Research Article

AN ASSESSMENT ON HIGH EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS READINESS ON CURRICULUM REFORM DURING COVID_19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

Blended mastering has been proposed as one solution that can decorate scholar mastering and engagement, enhance get right of entry to and flexibility, and tackle organizational and institutional imperatives in higher education. Therefore this study aimed at assessing the high education institutions readiness on their curriculum transformation during covid-19 pandemic. The study employed qualitative method approach where a case study design was used. Furthermore, the study involved 45 participants from five faculties at international university of management using focus group discussion as a method to collect data who were chosen using purposive sampling. The data obtained were analysed using content thematic approach. The major findings of this study are; the educators have pragmatic approaches they have employed for their teaching and learning, namely synchronous teaching and learning and then asynchronous learning and using the new online approaches lead to boredom, sense of isolation, lack of time to follow the different subjects, and lack of self-organizing capabilities among students. in addition the results showed that those involved must improve their understanding and readiness for this new teaching and learning process. The study established that in order to fully integrate online learning and teaching methodologies in higher education institutions, educators and students must both be fully committed. This requires more skills and training for both educators and students to be able to fully migrate to a new mode of teaching and learning. This can be achieved by employing an open on-line guides to build moocs (massive open on-line courses), the requirements are higher than open on-line courses. And an exact path resource requires robust financial and technical support within the institutions of high learning. Hence the study concluded that these challenges can still be addressed as there are already some educators who have known how to use online teaching and learning approaches and only require financial and resources support.

Keywords: Curriculum reform, transformation, online teaching, high institutions, readiness and blended mastering..

INTRODUCTION

Rapid technological innovation over the past decade has dramatically increased the range of methods that educating and gaining knowledge can occur. Learning environments that have been once restrained by way of space and time now no longer have the same constraints (Charles and Reid, 2007). The disruption prompted by using the current Covid-19 pandemic is unprecedented, and the resulting financial and social measures have brought big change (Krishnamurthy, 2020). To mitigate the spread of the virus, governments all over the world have imposed social distancing measures, lockdowns, and cessation of non-public contact outdoor on the spot households. The pandemic is for this reason having a huge effect on educational activity. In a depend of weeks, complete education systems from basic to higher education had to totally seriously change undertaking to evolve to an online teaching-learning state of affairs (Mishra *et al.,* 2020). According to UNESCO, higher training establishments (HEIs) were closed absolutely in 185 international locations in April 2020, affecting more than 1,000 million learners round the globe (Marinoni *et al.,* 2020). Higher education institutions have been actively stimulated to find effective and bendy delivery models to provide all students with greater handy get entry to exceptional getting to know experiences than is viable with ordinary on campus offerings alone. Time terrible students with commitments to family, earning, wellness, sport, technology and other interests are annoying a range of access points to getting to know and information.

At the same time, universities are sure through neighbourhood and professional requirements including tutorial integrity, organisational efficiency, scholar retention, and neighbourhood needs for the technologically-savvy worker of the expertise society. Blended mastering has been proposed as one solution that can decorate scholar mastering and engagement, enhance get right of entry to and flexibility, and tackle organizational and institutional imperatives in higher education (Bonk, Kim and Zeng, 2006; De George-Walker, Hafeez-Baig, Gururajan and Danaher, 2010; Graham, 2006; Twigg, 1996). Garrison and Kanuka (2004) have also argued that adopting a blended mastering strategy is a nice and low-risk strategy towards meeting the challenge of the transformational changes that technological developments bring to higher education. The promise of blended mastering has considered pastime and functions of the concept steadily enlarge in the higher training sector. In a worldwide comparative survey, Collis and Van Der Wende (2002) observed that it was well known for higher training institutions to utilise Self-determined blended mastering 3 information and verbal exchange technologies to complement traditional face-to-face or distance learning approaches. Bonk *et al.,* (2006) found that more than seven in ten respondents to a North American higher training survey expected to provide more than 40% of their courses in a blended format from 2013. Findings such as these recommend blended studying is more than a passing educational fad. The declaration of COVID-19 as a public health emergency disrupted various productive and industrial sectors (Government of Mexico, 2020), with education being one of the most impacted, because in addition to ensuring community members' health and integrity, it should also ensure academic quality (Valdez-Garca, López, Jiménez, Daz, Dávila, and

