

Quality assurance in an era of sudden online education

Recently, the world experienced dramatic challenges, and educational institutions continued their important roles to ensure that educational quality was not diminished. Although education's goal should always be to promote better thinking processes among learners (Flavian, 2019), the eruption of the COVID-19 forced educators to look for innovative methods they were not familiar with to continue their educational work while maintaining the quality of education in their countries. During the early stage of the worldwide global COVID-19 pandemic crisis, we decided to call for related scholarship about this important matter, in *Quality Assurance in an Era of Sudden Online Education*. The ways and methods used by different educational institutions, leaders and educators to continue their crucial task of enlightening and cultivating minds vary. This special issue offers an opportunity to consider the distinctive perspectives of educators and researchers from around the world to help inform practitioners, policymakers and researchers.

The COVID-19 emergency began in 2020 and included all areas of life across the world. Although in some fields people could take their time and plan their steps during this previously unexplored situation, it was not so for educators; at all levels of education, they had to deal immediately with the dramatically powerful effects of COVID-19. Millions of students residing on campus at tertiary institutions returned to their homes and resumed their learning using online education methods. Elementary and secondary students and institutions were similarly challenged with the formidable task of remote education with the additional burden of little previous online experience using distance learning. Some postsecondary education, faculty members were familiar with online instruction or partially virtual courses and modified their teaching rapidly, whereas other institutions and faculty members who were predominantly teaching in traditional physical facilities took a short hiatus to prepare for the resumption of education online.

Assessment and Quality Assurance in Schools was the topic of a previous special issue (Flavian, 2018) as well as *Assuring Quality in eLearning* (Srikanthan and Inglis, 2009). The contribution of the current special issue evolves from the integration of these concepts while examining quality assurance education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The direct impact on education activities initially resulted in added training sessions to provide guidance on the effective application of learning management systems features, using video conferencing for live class sessions, screening virtual proctoring vendors and originality verification systems and getting to grips with the modalities of synchronous and asynchronous instruction. Other changes included modifying grading policies to accommodate the special circumstances, moving events such as degree commencement and other occasions to become virtual affairs, modifying many subsequent courses to be taught fully online and arranging repositories of training session recordings and materials for instructors to review.

The challenges of remote assessment in education were strong and are ongoing. Educators and institutions faced additional tasks involving dealing with academic dishonesty, coverage of learning outcomes and commitment of students to submit learning assessment (Guangul *et al.*, 2020). Some faculty chose to simulate traditional in-person classroom examinations with remote proctoring, whereas others decided to replace exams with project-based learning and written assignments (El-Bassiouny and Ehab, 2021). On-



campus versus distance education and remote learning has been studied for many years (Alstete and Beutell, 2004, 2016, 2021; Petrova and Sinclair, 2005, 2008), and undoubtedly, the global pandemic will produce additional scholarly research articles in education now and in the future. Faculty at all levels of education were suddenly thrust into online learning whether they had distance education experience or not. Educators, governing agencies and the general public nearly immediately became aware of teaching terminology and concepts (e.g. asynchronous, synchronous and remote proctoring) that were previously known by a relatively small number of people. Moreover, even as the world returns to pre-pandemic education and quality assurance, the level of increased scrutiny is likely to remain.

This special issue examines important matters involving quality assurance and the rapid move to online education globally during COVID-19. The change to online distance education for younger students, which was not widespread before the pandemic, could be considered among the most challenging experiences; important lessons are presented in “An Investigation of Quality Assurance Practices in Online English Classes for Young Learners and We Have Efficacy but Lack Infrastructure: Teachers’ Views on Online Teaching and Learning during COVID-19.”

Post-secondary education attempted to control the impact of the immediate move to online delivery. Elements of how institutions adapted administratively are considered in “Rapid, Centralised Decision-making in a Higher Education Emergency.” Effects on students and faculty are investigated in “Learning Online Education during COVID-19 Pandemic - Attitudes and Perceptions of Non-traditional Adult Learners;” “An Evaluation of the Impact of Confinement on the Quality of E-learning in Higher Education institutions;” “E-teaching Satisfaction in a Black Swan Moment: The Effect of Student Engagement and Institutional Support;” and “COVID-19 and Rapid Digitalization of Learning and Teaching: Quality Assurance Issues and Solutions in a Sino-Foreign Higher Education Institution.”

Higher education institutions around the world continued their educational missions and strived to ensure that quality control processes continued during the great global pandemic. Articles from several different countries and regions illustrate the issues encountered and provide interesting highlights; these include “The Effects of Perceived Quality Differences between the Traditional Classroom and Online Distance Learning on Student Satisfaction: Evidence from the Covid-19 Pandemic in Indonesia;” “Student Satisfaction on the Implementation of the Online Undergraduate Thesis Examination: a PLS-SEM Analysis;” “E-teaching Satisfaction in a Black Swan Moment: the Effect of Student Engagement and Institutional Support;” “Are University Teachers Ready to Use and Adopt E-Learning Systems? An Empirical Substantiation during the COVID-19 Pandemic;” and “COVID-19 and Rapid Digitalization of Learning and Teaching: Quality Assurance Issues and Solutions in a Sino-Foreign Higher Education Institution.”

In addition to the above, this special issue also refers to questions beyond undergraduate education and these are presented in “CALL in a Social Context: Reflecting on Digital Equity, Identity, and Interaction in the Post-COVID Age and Online Examination: A Feasible Alternative During the COVID-19 Lockdown.”

The pandemic has caused educators and all stakeholders to look more closely at education methods and quality assurance. Some of the takeaways from this experience include increased understanding about the importance of emergency preparedness to maintain continuity of service and the value that educational expertise has to serve society in a wide variety of ways. Additionally, there is more awareness that effective online instruction requires thorough design considerations and is more complicated than merely trying to replicate on-campus lecturing and testing.

Throughout this special issue, we aimed to present a collection of diverse, up-to-date studies that will allow educators and educational leaders around the world to promote quality assurance in education while experiencing unexpected global changes such as the COVID-19. We believe researchers and authors of the included papers have enriched the global body of knowledge, and we highly appreciate their professional work.

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