COVID-19 and online education during emergencies in higher education: A case study of Islamic University in Uganda Females Campus

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ABSTRACT

Higher education faced unplanned, unwanted, un experienced, tense test in online learning with Novel Covid-19 pandemic. For all the stakeholders participating in this type of training from lecturers, students and support ICT staff its unwelcome but the university systems were stuck on how they have to go through to ensure that they end Semester II academic year 2019/20. Early January 2020, the outbreak of the Covid-19 caused Ugandan universities to close the physical campuses following a presidential directive. On 20th March 2020, from lower primary, secondary education to universities. This forced university administration to instruct teaching staff to teach all courses on-line apart from practical courses that need laboratory training. This paper focused on instructional strategies in Uganda and focuses on a case of Islamic University in Uganda Females' Campus (IUIUFC). Fifteen specific instructional strategies are presented to summarize current online teaching experiences for university instructors who might conduct online education in similar circumstances. The study concluded with 15 high impact principles for online education.

Keywords: Covid-19, instructional strategies, online teach and learning, academic managers and IUIUFC

Online teaching and learning are a gold mine and as the saying goes; "*every dark cloud has a silver lining*". Universities have taken on a neoliberal approach towards education where they will realise "*mass-oriented higher education*".

In 2020 March is the year of silence buildings are in lockdown and staff barred from their offices and the students who remained behind were unable to return home since they couldn't afford tickets to return back home. Learning has been displaced but not discontinued. Novel Covid-19 is exposing creativity from lecturers' homes. The use of WhatsApp, skype, learning management systems (LMS), videoconferencing, google class room, zoom groups were urgently created for coordinating the strategy and teaching staff are supporting one another. The universities are trying to win trust from their stakeholders [1]. Some schools of thought argue that there has been quicken decolonization of curriculums a shift from traditional teaching and research will open opportunities for collaboration. The universities should stop thinking of physical location but find

them selves suddenly free to think of their new place in society. There is need for universities to gain public confidence. Universities are already thinking of ways to cash ins, it's the best moment for staff to value their employers [2, 3].

INTRODUCTION

Early January 2020, the outbreak of the Novel Covid-19 caused Ugandan universities to close the physical campuses following a presidential directive on 20th March 2020 in a bid to avoid the possible rapid spread of new infections of COVID- 19. All educational institutions in Uganda from lower primary, secondary education, other Tertiary Institutions including BTVET institutions to universities. Due to the wide spread Coronavirus disease (Novel Covid-19) in the rest of world, following Uganda's fear for protection of its citizen given the limping health sector, government decided to close all schools and universities.

Uganda has an estimated total of 15,000,000 students and 548,000 teachers at all levels of education and 600,000 refugee learners in the 13 districts hosting refugees in the country. Some of these settlements are located in high risk towns bordering countries that have reported confirmed cases of COVID-19, increasing the risks for the entire school system in Uganda. In January, 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of the new Corona virus disease a public health emergency of international concern. WHO also indicated that it was spreading rapidly to other regions, and countries. According to UNESCO at least 165 countries have closed schools globally and more than 516,000 million children and youth are affected. 17 other countries are implementing localized school closure. In Uganda, there are over 15 million learners enrolled in the education system.

According to UNESCO there are a number of applications, platforms and resources list here to help parents, teachers, schools, lecturers and school administrators to facilitate student learning and provide social care and interaction during closure these include; rresources to provide psychosocial support, ddigital learning management systems, ssystems built for use on basic mobile phones, ssystems with strong offline functionality, mmassive open oonline ccourse (MOOC) Platforms, self-directed learning content, mmobile reading applications, ccollaboration platforms that support live-video communication, tools for teachers to create of digital learning content and eexternal repositories of distance learning solutions [4]. Online resources connect educators and learners with each other in separate locations, assessing information and environments and supporting continued professional development for educators [5].

The minister of education instructed Ugandan universities not force students to pay for and do online Examinations during this period, yet quite a number of our students do not have the required facilities and the money to engage in online teaching. The ministry therefore, decided that all these Examinations be suspended until when the country is out of this crisis since it benefits the few since a reasonable number of students don't have the required facilities and money for this engagement.

