COMMENTARY ARTICLES

Commentary: A Significant Transition of Mode of Teaching and Studying to meet the Covid-19 challenges in an university in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

Since the coronavirus outbreak in January, many schools and universities in Vietnam have almost entirely closed for nearly three months as a means of social distancing. The Ministry of Education has requested institutions to shift to online teaching to ensure students are kept up with their study progress while staying at home, and millions of students have been using different digital online learning approaches to satisfy their home-based learning needs. This paper is to comment on the change and challenges of students and lecturers in adapting training strategies response to Covid 19. Although the social distancing lasted only 3 months and there were some concerns regarding the disadvantages of digital and online way of studying, the training strategies in the Universities have changed significantly. Covid -19 also brings an opportunity in rebuild our education system carefully and adaptably in this sensitive world.

Keywords: Covid-19, university, training, opportunity, challenges, Vietnam.

INTRODUCTION

In the world, 90 per cent of the world's learners – more than 1.5 billion students - have been affected by school closures, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development estimates (1). In Vietnam, during lockdown due to Covid - 19 from March to May, 2020, almost all students have been learning on digital apps such as Zoom, Google class or Mircrosoft team (2). Lecturers and students have to find a way to use this outbreak to reimagine education, including what and how our students learn. Never before has there been a concerted global effort to digitise education.

A Significant Transition of Teaching and Studying

As requirement of social distancing, students have been on home-based learning for 8 weeks from March to May, 2020. From the educator site, lecturers are overload with messages, emails and reminders for participants in virtual classes and also, other things that educators have to adapt and adjust such as preparing equipment, learning how to adapt lecture content and methodology of teaching and learning. From the student site, the challenges of digital equipments such as computers, laptops, smartphone and internet requirement for study were huge because not all students are well equipped with these devices. This situation is truly significant transition of teaching and studying from traditional approach to the new style of learning. While there has a lot of focus on going digital this home-based learning season, the bigger issue is that education needs to modernise and become more relevant. Digitalisation is both the solution and the challenge.

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Change How the Lecturers Teach

Starting with the "transition", many academic institutions and lecturers are unprepared for this sudden transition to digital platforms to move to the online teaching. For example, in the Hanoi University of Public health, the young lecturers were easy to familiar with digital platforms of Zoom and Mircrosoft team, however, the invited old lecturers (from other universities) faced challenges of using the electronic devices from home. The solutions for this problem was that the assistant lecturers had to assist these invited lecturers via team viewer or visit home of the invited lecturers to install apps or provide technical helps if needed.

According to Lange C, "while COVID-19 is challenging assumptions regarding engagement and building connections, these attempts at modernisation have merely offered the same outdated educational content and the same passive teaching methods, but now facing a webcam plonked in front of them" (3). Most of the time, lecturers talked and talked, shared their presentation slides and many students turned off their video/audio to stablize the internet. Many active teaching methods were ignored during the class such as role play or group discussion. We forget something else is needed in the equation to spark learning when a distance is placed between the teacher and student. Most of the discussions, group works were left for students to complete at their own pace, but it was clear that not all of student members involved in the project. Only one to two key persons of the group completed the assignments.

In order to transit from traditional to digital training environments, it is needed to avoid the temptation of distractions and maximise the learning experience (4). Educators need training in how to teach differently on these platforms, when the traditional method of teaching by instructing, asking and reviewing is still popular. Part of the issue may be that video conferencing solutions are not necessarily the right tools to deliver learning and come with their own challenges such as limited connection bandwidths, security and privacy. There were some evidences such as lagging video, internet disconection, or stranger(s) signed in the zoom class. Therefore, educators should equip themselves technical competencies in computer skills and improve communication with students through quality discussion (inside and outside classroom, email and other communication approaches).

During Covid-19 lockdown, education systems in the universities have done a good job making the jump onto digital platforms and must now focus on how to make digital learning count. So how about changing up teaching to nurture thinking rather than to dish out instructions?

Focus on Interacting And Responses, Rather than Presentation

The teachers acted much more as facilitators, provoking thought and stimulated general discussion, while speaking for several classes from 40-120 students. Lessons started with a "chaos" at the beginning of waiting student logging into the class and counting for performing attendance. Some used laptop while the others used smartphone. Some students were at home, some were at the café/ tea house because their internet at home was not available. Lecturers shared screen and started presentation. Short quizzes and polls peppered for each class, and students were called on constantly to give their opinions, summarise the arguments presented by their peers so far, and even to step in for the teacher and moderate.

Teaching via zoom was a refreshing and thoroughly modern experience. It succeeded also because investments were made in having faculty undergo months of training

in the principles of learning sciences and online facilitation. The university paid for Zoom accounts, therefore, the lecture was not discreted, however, many students feeded back the internet was not stable, or their audio/video was not available

It might sound like a difficult task but such investments in shaping the minds of our digital era across all learning ages will go a long way. Learning can be broken up with internet corruption or even bias sound from home of both lecturer and students.

CHANGE HOW WE TEACH AND EVALUATION

The rapid spread of COVID-19 has demonstrated the importance of developing resilience to cope with the volatility and uncertainty of the future. It seems that the traditional way of teaching (in class) cannot applied successfully online. Many active teaching techniques such as group discussions, role play… cannot or limited applied online. Furthermore, the training of some subjects required skills such as laboratory, statistic or data analysis face challenges. This may involve a strategic overhaul of curriculum so that we are not just adding more to our already weighty student workload, and a huge dose of imagination and creativity to weave some of these new digital-era competencies.

The online evaluation (via zoom) faced the risk of lost tests/or questions of examination bank. In one examination, all of the questions of examination bank were lost, and the university has to develop many new questions to compensate the test bank. This way of evaluation also cannot control the student's internet copying during exams time.

The Opportunity Covid-19

COVID-19 poses a valuable opportunity to remind us that the skills students and lecturers need in this era are meta-skills that they can apply to many different circumstances, for example, creative problem-solving, focus and perseverance, critical thinking, and above all, adaptability.

As experiences of this Covid-19 outbreak, students and lecturers are learning lessons about how interconnected we all are, the need of updating technology in training and what globalisation really means.

Let us not waste the opportunity this crisis offers and rebuild our education systems thoughtfully and intentionally, celebrating resilience, creativity and adaptability as the cornerstones of what it means to be educated in this sensitive world.

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