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Olivares, 2020). Despite the fact that some universities that consistently carry out innovation already have expertise with pilot implementations of educational projects that they might use, the emergency caused misunderstanding among the educational community's various actors (López and Valdez, 2019). Teachers had to transition content and practice to a new environment in a record-breaking amount of time. Furthermore, Covid-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on higher education around the world. This dilemma is most visible in higher education systems that rely largely on overseas student tuition fees and where a drop in student numbers implies a significant drop in university income (Skidmore, 2020). Ultimately, Universities have quickly developed new forms of teaching and learning in response to the current crisis, with shifts to online instruction, new kinds of evaluation, and creative digital communication technologies are all visible (Clow, 2020; Clune, 2020; Lederman, 2020). This paper therefore aimed to assess the high institutions readiness on curriculum transformation in digital era during covid_19 pandemic. The researcher explored how high institutions of learning transformed to a new way of teaching and learning through blended learning platform and how students and educators would still ensure quality education is sustained. The intention of open online courses is the concrete embodiment of Internet thinking. It's simple attribute is to keep the concepts of educational sources sharing, put ordinary lecture room teaching to "the Internet" through the facts technology. But it's no longer virtually recording route video and play on the internet, and it's an organized and designed teaching process, which is involved via the educating teams. It makes the traditional teacher-cantered and face-to-face teaching mode into the student-cantered blending teaching mode. In reality, open on line course is the product of "Internet +" era, and it is also the essential improvement course of universities (Gin and Xiao, 2020).

Objectives of the study

- To assess how institutions of high learning transformed their curriculum into digital content.
- To evaluate challenges experienced during the transformation of curriculumin digital era at Universities level.
- To find the best practices employed by Universities to transform curriculum in digital era and covid_19 pandemic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical framework

This study is informed by transformational model, which emphasis that the believe that management is a procedure that is ultimately concerned with fostering change hence it is indispensable in this study to employ transformational leadership model. In distinction to the concept of "management," which suggests preservation or maintenance, "leadership" implies a process where there is movement from anyplace we are now to some future place or situation that is different. Leadership also implies intentionality, in the sense that the implied exchange is now not random "change for change's sake" however is as a substitute directed towards some future end or condition which is desired or valued. Accordingly, management is a purposive process which is inherently value-based (Astin and Astin, 2000). Furthermore

instructor-leadership, conceptualizations of leadership frequently assert that leaders influence followers towards a purpose (Yukl, 2006). With appreciate to instructor-leadership, instructors may additionally set specific path desires or objectives regarding improvements in students' situation knowledge, critical thinking skills, and interpersonal skills. Arguably, some goals might also not constantly be collective desires as is typically associated with leadership theory. However, a shared goal with regard to mastering or tutorial achievement is probably to exist (Peters, 2014). That is, students may strive for true grades for the prestige that is associated with exact grades, profession reasons, accelerated satisfaction, and so on. At the identical time, instructors may also be involved with proper grades due to the fact a grade is frequently a gauge for instructing effectiveness and quality, thus affecting promotional potentialities.

Challenges of online teaching/blended learning

The lack of first-class expert development, college policies that fail to help mobile technological know-how use, instructors' beliefs about the position of technological know-how in the curriculum, and cultures that are simply now not supportive of cellular computing adoption have made the integration of cellular initiatives difficult in U.S. colleges and universities. Although this claim is made in USA, the truth is it has become global trends as all high institutions of education migrated to online learning hence the use of cellular integration is the way to go. Hence many researchers and authors conclude from their trip that technology integration of any form has been moderately achieved, if at all (Bauer and Kenton, 2005; Bolick, Berson, Friedman, and Porfeli, 2007; Er and Kay, 2005; Franklin and Molebash, 2007; Hew and Brush, 2007; Lawless and Pellegrino, 2007). Other researchers trust that science integration has been achieved greater in some segments of industry and society than others (Drucker, 2006; Hughes and Ooms, 2004; Judge, Puckett, and Cabuk, 2004; Swain and Pearson, 2003). A study by Yusuf and Ahmad (2020) emphasised that in order to fully integrate online learning and teaching methodologies in higher education institutions, educators and students must both be fully committed. Those involved must improve their understanding and readiness for this new teaching and learning process. In addition to the abilities, (allowing educators and students to effectively use online platforms), appropriate interconnection. This requires more skills and training for both educators and students to be able to fully migrate to a new mode of teaching and learning.

