and self-reflection protocols. These innovations aim to develop university teachers' knowledge and skills through innovative practices. The potential for preparing adaptive, culturally responsive teachers is emphasised, noting the need for broader contextualisation and integration of emerging technologies to maintain relevance and efficacy.

Chapter 7, by Stocks and colleagues, examines the impact of transitioning to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic on students' learning experiences. The chapter emphasises the benefits of session-by-session student feedback, which is used to shape teaching and directly enhance the students' experience. This innovative approach ensures that students benefit from ongoing evaluations of their learning experience, rather than just influencing future students through end-of-module evaluations.

In Chapter 8, Millard and colleagues discuss the introduction of an innovative personal tutoring model at Abertay University, involving three Student Success Officers who provided personalised interventions for new students. The focus was on improving retention through peer-to-peer conversations, using learning analytics data, institutional staff and student feedback. The model led to a better understanding of student challenges, improved retention rates and highlighted the broader benefits for student development and success.

Chapter 9, by Warden and colleagues, details a contextualised study support programme for undergraduate science students at risk of non-progression. Through supportive meetings and solution-focused coaching, personalised study plans are co-created and adapted over time. This approach boosts students' sense of 'mattering', improves faculty continuation rates and increases learners' confidence in independent learning, with students appreciating the tailored interventions.

In Chapter 10, Yong and colleagues present findings from a small-scale qualitative study on postgraduate students returning for a master's in psychology. The study explored factors affecting their sense of belonging and well-being, emphasising the influence of their academic and personal backgrounds. The chapter offers recommendations for institutional support systems to enhance postgraduate students' learning and well-being.

PART 3: INNOVATIONS IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Chapter 11 by Best critically analyses literature supporting coaching as a paradigm for change and continuous professional development. The chapter introduces coaching as a professional construct and its application in nursing, healthcare and leadership to enhance practice. It also explores how the coaching role, distinct from mentorship, can help academics engage in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), making this analysis timely and relevant.

In Chapter 12, Boylan and colleagues emphasise the importance of CoP as a professional development strategy. The chapter outlines a research project undertaken to establish the ongoing professional development needs of CoP facilitators. The shared findings may inform the provision of institutional support for the establishment, refocusing and maximising impact benefits generated by current and future CoP-related activities.

Chapter 13 by Atenas and Trowsdale presents insights into the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PgCAP) at the University of Suffolk, designed to support new academics with professional backgrounds and those in professional contracts working with students.

PART 4: SCHOLARLY CASE STUDIES

Case study 1 by Yue highlights the delivery of a Foundation Year Psychology course at a UK university, showcasing assessment and feedback strategies that promote active student learning. It emphasises the effective scaffolding approach to assessment support, collaborative learning in exam preparation and the innovative use of AI tools for feedback. The author posits that these strategies foster a partnership between students and educators which leads to high levels of student satisfaction.

In Case study 2, Keshishi and Surendran reflect on the impact of non-credit bearing summer volunteer programmes on students' intercultural competence and personal/professional growth at a university in southeast England. Details of the approach including findings and recommendations for post-programme support to foster intercultural competencies and global citizenship are outlined.

Case study 3 by Donkor reflects on the use of digital badges in HE. The case study provides a reflective analysis of the development, implementation and key challenges of digital badges. It highlights the need for standardisation, stronger local employer partnerships and clearer articulation of competencies. In addition, it asserts that a national HE-driven framework could help ensure consistency and build trust in badge issuance, making them more valuable and sought after by employers.

This edited book is a testament to the power of collaboration of ITLSIG members whose unwavering support made this project a reality. We are grateful to all the authors who worked diligently to meet the tight submission deadlines to produce this book. We also wish to extend our gratitude to all the book chapter reviewers within and beyond our network, who contributed to enhancing the quality of the book chapters. Our gratitude also extends to the Emerald Team, who have provided guidance in our journey towards completing this book project. Lastly, the four co-editors – Gladson Chikwa, Josephine Deguara, Edwin Rajah and Yanmin Zhao – each brought their unique expertise and experience to this project, while collaborating across different time zones to bring this book to fruition.

To all the readers, we hope the chapters and case studies in this book provide valuable food for thought and serve as a catalyst for transformative practice within your different areas. This book is a worthwhile addition to the extant literature on teaching and learning in HE.

