SPECIAL ISSUE

How is COVID-19 impacting higher education?
Editor’s Message

The COVID-19 pandemic has left no aspect of modern life untouched, and higher education is no exception. If seen as the harbinger of the future, as higher education institutions rightly should, it should concern us all how the crisis has impacted higher education in Asia and beyond.

In this eighth edition of Higher Education in Southeast Asia and Beyond (HESB), Cham Tao Soon, the doyen of university leaders in Singapore, re-examines the rationale for e-learning in light of the closure of physical campuses of universities. Philip Altbach and Hans de Wit reflect on the major implications of the crisis for global student mobility, with declines overall most significantly from China. Wesley Teter and Libing Wang share about UNESCO’s multilateral response towards making higher education in the Asia-Pacific more responsive and relevant for all during this time, especially the most vulnerable learners. Tony Bush offers a personal perspective on the impact of the pandemic on a “global university” with campuses in the UK and Asia.

Nymia Pimentel Simbulan writes about the bayanihan spirit of community mobilisation in higher education institutions in the Philippines, while Wan Chang Da explains how the lockdown is forcing a rethink on assessment in Malaysian universities, where take-home exams are almost unheard of. Thanh Pham and Huong Nguyen discuss how teaching and learning practices traditionally deployed in Asian classrooms like Vietnam’s could have wider application now that the delivery of higher education around the world has precipitously moved online. In Brunei, a survey of university students has shown a preference for blended learning over online learning, as Wida Susanty Hijj Suhalil writes, while Elsuke Saito discusses what faculties of education in ASEAN countries need to do in terms of pedagogy, curriculum, student teacher support and research.

Moving beyond Southeast Asia, Fazal Rizvi writes on how Australian universities will need to rethink their business model, now that they can no longer rely on international students as the main source of revenue. Mosurumi Mukherjee explains how the crisis should be taken as an opportunity to seriously rethink higher education reform in India beyond just access to technology and the digital divide. Meanwhile, Bie Dunrong and Liu Jin ask whether the large-scale experimentation in China’s colleges and universities will disappear after the crisis subsides, or whether some experiences and practices will be retained and integrated into traditional classroom teaching. Ian Holliday and Gerard Postiglione reflect on how Hong Kong’s universities were largely unencumbered by government bureaucracy in responding to the crisis because of their high degree of institutional autonomy. Rawool Hong writes about how the crisis has forced South Korea’s policy-makers to modify a policy that had previously prevented all universities from delivering more than 20% of classes online, and where previously, demands from higher education practitioners towards this end had met with little to no effect.

We invite you to consider contributing to future issues, and be part of the conversations and debates on higher education in Southeast Asia and beyond. Meanwhile, we hope you will stay safe and well in these unprecedented times.
According to UNESCO, nearly 75% of the world’s student population has been affected by school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a first in history and it will have a lasting impact on students, parents and education systems — both global and local.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a new phenomenon that is truly worldwide in its impact. In the past, we have had only epidemics afflicting certain regions of the world, but this time the virus has spread to all corners of the globe.

E-learning

E-learning is not something new; it has been around for at least three decades. But until now, the objective of e-learning for institutions of higher education has not been for the purpose of continued learning in the face of disruptions like what we have seen with the COVID-19 situation.

The second rationale for e-learning, particularly at institutions of higher learning, has to do with the rapid evolution of technology and the pressing need to keep workforce skills up to date. Lifelong learning is now considered essential for continued economic and social progress, and e-learning methods often prove to be the best way to deliver lifelong learning.

When I was an undergraduate in the 1960s, the technology we used was so dramatically different from what we have today. If we did not continue learning after we graduated, it would have been very challenging for us to adjust to new requirements at work, and indeed to a whole new lifestyle that is now intertwined with technology.

Today, with the COVID-19 pandemic and its ensuing lockdowns and social distancing, e-learning has become a vital tool to ensure the continuity of learning and education. Some have argued that during these periods of school closures, students can be left to learn and discover on their own and to return to the school curriculum when the situation improves. Personally, my education was disrupted by the Japanese occupation during the Second World War, and despite that my peers and I did go on to continue our education and succeed. But unlike a war with a visible enemy, COVID-19 is not just a war with an invisible and seemingly omnipresent enemy, but one that also exposes our vulnerability to future virus outbreaks. Importantly, this pandemic is going to force us to rethink our social interactions and that will include the way we educate.

Institutions of higher learning in Singapore are generally quite prepared to adapt to this new reality, because they are likely to already be using e-learning tools to some extent.

The Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS), of which I was Chancellor from 2005 to 2014, has been ready for this for a very long time. A large number of SUSS students are part-timers, and e-learning tools are indispensable to making the part-time educational experience effective.
If we look throughout the Asian region though, not all university students may be in the same situation – some of them may not even have Internet access, let alone laptops or tablets.

In any case, higher education should not strive to be a completely online activity. In engineering for instance, you would need to touch equipment, to get a feel of things. Blended learning — where you have a course taught through a mix of e-learning and traditional face-to-face learning — will certainly prove to be much more satisfactory than a purely e-learning experience. Ultimately, the interaction with fellow students is a defining experience of university life.

The Future of Singapore as a Global Higher Education Hub

Ten years ago, I was a committee member in an audit exercise of one of the top universities in China. During one meeting with 20 of their students, I asked if they, as citizens of the most populous country in the world, had an interest in the little city-state of Singapore. I was pleasantly surprised to hear that they were in fact all keen to study in Singapore — surprised, because of the prestigious status of the university they were already part of. They replied that because the nature of business has become so international, they did not want to just remain within their university — learnt from this pandemic and increased preventive measures, numbers will begin to return to pre-COVID-19 levels.

In that sense, we all certainly hope the COVID-19 situation would improve sooner rather than later. We cannot eliminate the notion of the physical classroom and the physical university in the pursuit of serious, all-rounded learning.

I believe that Singapore will continue to remain an attractive place for international students. The high quality and international standing of our universities, and particularly for students in Asia and our use of English as the lingua franca will remain strong pull factors post-COVID-19.

Transnational Education

There is also the aspect of cross-border educational exchanges. When you travel to a certain place, you meet new people, you learn new philosophies and new cultures. I believe students should always spend a part of their learning overseas as far as possible.

In the short term we will certainly see a fall in the number of students travelling overseas for an education, but I feel that over time and having learnt from this pandemic and increased preventive measures, numbers will begin to return to pre-COVID-19 levels.

In that sense, we all certainly hope the COVID-19 situation would improve sooner rather than later. We cannot eliminate the notion of the physical classroom and the physical university in the pursuit of serious, all-rounded learning.

CHAM TAO SOON was founding President of the Nanyang Technological University in 1981, and was conferred the title of President Emeritus in July 2007. He was also the first Chancellor and Chairman of the SIM University (UniSIM). He is currently Chairman of the Advisory Board of The HEAD Foundation.

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Postpandemic Outlook for Higher Education is Bleakest for the Poorest

PHILIP G. ALTBACH & HANS DE WIT

In the midst of crisis, with the scope and outcomes largely uncertain, it is too early to accurately predict the broader implications of the coronavirus pandemic for higher education or for society in general. We have argued (COVID-19: The Internationalisation Revolution That Isn’t, University World News, March 14, 2020) that the basic configuration of internationalisation is likely to remain. And we think that, broadly, global higher education will remain fundamentally stable. But significant short-, medium-, and perhaps long-term consequences and disruptions are inevitable — becoming increasingly serious as the crisis continues. Our purpose here is to outline what we think are likely implications.

It is, of course, folly to overly generalise about the broad landscape of postsecondary education worldwide — with more than 20,000 universities and 200 million students. Higher education is everywhere segmented and differentiated, with public and private institutions with vastly differing resources and serving different needs. This is true within countries, and across borders. Thus, generalising about individual countries or about the world as a whole is not very useful.

Furthermore, so much depends on the broader political and economic realities that will emerge from the crisis. Without question, the global and national economies will take a massive hit. Low per-capita income countries are likely to suffer more and take longer to recover. Economic recovery will take time, with many arguing that implications will be more serious than the Great Recession, and it seems impossible that higher education will have a high priority in national recovery plans. Whether the current trends toward nationalism and populism in many countries will be strengthened by the crisis is unclear, but there are indications that these malign trends will continue.

The very future of globalisation may be called into question, although the underlying realities of the twenty-first century will make its survival likely. Significant aspects of contemporary higher education depend on globalisation: not only student mobility and internationalisation initiatives, but also collaborative research, and, increasingly, global knowledge networks and other aspects.
Thus, fundamental elements of the global macroenvironment in general and of higher education in particular, are being threatened by the COVID-19 crisis, and this might negatively impact on support for internationalisation, when international cooperation is needed more than ever.