Best practices employed to address blended learning

The present situation offers an advantage, as there is \san existing social media platform where most students are familiar with the usage. So, in addition to other ancillary platforms developed by institutions of higher learning, such as Google Classroom, Since Moodle and Webex, as well as a variety of other existing social media platforms, may be used online, because students are already accustomed with apps like WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, Google Meet, and Instagram. Educators and students who are new to or are first-timers in the process of learning about these online platforms will undoubtedly confront some difficulties (Yusuf and Ahmad, 2020). Blended getting to know environments are at these crossroads; they integrate allotted (or technology-mediated) coaching with traditional face-to-face instruction (Graham,

2005; Graham and Allen, 2005; Graham, Allen, and Ure, 2005). There is a growing focus of the use of blended approaches in greater education. John Bourne, editor of The Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, has predicted a dramatic make bigger in the wide variety of hybrid (i.e., blended) courses to consist of as many as 80-90% of the range of guides (Young, 2002), while de Boer (2002) claims that "blended gaining knowledge of is already the norm" in many European international locations (p. 29). Namibian institutions of high learning are not in exceptions as blended learning is already here and the educators must adopt best practices to embrace blended learning. In addition the possible for technological know-how to act as a catalyst in the transformation of standard tactics to instructing is a notion that has been written about for some time (Reigeluth and Joseph, 2002; West and Graham, 2005). Garrison and Kanuka (2004) have recently written about the achievable for blended learning to transform higher education: "The actual check of blended mastering is the superb integration of the two primary aspects (face-to-face and Internet technology) such that we are now not just including on to the existing dominant approach or method".

Studies shows that students also discovered that it is hard to maintain interest in an in simple terms on-line context, reporting the following good sized barriers (among others) (Liang *et al.,* 2020; Mishra *et al.,* 2020): boredom, sense of isolation, lack of time to follow the different subjects, and lack of self-organizing capabilities. Interestingly, professors also stated that isolation was a substantial trouble in designing the courses, indicating the want to locate the highest quality stability of man or woman student-cantered learning and collaborative learning, fostering digital communities of practice to enhance scholar peer engagement and collaboration (Carolan *et al.,* 2020). The sudden transition from face-to-face to distance educating also required a instructing body of workers with numerous levels of readiness to use unique pedagogies with specific capabilities (Marinoni *et al.,* 2020). The digital divide can also be utilized to academics. Not all school contributors are at ease in an on-line setting, and a generational divide may additionally separate these who have relied on classical methods and by no means used technological know-how tools from the younger faculty who may additionally be extra adept with newer technologies (Govindarajan and Srivastava, 2020). Different from the common curriculum development methods, the centre of attention of open online course is teaching design and building of curriculum resources. The intention of an open on-line guides is to build MOOCs (massive open on-line courses), the requirements are higher than open on-line courses. And an exact path resource requires robust financial and technical support (Gin and Xiao, 2020). For this reason during this digital era institutions of high learning requires more financial boosts to enable to transform their curriculum to digital content. Eventually there is also a need for more expertise to do such curriculum transformation. Therefore, high institutions managers need to redesign work ideas from the development necessities and content material of open online courses. Moreover, improve the work technology, the building and use of open on line courses need to be finished through academic techniques, which includes the improvement of blended mastering or flipped classroom. In addition, the construction of an open on line publications depends on the route platform for sharing. Today, the core of MOOC is the platform Management of high institutions want to comprehend the advantages of the platform, and the use of curriculum sources in the curriculum platform. They require enhancing the technological know-how and learning the technological know-how of information analysis to manipulate the best of curriculum construction in real-time (Gin and Xiao, 2020). According to previous research by Agrawal et al. (2016) online methodology has six (6) benefits, including learners being able to obtain expert knowledge, competitive and academic examination preparation, anytime and anywhere access, interactive section, reduced learning time, employability skills, and sources of skills and knowledge maintained to procure. A study by Victor, Aurora and Rodrigo (2020), the technological resources handy grant more than one choices for teaching, such as giving lectures via videoconference, sharing fabric (e.g., slides, videos, presentations), interacting via chats, creating debate forums or workgroups, supervising practical activities, evaluating and tutoring students, recording explanations and making them on hand to students, etc. Furthermore, these tools can be used synchronously or asynchronously and integrated. All of these resources ought to be supported, however, by using an academic methodology to hold students' interest and keep them worried in the course. To make sure readability of the instructional objective of every activity, instructors should format the audio-visual material, sketch students' work time, and use the right tools for each activity for example, for tutoring, videoconferencing activities, or scholar assessment. Therefore, it is essential to make sessions dynamic by way of introducing collaborative and formative tools. It hence additionally appears vital to introduce energetic methodologies for the interaction of students and professors, and that interact students in peer collaboration (Victor, Aurora and Rodrigo, 2020).

METHODS

The researcher has chosen to use qualitative approach in this study by employing a case study design. Case study is employed in this study to elicit information from the Lecturers and University managers such as dean of faculties, head of departments in various faculties and subject heads. The case must be defined in order to focus, frame, and manage data collection and analysis. This entails being selective and detailed in selecting the case's specifications, such as the participant(s), location, and/or process to be investigated, as well as establishing a deadline for the investigation (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2006; YIN, 2014). In this case when doing case study research, meticulous preparation and planning, as well as the construction of a methodical execution framework, are crucial (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2006; Stewart, 2014; YIN, 2014). Focus group discussion is used in this study to collect data from the lecturers and university managers and data collected were analysed using content thematic analysis method. This was done in order to explicitly elicit adequate information from all participants on how they employed curriculum transformation during the current Coivd-19 pandemic. This allowed the researcher to make thoroughly analysis of how Universities reformed their curriculum to online setting which is total different from the traditional practices.