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Part 1

Innovations in Assessment and Feedback in Higher Education

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Chapter 1

A Pandemic Legacy: Adapting New Modes of Teaching Practicum Assessment for Student Teachers in Early and Primary Schools in Malta – Narrative Perspectives From Six Examiners

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Abstract

One of the most significant components of initial teacher education (ITE) programmes is the teaching practicum. The COVID-19 pandemic brought significant challenges and changes to the conventional ways the teaching practicum is conducted and assessed. Research shows how student-teachers experienced their teaching practicum during the pandemic; however, the perspective of teaching examiners remains under-investigated. Using a textual narrative approach and drawing on the Disaster Management Cycle (DMC) as a theoretical framework, this study seeks to investigate how examiners in a Maltese ITE institution went about assessing students in their teaching practicum during the COVID-19 pandemic when restrictions were still in place. Adopting a naturalist narrative methodological stance, participants were invited to write narratives about their experiences of assessing student-teachers. Data were analysed using the content analysis technique. Findings show that while the remote modes of assessing student-teachers were provisionally beneficial as they allowed for the continuation of ITE and practicum assessment during the pandemic, this was very time-consuming for examiners and, at times, only provided a selected snapshot of the practice being assessed. Moreover, results show that remote assessments cannot replace face-to-face ones. The findings also show that

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beyond the pandemic, a hybrid assessment mode can benefit examiners and students alike, as it allows for flexibility, accessibility and efficiency.

Keywords: Teaching practicum; remote assessment; COVID-19 pandemic; initial teacher education; online; hybrid mode; disaster management cycle

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly caused massive disruptions to education systems worldwide, leading to widespread school closures, the implementation of hybrid teaching models and adherence to strict health protocols such as social distancing and mask-wearing to mitigate virus transmission in educational settings (Almonacid-Fierro et al., 2021; Sasaki et al., 2020). This unpredictable scenario posed substantial challenges to teacher-training programmes, compelling Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to rapidly adapt and reimagine alternative assessment methods for student-teachers during the Teaching Practicum (TP)¹ (Doyle et al., 2024; Kidd & Murray, 2020; Malik et al., 2023). This adaptation was framed within an ‘emergency eLearning’ protocol (Murphy, 2020, p. 492), necessitating a transformation of the TP from traditional, in-person, classroom-based experiences to entirely or partially virtual, blended formats. This shift involved recreating different forms of experience-based lessons and the sharing of documentation while ensuring a high-quality teaching experience and maintaining high academic standards (Atkins & Danley, 2020; Choi & Park, 2022; Gamage et al., 2020; Perla & Agrati, 2023). These changes created uncertainties and challenges for both examiners and student-teachers (Ersin et al., 2020; Kim, 2020), with Ellis et al. (2020, p. 565) noting a prevailing ‘feeling of shock and confusion’ regarding the abrupt transition to remote teaching practicums.

Various studies (Aghar & Quirke, 2023; Almonacid-Fierro et al., 2021; Annamalai et al., 2022; Bonello et al., 2021; Milton et al., 2022) have explored student-teachers’ experiences of their teaching practicum during the pandemic. However, the perspectives of practicum examiners and the assessment processes remain underexplored (Kidd & Murray, 2020; Perla & Agrati, 2023). While many investigations have concentrated on the shift to online teaching and learning, there has been insufficient focus on adapting assessment practices. Thus, this study aims to fill this lacuna by examining how six examiners in a Higher Education institution in Malta experienced the teaching practicum assessment of undergraduate and postgraduate student-teachers in early and primary education during the pandemic. It explores their navigation of new assessment methods, their communication with student-teachers, and the use of

¹The professional practice placement is often termed ‘field experience’, ‘field placement’, ‘school-based training’, ‘professional experience placement’, ‘teaching practice’ or ‘teaching practicum’. For the scope of this study, the term ‘teaching practicum’ (TP) will be used.

digital technologies and platforms. Drawing on the perspectives of the six examiners, this study seeks to inform future TP strategies and assessment approaches, both during normal times and in periods of crisis. Employing written narratives as a primary tool for data collection, this study addresses the following main research question:

How did university examiners experience and assess remote teaching practicum during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malta?

The TP During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Teaching Practicum (TP) is a key component in initial teacher education (ITE), where student-teachers gain real teaching experience, developing their pedagogical skills and professional identities (Allen & Wright, 2013; Matengu et al., 2021; OECD, 2021).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the TP provided hands-on teaching experience, allowing student-teachers to apply theoretical knowledge in real classrooms, preparing them to understand classroom dynamics and manage the complexity of teaching. This ‘situated learning’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991) fostered the development of professional competencies in authentic social and cultural contexts (Almonacid-Fierro et al., 2021; Annamalai et al., 2022; Hendrith et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021). Feedback provided during the TP was typically formative, addressing planning, practice, self-reflection and professional identity (Chetty et al., 2014; Giner-Gomis et al., 2022; Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Remote Assessment of the TP

The pandemic necessitated a rapid shift to online practicum, presenting significant logistical and pedagogical challenges, which proved stressful and challenging for TP examiners and student-teachers (Burns et al., 2020; Carroll & Constantinou, 2023). Examiners had to adapt to remote assessment methods to ensure the TP’s continuity (Ersin et al., 2020; Kim, 2020). Most ITE programmes had never considered online practicum experiences essential, which made the transition particularly difficult (Burns et al., 2020; Lawson et al., 2015). Before the pandemic, no ITE programmes in Malta offered an online practicum experience. Similarly, Kennedy and Archambault (2012) reported that only 1.3% of ITE programmes in the United States included online practicum experiences. Consequently, shifting to an online assessment required a complete redesigning of teacher education programming (Burns et al., 2020).

