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PROGRAMME: MASTER’S DEGREE IN LINGUISTIC STUDIES

COURSE TITLE: 2020: THE YEAR OF THE ONLINE EDUCATION

ATLANTIC INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITY STUDIES

QUESTION:

Write an essay on the topic of the article. Develop the points to make in your essay to summarize and analyze the topic. What do you learn from the article? How can you apply the knowledge to study better at AIU? What are the specific details in the article that are highlighted?

Study Materials:

Covid-19 pandemic and online learning: the challenges and opportunities.

 JULY, 2022

.INTRODUCTION

It is indisputable that corona virus pandemic created a change in global education. As such, millions of students left the classrooms and moved to virtual learning in an attempt to contain corona virus infections around the world. Although the school will not be replaced by virtual learning, it is somewhat believed that the model of education has changed forever.

The good-to-have narrative changed as a result of the global closure of schools has part of measures to maintain social distancing in order to curb rapid transmission of Covid-19, schools switched instructional activities to remote learning platforms and this migration came with several logistical challenges, and one major issue is that the migration has caused compulsory modification in the attitudes of education administrators, instructors and learners on the significance of online learning (Ribeiro, 2020).

After the announcement of physical closure of schools by the governments as a means of curtailing the global and community rapid spread of the pandemic, the only option available for universities to adopt is online learning. Universities across the globe engaged in digital transformation process in order to leave up to their objectives. The transformation process was smooth for some institutions, while some responded with crisis-response migration process due to the pandemic, as cited by Hodges et al. (2020) and Manfuso (2020).

The *crisis-response migration methods* employed by some universities can be classified into two parts, namely External-Assisted Migration and External-Integrated Migration. External-Assisted Migration is referred to as situation whereby universities make use of Web 2.0 platforms designed by external corporate bodies or organizations. External-Integrated Migration on the hand refers to a situation whereby universities integrate Web 2.0 platforms designed by external corporate bodies or organizations into their personal online learning platforms, such integrated applications are Big Blue Button, Google Classroom, etc. It is also important to note that both External-Assisted Migration and External-Integrated Migration offer the same features for instructional delivery and assessment through video conferencing, submission of assignments, forum discussion, assessment, etc.

The crisis-response migration process of students and faculty members can also be viewed from the level of their digital competence and availability of information on online learning. Contemporary students and some faculty members are digital natives, since digital natives are the group of people born and raised during digital period (Prensky, 2001), and they are expected to be tech-savvy. However, a substantial number of them do not have the skills expected of digital natives (Bennett et al., 2008), which also prompted Shariman et al. (2012) to conclude that the effects of new digital technologies to redefine literacy are yet to be fully revealed.

 With Covid-19 pandemic, it has become clearer that education system is susceptible to external dangers (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). Ribeiro (2020) rightly noted that this digital transformation of instructional delivery came with several logistical challenges and attitudinal modifications. Feldman (n.d.) while addressing student assessment during this pandemic on how districts can legislate unbiased and evenhanded grading policies based on these recommendations; (i) pandemic-related anxiety will have negative effects on student academic performance, (ii) academic performance of students might be affect by racial, economic and resource differences, and (iii) the larger parts of instructors were not effectively ready to deliver high-quality instruction remotely. The challenges discussed here are limited to digital transformation of instructional operations during the period of Covid-19 pandemic.

Online learning in its entirety is dependent on *technological devices* and internet, instructors and students with bad internet connections are liable to be denied access to online leaning. The dependency of online learning on technological equipment and the provision of the equipment was a *big challenge* for institutions, faculty and learners. Therefore, students with accessibility problems that may find it difficult to follow instructions posted on the course announcement section of programs and a typical example of that is when the instructor posted on the course announcement page that there won’t be class on a particular date, one of the students still sent mail asking if class will hold on that date.

As a result of *inequality in the socio-economic* status of students, some rely on the computer and free internet in school (Demirbilek, 2014), and due to the closure of schools, the migration process of these set of students is expected to be slow. It becomes undeniable that students with low socio-economic background will definitely find it difficult to migrate as early as expected since they cannot come to school due to the pandemic. *Human and pets’ intrusion* here is the unexpected appearance or interruption of family members, friends and or pets that may cause disruption or diversion of online learning participants’ attention during the online teaching and learning process. Malcolm Brown, the Director of Learning Initiatives at EDUCAUSE also cited pets’ intrusions, through situations where online learnings are in progress via videoconference and someone’s pet such dogs will be barking, or cat will walk across the table (Manfuso, 2020). Another intrusion linked to family members of online learning participants, when classes are in progress, can be found on a video file from St J. D.S.G. Pietermaritzburg (2020).