At the other end of the spectrum, those institutions that are most at risk are poorly funded private institutions depending entirely on tuition fees — and half the world's postsecondary institutions are private.

The Fittest Will Survive

Research universities and top quality institutions that are globally and nationally recognised and have stable income streams, such as the Indian Institutes of Technology, elite American private liberal arts colleges and similar institutions worldwide, will recover more rapidly and emerge relatively unscathed from the crisis. Their role at the top of higher education will remain and perhaps will even be strengthened. These institutions are in general better able to protect their staff and students during a crisis and will be able to attract new students and overcome admissions disruptions and other instabilities.

The traditional university experience may increasingly become the privilege of wealthier students enrolled at top universities.

At the other end of the spectrum, those institutions that are most at risk are poorly funded private institutions depending entirely on tuition fees — and half the world's postsecondary institutions are private. This reality affects especially low-income countries, where a low-quality private sector increasingly dominates higher education. Much of the global massification, as well as international student mobility, has been driven by the emergence of a middle-class — these groups are likely to be affected most by post-coronavirus higher education adjustments, as Simon Marginson pointed out in Times Higher Education and in University World News on March 26. One estimate for the United States is that perhaps 20% of postsecondary institutions will close.

Research

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, where the significance of research to manage and solve the crisis, invent vaccines, and support society with related crucial projects has become evident to policy makers and the public, it is possible that top research institutions — in particular those specialised in the life sciences — will receive greater emphasis and funding.

A Deep Financial Crisis

Universities, public and private, face immediate financial problems during the COVID-19 crisis since their campuses are closed. It is not clear how admissions will be handled for the coming year or two. Many universities have already stopped hiring new staff. For prestigious private universities, mainly in the United States, endowments have lost value with declines in the stock market. Most of them will recover, but for the mid-term it will affect them. Because of massive expenditures aimed at stabilising economies during the crisis, it is likely that future public allocations to higher education will shrink.

Increased Inequality

Higher education — globally and within countries — is characterised by inequalities of all kinds. The COVID-19 crisis is likely to exacerbate these inequalities, as highlighted above: private institutions catering for the masses will suffer the brunt of the depression, while, at the same time, there may be an increase in demand for community colleges in the United States and less expensive professional schools elsewhere. In times of unemployment, education is an alternative choice, but it has to be affordable.

Distance vs Face-to-Face Education

Universities worldwide have had to shift to 100% online teaching. There have been reports of significant success, but also of abject failure. Access to appropriate technology and internet speed — or even access to the Internet at all — is a significant challenge, reflecting, again, deep inequalities between students. While lessons are being learned, the skills of teaching staff upgraded (very much through learning by doing), and learning platforms and online curricula improved, we doubt that there will be a profound and lasting “technological revolution” in higher education. But the COVID-19 crisis will significantly expand the use of distance education. And from now on, teaching staff may become less reluctant regarding opportunities offered by hybrid teaching models.

Yet, for many reasons — community, prestige, teaching networking, and learning advantages, among others — students and academics will continue to prefer face-to-face higher education. The traditional university experience may increasingly become the privilege of wealthier students enrolled at top universities.

International Student Mobility

As we wrote in our commentary on the short-term implications of the crisis, its impact on international student mobility is uncertain. Institutions and countries that have been dependent on revenue from international students will try as soon as possible to go back into the market. As Simon Marginson observes, that market will become a buyer’s market with institutions “hunting for scarce international students for some years to come.” But that market will be far more vulnerable, more competitive, and less massive, and the provision may shift to some degree from high-income countries to middle-income countries that can offer lower costs. Simon Marginson reckons that it will take at least five years to recover.

Maybe, but we will not go back to the status quo ante. The industry that has developed over the past decades — agents, pathway programmes, and recruitment companies — will decline drastically and will need to adapt to new models to survive. Issues such as student safety and well-being will become more important push and pull factors in decisions of students and their parents.
Study abroad programmes in which students participate for a year, a semester, or even shorter periods, may suffer even greater problems as students assess possible risks and challenges for experiences that are mandatory for their academic success. In Europe, the flagship programme Erasmus+ might encounter serious cuts instead of its anticipated rise in funding. In the United States, one of the larger providers of study abroad, the Council on International Educational Exchange, has announced that it will eliminate 600 jobs.

No Academic Revolution

While it is impossible to make clear predictions in the midst of the most severe global health crisis in a century, implications for higher education will be considerable and mostly negative, amplifying gaps and inequalities between learners, institutions, and countries. There will be significant variations globally, with the likelihood that universities in the poorest part of the world will be affected more severely.

This article has previously been published by University World News and International Higher Education.

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COVID-19 and UNESCO: Monitoring the Impact on People and Places for Relevant Higher Education

Learning Stops

Recently in Herat, Afghanistan a lecturer in a private higher education institution took to the street, declaring: “I am not a beggar. I am a lecturer from the private school. I don’t have a contract to receive my monthly salary; my salary depends on the daily teaching of classes, and now the schools are locked down and I am jobless. I have no provision to support my poor family.” As the centre of the COVID-19 pandemic in Afghanistan, the Herat Province faces severe impacts on its educational institutions and livelihoods of people. This is especially true for women working in low-paying and informal jobs with no social safety net. As a global pandemic, COVID-19 is intensifying learning inequalities. Countries in Southeast Asia and the wider Asia-Pacific region have a key role to play in monitoring the growing impact on people and places to make higher education more responsive and relevant for all, including the most vulnerable learners.

Three months since the World Health Organization declared a public health emergency of international concern over the outbreak of novel coronavirus, a clearer picture of the sectors, regions and demographic groups most at risk is emerging. As of late April 2020, 1.2 billion (73.8% worldwide) students and youth across the planet are affected by school and university closures due to the COVID-19 outbreak. In Southeast Asia, the region is monitoring the impact and scale of educational disruption and what is required going forward.

How will governments in Southeast Asia protect the most vulnerable learners? How will the higher education community continue to respond in terms of quality teaching, research and public service to remain relevant to their local communities? How can UNESCO and stakeholders throughout the region respond to ensure equitable access to quality higher education for all? These are immediate and long-term challenges that will reshape the future of higher education and UNESCO’s multilateral response.

Overcoming Learning Inequalities

UNESCO promotes international solidarity through education, science and knowledge. The COVID-19 outbreak is a public health crisis, and it resonates deeply at the heart of UNESCO’s mission. As the only UN agency with a mandate in higher education,
As part of the Global Education Coalition, launched by UNESCO in March 2020, partners in the Asia-Pacific are working together to mobilise, coordinate, match and deliver distance education through leveraging hi-tech, low-tech and no-tech approaches. UNESCO has a unique responsibility to serve as a laboratory of ideas to respond effectively to the current pandemic. COVID-19 has shown us that scientific cooperation is key when dealing with an international public health issue. It is a stark reminder of the importance of quality education and reliable information, at a time when rumours and misinformation are flourishing. It tells of the power of culture and knowledge to strengthen solidarity, at a time when so many people around the world must keep social distance and stay at home.

UNESCO is fully committed to supporting governments in their initiatives in distance learning, open science, knowledge and culture sharing, as fundamental means to stand together and tighten the bonds of our shared humanity. Monitoring the impact on all people and places is of immediate concern and our gaps in data and understanding of implications for diverse populations such as those in Herat are still unclear. We know that COVID-19 is not only a challenge in terms of public health. It is a challenge to our ideals and to our humanistic values as a global campus.

As part of the Global Education Coalition, launched by UNESCO in March 2020, partners in the Asia-Pacific are working together to mobilise, coordinate, match and deliver distance education through leveraging hi-tech, low-tech and no-tech approaches. To date, China has made more than 30,000 online courses for higher education freely available. Countries in Southeast Asia are adapting rapidly and in close coordination across national systems and institutional levels.

UNESCO is a people-centred forum for ministers, civil servants, researchers and students to discuss key issues of global concern and identify common solutions through higher education – thereby strengthening multilateralism. This shared knowledge and expertise is critical for each country as it considers options to determine its own future of higher education.

**Action Principles: Doing Good By All**

The COVID-19 pandemic provides opportunities for us to reflect on how to make quality higher education mainstream and ensure equitable access for all. Several action principles are emerging to guide our collective response in Southeast Asia and the wider region. First, we need to build a supportive and inclusive ecosystem, including quality assurance and recognition of online and blended learning programmes, infrastructure development, institutional strategic planning, budgeting and capacity building, and continuing professional development programmes for faculty. Holistic support for learners is also critical as they face isolation and uncertainties about the future of work.