Various methods were adopted for remote TP assessment. Some institutions conducted evaluations of in-class performance remotely (Ersin et al., 2020), while others opted for peer micro-teaching (Saraç et al., 2022) and reflected tasks based on real-classroom episodes (Schelling & Rausch, 2020). Assigning student-teachers

to teacher mentors for online lesson planning evaluation (Burns et al., 2020) and using virtual classrooms with avatar students for simulated teaching were also common (Almonacid-Fierro et al., 2021; Sasaki et al., 2020). E-portfolios (Hendrith et al., 2020), combining synchronous and asynchronous assessment methods, were employed by some institutions (Aghar & Quirke, 2023).

Remote assessment posed challenges such as limited real-time communication and delayed feedback, impacting emotional support for student-teachers (Badaru et al., 2022; Gamage et al., 2020; Perla & Agrati, 2023). Ersin et al. (2020) found that student-teachers expected more immediate online support, which was considered insufficient.

The Role of Technology

Technology was crucial for continuing the TP during the pandemic, facilitating planning, instruction and communication (Almuqayteeb & Alzahrani, 2023). Digital tools such as Zoom, YouTube and Nearpod were used for lesson creation (Ersin et al., 2020; Kim, 2020), while platforms such as MS Teams, Google Meet, Zoom, emails and cloud services (such as Google Drive or OneDrive) were used for communication and document sharing (Pike et al., 2020; Vakil, 2020). The pandemic highlighted the necessity for proficiency in digital tools and online pedagogical practices in their teaching (Lisa et al., 2021).

The adaptation of virtual TP presented significant challenges. Reliable internet connectivity and expertise in digital skills for accessing digital materials and using online modes effectively were identified as essential prerequisites (Badaru et al., 2022; Perla & Agrati, 2023). Both examiners and student-teachers were anxious about technology-mediated teaching, learning and assessment due to inadequate training (Ellis et al., 2020). Chinengundu et al. (2022) found that poor digital skills and internet connectivity hindered online practicum assessments in Zimbabwe. Conversely, Ersin et al. (2020) reported adequate technological support for student-teachers in Turkey, yet they still struggled to integrate technology into their teaching–learning process. Moreover, clear instructions and concise guidelines were critical for effective technology integration (Nel & Marais, 2020).

The unique nature of the pandemic and the innovative modes of assessments introduced indicate that without the use of digital technology, TP examiners would not have been able to examine students, provide feedback, and communicate with them during the pandemic, and therefore, would not have been able to secure the continuation of undergraduate and postgraduate teacher-training courses. Thus, in this study, we focus on the process of the teaching practicum assessment and how a redesign to remote modes operated within a ‘third space’ (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37) is used as an intermediary space to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between teaching practicum examiners who assessed student-teachers remotely (digital space) and student-teachers who were conducting their practicum in schools (primary space).

Theoretical Framework

This study uses the Disaster Management Cycle (DMC) framework (Baird et al., 1975) to understand examiners' experiences during the pandemic. THE DMC, widely recognised for managing disasters, consists of four phases: *Mitigation (Preventing crisis)*, *Preparedness (Getting ready)*, *Response (Protecting People)* and *Recovery (Effective measures)* (Abid et al., 2021; Climate ADAPT, 2021; Moorhouse, 2020; Shah et al., 2023).

Inspired by Annamalai et al. (2022), who used the DMC to position and understand the TP experiences of student-teachers during the pandemic, this framework helps analyse the examiners' adaptation to remote TP. The DMC provides a guiding theory to situate the experiences of TP examiners in managing the crisis and ensuring the continuation of teacher education during times of crisis and beyond.

Fig. 1.1 illustrates the four phases of the DMC (the rectangular boxes on the outside of each phase) and how we used the DMC framework as a guiding theory to situate the experiences of the teaching practicum examiners when analysing the data. The matrix (Fig. 1.1) indicates how DMC could be used for TP. This framework will be used in the discussion and referred to as an example of crisis management of the TP.

Research Context

In March 2020, educational institutions in Malta, like those globally, closed their doors due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Donista-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020). This sudden closure affected all educational levels, compelling institutions to adopt online learning to continue their programmes (Cefai et al., 2021). The transition to online teaching and assessment was rapid at the University of Malta's Faculty of Education (Camilleri et al., 2023; Deguara et al., 2022; Field Placement Office, FoE, 2020).