Following the directive of the Executive Board (EB) commonly called Senate not to stop teaching rather continue engaging learners on all courses using all university online platforms and other available user-friendly online platforms agreeable to students hence the forceful beginning of online teaching in Islamic university in Uganda. In a short period, hundreds of faculty members

started to teach in front of computer screens, and their students have to stay at home and take the courses by the use of internet. Beyond Uganda, with the spread of Novel Covid-19 across the world, as of March 10, 65 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, the middle East, North America, and South America announced or implemented school and university closures and most of universities have forced localize closure [4, 6]. This paper therefore identifies the high-impact practice principles of online higher education and provides a case study for colleagues at universities to consider conducting online education in similar circumstances although for long universities had dragged their feet in taking the move to online teaching and learning.

CASE FOCUS

Its is a huge, unsettling shift to transfer all the existing courses online in a matter of days. In over-all, a comprehensive online course necessitates an elaborate lesson plan design, teaching materials such as audio and video contents, as well as technology support teams. However, due to the sudden emergence of the Novel Covid-19, most faculty members are encountering the challenges of lack of online teaching experience, early preparation, or support from educational technology teams.

In addition to the challenges encountered by the faculty members, existing research indicates that more than 60% of the students dream big, spend more time in-class study than out-side class study and lack of active academic maturity and involvement [7]. In additional, based on the analysis of student's responses on social media, for such a large-scale online teaching, the challenges for students did not come from technical operational obstacles. Instead, they have difficulties due to the lack of good learning attitude. Students often have problems such as lack of self-discipline, suitable learning materials, or good learning environments when they are self-isolated at home.

The present case study focuses on those challenges presented above, and discuss how faculties can implement effective instructional strategies to prevent negative learning attitudes of college students and ensure efficient and effectiveness of online education.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Based on the observations of online teaching at IUIUFC, this paper clarifies 15 instructional strategies to improve student's learning concentration and engagement in order to achieve a smooth transition to online learning:

1. Policy matters-Emergency executive (EB) emergency meeting; that decided that education must continue online in spite university closure. A memo was sent to all students instructing them to go back home & continue classes online. Any lecturer who doesn't implement the Senate decision is going against the policy.

2. Do whatever it takes to get through this phase of the invisible enemy- academic departments must craft how learning should take place no matter what in line with measuring consideration of aspects like curriculum, resources and design the learning space.

3. Emergency preparedness by the teaching staff to immediately switch from the face to face teaching mode to online teaching mode at such a big scale. The university immediately upgraded the existing online platforms to ensure that it has enough capacity to handle all the university courses.

4. Student as a customer- there is anxiety all over the world and depression is rampant not only among students but teachers as well. This pandemic has added to many global threats that result into economic disasters [7]. It's should be noted that scarcity of resources deprives cognitive learning. Students whose parents can't provide food, data boundless for her online learning, close family members are very ill, they landlord is forcing the family out of the house, they lost loved ones and has less safety at home than school is unable to perform. State Minister from the Islamic University Student Union (IUSU) complained as seen below;

5. *We have learnt about the continuous giving of online course works as well as setting deadlines for their submissions by lecturers through a number of phone calls we have received from students thus making their lives uncomfortable and it is contrary to the directives of the minister of education and sports issued on 5th April, 2020 as quoted in the directive no.6 on the however part of her speech "…we have therefore, decided that all those exams be suspended until we are out of this crisis".* Like other institutions have done, we also hope to be responsible Ugandans by being in agreement with the presidential guidelines, ministry of health and followed by the ministry of Education and sports where our mighty university (IUIU) directly subscribes as an institution. Using different online platforms to cover small different units and incorporate students' choices. IUIU students on all the four campuses have demonstrated weak persistence in online learning which will affect their learning effectiveness. Teaching staff are sending and discussing with students their prepared online units/topic/ modular system while following the course material/outline to ensure that learning takes place either by the use of ERP university system or use of zoom video meetings and others to enable them cover the entire curriculum is covered per paper, course and year. The Guild president wrote to the university administration requesting for some changes; students' fraternity Islamic University Student Union (IUSU) appealed to various senior management portraying their discontentment on the resolution of sitting their exams in a one week's time immediately they report back to the university and fronted the following reasons; *(i)some students have no access to internet and others lack smart phones to comply with the online learning as decided by the university executive board, (ii) some students have divergent programs as they go back home which limits the effectiveness of the online learning, (iii) some students have practical papers that are genuinely understood while setting their eyes on the lecturer such as mathematics, chemistry, biology, introductory Arabic, physics among others, (iv) some international students left the country and immediately as they come back, they are to be quarantined for a period of fourteen (14) days (2weeks) thus if exams are to be sat in the one week's time as proposed by the university EB, they will miss out, some lecturers have been intentionally dodging the lectures during the normal university programs and thus they are doubted whether they will make it during the online lessons, (v) Prayer in the alternative but without prejudice to the general prayers above, given the general impact on the economy, parents' earnings have been affected adversely and what shall students do as far as the university's zero balance policy is concerned in a period of one week as resolved by the EB-Students clearing at least 70 percent of tuition fee and be allowed to sit for their examinations.*

