

Book review

Online teaching and learning in higher education during COVID-19

Roy Chan, Krishna Bista, Ryan Allen, London & New York,
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Reviewed by Lei Xia

Online teaching and learning in higher education during COVID-19 is a compilation of research done by individuals from faculty and students and highlights the impact it had nationally and regionally in general but in particular the higher education sector. Its 17 chapters reflect the resilience of faculty, students, and administration. It further reflects the problem-solving of administration, the efficiency of policymakers, the commitment of all relevant stakeholders, to ensure that the academic program continues, and lastly, it reflects the student's discipline to continue their studies. Further research to be done also forms part of the book. More importantly, it provides insight into the widening gap in digital online education between countries and specifically the education institutions, and their capacity to render optimal digital learning and teaching services.

The book consists of 16 short reviews from professors, directors of institutes, researchers, and lecturers. It is followed by a foreword that highlights the book as a symbol of hope to manage future epidemics,

setting the context and tone of the 17 chapters. Chapter 1 gives a summary of each chapter and here the editors ask the question, 'Are online and distance learning the future in global higher education?'

Part 1 consists of 5 chapters that discuss the effectiveness of learning, assessing, and teaching, during and after the pandemic. Chapter 2 examines how training in designing online courses and pedagogy was the starting point when COVID-19 occurred, while Chapter 3 shows the disparity in the effectiveness of remote teaching within universities. Here Linda Dam uses social media as a method and discusses the important debates for qualitative analyses. In my view, this qualitative method is important because emerging themes besides the main themes give more in-depth insight into the social variables of disparity in remote teaching. Chapter 5 uses a methodology similar to Chapter 3 by exploring the narrative inquiry to discuss challenges the authors came across in their research about students working from home while using different multimedia tools to interact. Chapters 4 and 6 unpack the assessment methods. Methods such as live chat and video conferencing as strategies for online testing were added for the effectiveness of assessments. My question here was whether the outcome was successful and in chapter 6 the authors investigated whether the authentic assessment was better or not at RMIT University in Vietnam. However, there is a gap in this chapter and it is a comparative study of assessments with a university in a developed country. The strength of this part is pointing out, after extensive research by all the authors, the positive and negative variables in an innovative form of the phenomenon of distance learning and online teaching. For instance, the book points out how these trends will be more successful in the future in the long term given the normalization and adaptation of various methods and strategies being applied in higher education globally.

Part 2 emphasizes the impact distance education had on students, access for students to online teaching and learning, and how students were socially inclusive during COVID-19. This part is the most important part of the book to me because it speaks to very pertinent global social issues about online higher education. For example, in chapter 7 the authors highlight the limited access to remote learning in developing countries and indicate how the use of Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms narrowed the gap between the haves and the have-nots. Chapters 8 and 9 explore limitations on international

students, vulnerable students, and underrepresented students. Chapter 10 is the highlight of this part. A developing country in Africa, Botswana, is at the centre of this study because of the use of ICTs which might have contributed to social exclusion and digital inequality in higher education during the global pandemic. The study about Russia and inequality in technology in Chapter 11 is a phenomenon in various countries in Africa, Asia, and South America. Africa is the continent with the most social problems and technology is one of them. Houses are overcrowded in some parts of each country and studying at home is a challenge like it is in Russia. Furthermore, in Russia, there is poor internet connection but in parts of Africa there is no internet at all, so online learning is an impossible phenomenon. However, there is a paradigm shift post-COVID-19 in developing countries and this is the availability of the internet, technology, and more resources for online teaching and learning.

The third part includes case studies about teaching and learning remotely during the pandemic and long-term lessons. Various countries' studies are included in this part, for instance, Hong Kong, India, Australia, and the United Arab Emirates. Chapter 13, about autoethnography, provides readers with a better understanding of diversity within narratives in online communities. A paradigm shift is discussed in Chapter 14, from face-to-face teaching to a rise in virtual teaching in Hong Kong. It could have been more insightful if this paradigm shift could have been compared with a developing country. All this could have shown the implications of these paradigm shifts in developed and developing countries. Chapters 15 and 17 examine public universities and private universities. The example of an Indian private university analyses the data surveyed from 106 students to document the pros and cons of mainstream online learning during COVID-19. The author concludes this study and argues that the norms of lockdown and social distancing might change the methods of higher education in the future. The public higher institutions discussed in Chapter 17 include a theoretical framework where the author uses diffusion innovation theory. The author concludes that the method which is a blended learning model is ideal for higher education in the UAE. An elaboration on the reimagining of teacher education in Australian universities highlights hindrances and benefits post-COVID-19. The authors argued that these changes were reimagined and necessary in the online sphere.

An epilogue follows the 17 chapters where the editors indicate five commonalities and overarching variables. A few questions among others, which guide the book are, how do we support students in general, but vulnerable ones in particular for intercultural learning, how do we continuously engage alumni, staff, faculty, and students in enhancing online relationships, and lastly, how are field base and experiential learning remote courses design?

The compilation of studies contributes to the knowledge capital to empower administrations, families, policymakers, educators, researchers, and practitioners. The advice, new ideas, and principles could be implemented in the academic years to come. Likewise, readers benefit tremendously from this relevant book during COVID-19 and will continue to benefit in the future. While the book focuses on a few countries, a few studies from Sub-Saharan Africa could have given more insight into the social, cultural, economic, and political phenomena of online education during COVID-19 in higher education institutions. I view this omission as a huge gap within this book because it could have given more insight into unequal access to communication technologies, especially affordability. What also should have been highlighted more is the transformation in digital and institutional culture and the investment in it. In my view, access to online teaching was and is still unequal.

A few changes could be made to this book. Add chapter 18 as a chapter with statistics about Sub-Saharan African access to online teaching. Another chapter should highlight how the West is negatively impacting education in Africa by having conditions attached to aid that is not at times benefitting education. Indigenous communities are especially disadvantaged by the West. Other variables include age, gender, race, ethnicity, minority groups, and lower-income groups. These further studies should include action plans on how to design courses online that could be free and without the requirement of Wi-fi usage and to enhance students' social and emotional development.