TP Assessment Procedures Before and During the Pandemic

Participants in this study assessed ITE students from the University of Malta's Faculty of Education during their TP in early and primary schools. The students were enrolled in either the Master in Teaching and Learning (MTL) in Early Childhood and Primary Education or the Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education and Care (B.A. Hons. ECEC) programmes (Milton et al., 2022). Before the pandemic, TP involved student-teachers taking over classrooms for several weeks, assessed through at least three classroom visits by two examiners, either resident academics or part-time examiners occupying teaching and/or leadership roles in schools and other educational settings. Examiners would hold preparatory meetings, observe lessons, give feedback in class or school immediately after the assessment visit and write a handwritten assessment report (Milton et al., 2022). While the TP assessment was in the main formative and no marks were issued, the TP visit carried a pass/fail decision by an

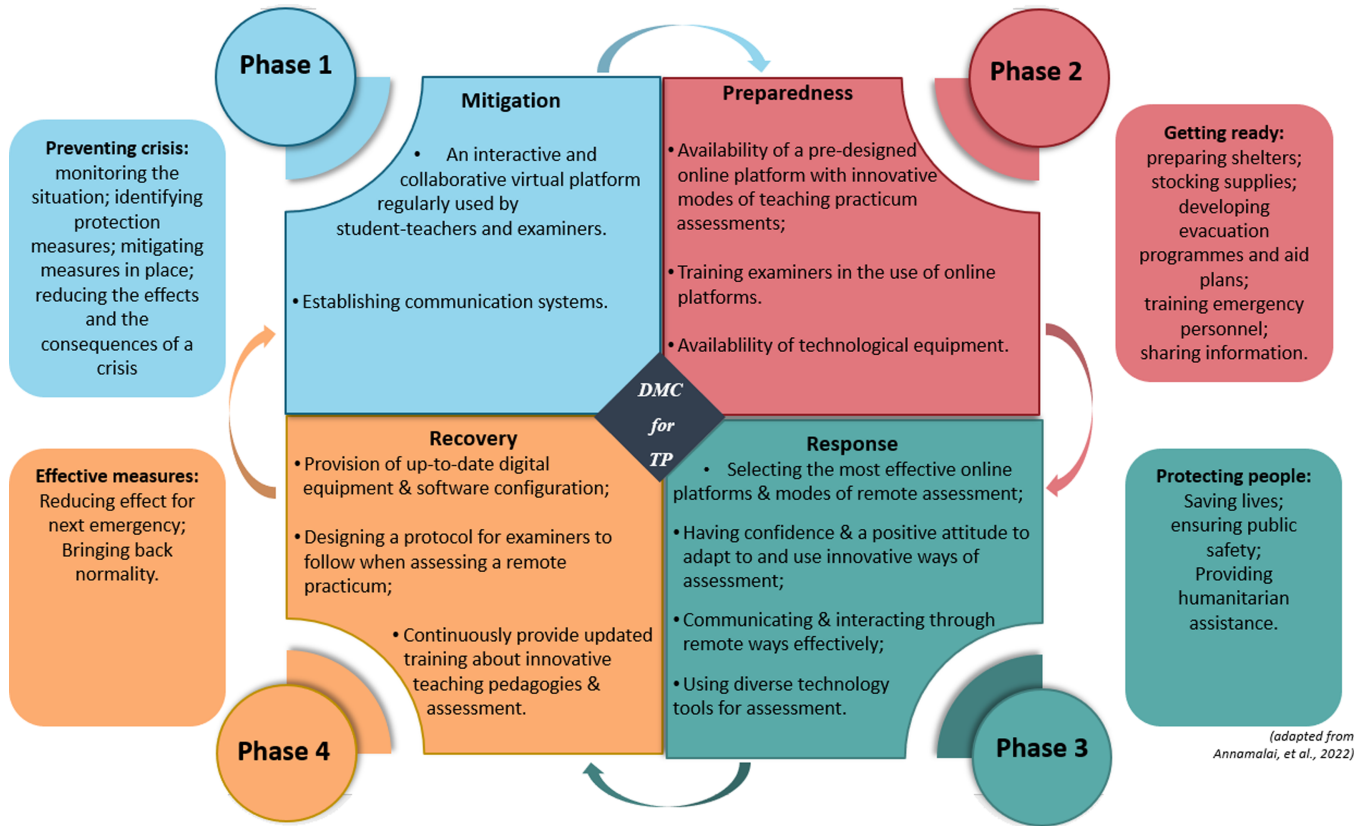


Fig. 1.1. The Disaster Management Cycle Used as the Framework for Remote Teaching Practicum Management.