Population
The population of this study was all International University of Management managers and lecturers. For that reason the study included all participants at the university who are playing pivotal role in ensuring the curriculum reform.

Sample

The sample consist of all 14 lecturers from the faculty of education, 3 lecturers from faculty of tourism and event management, 4 lecturers from faculty of strategic management and business administration, 3 lecturers from the faculty of ITC, 2 lecturers from faculty of environmental studies and 4 lecturers from nursing faculty including all 5 deans from all the five faculties and 10 Heads of departments. The 45 participants were purposively sampled because they were deemed fit to give in depth and detailed information about the subject under investigation.

Research instruments

The researcher used focus group discussion with all the participants to collect the data for this study. The focus group discussion included open ended questions that were posed to the participants which allowed them to fully give detailed answers.

Procedures of data collection

The researcher requested consent from all the faculties at the university to have 2 hours one day focus group discussion with all deans, heads of departments and lecturers in all faculties. The venue was identified and the researcher started with the participants on the topical issue on how the curriculum was transformed at the university in different faculties and discussed challenges and successes from all faculties.

Data analysis

Content thematic data analysis was used in this study to analysis the focus group discussion data. The themes that emerged from this research were grouped and analysed in order to obtain more thorough information regarding the subject of this study (Creswell, 2012). The analysis was done through detailed description format. The study was limited to 45 educators and managers from five faculties at International University of Management private institution in Namibia. The data obtained from these 45 participants could not be generalised to all institutions of high learning that are in Namibia. Furthermore, data obtained were mainly preliminary data for the themes and factors for this particular study topic. The researcher propose that other researchers shall need to further conduct an extensive quantitative research so that the data and statistics obtained can be further expanded and generalised to all public and private institutions of higher learning in Namibia. In addition other scholars can also make a comparison of their results of their studies between public and private institutions of higher learning in future. This study also reviewed thescope of study on challenges and best practices faced or employed by online educators and in the future, the scope of the study may be extended to the scope of institutions and incorporating feedback from the students involved in online learning as well.

FINDINGS

A total of 45 faculties' members (educators) have participated in this case study and all participants in this study were all first timers conducting online classes on a full time mode. Out of the total participants, 30 were lecturers from five faculties at the institution, 5 deans of faculties, and 10 heads of departments who comprises of both female and male educators. The results showed that educators had pragmatic approaches they have employed for their teaching and learning, namely synchronous teaching and learning and then asynchronous learning. For the synchronous teaching and learning approach, educators and students met and communicated in a virtual classroom. On the other hand, if educators and students do not have good internet access, they then resort to the second option (asynchronous learning) method that allows educators to upload videos and audio lectures and reading information to students and students who could study at a later or at any given time when the internet facilities were in stable conditions. In asynchronous learning approach is where the usage of WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, Google Meet, and Instagram applied. Furthermore, the results revealed that by using the new online approaches lead to boredom, sense of isolation, lack of time to follow the different subjects, and lack of self-organizing capabilities among students. In addition the results showed that those involved must improve their understanding and readiness for this new teaching and learning process. This requires more skills and training for both educators and students to be able to fully migrate to a new mode of teaching and learning.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The outcome of this study can provide some acumens to those involved in online teaching and learning, especially institutions of higher learning offering programs of study, educators, and institutions managers making decisions on curriculum reform for online plat form. Furthermore, this study may contribute to the development of online learning methods besides traditional method or face to face practices. The findings can also serve as guidance for educators in understanding the challenges of online teaching. Established findings of this study showed that those involved must improve their understanding and readiness for this new teaching and learning process. Yusuf and Ahmad (2020) emphasised that in order to fully integrate online learning and teaching methodologies in higher education institutions, educators and students must both be fully committed. This requires more skills and training for both educators and students to be able to fully migrate to a new mode of teaching and learning. The intention of an open on-line guides is to build MOOCs (massive open on-line courses), the requirements are higher than open on-line courses. And an exact path resource requires robust financial and technical support (Gin and Xiao, 2020). These challenges can still be addressed as there are already some educators who have known how to use online teaching and learning approaches and only require financial and resources support.

Recommendations

There is a need for more training on online teaching and learning at University in order to equip all the curriculum role player with necessary skills on how to study and assess online content. Refresher courses are also required to for those who have know how already to keep catching up with new IT skills and development.

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