A second action principle is a renewed commitment to fairness. The Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education, better known as the Tokyo Convention, is an instrument to promote fair and transparent recognition of qualifications. To date, no country in Southeast Asia has ratified or implemented the Convention. This missing legal foundation is a critical weakness at the policy level to effectively manage recognition of diverse learning pathways, including online learning. Blended learning, the synthesis of online and in-person teaching will be the ‘new normal’ that will combine not only online and offline learning, but also formal, informal and non-formal learning.

And last, a key action principle must be to ensure that higher education teaching, research and services are relevant to local needs. While some faculty and higher education institutions will have available capacity to serve globally, the majority of providers must reassess their place-based relevance, given COVID-19 and its impacts. Building relevance requires leadership, innovation and local stakeholder engagement to rebuild a curriculum that fosters human development and creativity to respond to challenging times ahead.

Going forward, UNESCO will continue to facilitate meaningful dialogue and rally international organisations, civil society and private-sector partners in a broad coalition to ensure learning never stops. As we embark on a decade of action for the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, our responsibility as a community is to leave absolutely no one behind.

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Life Under Lockdown in Higher Education: Insights From a Global University

TONY BUSH

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed lives all over the world in ways that could not have been imagined only a few weeks ago. While health services have been impacted most severely, the consequences for higher education are also quite profound. Universities in the UK have been closed since 20 March, when the government ordered people to stay at home. UK students have returned to their homes, but many international students remain in the UK, either because they cannot get flights to their home countries or because they prefer to complete their degrees in the UK.

The University of Nottingham is termed the “the global university”, with campuses in Malaysia and Ningbo in China, besides Nottingham in the UK. These two branch campuses are also closed; teaching continues on all three campuses but in online mode. This takes different forms, including Moodle, Microsoft Teams, WhatsApp and e-mail.

Impact on Teaching

My own teaching is focused on the School of Education’s MA in Educational Leadership and Management which has 75 full-time students, almost all of whom are international. This is a one-year programme, with four modules and a final dissertation. I lead and teach the third module, “Leading Learning”. Teaching for this was completed at the end of February. I was also able to complete face-to-face tutorials with these students before the university closure. Subsequently, I have maintained contact with these students via e-mail to support assignment preparation. Submission and assessment are both done via Moodle. Students will also be supported online for their final dissertations, which are due for submission in September. We are also holding online meetings with the teaching team, and the wider leadership team.

The viva is a high-stakes event, a culmination of four years of work, and students are inevitably anxious about it. This anxiety will continue for many weeks before the viva can be held. I was due to fly to Malaysia to attend these vivas but had delays in data collection because schools in Malaysia were closed on 20 March. Two of them were due to have their viva voice examinations in March but these were postponed indefinitely when the Malaysia campus was closed as a result of government and university policy. The viva is a high-stakes event, a culmination of four years of work, and students are inevitably anxious about it. This anxiety will continue for many weeks before the viva can be held. I was due to fly to Malaysia to attend these vivas but had to cancel my flight when the university closed. In my 28 years of doctoral supervision, I have never missed a student’s viva voice examination.

I was also due to meet my other five students, who are at earlier stages in their doctoral journeys. Face-to-face tutorials and annual reviews are postponed, with implications for student progression. Sustaining motivation is a challenge during the pandemic when health and family issues are understandably regarded as more important. One student also faces delays in data collection because schools in Malaysia are closed. Maintaining contact with them via e-mail helps to address all these challenges.

Impact on Research

Nottingham is a world’s top 100 university and the School of Education is one of its top-performing departments. Research is a central part of academic life, but fieldwork is impossible in the current climate. The silver lining is that there is now more time for writing. Since the pandemic, I have completed and submitted a journal article with one of my doctoral students. I have also revised a paper arising from research supported by The HEAD Foundation, on educational policy reform in Malaysia, in response to the journal’s review process. I have also been conducting desk research, and preparing reports, for a study on school leadership in the Commonwealth, commissioned by the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The situation for the PhD students registered in Malaysia is more difficult. Two of them were due to have their viva voice examinations in March but these were postponed indefinitely when the Malaysia campus was closed as a result of government and university policy. The viva is a high-stakes event, a culmination of four years of work, and students are inevitably anxious about it. This anxiety will continue for many weeks before the viva can be held. I was due to fly to Malaysia to attend these vivas but had to cancel my flight when the university closed. In my 28 years of doctoral supervision, I have never missed a student’s viva voice examination.

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Impact on Other Academic Activities

I also edit a leading international journal, Educational Management, Administration and Leadership. Perhaps as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown, there has been a sharp increase in the number of submissions to the journal, up about 50% from this time last year. The journal is managed through an online platform, Manuscript Central, and so is largely unaffected by the pandemic except for the increased workload arising from the record number of submissions.

Excessive reliance on remote teaching and learning leads to an impoverished model, with students missing out on the wider benefits of global learning, including cultural gains.
I am also privileged to be the current President (2019–2024) of the British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society (BELMAS). I have been involved in online meetings, notably when the decision was taken to cancel this year’s annual BELMAS International Conference, scheduled for July. This is one of the most important global conferences on educational leadership, so the decision was taken with great reluctance.

Facing the future

The longer-term consequences of COVID-19 on higher education are harder to predict. If international students are more reluctant to travel to the UK for their undergraduate or postgraduate studies, this will impact university income and may have implications for staff employment and careers. The short-term switch to online learning may lead to a more permanent change in pedagogy. Nottingham’s School of Education already has successful online programmes, and these may thrive in the post-pandemic climate. Alternatively, blended learning models may become more common with a reduced reliance on face-to-face seminars and tutorials. However, it can also be argued that excessive reliance on remote teaching and learning leads to an impoverished model, with students missing out on the wider benefits of global learning, including cultural gains.

The post-COVID19 future for universities with branch campuses is also difficult to predict. Nottingham has thousands of Chinese students, who have chosen to come to the UK campus, rather than selecting the Ningbo campus, though the latter seem to be a good “fit” by providing a UK degree but within the Chinese cultural context. When I asked my Chinese students if they considered applying to the Ningbo campus, they mostly replied that they wanted the full cultural experience of studying in the UK, while also counting on English-language gains. The Malaysia campus positions itself as an Asian hub, notably for ASEAN countries, with some success. It is possible that the Malaysian and Chinese campuses will see an upsurge in student demand following the pandemic but, in the medium term, it seems likely that most students will continue to prefer a UK education. Predicting a post-pandemic future for universities is fraught with difficulty, but demand for higher education is certain to continue, and probably to grow, to serve the global knowledge economy.

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The Philippines –
COVID-19 and Its Impact on Higher Education in the Philippines

Nymia Pimentel Simbulan

COVID-19 Pandemic in the Philippines and Governmental Response

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world. Due to the nature of the virus, particularly how it is transmitted, it has altered human behaviours, relations and lifestyles, and had profound impacts on the economic, political and cultural landscapes of societies across the world. It has likewise exacerbated poverty, discrimination and inequalities in many parts of the world, not only through how COVID-19 appears to be affecting poorer communities more than the rich, but also as a consequence of the measures taken by states to control the spread of the virus, primarily by curtailing freedom of movement through the imposition of community quarantine, lockdowns and curfews in many parts of the world.

As of 7 May 2020, the total number of COVID-19 cases reported in the Philippines by the Department of Health (DOH) was 10,343 with 685 deaths and 1,680 recovered. With these figures, the Philippines ranks third, after Singapore and Indonesia, in the number of COVID-19 cases in Southeast Asia.

After the DOH reported the first COVID-19 case in the country, acquired through local transmission, the Philippine President Rodrigo R. Duterte signed Proclamation No. 922 on 8 March 2020, declaring the country under a state of public health emergency.
The ECQ instructed all residents to stay at home, and the closure of all non-essential business establishments, schools and universities, public transportation facilities, malls and shopping centres, churches and other faith-based institutions. Checkpoints were set up in various parts of Metro Manila and throughout Luzon as means to control movement of people throughout the island. In essence, the ECQ meant the suspension of the freedom of movement.

With people confined to their homes for almost two months, the most vulnerable residents, particularly the daily wage earners covered by the “no work, no pay” policy, and those employed in the informal economy, have borne the brunt of the “no work, no pay” policy, and those employed in the informal economy, have borne the brunt of the ECQ. The loss of their income has forced these employees to rely on whatever assistance and support service units, to administrators and teachers, adjusted to work-from-home arrangements.