*Digital competence* is the group of skills, knowledge and attitudes needed when using ICT and digital devices to perform responsibilities, such as problem solving, information management, collaboration with respect to effectiveness, efficiency and ethics (Ferrari, 2012). In this jet age, not all digital natives possessed digital competence that are not limited to education but all spheres of life (Bennett et al., 2008). Students and instructors with low digital competence are liable to lack behind in online learning. Due to digital transformation of instructional activities during this pandemic, libraries are to follow the trend in order to deliver effective services to faculty, students and other stakeholders through digital library, students and faculty with low digital competence might find it difficult to make optimal utilization of the digital library. Omotayo and Haliru (2020) has established digital competence as a variable with positive correlation and substantial effects on the application of digital library by higher education learners.

After instructional delivery here comes assessment where instructors measure learning activities to ascertain the instructional objectives through test, quiz and examination. Osterlind (2002), there exists numerous literature on test and measurement theory and analysis with little details on planning, development and test items writing by instructors. In online learning, assessments are often carried online whereby instructors are limited to proxy supervision of learners making it impossible to regulate and control cheating (Arkorful & Abaidoo, 2015). There are several students testing formats that are applicable with e-learning and according to Osterlind (2002), such ICT-enhanced testing formats include constructed-response, performance-based formats, sentence-completion or short-answer, matching, true-false and cloze-procedure. Flaherty (2020) added that Kevin Gannon, the Director of Center for Excellence in Teaching, Grand View University in a contemporary publication, has opined that he’s a strong advocate of considerable modification of grading systems during this pandemic because it is unimaginable to claim that learners are getting the same learning experiences and chances through online learning during this pandemic and this will make assessment more complicated.

The quick and sudden digital transformation process of universities has huge workload on ICT units of institutions to build e-platforms, integrated existing external applications into their systems and as well as full migration into external applications. Instructors also share part of the workload because they are responsible for transforming their course contents to be e-platform-friendly to the learners. This heavy workload is expected to cause unforeseen financial and time cost (Akkoyunlu & Soylu, 2006).

The *compatibility* of online learning with social science and humanities has been proved effective while researchers have also contested its compatibility with sports sciences, engineering and medical sciences where hands-on practical experiences are required as part of instructional activities (Leszczyński et al., 2018). Remote laboratories are used as alternative laboratories in online learning and such virtual laboratories offered by online learning can only fill the theory-to-practice hole (Iqbal et al., 2015). Online learning cannot be effectively and efficiently applied in some disciplines and this compatibility gap is yet to be filled (Leszczyński et al., 2018). According to Murphy (2020), based on the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) recommendations, medical students were directed to abstain from having direct contact with patient in the middle of March 2020, medical-trainees of Brown University were in clerkships and the school were able to “augment” medical students training by migrating some aspects of clinical education to online platform. This implies that online learning is not compatible with clinical but can only be used to augment face-to-face training method pending the time there will be chance to go back to the normal traditional setting (Leszczyński et al., 2018). Boczkowska et al. (2018) recommended that e-learning programs are necessary systems of continual education and to advance the value education in emergency nursing, additional work need to be directed to the enhancement of online learning programs.

Online learning on its own has advantages, such as flexibility (Smedley, 2010), interactivity (Leszczyński et al., 2018; Wagner et al., 2008), self-pacing (Amer, 2007) and opportunities, the current increase in its adoption by universities is born of their desire to direct their actions toward alignment with both local and global practices and policies to overcome the spread of Covid-19 pandemic and maintenance of academic calendar. Universities and other educational platforms have responded to the pandemic with quick digital transformation of their educational activities. Apart from the educational and economical roles of universities, Wang and Zha (2018) also recognized the social roles of universities as the world battle for the eradication of the pandemic. According to Manfuso (2020), Greg Flanik, Chief Information Officer of Baldwin Wallace University in Ohio, stated that when they were informed of the digital transformation of instructional activities, he told his team to make the best use of the opportunity offered by the crisis since they have always said that to get everybody to make use of online learning tools would be an ultimate accomplishment. Greg Flanik continued by adding that online learning has provided a clear roadmap that educators need to take advantage and engage major stakeholders in education to create novel market for instructional delivery and the longer the pandemic lasts, the more likely online learning becomes a general acceptable mode of teaching and learning.

This pandemic is, no doubt, a threat to humanity (Poon & Peiris, 2020), considering the state of emergency declared by WHO as a result of the rapid spread and severity of the deadly virus across the globe. As researchers spring into actions on finding short-term and long-term solutions to the threat posed on humanity by the virus, there is a need for instructional technologists most especially researchers in distance education to also take advantage of the sudden increase in participants of online learning as opportunities for research advancement in order to provide novel innovations to meet latest challenges of online learning. These research advancements should cover the following: (a) the need to provide models to accommodate the contemporary changes in online learning, (b) review the process of digital transformation of institutions, (c) designing of more scalable and personalized online learning models, (d) designing of online learning model that will reduce the workload on the instructors, (e) redesign the learning process. N. N. Hameed (personal communication, April 4, 2020) added that there is global diversion of academic attentions to Covid-19, it is expected that most researchers will spring into research activities because of the topical issue and massive research publications and innovations will be recorded.

