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Incorporating 'New Normal' online learning methodology: A comparative study

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Abstract

Online learning and quarantine are the "new normal" for students globally. Entire education is now limited to laptops and smartphones, standing on the pillar of technology. Virtual is now the real normal. One main lesson that students learnt at this young age is how to respond to the crisis like this and move on. This paper highlights university online teaching methodology of two different countries. The respondents of the study were especially the freshers and the graduating students, as for this group it was the turning point of their life, practically. Even though this is a digital era, but not all the students responded positively to this New Normal way of learning during pandemic.

Keywords: New normal, pandemic, online learning, students

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic reported to be started in December 2019 and within months spread around the world rapidly. This resulted in the global lockdown, and the education system was not an exception for this. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a global public health emergency of international concern on 30th January 2020 as well as a pandemic on 11th March 2020 [1]. So, for the same social distancing measures such as isolation, mass gathering prohibited, and the closing and shut down of universities and colleges, shops, malls were adopted throughout the world and proved to be more effective ways to lessen the transmission rate, which in turn will avoid the collapse of healthcare systems, and minimal death rate [2]. As an answer to COVID-19, as integral step, a lot of countries have also imposed immigration bans on the community (both internal and external) and having the objective and the goal is to avoid the

outbreak from expanding the infection from one to the other. National health specialists including state authorities are undertaking multiple steps, request everyone to stay at home [3]. The 'new normal' is changing student priorities not only in educations but at the social front as well. To understand how institutions can adapt to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, TIAA and EY-Parthenon analyzed publicly available data and industry publications and interviewed leaders at 14 four-year higher education institutions ranging from small liberal arts colleges to large flagship public universities [4].

2. Literature review

The current circumstances are unique; unlike normal digital learning situations, as some might argue, it is more accurately crisis learning [5]. Taking in account the experience of the newcomers who joined the universities during pandemic is totally different what their seniors have experienced. Certainly, like many other

aspects of everyday life, COVID-19 has had a serious impact on students, instructors, and educational organizations around the globe [6]. History has proved that the period of pandemics has been the cause of surge in the stress related issues globally. The literature has showed that the biggest concern during such time is the need of psychological support in the mass, with every individual. To achieve this objective, the National Centre for Mental Health Promotion collaborated with the developers of a local mobile counseling app, Labayh, to provide free sessions for people experiencing anxiety and panic symptoms in the current situation [7]. Another notable step taken in Saudi Arabia by the Saudi Commission for Health Specialties (SCFHS) nationally launched a set of mental health support services for all health care professionals in the Kingdom under its Emtenan initiative as well as for residents in training [8]. The SCFHS not only called its registered health care professionals but also sent those SMS text messages, enquiring about their safety and advising them to keep safe. Embracing the New Normal positively during this crucial hour the young generation exhibited their mature psychological and social level. 10 March: One in five students worldwide was "staying away from school due to the COVID-19 crisis" while another one in four was barred from higher education institutions according to UNESCO [9].

3. Discussion

Saudi Arabia has managed and implemented its well-planned strategies and technological strategies to control and overcome the spread of COVID -19. The Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education directed all schools and universities in the Kingdom, from 8th of March 2020 to start remote teaching and student attendance was suspended for an indefinite period. Remote learning had taken place replacing the traditional way of learning. This was made possible within a short notice via online learning managements like Black Board. Universities throughout the Kingdom spent great efforts in order to make this sudden remote teaching easy for the teachers so that the students could get the maximum benefit, CLO (course learning outcomes) could be achieved at all the levels. Many training sessions were launched throughout the Kingdom to do so. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia instituted important

actions to prevent COVID-19 from increasing COVID-19 positive cases hysterically at the right time in the country. At the very beginning of March, the Saudi Arabian government decided to close all schools and universities until further notice.[10].

The Saudi Ministry of Education announced online classes to continue in place of face-to-face for the learning process in order to move on with a safe and secure manner. All universities including medical universities were shifted to online learning within days [11]. According to [11] posit that earlier this week, Saudi Arabia launched an online education program when it suspended universities around the Country over coronavirus issues, although students including academics ran into problems transitioning to a digital educational environment. Blackboard Learn, has already been leading on in Saudi Arabia. Most university students often worried concerning certain area's weak connectivity, trouble login to the network and taking courses, including lack of resources to access reports or perhaps even comprehend certain mentors [12]. The world has turned digital, and the start of the health crisis during pandemic this digitalization proved to be a boon. Meetings, teaching and many other such things were carried out via Zoom and other such medium. Dr.Melibari said, I am not going to sugarcoat it here, virtual classes are challenging, but they also come with many rewards. Distant learning is the future of education, not just a replacement in the times of the current crisis. It also fits easily within the Vision 2030 for education [10]. In India On 30 January 2020, the first case of COVID-19 in India was reported. "India most infected by Covid-19 among Asian countries, leaves Turkey behind". Hindustan Times [13] on 16 March, India declared a countrywide lock-down of schools and colleges. To control the spread of infections among the masses, on 19 March, the University Grants Commission (UGC) asked all the universities of the country to postpone exams until March 31. As per the data issued by United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), the pandemic has affected more than 91% of the students globally and around 1.6 billion kids and youngster were not able to attend the schools because of the lockdown and the closing down of the schools in order to maintain social distancing. During this ongoing

pandemic, as per the data issued by UNESCO, around 1.3 billion learners across the world were not able to attend school or university as of March 23, 2020, and current UNESCO statistics put this figure at over 1.5 billion [14]. The changes in student behaviour towards the mode and preference of degree programs might become a significant impact after the Covid-19 pandemic. Although the impact would vary from context to context, the overall impact on higher education is likely to be quite significant [15].

Conclusion

The Vision 2030 of Saudi Arabia which was released in 2017 has paved the path for digital transformation of the country. Synchronized online classes were well-accepted by the university students. We must recognize that our normal ways of living will have to adjust to a 'new normal' way of living. More than anything, these new measures reflect the strength and tenacity of the college community, which we are so lucky to be a part of in a time when community spirit is needed more than ever. There is a stronger need for academic organizations to improve their curriculum and the usage of new instructional methods and strategies should be of utmost significance [16]. Teaching-learning to continue on an online platform requires students to understand... Thus, there is a need to make the students understand the structure and requirement of the course when carried out on a digital platform [17]. Campus life is one of the facets of college life which the university students miss the most. In a comparison is done between the face-to-face environment, where the students get an opportunity to interact with the facilitator and other peers freely and they enjoy it, and this helps the overall development of the students as well. In face-to-face environment, face to face interacting with teachers, classroom debates and discussions all this also promotes social connectivity between teachers and students.

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