From the confines of their homes, teachers and administrators were put to the task of revising and adapting course syllabi and requirements as they shifted to alternative or remote teaching modalities, both synchronous and asynchronous. Where students and teachers had access to electronic devices and reliable Internet connections, learning management systems such as Canvas, Moodle, Blackboard, and applications like Google Hangouts, Zoom and Skype, were used. But where students had limited access to computers or unreliable access to the Internet, teachers and students used smartphones to exchange messages, notes and materials, through text messaging, e-mail, Facebook Messenger, and Twitter.

HEIs like the University of the Philippines-National Institutes of Health, with funding support from the Department of Science and Technology, produced a COVID-19 diagnostic kit called GenAmplify COVID-19 rRT-PCR Detection Kit, a less expensive alternative to the imported testing kits. This made it easier to increase the number of tests conducted per day.

State and private universities and colleges, including those owned and operated by religious groups, actively designed, produced and distributed 3D-printed face shields, face masks, and personal protective equipment for healthcare and other frontline workers. Local versions of ethyl alcohol and sanitisers, sensor-enabled hand spray, mobile full-body disinfection chambers at entrances, and even an “Anti-COVID” drink named ExCite which stands for “Extinguishing Communicable Infection Through Edible Plant Source,” a drink made from carrot extract, moringa and calamansi (lime) juice, were among the inventions and products produced and distributed during the pandemic.

Furthermore, HEIs were involved in enhancing the capabilities and competencies of members of the academe, professional groups, and the general public by sharing their knowledge, skills and expertise on relevant topics. Training activities, mentoring sessions, and webinars were organised by various colleges and universities using Zoom and Skype. Topics covered in these activities include online teaching, biosafety, COVID-19 and emerging infectious diseases, and psychosocial first aid and support for students and faculty. Students, teachers, staff and alumni initiated various projects and activities to solicit, and 1.

### The Impact of the Lockdown on Higher Education

Higher education institutions (HEIs), both public and private, have also had to adjust to the new situation where face-to-face interaction and mass gatherings are prohibited. Committed to their mandate, the leading universities and colleges in the Philippines, particularly those affiliated with the ASEAN University Network - such as the University of the Philippines, Ateneo de Manila University and De la Salle University, found innovative ways to fulfil their threong-pronged tasks of education, research and service. Everyone, from the operations and support service units, to administrators and teachers, adjusted to work-from-home arrangements.

From the confines of their homes, teachers and administrators were put to the task of revising and adapting course syllabi and requirements as they shifted to alternative or remote teaching modalities, both synchronous and asynchronous. Where students and teachers had access to electronic devices and reliable Internet connections, learning management systems such as Canvas, Moodle, Blackboard, and applications like Google Hangouts, Zoom and Skype, were used. But where students had limited access to computers or unreliable access to the Internet, teachers and students used smartphones to exchange messages, notes and materials, through text messaging, e-mail, Facebook Messenger, and Twitter.

In some instances, these arrangements became unsustainable and some universities had to suspend remote or online classes because the uneven socioeconomic status of students affected their access to these modalities of learning.

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extend support and resources to ensure the safety of healthcare workers, food producers and distributors, grocery and supermarket workers, and law enforcement agents manning checkpoints.

Cognisant of their education, research and service functions, HEIs in the Philippines certainly had their hands full in responding to the challenges of the time. The bayanihan spirit or collective community mobilisation very typical of Filipino culture in times of crisis and emergency, was strongly demonstrated by the different sectors in HEIs during the pandemic.

Anticipated Challenges Under the “New Normal”

With the anticipated lifting or relaxing of the ECQ in many parts of the country after 15 May, sustaining the delivery of quality education continues to be a major challenge. With the restrictions on the movement of people, the need to practise physical distancing, and prohibitions on mass gatherings, face-to-face classes, community engagements, internships, practicum activities, and other forms of experiential learning methods can no longer be employed for as long as the pandemic persists. This presents an opportunity for the academic community to innovate and develop alternative teaching strategies that will allow for a more conducive learning environment, given these limitations.

The pandemic has clearly demonstrated the social, economic, political and environmental realities and phenomena from varying perspectives, and the unsustainable conditions that many of us have been living with; it has also produced new problems and challenges and changed the way we live our lives. HEIs also need to review and evaluate their research agenda and priorities to respond to these realisations and changes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has produced a new world full of challenges, dilemmas, as well as opportunities. It is up to us to adapt and transform the challenges and dilemmas to opportunities for growth and development for our nation and the global community.

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Malaysia – An Unexpected Disruption to Teaching and Learning

CHANG-DA WAN

COVID-19 is arguably one of the most disruptive pandemics in recent years to afflict our societies in general, and to higher education in particular. Due to the urgent need to contain this highly contagious virus, unprecedented public health interventions have been undertaken in varying degrees around the world. Global travel has come to a standstill, and billions of people have been asked to stay at home. This has resulted in sudden and massive disruptions to daily life and socioeconomic activities.

Background in Malaysia

Malaysia, alongside its neighbours Singapore and Thailand, were among the first few countries to report incidents of COVID-19 outside of China. To date, there have been two waves of COVID-19 cases in Malaysia. The first wave was between mid-January and mid-February, when 22 cases were reported – all individuals arriving from China. The second wave that began end of February, was monumental and saw a rapid increase in active cases of community transmission. The rapid rise in active cases led the Malaysian government to order a Movement Control Order (MCO) beginning 18 March 2020.

Yet even before the MCO and while the situation of COVID-19 was escalating, a major disruption from the political arena was happening concurrently. Over the fourth weekend of February, some Members of Parliament, including ministers in the Cabinet, defected from the ruling coalition, and this led to the resignation of the Prime Minister (PM). The country was in political turmoil for a week until the new PM, who is from the same political party as the previous one but is now aligned with the alternative coalition, was appointed on leap day. Given that the Malaysian higher education system is highly centralised with strong control from the government, the re-emergence of a Ministry of Higher Education (which was part of the Ministry of Education in the previous Cabinet) with a new Minister of Higher Education at the helm, is a major change and disruption in itself. Yet, the COVID-19 and MCO have overshadowed this major disruption in higher education. But it is crucial to take this political change into account when looking at the current state of higher education in Malaysia.
The Movement Control Order (MCO) was enforced on 18 March 2020, with closure of education institutions and all government and private premises except those involved in essential services. Beginning 4 May 2020, Malaysia eased into a “conditional MCO” allowing the majority of economic sectors to resume their operations. Schools however remain shut and large social gatherings are still banned. The country’s borders also remained closed, the majority of economic sectors to resume their operations. Schools however remain shut and large social gatherings are still banned. The country’s borders also remained shut to tourists.

Higher Education and The Movement Control Order (MCO)

While the MCO is a major disruption to higher education as all universities and higher education institutions have been ordered to close with immediate effect, prior to the MCO, the readiness of Malaysian universities — both public and private — had already been put to the test. When the COVID-19 situation was at its peak in China, in late January and early February, the period coincided with the beginning of a new semester in most higher education institutions in Malaysia. This was when new international students were arriving and current international students were returning from their holidays, especially those from China. Various universities had to develop standard operating procedures to screen and quarantine students and staff who had travelled back from the affected places.

The various measures can be seen as successful given that no new case was reported among students and staff in universities during the first wave.

The MCO announcement on the evening of 16 March, mandated that universities and schools would be closed beginning 18 March. The Department of Higher Education then issued a circular that ordered all teaching and learning activities, which strangely also included online activities, to cease with immediate effect. Consequently, some universities instructed their students to vacate their hostel rooms on campus and return to their respective homes. This caused a frenzied gathering of students at bus stations and airports within hours, and everyone seemed to forget the essential need of social distancing to contain COVID-19. To make matters worse, the government, for several hours on 17 March before the beginning of the MCO, also ordered that movements across states would require cross-border permits from the police.

Instantly, police stations near major transportation hubs also became pre-MCO gathering venues.

Adaptations in Teaching and Learning

In terms of teaching and learning, a new circular was issued on Day 1 of the MCO that allowed teaching and learning activities to resume, provided that the MCO was adhered to. Universities were required to assess their readiness as well as their students’, before online teaching and learning could resume. The Department of Higher Education seemed to have learned from its mistake of ‘instructing’ universities: on the subsequent matter of what teaching and learning could resume.

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Instantly, police stations near major transportation hubs also became pre-MCO gathering venues. Readiness of many universities and the government in dealing with students at this critical juncture was way below par.