6. Universities that can't figure out a way during Novel Covid-19 lock down may not figure out how to work differently at all its now or never. University life provides a lot of support and accountability to students in need and since they had to return home in challenging environments with the need to study online it is hash light and presents issues related to equity and marginalized students disappear from the system if no extra support is provided either by fellow students, care takers or university administration.

7. Emphasis is focused on use of voice in teaching- Well as in traditional teaching there is evidence in face to face, body expressions and teacher's voice as major tools in teaching, its is not the same case with online pedagogy. However, once a course is modified to online teaching, the facial and body expression have been restricted as variable tools through use of screens, or use of only "voice" could be fully functional in some cases. Teaching staff should be advised to slow down in speech to enable students capture key knowledge points.

8. One on one student interaction managed on online due to social distancing measures many countries have implemented lockdowns. It helps to know that all people you care for are safe then this determines cognitive learning in terms of catching up with deadlines, course works, outcomes and how these would affect their grades. All these would be secondary as they knew that they matter as customers.

9. Teaching assistants navigating in the sea of providing online support to both students and teaching staff- the demands of online teaching and learning are far greater than the traditional in-class teaching for experienced teaching staffs. Majority of teaching staffs are insufficiently trained and supported to use online education platforms, the support from the teaching assistants is a key success factor during this revolutionary change. The students and academic managers should improve their communication between students and teaching assistants to ensure that learning takes place within the knowledge framework of the curriculum and teaching activities of each and every class hence proving the needed assistance and consultations to be in position to answer academic questions through the use of WeChat, WhatsApp, emails, zoom and other social platforms after the online class.

10. Learning outside class: students' active learning abilities should be tested- the faculty has less control online teaching compared to the traditional in-class lectures. For learning to take place it is highly dependent on students' high-level of active learning outside the class room. There is need to use various methods acceptable and within the reach of students to moderate students teaching and course works to strengthen active learning during online training and isolation.

11. Plan for the long session-for countries that fail to put measures to manage the pandemic response well, they will leave universities closed for a very long time. This will be good if the periods are extended since online learning was adopted to just manage a crisis but wasn't part of the curriculum. There is need to design integrated curriculum and have them accredited by National Council for Higher Education (NCHE).

12. Offline self-learning -some students borrowed hard copy books and requested library staff section to download e-books to enable them read at home and prepare them selves

sufficiently before the lessons start this would limit inadequate discussions and encourage depth understanding a scenario that is common in traditional in-class teaching. Similarly, the faculty administrators and academic managers need to bear in mind of the preparation for offline phase and the online teaching phase if learning is to take place. There is need for platforms that provides students with feedback from their assessments to appreciate and assess cognitive levels of students hence need for adjustment in the teaching content before the class starts. There is need for student to student learning during discussion sessions based on their level of reading of the literature to enhance deep learning and avoid surface learning experiences.

13. Active parent participation- parents can give students points for positive behaviors at home hence providing educators with additional classroom management support and a full picture of student engagement.

14. Digital rewards- giving points to those who participate in class discussions this brings good behaviors in the online learning environment. The students should be informed of the rules of the game including roll calling in class while online to know the percentage of students in attendance.

15. Students working in online teams- students become more invested in their own progress and become accountable to their colleagues hence support services. Teaching staff should mirror a face to face class management while online for example asking the class coordinator that he or she is still responsible for their roles including figuring out where the class members are and what happened to each one of them in case they are not in attendance this builds team spirit.

