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Rethinking Education in the Post Covid-19 Era: Implications for the Academia

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Abstract

COVID-19 Pandemic has completely altered every aspect of work and personal life. The current study attempts to shed light on the role the education sector in the new normal. The study outlines how the recent pandemic affected academia in general and higher education sector in particular. The research highlights the new approaches and practices introduced in the sector and how they reshaped the face of the conventional education system. The paper also underlines how educational institutions worked to focus on technology and developments in their assessment. Towards the end, the paper offers critical insight to decision-makers in the education sector, particularly in the higher education sector, as a way forward to sustain any such Pandemics in the future. Overall, the paper is a fine piece of critical work to help guide academic authorities in managing the new normal and understanding how to ensure such pandemics do not affect the higher education sector in the future.

Keywords

Academia, Higher Education, COVID-19, Pandemic, Universities

1. Introduction

Unquestionably, universities are considered the oldest institutions still in operation in today's world. One of which is the Institution of Al-Qarawiyyin, commonly known as Al-Karaouine or Al Quaraouiyine, a Moroccan university located in Fez founded as a mosque by Fatima al-Fihri. In the beginning, it was established as a mosque in 857-859 A.D. It is one of the Islamic Golden Age's most important spiritual and educational institutions and is considered the oldest institution, followed by the University of Bologna, established in Italy in 1088. The

worldwide higher education market was worth $77.41 billion in 2020 and is expected to increase to $114.69 billion by 2026 at a compound yearly growth rate (CAGR) of 9.3% throughout the forecast period (Market Data Forecast ltd, 2022). Universities are merely granted as the service-providing sector (Lella et al., 2012).

Pandemics have historically compelled humanity to abandon the past and reimagine their world (Roy 2020). Will COVID-19 lead to the disruptive shift and structural changes that many in and out of the industry have been promoting? Or will it be remembered as just another hiccup on the well-worn path of higher education? Will the pandemic's disruptive consequences be perceived unevenly throughout the industry? The current paper has been designed to find out the answers to these questions. First, higher education as a service is explored, followed by current literature on the influence of COVID-19 on the education industry. Towards the end, the paper discusses the way forward for higher education institutions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Universities as Service Institutions

Many lines of symmetry can be drawn between services and education (Ng and Forbes 2009; Ledden et al. 2011; Guilbault 2016). The fact is that the fundamental foundations of the service sectors extended to universities and higher education. The beginning of the logic which is service-dominant has been acknowledged as a powerful blueprint for conceptual development and a complete transformation (Vargo and Lusch 2004a, b; Svensson and Grönroos 2008; Vargo and Lusch 2017). The 'application of specialized skills and knowledge is the essential unit of exchange' within a university framework, establishing the basis for their distinction and competitive advantage (Lusch et al. 2007, p. 7). Furthermore, students and teachers are the focal points of the outcome of the educational experience (Guilbault, 2016 Khalid et al., 2019). There is no doubt that there is no value until an offering is used, and value is always co-produced in the higher education setting (Elsharnouby 2015). Educational institutions exist to combine and turn micro-specialized abilities into complicated market-demanded services (Lusch et al. 2007, p. 7). Within the education sector, it has always been a debate about either student are products or customers (Guilbault 2018). Instead of a dyadic transaction, the higher education research area must embrace the networks of interactions at the heart of services and their value (Barile et al. 2016).

2.2 COVID-19’s Impact on Higher Education

The coronavirus pandemic is resulting in a "massive wave of disruption" in the higher education sector (MacIntosh 2020), with the global higher education environment "changing dramatically" as a matter of fact of the virus's spread (Ahmed & Ismail, 2020; Lee & Han, 2021). Over 1.6 billion students have been

affected, accounting for 91% of all students worldwide (DeVaney et al. 2020). The disease outbreak has forced the world to try new things with remote teaching. Indeed, demand for online academic achievement has risen dramatically, with Coursera reporting a 644% year-on-year increase in March 2020. (DeVaney et al. 2020).

Universities struggled to provide academic (and revenue) continuity through "emergency remote teaching" when they were unable to deliver on-campus learning. Indeed, universities, like many other organisations, encounter various difficult situations and are "growing up" digitally in real-time and in full view (MacIntosh 2020). More extreme views blow the whistle and professionalism into question. The 'credit hour,' as well as the strict and complex laws regarding school terms and attendance LeBlanc (2020) emphasizes competency-based degree routes that are not time-bound and, thus, trigger more academic creativity and innovations. Govindarajan and Srivastava (2020) express similar reservations about the four-year residential programs and their monetization. They argue for more blended learning, the availability of various courses, and further customized online delivery. They are concerned about how an increase in tuition fees be favorable in such a disruptive education market.