Access to the Internet throughout the country remains a challenge, especially for those in rural areas. Even those with Internet access outside of campus may not have the bandwidth and speed to adequately support online learning.

While not all universities are ready or have the capacity and infrastructure to convert to online learning, the mass exodus of students on 17 March means that many of them are currently away from the campus. Access to the Internet throughout the country remains a challenge, especially for those in rural areas. Even those with Internet access outside of campus may not have the bandwidth and speed to adequately support online learning. An informal survey done with a group of students in a public university indicated 90% of them are not prepared to switch to online learning. Other universities have taken varying approaches along a continuum of the two cases illustrated here.

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the semester timetable and shifting all teaching and learning activities online, with the plan to have final examinations once the MCO is lifted. The rationale behind this plan is to ensure their graduates will join the labour market without delay, despite the fact that an informal survey revealed that at least a tenth of students have no Internet access. Conversely, another public university postponed the entire semester to June, provided the MCO is lifted by then. The decision was taken after consultation with its student body and staff, in view of the fact that most of them are not prepared to switch to online learning. Other universities have taken varying approaches along a continuum of the two cases illustrated here.

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Vietnam –
COVID-19: Challenges and Opportunities for Vietnamese Higher Education

THANH PHAM & HUONG NGUYEN

Online Teaching and Learning: Time to Kick Off Locally

Vietnam’s higher education has not developed adequately compared to its economic development in many aspects. The landscape of online teaching and learning is an example that illustrates how education is falling behind economic development. Although technology has been widely embedded in various aspects of economic and social life of the Vietnamese people (for example, online trading and businesses have become popular; Internet and mobile phone services are widely offered and utilised), the utilisation of technology in education is still very limited. Although the government and universities have proposed various forms of online teaching for years, very few institutions, academics and students have shown enthusiasm for these practices. Reasons vary but the main ones are long-lasting attachments to physical teaching traditions, low demand for resources in foreign languages (Vietnamese language is the language of instruction of all universities except some newly established international universities) and limited collaborations with foreign institutions (very few Vietnamese universities have joint and exchange programmes with foreign institutions). The outbreak might be an impetus for authorities and people to identify online infrastructure and then foster blended teaching and learning programmes and practices, which combine both face-to-face teaching and online delivery. The teaching and learning experiences that teachers and students are going through during the lockdown period will be a push to make this scenario become more probable.

When online teaching and learning are expanded, various economic, social and cultural benefits at both local and international levels could be achieved. Locally, undoubtedly current traffic problems in big cities will be significantly solved if more people take online courses; students in remote areas will have a better chance to participate in quality educational programmes and institutions; and academics and students could enhance research, teaching and learning capacities when they are able to access international research resources. Internationally, online programmes and practices could strengthen and foster connections between Vietnamese higher education and other countries. An increasing number of institutions and countries are collaborating by offering joint online programmes and degrees. Such collaborations require skills and knowledge of stakeholders involved in running the online programmes. Vietnam has lost opportunities for such collaborations due to the unavailability of online programmes and limitations in capacity for online teaching and learning of academics and students.

After COVID-19, common teaching and learning practices traditionally deployed in Asian classrooms promise to become more popular in Western classrooms. Fundamentally, long-existing educational principles which stress that interactions and verbal discussion lead to learning, such as those of Vygotsky’s, could be less enthusiastically advocated. After experiencing limited opportunities for verbal interactions but more engagement in quiet learning in online classrooms, teachers and students might ask: which forms of teaching and learning are actually more effective; or how various teaching and learning practices could be blended in teaching and learning?

Vietnamese Cultural and Intellectual Resources: Opportunities for Global Dissemination

Recent trends in internationalisation of higher education are calling for researchers in countries in the Global North to pay more attention to the cultural and intellectual resources of countries in the South (Singh, 2010). This originates from current economic and environmental crises in many Western countries and fast economic development and constant successes of educational institutions in non-Western countries. Current online teaching and learning practices are, to a great extent, creating opportunities for the trend to happen more quickly. Various examples could be used to illustrate this. First, to have quality online teaching, teachers and students have to use heavy scaffolding and explicit pedagogies with clear instructions and steps (Pham, 2016). Common teaching practices in Western classrooms, such as independent, critical and inquiring, are increasingly being replaced by strong scaffolding and explicit teaching in online delivery. This replacement is being reinforced and becoming a “must” due to high anxiety and enormous stress facing students currently. After COVID-19, common teaching and learning practices traditionally deployed in Asian classrooms promise to become more popular in Western classrooms.

Fundamentally, long-existing educational principles which stress that interactions and verbal discussion lead to learning, such as those of Vygotsky’s, could be less enthusiastically advocated. After experiencing limited opportunities for verbal interactions but more engagement in quiet learning in online classrooms, teachers and students might ask: which forms of teaching and learning are actually more effective; or how various teaching and learning practices could be blended in teaching and learning?
Finally, the increase in deaths, shortages in medical services and enormous stresses people are experiencing globally are putting forward a fundamental question for both authorities and ordinary people: should the wealth and development of a country be only limited to political strengths, scientific and technological advancements and strong performance of students in science and maths subjects? Many people are changing their beliefs. More enthusiasm and attention are being paid to human values such as loyalty, community, collaboration, unitedness, tolerance, kindness and respect — common Confucian educational principles taught in Asian classrooms. These values have been clearly displayed in activities that Vietnam is undertaking to control COVID-19. Vietnam has been praised by many countries as a model in the COVID-19 war (no death and a small number of confirmed cases). Human-centred programmes, such as the establishment of rice ATMs in many cities and areas, cooperation of the people with authorities by closely following, listening to and proactively acting on governmental policies and instructions have inspired people in many other countries. These successes are the results of an emphasis in humanity education in Vietnam.

In sum, COVID-19 is threatening many sectors and countries but to limit consequences and open new opportunities, authorities of Vietnamese institutions need to take actions to review current programmes and see how more online programmes and services could be delivered. Vietnam's educational and cultural values could also be more widely disseminated. The crisis is urging us to ask a fundamental question: to make a better world, should the South learn from the North or should both the North and South learn and support each other?

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Impact on Brunei’s Higher Education Teaching and Learning

In Brunei Darussalam, the higher education system is made up of higher education institutions, namely Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Universiti Teknologi Brunei (UTB), Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali and Politeknik Brunei. The country’s decisions on matters relating to COVID-19 have been well informed by Ministry of Health. All higher education institutions under the Ministry of Education took precautionary measures in ensuring that the infection was contained. Health, safety and well-being of their community are the institutions’ top priority. Hence, respective institutions were asked to come up with their respective Business Continuity Plan, or BCP. All universities have decided to suspend face-to-face teaching and learning for students.

UTB remains open and operational but has changed its methods of engagement with students, in light of the current COVID-19 situation. Teaching and learning continue online and remote instructions were provided to the students. UTB has been utilising its online education platforms and other non-face-to-face delivery methods of teaching and learning since the first BCP announcement. Moodle, an online education platform, is not new to the university but unfortunately, utilisation was not very high. But with the suspension of face-to-face teaching and learning, utilisation is now at its highest. Both lecturers and students have no choice but to embrace the technology. Especially with no on-campus examinations, all assessments are to be converted to 100% coursework. Issues such as access to the Internet, unstable devices and uncondusive environment for learning at home have emerged.

1. Source: The ASEAN Post

In addition, all students’ work is to be submitted online. The graduation dates are fixed with no extension to avoid any delay in the completion of study for final-year students. Individual lecturers are to set their own submission deadlines, with the final date of marks submission sent out by the Examination Office. Assignment or coursework are allowed to start now so that students will not be overwhelmed by too many of them within a short period; there are also no changes in degree classification.

All lecturers are working from home on a weekly basis. To restrict access to the campus, including laboratories, except for group design projects, students are allowed to return to campus to work on final year projects and other research projects at most three times a week and only if recommended by their respective supervisor. Students must observe the current access procedures put in place by the University and the respective rules and regulations for laboratory use of the respective faculty or school. Prior permission must be obtained from the BCP Team in order to access the laboratories.

At the time of writing, Brunei’s number of confirmed cases remain below 200. While Brunei did not opt for a lockdown, its government was swift in introducing measures such as travel ban, restrictions on public gatherings, closure of places of worship, work-from-home arrangements, and all public and private educational institutions shifting to online learning.1 The government may relax its COVID-19 response measures if there are no new cases of infection observed for a month.