Regulators have for a long-time distracted university from their core functions by making endless demands from research to teaching income. Universities are now empty and the academic staff have demonstrated adaptability, intuitively and collegially most efficiently and effectively. It's time we trust that Novel Covid-19 has offered a chance for revolutionizing the higher education sector to redefine its relationship with the community, academic managers, administrative managers, regulators and students [2]. This is in two folds; (i) do universities still need all checks on academic programs and (ii) the sector's current metrics, they are eye-wateringly expensive and bureaucratic. Could online learning ultimately solve multiple problems that are threatening higher education i.e., escalating student debt and tuition rates and dwindling access? Dogotal learning has ability to scale up programs and scale down costs [8]. Teachers have to get out of the traditional passive, teacher-centered modes of teaching.

Long distance programs had initially faced critics and universities were referred to as "flying universities". The resistors are ready to take plunge and allow assessment judge whether they were adequately trained for the purpose. Online teaching is new experience many academicians were not ready for yet it's a system that reaches students everywhere they go [1, 9]. The prominent educators, stated that; "*Critical teachers who question the unequal, toxic status quo will deliver critical education no matter the delivery system*" as cited in [9, 10]

The year 2020 is streamed as the year when online education was main streamed globally and online education will never be the same again [11]. As streamline online learning tough times are not over sold continuous must be taken to understand that it's a whole lot of complex issues involved to avoid the complex science and art involved especially in line with choosing the design. An hour of a passive audience of learners is not the best and when care Is not taken it can be very challenging for the educator and the learners and difficult to produce results because of technology constraints. There is need make reflections on educators initial choices rather than "phew we have got online" there is need to explore ways and innovate opportunities if educators and learners will have lively, attractive and meaningful experiences [12]. 21st education is perceived as "*pump it down analogy*". It's important to the educator to identify the essential and non-essential information for learners hence creative think is the key drive for online learning coupled right mindset, retrain, reopen minded and be innovative. This new era of online learning is not only inspiring, humbling but challenging. It's an era where education can't wait no matter what while we keep the doors of learning open to all students. The need for students to change their attitude towards online learning will enhance support and market for the online programs.

There is need to begin designing high quality, student-centered online programs from reliable service providers. Need to set up robust systems to support in areas like academic advising, IT, administrative functions tutoring and more. Teaching staff need to prepare timely to ensure that training materials are available for free and timely. ICT teams in the university should start learning management systems (LMS) and develop a good customer relationship management tool for support. Many universities may not be ready for the fall hence outsource to companies with knowledge and resources and soonest to avoid relying on the traditional delivery models in digital and competitive times. The staff are closest to the problem are often closest to the solution these are faculty members, they have the technical know how, they are not in top administration, they have passion for online learning and technology and they tried to use it before, the ICT support teams and know how to use their capabilities and have already thought about alternative delivery [13]. There is continuous need to reach students in virtual ways and many companies have stepped up to give free service these can be maximized and negotiated to work with universities in future. The need for the "*Pandemic play book*" should be written for all universities and countries, governments need to take lessons grieve their losses and plan on how to move forward strategically. The students need to pay tuition fees to zero balance since the university mode of operation is 90 percent tuition fees, if students fail to pay the university will fail to manage it operating costs.

The paper concludes with 15 principles of high-impact teaching practice to enable effectively deliver large scale instruction, through the case analysis of IUIUFC's online education. First Policy matters, second do whatever it takes to get through this phase of the invisible enemy, third Emergency preparedness, fourth a student as a customer, fifth Using different online platforms to cover small different units and incorporate students' choices, sixth universities that can't figure out a way during Novel Covid-19 lock down may not figure out how to work differently, seventh emphasis is focused on use of voice in teaching, eight one on one student interaction managed on online, ninth teaching assistants navigating in the sea of providing online support, tenth learning outside class, eleventh Plan for the long session, twelve offline self-learning, thirteen active parent participation, fourteen digital rewards, fifteen students working in online teams. In view of the extraordinarily large of online education, it is necessary to make contingency plans in

advance for addressing possible problems such as the traffic overload issue of the online education platform, Furthermore, since this online teaching "migration" is implemented quickly during the outbreak of Novel Covid-19, students' anxiety needs to be relieved in various ways to ensure that they can actively and effectively engage in online learning.

The outbreak became primetime news in Africa as the dilemma to the country and its education sector that affected universities and their students. It begun from Wuhan in China and spread all over the world. In the early days of the crisis, it was ignored by many leaders in developed countries in America and Europe and their concerns in the Global focused was primarily on the disruption of the pandemic which caused closure of universities and their physical campuses following a presidential directive. The university decided that learning must continue even if it can't happen in person a decision that had to be upheld.

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