2.3 A Goal-Oriented Approach to Preparedness

The new normal post-COVID-19 period provides a chance to reconsider educational aspirations. The development of readiness in disasters, illnesses, and crises is one of the aims of making the curriculum relevant, suitable, and responsive. Existing curricular goals address a set of readiness competencies in several study sectors (Mozammel et al., 2021). However, the emphasis of these objectives is on natural catastrophe preparedness. Given the upcoming new normal post-COVID-19 timeframe, there is a demand for a more concentrated aim on global disease outbreak preparation.

It is necessary to establish the purpose of preparation while developing it. However, it appears that reaching an agreement on a definition of preparation is difficult, as evidenced by its current position in medical education (McCabe et al., 2010; Nelson et al., 2007). It appears to be a hazy idea whose terrains have not been fully defined. However, comparable terminology such as health readiness (Khan et al., 2018), emergency preparedness (Gebbie & Qureshi, 2002), and disaster preparedness (Kent, 1994) are frequently seen.

Once it comes especially to higher education, initiatives to enhance the role of nursing in managing international illness epidemics have been placed (Corless et al., 2018). (Corless et al., 2018). Objectives for preparation have also been established in various higher education disciplines (e.g., see Uhernik, 2016 in neuroscience in trauma therapy; Kaslow, 2004 in professional psychology; Ng, 2012 in digital literacy). In the post pandemic period, these efforts should be expanded to include more disciplines such as teacher education, agricultural extension, transportation studies, health services, and other sectors connected to

social services. The COVID-19 epidemic undoubtedly took educators and students off stride. This incident exposed curricular shortcomings. One approach towards closing this gap is to create a set of readiness skills that will serve as a curricular aim.

With the constraints imposed by COVID-19, a new standard curriculum may potentially include content blending. This method reduces the amount of time spent on each course while still meeting all of the curriculum goals. This technique will allow for incorporating curricular content demands from different topics in the design of lessons (Romano et al., 2012). In teaching literature, science, and history, for instance, curriculum might be combined by going through different eras and focusing on scientific innovations and literary masterpieces within each period.

Fogarty and Stoehr (1991) proposed many different approaches. They proposed eleven integration models, including fragmented, linked, nested, sequenced, shared, webbed, threaded, integrated, immersed, and networked integration. These models require incorporating concepts and techniques from various areas or disciplines into a syllabus. In light of the ongoing constraints, it might be a sensible idea for educators to lessen curricular requirements to cover all topics.

Besides combining content, several academic institutions are considering reducing syllabi. They seek to educate "important" content while removing non-essential content. However, one fundamental issue with this concept is the definition of "necessary" content. Print (1993) stated that numerous factors should be considered while choosing material. The study suggests the following three factors for the present worldwide COVID-19 outbreak:

1. **Importance:** The significant factor applies when considering content in terms of how vital it is to the issue under consideration. Where the information is thought to be relevant to the topic, it is judged significant and hence suggested for inclusion in a curriculum.
2. **Relevance:** This factor is based on the fact that material should indeed be connected to traditional norms, goals, principles, and concerns of the community to enable students to become productive members of that community and society at large.
3. **Usefulness**: Educationists should examine the content's present and future value. They should ensure that the contents must have some material that learners must learn to apply in the immediate present, as well as content that will prepare them for the future.

The upcoming new normal post-COVID-19 period can be a teaching time for substantial, relevant, and beneficial information. For example, Gonser (2020) offered topics ranging from "why hygiene matters" and "how germs spread" to "ethical judgments, the science behind how viral diseases function, or the mathematics behind pandemics." Flannery (2020) conducted interviews with instructors who incorporated relevant topics. One instructor began working with her pupils on the topic of coronavirus vaccines in animals, which is significant in

general and ranching communities. Another teacher concentrated on instilling a new typical behavior known as social distance. These are some samples of important content in the post-COVID-19 period.

The COVID-19 situation is restructuring educational material. Between content integration and content reduction, educators must carefully assess each choice without compromising much of the knowledge that should be taught to students.

2.4 A Variety of Teaching Methods

Several educational institutions are considering flexible ways for curriculum implementation. The majority of them are examining the influence of technology. Many institutions are moving toward total online or blended learning mode in instruction in an era of social distancing practice displaying a big new normal conduct.

During the post-COVID-19 time, a fully online teaching strategy may be conceivable. It was made available online via several online courses and electronic textbooks (Patrinos & Shmis, 2020). In fact, in China, the virus's original epicenter, more than 180 million children were instructed to stay at home. However, instruction had to continue when schools were closed for quarantine, albeit in a different format.