A survey was done on online education platform usage during the COVID-19 crisis from 14 to 17 March. 670 responses were collected, which represent 45% of UTB’s student population. The analysis of the data concluded that students prefer blended learning over online learning, and to limit this to a maximum of four hours per day. The report further stated: “Higher education institutions are trying to innovate their services and raise their public reputation as education is currently undergoing a dramatic transformation. Technology plays a powerful role today and institutions can no longer meet students’ needs through classroom-based instruction alone.” It added that the university is increasingly focused on determining the right model to integrate technologies in teaching and learning in order to fulfil students’ needs and provide the skills and education needed to prepare for the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Conclusion

No one knows for sure how long these closures are likely to last. All measures will be extended until the pandemic subsides. All are reminded not to panic and to continue to maintain the advocated good practices at all times as a precautionary measure.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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UTB website- BCP circulars
Survey conducted by: (Dr Safal Omar, Dr Hjh Noor Maya Hj Md Salleh and Dr Aizaal H Selay)

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Introduction

COVID-19 is a game changer. Various 'rules of the game' will change in society during and after this pandemic, including those in the education sector. In this article, I will discuss what faculties of education (FoEs) should do, especially in the contexts of developing ASEAN countries, with a focus on issues in pedagogy, curriculum and support for student teachers.

Labour Market Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Back to the Future

FoEs that do not have many facilities or human resources, as well as financial capacities for online learning, would have to go for non-online approaches — back to the future. Probably one of the most efficient solutions would be to have a partnership with and utilise the available resources of open universities. They have know-how and resources to deliver education for wider audiences in various parts of the countries — by printed materials, radio programmes, TV programmes, DVDs, and so forth. Faculty members can interact with student teachers on a corresponding basis by email, post or short messages even.

Some faculty members may be dissatisfied with this approach. However, it would save much time and labour. Otherwise, the cost of time and labour to support and train faculty members on online teaching will be immense. In considering all these costs, it is the best for FoEs to rely on open universities' existing resources for the time being, if not permanently.

Rush to the Future

If there is no open university in the country, or if FoEs prefer their own ways of teaching, it is necessary to develop online teaching as fast as possible — rush to the future. In such a case, first, faculty members need to be able to access reliable online teaching platforms. Second, they need extensive support to familiarise themselves with new ways of teaching. Not all faculty members would have experience teaching online, and senior faculty members who do not use learning management systems such as Moodle, Blackboard and other platforms or social networks might especially struggle to adapt. Thus, it is crucial that universities rapidly invest in appropriate infrastructure and human resources to support all the faculty members for the transition.

If FoEs go online, they have to make sure that every student teacher has access to online lessons. To achieve this, quiet study areas, reliable Wi-Fi services and devices (e.g., laptop, desktop, tablet or even smartphone) have to be readily available. However, not every student teacher will have access to them due to their family and financial situations, as well as geographical locations. There must be interventions by either national or international agencies to support the procurement or rental of devices for student teachers.

Subject education courses [...] are necessary but not sufficient. Student teachers also need to learn how to provide well-being consultation and counselling to their prospective students.

Ready for the Future

Curriculum in FoEs needs to be revisited during this challenging period. Student teachers will face immense challenges once they are assigned to schools in which they will start to teach. FoEs will have to prepare them — ready for the future. The challenges include psychological and behavioural issues of their students, caused by socio-economic hardships. Then, the employment and incomes of students’ parents will be highly uncertain due to this pandemic. Parental stresses and anger may be passed on to children in various forms. Many of the students may have to drop out due to insufficient parental income.
It is critical for student teachers to understand and empathise with their students’ struggles. This is the first step in caring for their students and helping them learn. Their important job is to build up a classroom culture where all students can feel safe and accepted, as well as settle down for learning. In some extreme cases, classrooms may be the safest place for some learners.

Thus, in FoEs, there should be more courses on educational and school psychology compared to what is currently offered. Subject education courses such as mathematics education or science education are necessary but not sufficient. Student teachers also need to learn how to provide well-being consultation and counselling to their prospective students. In teaching those psychological subjects, then, the content should be practical, based on real cases and voices from the classrooms. Faculty members need to build up a strong nexus between the practices and theories in the given disciplines.

Stay for the Future
There will be a huge increase in the need for financial support among student teachers — to let them stay for the future. I recently learnt that many students are wondering whether they can continue their studies, even in one of the best FoEs in ASEAN. We cannot and must not let future teachers drop out because of this pandemic. We need to let them stay in the teaching profession to serve the next generations. This problem is beyond the capacities of individual FoEs, so universities, ministries or international donor agencies have to support the teacher-education sector by providing scholarships to student teachers in financial need.

Trace out the Future
It is critical to research the actual impacts of COVID-19 in both FoEs and schools — tracing out the future. This can be achieved by conducting surveys, interviews and longitudinal studies to clarify the impact of the pandemic on schools. Further, both school and faculty practices need to be investigated by action research to understand how they might be used to mitigate the impact of this pandemic. These studies will inform teaching in FoEs as well.

Postscript
I would like to make reference to two aspects of this pandemic. First, it is a health crisis and it requires a totally new treatment — breaking the classroom processes of FoEs into completely individual bases. Then, it is a socio-economic crisis that leads to people suffering from the huge extent of the recession. Efforts to keep FoEs as well as schools united through pedagogy, curriculum, support and research is key.

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Financial Impact of COVID-19 on Universities
The Australian system of higher education has been hit hard by the coronavirus crisis, perhaps harder than many other university systems. This is so because Australian universities are heavily reliant on the revenue generated from international students. Almost 35% of their students are international, and a large proportion of their income is generated from this source of revenue.

With the financial crisis created by COVID-19, Australian universities are expecting a major decline in the number of their international students, particularly from China. The Mitchell Institute has projected cumulative losses of more than 19 billion Australian dollars over the next three years. The impact is almost immediate as international students are unable to travel to Australia to start their courses in July for the second semester. A number of international students have already paused their studies. The broader economy reliant on international education has also taken a major hit.

To address the severe financial shortfall, most Australian universities have frozen new appointments, enforced some redundancies, cut back on capital projects and shelved new initiatives, even those that were already at an advanced stage of planning. With more than 15% decline in revenue, senior executives at most Australian universities have taken a cut in their pay of around 20%. The staff has been warned to expect financial austerity the like of which Australian universities have not faced before.
No Going Back To the “Old Normal”

At the same time, Australian universities are mostly satisfied with the ways in which they have handled the crisis. They moved decisively with the physical closure of their campuses, communicated effectively with students, reassured them of their commitment to quality teaching. In transferring to an online mode of delivery, the universities have supported the teaching staff in developing new skills and adapting to the new conditions. Impressive also has been the speed with which the teaching staff has acquired these skills, and also the ways in which students have embraced the imperatives of working remotely.

As the health crisis begins to show signs of recovery, there are now intense debates about the future throughout the Australian system of higher education. The universities are working very hard to ensure that the quality of instruction and research remains high. They insist that even if we could go back to the old normal, we should not. Instead, the crisis should be viewed as an opportunity to ask some hard questions about some of the system’s inherent inadequacies, limitations and contradictions.

In Australia, there is remarkably little resistance to the notion that new business models will have to be developed, along with new approaches to research, pedagogy, governance and engagement with the community. Less clear is what these approaches might look like, and how they might be imagined, created, trialled and evaluated. What is widely acknowledged is that there may never be a “new normal”, and that Australian universities will in future need to be constantly vigilant, and develop structures that are flexible and invite support innovation. The universities will need to become much more responsive to rapid and unexpected changes, remain attentive and prepared, and not afraid to experiment and promote innovation.

They will need to rethink their business model. It is now clear that Australian universities can no longer rely on a single major source of revenue: international students. For a number of years, Australian universities have been warned not to depend so heavily on their ability to recruit students from China almost at will. The current crisis has reinforced the importance of this warning, especially in view of the geopolitical uncertainties and tensions to which COVID-19 appears to have given rise, with Australia caught in the rivalry between the United States and China.

With their success in recruiting international students, Australian universities have, over the past two decades, allowed the Australian government to reduce the level of its public investment in higher education. The government has been able to argue that universities are already rich through the incomes they generate from international students. And now it has hinted that it is not in a position to provide any significant rescue packages. If Australian universities are to remain strong, they need to figure out new ways of pressuring the government into realising its role in the promotion of public goods.

The crisis has clearly shown how useful online tools can be in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning — though not on their own and not for every subject area — as a cheaper version of teacher-centric instruction. Such tools need to be embedded within a broader and a more sophisticated approach to pedagogy, based on multiple ways of helping students to learn. COVID-19 has thus provided universities an opportunity to experiment with new approaches to pedagogy within the context of reflections about the basic purposes of higher education, and how it might be possible to place students at the centre of pedagogic processes.

