ONLINE TEACHING: READINESS AMONG LECTURERS IN HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

The deadly and infectious disease Corona Virus also known as Covid-19 has deeply affected the world. This outbreak has affected the global economy as well as the education sector. It forced the schools, colleges and university to stop temporarily. Teachers and lecturers had to shift to entirely online teaching substituting the traditional face-to-face teaching. Within a limited time, educators had to increase their knowledge in technological competencies and equip themselves with knowledge on online teaching. Majority of them who were quite sceptical and limit themselves from using digital tools were forced to utilise such tools and familiarize themselves with online applications. (Dhawan, 2020) There was no option for the educators but to prepare themselves to ensure the smooth running of teaching and learning process. These circumstances make us realise that there is an urgent need for the academic institutions to prepare for such scenario (*Rieley, 2020*).It is hoped that this paper could help the educators and academic staff to find options to deal with online teaching challenges besides providing benefit to university administrators and management in taking future emergency decisions concerning the implementation of online teaching during this pandemic crisis.

Keywords: online teaching, lecturers, higher educational institutions, Covid-19

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus disease 19 (COVID-19) outbreak has affected the world in various aspects. It also has shaken the world's educational system forcing the schools, colleges, universities and educational institutions to abruptly and comprehensively adopt online learning in place of face-to-face classes, in an effort to limit transmission of the virus. Certainly, like many other aspects of everyday life, COVID-19 has had a serious impact on students, instructors, and educational organizations around the globe (Mailizar, et. al., 2020). The educational institutions have no better solutions but to opt for online learning. The academics, students, and support staff are all working to accommodate this massive change. (Brook & Grajek, 2020). Educational institutions across the globe decided to use the already available technical resources to create online learning material for students of all academic fields (Kaur, 2020). Despite the limitation of knowledge, the affected community have to struggle in finding ways to overcome the challenges. This rapid transformation is linked to various obstacles and challenges at this point (Crawford et.al., 2020).

Within a limited time, educators had to increase their knowledge in technological competencies and equip themselves with knowledge on online teaching. Majority of them who were quite sceptical and limit themselves from using digital tools were forced to utilize such tools and familiarize themselves with online applications. (Dhawan, 2020). There was no

option for the educators but to prepare themselves to ensure the smooth running of teaching and learning process.

It is hoped that this paper could help the educators and academic staff to be mentally and physically prepared in finding options in dealing with online teaching challenges. It could also benefit the university administrators and management in taking future emergency decisions concerning the implementation of online teaching during this pandemic crisis.

2.0 ASPECTS OF READINESS IN A VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Online education is considered to result in more academic dishonesty, impersonal and lack feeling compared to face-to-face classes, and difficult to manage in terms of technology. (Moralista & Educado, 2020).There were several difficulties and challenges in the online education setting. The is a feeling of uncertainty towards online education during the pandemic outbreak as they are called to shift to a new normal or non-traditional mode of delivery of instruction.

Majority of the academician had no training in online education. (Mallillin et. al., 2020). Lecturers face various challenges in the online classes on how to handle the access to quality of education and professional development through technology utilisation for effective teaching. Online education is not the default and may not be the preferred choice of delivery of instruction in a developing countries. The readiness of lecturers in online teaching explores their vulnerability in their profession because of their adjustment to technology from classroom setting to online lecture setting. This is another challenged for the lecturers in the different educational institutions (Cutri, & Mena, 2020). Motivation is also needed for the different purposes, preferences and behaviours.

Higher learning institutions are also confronted with a challenge to train and retool their faculties with online pedagogy, flexible learning environments or e-learning. They need to ensure the smooth-running of the administrative work as well as providing as much facilities as they can to help the educators to perform on online teaching such as providing adequate internet facilities and training on using online teaching applications. The institutions have to provide online teaching internet access to manage, create, communicate, gather, and distribute information for teaching and learning process. There is also a need to expand for formal education in online learning process on the existing educational resource and facilities. Teaching support can be effective to online learning process to improve the pedagogy and quality content of knowledge. (Li, & Tsai, 2017).

Difficulties in implementing online learning can be caused by a few related factors. This article is going to focus on three aspects in a virtual learning environment; namely the on knowledge, technical and pedagogical aspects.