Universities and other research centers across the globe are saddled with the responsibilities of providing research avenues for researchers’ collaboration in order to produce positive results as early as possible for the prevention and control of the pandemic. Beech (2020) likened the technological innovation opportunities brought by Covid-19 to that of Second World War that ushered in rocket technology and digital computer, and according to this World Economic Forum writer, some of the urgent technological innovations brought by Covid-19 era include 3D Printed Hands-Free Door Openers, Basic Ventilators, Spiderman Wrist-Mounted Disinfectant Sprays, Wristband that rings whenever someone wants to touch his/her face.

Monique Sendze as rightly quoted in Manfuso (2020) interview, Information Technology professionals responded quickly to the crisis like a SWAT crew to provide solutions, with the current technological interventions provided by IT professionals during this Covid-19 pandemic, there is no doubt that they are up to the task in providing more if more crisis erupts. Thus, this can be adopted in continuity of business, adversity rescue strategies.

Developed nations have been offering palliatives to their citizens and residents in order to cushion the effect of the global lockdown on the people and to a large extent, these palliative measures do not exempt public and private organizations, institution donations etc. University communities in North Cyprus have called on alumni, public and private organizations and other relevant bodies in providing socio-economic supports to the students. These socio-economic supports include food items, stoppage of increment in tuition debt policy on students, psychological and medical assistance to students and residences. According to Fishbane and Tomer (2020), some Internet Services Providers have stated providing socio-economic intervention programs such as provision of free broadband to college and K-12 learners in the USA, while digital inclusion campaigner Everyone has opened a search engine to assist people according to their ZIP code find low-cost internet bundle programs. Eastern Mediterranean University in conjunction with TurkCell also keyed into such socio-economic intervention as the form of corporate social responsibilities and service innovation to provide free internet for their students and faculty (Ogunmokun, Eluwole, et al., 2020; Ogunmokun, Unverdi-Creig, et al., 2020; Ogunmokun & Timur, 2019). Joosub (2020) also in the spirit of reducing the financial burden of internet data subscription on university students in order to access their online learning platforms during this Covid-19 pandemic, Vodacom has launched special bundles and also increased their zero-rated offer to all public citadels of learning in South Africa for students and faculty of those institutions to have internet access.

It is visible that *instructional technology*, as a research field with several sub-divisions, has played a major role in cushioning the effect of this pandemic on educational activities by serving as the only platform for instructional design, delivery and assessment platforms. Wang, Cheng, et al. (2020) as researchers across all disciplines strive to invent preventive and control mechanism for the pandemic, there is a need to share contemporary research findings in order to promote collaborative enquiry and technological networking for the assurance of viable Covid-19 studies.

*Online education* is deeply rooted in adequate planning and designs of instructions with several available theories and models, but the migration process of the universities to online education becomes questionable because these processes witnessed the absence of proper planning, design and development of online instructional programs due to the pandemic. The *crisis-response migration methods* adopted by universities are limited to delivery media without taking cognizance of effective online education theories and models. Thus, the crisis-response migration due to the pandemic should not be equated with effective online education or digital transformation of universities but rather be seen from the perspective emergency remote teaching platforms.

To address *digital competence* as an emergency remote teaching problem, Ala-Mutka et al. (2008) suggested that educational institutions need not design a separate platform for learning digital skills, but it should be embedded in teaching and learning process of all subjects, while Omotayo and Haliru (2020) also added that learners must be motivated to get digital competency for them to remain relevant in modernity. Online learning elements are technology- driven and dependent on internet facilities, educational institutions can collaborate with telecommunication industries to either subsidize the cost of internet subscriptions or provide free browsing data to the students and instructors as part of their corporate social responsibilities. Han and Ellis (2019) suggested the need for faculty to assist students in recognizing the values of learning via blended discussions and also elucidate on the integration of online discussion and traditional face-to-face learning.

*Human and pets’ intrusion* can also be either reduced to the nearest minimum or totally eradicated through setting up of separate online learning studio/library where those intrusions will be restricted. Despite the sudden migration of instructional delivery to online platforms by universities and other citadel of learning during this pandemic, provided the challenges experienced by faculty and students are well explored and transformed to opportunities, it is evident that online learning will be sustained and educational will become more hybrid. Development of emergency remote teaching evaluation instrument is to have more revealing information on the crisis-response migration methods and challenges experienced by the students and faculty as discussed in this paper for further research becomes recommendable.

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