No Going Back To the “Old Normal”

What is widely acknowledged is that there may never be a “new normal”, and that Australian universities will in future need to be constantly vigilant, and develop structures that are flexible and invite innovation.

Rethinking Priorities, Practices and Purpose

The coronavirus crisis has also underlined the urgency of rethinking the ways in which universities determine their priorities in the allocation and distribution of their funds. Given their success in moving to online education, they might be tempted to view it as a way of cutting costs. And there is already some evidence to suggest that this is the case. However, this manner of thinking would be fundamentally misguided and hazardous. The temptation to view online instruction as somehow cheaper cannot be assumed and should be resisted, if quality is to be maintained, and if student interest is to be encouraged.

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Universities also need to rethink how the work of academic staff is regarded within the universities whose governance practices have become increasingly corporatised. Even before the coronavirus crisis, many academics believed that their work was not sufficiently valued, and that the commercial imperatives took precedence over educational concerns for which they were responsible. This was evident in the university budgets becoming increasingly directed towards corporate practices of advertising and recruitment, large capital projects and the employment of a growing number of administrators whose functions were often unclear, and who did additional work that academic staff regarded as unnecessary.

As public universities in Australia and elsewhere became corporatised, academic work was increasingly subjected to managerial constraints, within which academic autonomy was compromised, together with a performance regime based on the assumptions of distrust. Education in the times of COVID-19 has shown how such an audit culture is neither necessary nor sufficient for ensuring that the academic staff are dedicated, self-directed and innovative. This realisation should lead universities to reconsider the corporate
and managerial practices that they have developed over the past few decades, to allow the professionalism of academic staff to flourish again.

The coronavirus crisis has also underlined the role of universities in working towards the public good. They have shown the contribution that universities make in generating the knowledge needed to provide relevant information, promote public debates, manage risks and generate socially useful products and services such as medicine. Indeed, they are located at the centre of the public space where solutions to our common problems are generated. In recent decades, the commercial utility of research has been prioritised, often ahead of research for public good. This crisis may have given universities and funding agencies an opportunity to reconsider the research that is most worthwhile, and how research might not only have commercial and strategic purposes, but moral and cultural ends as well.

This logic applies equally to the engagement activities of universities. Most of these activities in recent years have been focused on raising money through various corporations and philanthropic organisations. As a result, the universities have forged closer links with the "top end of the town" ahead of links with the communities within which they are socially embedded. The public nature of public universities is often overlooked, when they begin to regard their status and prestige in corporate terms, discounting the fact that they were created originally for societal good.

The coronavirus crisis has hopefully reminded us all of why public universities exist, and what role they are expected to play in forging caring and thoughtful citizens, and building robust, democratic and socially just communities. It has given us an opportunity to rethink the basic purposes of higher education, and realise the extent to which we have drifted away from them. Ultimately, we need to ask the question of what needs to be done to put the "public" back into the idea of a "public university".

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The temptation to view online instruction as somehow cheaper cannot be assumed and should be resisted, if quality is to be maintained, and if student interest is to be encouraged.

India –
Can a Better Higher Education System Emerge Out of the Coronavirus Crisis?
MOUSUMI MUKHERJEE

In a recent article in the Financial Times, Amartya Sen, Nobel laureate and professor at Harvard University, reflected on how a better society can emerge out of the lockdowns by citing historic developments around the world in the post-World-War II period. He calls for more concern for equity in crisis management to usher in a less unequal world in the future. If a better society can emerge out of the lockdowns, can a better higher education system also emerge out of the lockdowns?

In fact, India had a great ancient tradition of higher education, about which scholars such as Amartya Sen have already written extensively. Over the many centuries, this tradition of higher education had declined. The modern Indian higher education system, established during the British colonial period, has been caught up in a tug-of-war, post-independence from colonial rule, with its heritage as "retailers of knowledge" to reproduce educated professionals out of colonial subjects and the needs of a contemporary postcolonial sovereign nation-state to reproduce "critical thinking Indian citizens".

Historically, higher education has been a privilege for the few. Hence, widening access to higher education became a major postcolonial agenda. In recent years, there has also been a major policy shift to re-imagine modern Indian higher educational institutions as active "creators of knowledge", rather than passive retailers and consumers of knowledge.

Now with the coronavirus lockdowns, the delivery of education in the private higher educational institutions and some public institutions in India has moved online, like many other countries, in order to manage the learning gap for the rest of the academic year in 2020. But, many academics and experts, who are driven by a call towards social justice, have been raising questions about access to online education and highlighting the issue of the digital divide.

Two committees were set up by the University Grants Commission in India, led by the Vice-Chancellor of Haryana University and the Vice-Chancellor of the Indira Gandhi National Open University, to deliberate on issues related to learning loss and online education. The committee members have recommended a staggered approach to resume classes in the new academic session in September instead of July, and to conduct online classes and exams only when it is feasible. Otherwise, faculty and students should wait until the lockdown is over.
This could be an opportunity for new quality higher educational institutions in India to retain outward-mobile Indian students and build India as a regional educational hub.

Higher Education in Crisis Before COVID-19

However, will access to online education help to manage the learning gaps of even so-called privileged students in India? Here, it is important to narrate my own college experience within the mainstream public higher education system in India. Even without COVID-19 related national lockdowns, we hardly had meaningful teaching and learning experience in the classrooms.

Except for the classes delivered by one or two outstanding professors, students would take least interest in attending classes in college. Teachers would appear with a register to take attendance and then read out notes from the yellowed pages of their notebooks. These notes were probably delivered by their own professors 30 years ago!

Few students would sit in the front rows of the class to scribble down those notes read aloud in a monotonous tone by the professor. Most students could buy photocopies of these notes anyway at a cheap rate from a nearby bookstore before their exams, to rote-memorise them to pass the tests.

Most good students would be self-directed learners who seek out help outside of the mainstream education system in their pursuit of knowledge. Hence, more privileged students, those who seek out help outside of the mainstream public higher education system in India, to retain outward-mobile Indian students and build India as a regional educational hub.

Experts are predicting that it might take 5 years for students to move freely across borders again and for the international education market to recover. This could be an opportunity for new quality higher educational institutions in India to retain outward-mobile Indian students and build India as a regional educational hub, according to a recent QS-iGauge report. The Indian Minister of Human Resource and Development, Dr Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank also expressed great optimism about recovering Indian HEIs ancient glories and thanked teachers for their contributions as “yodhhas” (warriors) against coronavirus during his live interactions on 28 May with the heads and staff of 45,000 HEIs in India through Facebook and Twitter, organised by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council. But, could the restriction on international mobility for Indian students due to the global coronavirus crisis be taken as an opportunity to improve the overall domestic higher education system in India?

What is Missing in Indian Higher Education?

As highlighted in the narration of personal experience above, mainstream Indian higher education curriculum and pedagogy need a massive overhaul. Often, within academia, the use of technology is seen as something that is dumbing down the curriculum. The teaching and learning process is often viewed as a scholarly, monastic activity. Those who are bookworms, those who can read and write well without much effort are seen as intelligent, smart people. The rest are all seen as either stupid “Buddhoo” (in Hindi) or, highly entitled “spoiled-brats”.

At the higher education level in India, there is literally no training for teachers in teaching and learning. There is little awareness about critical and digital pedagogies among large masses of teachers. It is assumed that those who pursue higher education and get masters or doctorate degrees get to know, by default, how to teach. The result of this assumption has been disastrous.

It has led to huge brain drain and economic drain out of India. Universities have also produced graduates with degrees earned through “rote-memorising” of bookish knowledge without much connection to the needs of the contemporary society and economy. Hence, it has created the problem of “economic apartheid”, mostly for students from historically marginalised backgrounds.

This reminds me of another personal experience from a few years ago. At that time, I was visiting a school in India from Melbourne. As a visitor from Australia, I volunteered to work at the school on some of their educational outreach projects. There was some construction work going on inside the school campus at that time. One day, one of the construction workers approached me and the teacher-coordinator of the school outreach projects with a piece of paper in hand.

The piece of paper was the CV of this young man from a rural tribal background. It turned out that he holds a first-class Master’s degree from one of the premier public universities in that city. Since he was unable to get any other job, even after his MA degree, and could not go back to his native village, he decided to join the construction workers to do one of the least paid jobs for manual labourers in India.