3.0 KNOWLEDGE ON ONLINE TEACHING ANG LEARNING

Educators are the most important factor for effectively and successfully implementing virtual learning. However, these implementations often evokes a variety of recurrent difficulties, especially feelings of resistance among experienced educators. (Stolk et. al, 2011). Many teachers are still lack of experience with online pedagogy, curriculum and assessment. Before the pandemic, some of them showed resistance towards implementing online teaching and felt that they did not have enough expertise, for instance, insufficient knowledge and skills regarding appropriate new guidance for their students (Bliss et. al. 1996). It is well-known that many of them, especially older teachers, are not very familiar with the use of student computer software and similar ICT tools for education because they are not grown up with them. (Dori & Barnea,1997) even found that teachers are not willing to introduce computer technologies in

their lessons because of their fear of changes. Many academics do not see the value of online courses or of trying to become a better online teacher. Almost none of us set out to be great online teachers when we decided to go to graduate school. (Cutri et. al., 2020).

The barriers in terms of teacher level barrier included: lack of teacher confidence (Balanskat et. al., 2006), teachers' unwillingness to change their practice (Hew & Brush, 2007), teachers' lack of understanding of e-learning advantages (Scrimshaw, 2004); teachers' attitudes and beliefs to ICT (Hew & Brush, 2007), and teachers' knowledge and experience (Marwan, 2008). Educators also felt that they are lack of knowledge of individual student's background. This would create some difficulties in implementing suitable teaching approaches, methods and techniques. Students have their own learning styles and not knowing students preferences might lead to ineffective teaching and learning process.

It seems that educators were not well prepared and had to force themselves to use and familiarise themselves with online teaching tools. Most of the educators do not know how to teach online or how to get better at it and we may not be motivated to learn. Even more likely, we may not feel like we have time to learn.(Darby, 2019) Their most significant barriers were the lack of knowledge and skill in e-learning use., and their lack of access to devices and internet connection. However, there are many of them started using new technologies and possess personal computers with good internet connection, and have a positive attitude towards Internet use (Tekerek & Ercan, 2012).

4.0 READINESS ON TECHNICAL ASPECTS

Poor internet connection is also one of the issues in the adoption of online education.(Saleem, 2020). Majority of educational institutions were forced to suspend their online classes for a limited time due to the unavailability of learning and management systems. Only a few higher-ranked universities of the country were able to start their online classes immediately. (Adnan & Anwar, 2020) Preparing lessons, textbooks and lack of technical support are also major barriers for teachers.(Bingimlas, 2009). Lack of time to prepare a lesson using technology was a major challenge that teachers experienced. Other important limitations were lack of adequate professional development concerning technology, limited physical resources, inadequacy of resources, limited access to technology, lack of technical support, competence and confidence. (Hadija & Shalawati, 2017).

These technical issue could be more serious when the curriculums mismatch between students' assessments and e-learning (Hew & Brush, 2007). On students part, inadequate e-learning skills, lack access to technology infrastructure and internet connection are the crucial technical aspects (Assareh & Bidokht, 2011).

Lack of experience with e-learning resources and experience difficulties, especially, when educators do not understand how to use online applications (Zaharah & Kirilova, 2020). Smith and O'Day (1991) indicated that many of these courses often do not provide sufficient depth and scope to give educators the experience to make major changes in their teaching approaches. Focuus was not given to the needs of educators to implement virtual learning. The usual courses do often not create many opportunities for meaningful interactions with peers or the teacher educator. For instance, Galanouli & Murphy (2004) investigated an ICT-competence teacher course and found that the course did improve teachers' confidence in using ICT, but that many teachers were not satisfied with the communication element, especially the use of discussion forums to deliver online training.

Academic institutions simply have not used some of the basic technologies that might be needed in their online courses . (Brook & Grajek, 2020). Basic technical skills, training, virtual classroom software are also needed. Institutions should also equip themselves with adequate power supply in case of any power shut down or crashing of server or system.

5.0 PEDAGOGICAL ISSUES

Another issue is that curriculum may not support technology-based application (Hew & Brush, 2007). When the pandemic has forced the online learning to replace the face to face learning, educators had the challenges to develop and integrate a suitable and effective e-contents for the students. Within a limited time, they have to come out with suitable tasks and activities, able to accommodate different students' learning style and preference to ensure that the learning process would be too affected by the pandemic situations. Lecturers and teachers, despite their lack of online pedagogical knowledge, had pushed their limits to perform their responsibilities.

However, the process may not run smoothly when there were issues with students' behaviour such as poor learner's engagement. Regarding this matter, motivation is a crucial aspect in helping to create students' discipline and successfully engaged in online classrooms. Lack of teacher autonomy is one of the factors that educators have to bear when communication only occurs through screens. The absence of teachers could affect students' motivation and losing teacher-learner connection. There should also be ways to curb cheating and plagiarism during assessment.