Furthermore, in the field of educational technology, blended learning is characterized as the "new normal" (Norberg et al., 2011). Despite some ambiguity in its description, blended learning is typically defined as an educational strategy that combines traditional classroom methods with online digital means (Graham 2013). It requires the actual presence of both the teacher and the learner, as well as learner control over time, place, or pacing (Huang et al., 2009). Given these characteristics of blended learning, it offers promising possibilities for use in education in the new normal era.

While comprehensive online and blended learning appear to be the "holy grail" of education in this new century, they necessitate major modifications. Some rich economies have adopted blended learning as an established educational approach. This approach has allowed these economies to deal with the present COVID-19 pandemic. Structures and trained instructors within these economies have assisted online learning and teaching (Olivier, 2020). On the other hand, educational institutions in other nations must carefully prepare virtual learning solutions. It requires an assessment of their skills based on the dependability of local power supply, internet connection, and instructor preparation (Loureiro & Guerreiro, 2021).

Blended learning remains dependent on a conventional classroom mode. Given the method of social distancing in this modern age, group work approaches that require interactions with close physical interaction, such as structured and informal cooperative learning groups, think-pair-share, peer instruction, and jigsaw may be amended or diminished, if not eliminated, from the instructional methods

of teaching options (Brame & Biel, 2015). On the contrary, less movement and physical contact approaches may be used more frequently. Direct teaching is one technique. It is a method of education that is planned, scheduled, and managed by instructors. Instruction is mostly delivered to students through tactics such as tutorials or workshops. Teachers often control the process using this strategy, making students less active ("Glossary," 1971).

As education systems deal with the pandemic, they must also consider how to restore better, with a continual improvement of responsibility on the part of all stakeholders and a greater understanding and strong urge on the need to shut the opportunity gap and make sure that all children have equal access to quality education ("Educational challenges and opportunities of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic," n.d.).

2.5 Pedagogical Assessment Reassurance

Many educational systems were closed during student evaluation time in the education setting. Consequently, many instructional assessment approaches have been implemented in response to the COVID-19 dilemma. These approaches are quite likely to become the new norm in education. Education systems have produced implementation instructions that have altered many components of the curriculum's evaluation component (Cahapay, 2020). This is, certainly, a new chapter in the curriculum.

There are two main categories of online educational assessment modes: synchronous and asynchronous. The synchronous mode involves the pupil and the teacher collaborating at a predetermined time through online apps such as Zoom. It may also be accomplished through phone, in which the instructor delivers real-time lessons to the students. On the other hand, the asynchronous version does not need the teacher and students to engage online simultaneously. They are based on several spaces and times. For instance, Moodle is a program that is used to complete the assessment form, in which teachers provide assessment assignments for students to complete (UKFIET, 2020).

In the case of the grading system, several schools have opted to go from quantitative to qualitative assessment scales, such as the pass-or-fail method (Farrington, 2020). Although the decision is motivated by good intentions, some individuals are concerned about its consequences. They believe it may harm the students' motivation to achieve good grades or marks (Dilanchyan, 2020). In the context of student motivation, the benefits and drawbacks of various evaluation instruments are disputed (Barnes & Buring, 2012).

With the ongoing global crisis, the traditional quantitative assessment technique will likely remain intact in the new normal, and there will likely be a tendency for types of inaccuracy in school evaluation systems. Due to the tough circumstances for students, teachers are found to be too lenient in allocating marks and students are receiving high grades (Nitko & Brookhart, 2014). It is seen as one of the challenges to the reliability of student performance, about which several

education stakeholders have raised concerns.

The COVID-19 disaster is profoundly altering the educational assessment system. The significant shift of learner assessment to online, as well as changes to marking schemes, is unavoidable. These modifications encourage instructors to continue high-quality assessments (Dam, 2021).

3. The way forward for higher educational institutions

3.1.1 Focus on Distance Education

Educational institutions are now working on the prospect of distance education. The growing acceptance of distance learning due to the recent pandemic should be considered as a new normal for the education sector. This provides better access to quality education and opportunities for everyone and can also help the education sector sustain in the long run. Particularly, in the case of future outbreaks like COVID-19, distance learning will help to keep the education sector nearly unaffected. Distance education has a long history and the emergence of internet-based learning has made it even more convenient in the 21st century. Moreover, the internet revolution allows course material to be made available digitally, making distance learning more feasible. Importantly, with high-speed internet technologies such as 4G and 5G, universities can now run both models for distance learning (online interactive courses or recorded lecture-based programs).

3.1.2 Online Interactive Courses

Interactive online learning courses have become a new norm in the education sector. Particularly in the higher education sector, this approach has received much appreciation and acceptance (Ahmed et al., 2021; Roque-Hernández et al., 2021). It offers convenience for individuals looking for interactive education but in the comfort of their own location. Importantly, it offers the opportunity for learners to receive education from any part of the world without traveling, thus saving much money, time, and effort. Top universities like Harvard, Stanford and Oxford have all started working on it and running top programs in full swing (Guo & Huang, 2021).

3.2 Recorded Lecture-Based Programs

The launch of massive online open courses (MOOCs) platforms is a new avenue for higher education institutes to consider. These platforms mainly offer free courses and higher education institutions have now started collaborating with them to offer full-fledged degree programs at a reasonable price, thus making it equally attractive and affordable for prospective students. The success rate of such programs is very encouraging (Mota et al., 2022) and more educational institutions are working globally to start such collaborations (Zaremohzzabieh et al., 2022). Moreover, the recent pandemic has made the recorded lecture-based teaching

more acceptable since there were nations that discouraged this mode of learning in the past.

3.3 Governance

Universities should deal publicly with the issue of democracy, which is frequently avoided as "civil." Given the health crises we are all experiencing, although in very different circumstances, democratic governance has been largely suspended, and many critics have remained silent. A basic "authoritarianism" against "democracy" storyline has taken hold, recalling the 1970s Huntingdon argument on the "dangers of democracy." There is a general perception that democracy is ineffective when dealing decisively with crises. There is no doubt that Covid-19 plans are not being made public. The Covid-19 crisis successfully regulated democracy and society globally, elevating authoritarian governments while silencing their opponents. However, grassroots democracy flourished due to social solidarity and mutual connections. Democracy cannot be "postponed" without causing harm. Supporters of democratic governance everywhere in the world must respond to this wide spectrum of effects, whether it is fruitful or useless, to discover entry sites and actions that might take action in advance to long-term political damage and foster possible gains (Brown et al. 2020). The university must participate in this democratic movement and provide a new perspective of a stable society.

Deep and long-lasting socioeconomic inequities cannot be the foundation of democracy. We've previously mentioned the digital gap as a current and direct kind of social exclusion at today's universities. However, the Covid issue has shown a clear worldwide split between the protected and the vulnerable people. The impact of the pandemic has been starkly different in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, with deprived areas suffering twice the number of infections than the average, a difference that rises to three times the average among black and ethnic minority populations (Public Health England, 2020). The global North and South disparities are also on display, with the former experiencing already exhausted health systems and a failure to maintain basic levels of income all over the population. The democratic health of communities has also deteriorated, with the development of a blatant "survival of the fittest" manner of thought and a return to a type of racism concerning the aged and vulnerable last seen in Germany in the 1940s (Dyer, 2021). Universities cannot claim that this is a normal scenario; it is more similar to a post-war rebuilding period when accepted natural cures must be thrown aside and the emergency on our doorsteps must be tackled with all seriousness.

An idea that has prevailed in reaction to the current problem is "resilience," (Kirk & Rifkin, 2020) suggested that with the Covid-19 disaster, "we must enter a new age: the 'period of resilience''. Surprisingly, the idea has been prominent in international development research for some time (Chandler, 2014), indicating a natural inclination to recover more quickly from tragedy or change. People,

organizations, and governments have the diverse capacity to recover from significant calamities such as famines, natural disasters, pandemics, and financial crises. Developing numerous organizations associate resilience with crises, catastrophes, or risk management. The most basic is about how communities adapt to stress. However, there is a more critical, less policy-oriented understanding of resilience that regards it as a way of thinking and behaving in a complicated environment rather than a policy aim. With classical types of political portrayal and even approved types of the correct division becoming less relevant, resilience practice may act as a lens well placed to focus responses to a growingly unprotected way of life, where the true source of authority lies in a diverse and plural society. At this time, the approach of political participation and community-based study must be brought to the forefront to help frame the argument about what the university may look like beyond Covid-19.

3.4 A. I Based Education

Artificial intelligence-based educational tools can play a big part in the education in future (Feng & Law, 2021). It has already been regarded as most important innovative technology for the education sector. Artificial intelligence can best help educational institutions improve student assessment, online teaching, understanding student needs and exploring learning gaps for better academic achievement. The use of artificial intelligence in education has already started and academicians see a promising contribution of A.I based technologies (Paek & Kim, 2021). With the use of artificial intelligence, educational institutions can enrich the course content to boost student learning and comprehension. This has been made very clear, particularly in the last few years (Ouyang & Jiao, 2021) that artificial intelligence can help students learn better, provide better cases, scenarios and help understand concepts in education more profoundly. It is also appearing to work better for responsive academic progression.

3.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the current paper aimed to provide a way forward for educational institutions for teaching and learning. The paper suggests academicians and management in the education sector particularly at the higher education level to focus on distance learning, remote learning prospects, governance of learning and academic decision making and technology in the shape of artificial intelligence. With these refinements in the academic setting, academic institutions can actively sustain and avoid any future crisis, such as COVID-19 Pandemic affecting teaching and learning.

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