6.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Academics have to adapt to the new normal in the higher education landscape and the academics should be provided with continuous support, training, and development and be provided with ways to more fully understand and expand the opportunities that online education requires.(Cutri et. al., 2020). They must learn to embrace the educational challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic and view online teaching and learning as an inviting challenge. Academics should be provided with driven competencies in planning, implementing, and assessing the performance of their students, providing them with adequate training courses which can assist them to effectively implement the courses through electronic delivery. The training for the teachers can improve student learning in educational programming for the instructors to facilitate the goals aligned to the learning goals of higher education institutions (Ludeman et. al., 2009).

Several studies of effective attributes of these courses suggest that interaction among teachers is primary in facilitating teacher change processes (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Day, 1987; Heller et. al., 2012). Discussing and sharing experiences with colleagues similarly engaged are very fruitful learning activities. Collegial talk possesses a strong motivational character. Structuring communication between teachers can contribute to help teachers interpret curriculum innovations and to provide a context that builds professional learning. It was recommended that lecturers should develop more interest in online technologies and find more ways to incorporate online technologies into teaching and learning. (Soetan & Coker, 2018).

Studies on lecturers' online readiness can shed light on the pertinence of the pre-pandemic constructs of faculty online readiness and highlights important areas of future research, professional development, and policymaking considerations. (Cutri et. al., 2020). Institutions of higher education are expected to demonstrate responsiveness to the stakeholders. The expectations are higher because of the bars that government entities, accreditation agencies, and other stakeholders are setting for the performance of higher level institutions (Ludeman et. al., 2009). Higher education needs to demonstrate effectiveness and efficiency in the educational administration because the stakeholders demand evidence from institutions to be f excellent and effective.

A great deal of evidences are needed to determine how higher education institutions should respond to the educational, economic, and employment crises. There is an even greater need to produce research reports on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic to the educational system in the country. Higher learning institutions are expected to step out of the traditions of residential face-to-face education. The pandemic situation brings an opportunity for higher education institutions to scale up the training of the teachers for online learning instruction. Educational researchers are encouraged to document and produce research evidences on how the present pandemic has changed the working of the educational systems in the entire world. They should prioritize literacy for the world to be able to deal with a future virus outbreak.

Motivation in learning online, confidence in using e-learning technology, and teachers' attitudes to online instruction impact how and if learners will learn. All these barriers need to be considered when faced with an event such as a pandemic that forces teachers and students to immediately adjust to a different mode of teaching and learning.

7.0 CONCLUSION

Experiencing the pandemic era has actually provided us with both opportunities and challenges. The conditions of what educators referred to as 'forced readiness' actually brought about optimistic sentiments from the participants regarding their rapid transition to online teaching. Educators were willing to revise their teaching for online delivery and their sense of hope that their efforts would result in good online teaching are examples of such optimistic sentiments. This global pandemic opened up opportunities to the country to upgrade the educational mode of delivery and transfer its attention to emerging technologies.

There is a need to adapt to the changes in the educational landscape. It is crucial for all educators to equip themselves with knowledge on online teaching, becoming well-versed in technical issues and always prepared with secondary planning. Readiness in managing pedagogical issues is also crucial in making the teaching experience becoming more effective and meaningful. It is also important for the higher learning institutions to be competent in their role and acquire the necessary skills to ensure that the online learning environment will be able to effectively facilitate student learning and positively bring impact on students' outcomes.

Institutions are expected to strengthen research efforts and data monitoring to demonstrate responsiveness to the stakeholders. The expectations are higher because of the bars that government entities, accreditation agencies, and other stakeholders are setting for the performance of higher level institutions (Ludeman et. al., 2009). Higher education needs to demonstrate effectiveness and efficiency in the educational administration for the sake of the stakeholders. Other than that, these are changing times globally, and even the pandemic has affected the way that educational systems should function that a great deal of evidences are needed to determine how higher education institutions should respond to the educational, economic, and employment crises. Besides, educational institutions have to design appropriate and effective content, arrange an effective delivery system and provide digital literacy training to their faculty, so better learning outcomes can be achieved. The institutions have to take this educational challenges as an inviting challenge.

Every affected entity has to step out of the traditions of face-to-face education. We have to adapt to the new norms in the higher education landscape and in that case, educators have to be given continuous support, training, and development and be provided with ways to expand the opportunities that online education could offer. Despite facing the challenges due to this Covid-19 pandemic, we should embrace this situation as a blessing in disguise that gives us such meaningful experience.

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