What was missing in this young man’s education? Did access to the mainstream higher education system actually empower this young man? Of course, any kind of educational process creates a sense of empowerment and courage. I am sure his education gave the young man courage to approach us with his CV for better work opportunities. We were able to mentor this young man to re-draft his CV, train him to use computers for record-keeping and data management for school outreach work, and eventually he found employment with a non-governmental organisation. But there are so many more in similar situations.

Technology, Equity and Reform

Right now, online education is being seen as the best solution in many countries affected by the coronavirus crisis. At the same time, many experts within India are concerned about access and the digital divide. But, can this crisis be taken as an opportunity to seriously think about higher education reform beyond just access to technology and the digital divide?

The National Sample Survey 2017-2018 shows that only 42% of urban population and 15% rural households have internet access. But, irrespective of this existing digital divide, it is a fact that digital technology and social media are one of the most important phenomena in contemporary times. India and many other emerging economies with large young populations have more Internet and social media users than many other more affluent countries in the world. Education and technology are also two great levellers that can help to reduce existing socioeconomic inequality.

Can this usage be utilised as a pedagogic tool? Will access to new technology be further widened as promised by the Ministers? Will the teachers within HEIs be empowered to teach by providing necessary teacher’s training? How these questions are answered will determine the future of higher education in India and indeed, around the world.
China –
Temporary Action or New Model Experiment? Teaching at Chinese Universities in the Time of COVID-19
BIE DUNRONG & LIU JIN

Winter vacation is China’s most festive holiday. During this time, teachers and students return home from the colleges and universities where they work or study, to reunite with their families to celebrate the Spring Festival. The outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic this year disrupted winter vacation plans. In order to contain the epidemic, campuses closed, teachers and students could not return to school, and colleges and universities had to rely on information and communications technology and develop online teaching, to ensure that the teaching load of the spring semester could be carried out as planned.

A Large-Scale Online Teaching Experiment
Online teaching is hardly a new feature at Chinese colleges and universities and has been developed to supplement classroom teaching. However, during the COVID-19 epidemic, it has become the main mode of instruction and is being widely used in colleges and universities. China has the largest higher education system in the world, with 2,688 colleges and universities nationwide as of 2019. According to statistics from the ministry of education, that same year, the number of students reached 30,315 million. After the Spring Festival, colleges and universities hastily developed new teaching plans to be implemented during the period campuses would be closed. Teachers received online training to become familiar with the requirements of online teaching and to align their classes to this new medium.

There are three basic forms of online teaching, including Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), online real-time interactive teaching (ORIT), and video teaching. ORIT is the newest pedagogy to be implemented. Online teaching is now being implemented on a massive scale. Most teachers do not have any experience in online teaching, but starting teaching their courses online with great enthusiasm during the special time of the epidemic. Some foreign teachers who could not return to school on schedule after their vacation back home are overcoming the time difference and carrying out their teaching online from their home countries. Most theoretical courses are being taught online, while that is not possible for courses including practices and experiments. For example, Xiamen University is offering 3,675 online courses. Although, so far, no survey has been made on the quality of online teaching, the phenomenon is undoubtedly of great significance as a national experiment and ensures that teaching can go on, even at a basic level, during the COVID-19 epidemic.

The participation rate is very high. From their homes all over the country, students access their online classes at the same time and interact with teachers and classmates on learning issues. Statistics show that the average student participation rate in the first week of online teaching exceeded 85%, and what is surprising is that online interaction between teachers and students is much more frequent now than ever before. One reason for that may be related to a sense of novelty and appreciation for the new medium among students, since it also fosters networks; another may be the strict discipline promoted by schools.

Are the effects of this large-scale experiment going to disappear, or will some experiences and practices be retained and integrated into traditional classroom teaching?

Online teaching needs strong technical support. Colleges and universities did not have much time to mobilise and prepare themselves; the number of teachers is massive, and students are scattered all across the country. It is therefore unimaginable that online teaching and learning can be carried out smoothly without efficient technical support from modern educational technology centres at colleges and universities. Meanwhile, educational technology enterprises, such as the MOOC platform of China University, Wisdom Tree, Online School, Tencent, and others, can provide timely and powerful technical support. Therefore we can be confident that online education will not disappear, but rather, will be integrated into traditional teaching means.

Rain Classroom, Tencent, and more, are also providing technology support and teaching resources for online teaching.

Is this large-scale online teaching experiment of higher education successful so far? It is too early to say, since teachers are still insufficiently skilled, and since, for various reasons, about 15% of the students cannot participate. Yet, there is no doubt that this is an important emergency initiative for colleges and universities, which may have a significant impact on future developments of higher education after the COVID-19 epidemic.

Hybrid Teaching?
The COVID-19 epidemic will eventually pass, and colleges and universities will return to normal. Are the effects of this large-scale experiment going to disappear, or will some experiences and practices be retained and integrated into traditional classroom teaching? This is a question worthy of attention. The value of the experiment is not only to fill out a gap during school closure, but also to adopt new teaching ideas, methods, and techniques to improve campus education.

Scattered learning leads to wider outreach for universities and colleges. By not being located in the same space, teachers and students are constructing a new kind of learning community through the Internet. The advantage is that the “classroom” expands beyond the limitation of campus capacity, and allows colleges and universities to enrol more students.

students. In 2019, the gross enrolment ratio of China’s higher education was 51.6%, which is far behind that of many high-income countries. Meanwhile, the average student enrolment of colleges and universities has reached 11,260. Obviously, with the need to expand access to higher education, the space of traditional campuses has become a limiting factor. Large-scale online teaching and learning catering to a scattered student population can contribute to widening access.

Online interaction helps to make up for the lack of regular classroom communication. A number of studies show that students in East Asian countries tend to speak less in the classroom and interact less with their teachers. But in the context of large-scale online teaching, students are more willing to interact with teachers, possibly because they find it easier, with the sense of distance, to express themselves in the virtual environment. In regular campus teaching, teachers can open an online interactive channel outside of the classroom, in order to provide students with the opportunity to communicate with them and answer all kinds of questions related to their study. Online teaching and open online interaction channels are conducive to stimulating and cultivating students’ autonomy, and encouraging them to develop a sense of ownership and initiative toward their own learning.

School-enterprise cooperation has led to the development of a comprehensive educational model for students at colleges and universities. In the context of this large-scale online teaching experiment during the COVID-19 epidemic, school-enterprise cooperation played a key role, and the technology and services of many educational technology enterprises have won the trust of colleges and universities. The teaching resources of educational technology enterprises can make up for the shortage of teachers and curriculum resources. By strengthening their cooperation with related enterprises, colleges and universities are able to provide more abundant, comprehensive, personalised, and high quality teaching resources to their students, including courses, learning materials, interactive communication platforms, and more — far beyond the limitations of campus resources.

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Hong Kong –
Higher Education and the 2020 Outbreak: We’ve Been Here Before
IAN HOLLIDAY & GERARD A. POSTIGLIONE

Universities around the world are responding to COVID-19 in different ways. Hong Kong, located close to the origin, was fast to react. It learned useful lessons in 2003, when it was at the epicenter of the SARS epidemic, and again in late 2019, when anti-government protests engulfed university campuses and classes moved online. Globally, it has been one of the more effective jurisdictions in limiting COVID-19 cases and fatalities.

On the Heels of a Storm
Hong Kong’s fall protest movement meant that universities ended the first semester online. That initial experience was rough-and-ready. Professors scrambled to complete their courses through lecture capture, uploaded materials, virtual seminars, and chat rooms. Still more challenging was the switch to online assessment with a lead time of only two to three weeks. Nobody could claim that everything went smoothly in those turbulent weeks.

Handling COVID-19 was also enormously complicated. The virus emergency flared in the second half of January, just days or at most weeks into the new semester. The Chinese Lunar New Year holiday, in the final week of the month, was both a help and a hindrance. It gave universities limited breathing space. It also meant many students had left Hong Kong, either to return to the Chinese mainland or to other countries. When the holiday ended and the virus arrived, some students did not, or could not, return. Before the government closed the borders to many nonlocals, universities arranged quarantine facilities for returning students.
Expertise, Autonomy, and Action

Some universities quickly became influential in controlling the spread of the virus. The Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine at the University of Hong Kong developed rapid tests for COVID-19 that have been adopted worldwide. In shaping wider responses, Hong Kong universities were largely unencumbered by government bureaucracy because of their high degree of institutional autonomy. They could therefore act quickly to sustain instruction, research, and knowledge exchange. Nevertheless, the government did create a shadow policy framework. In particular, decisions taken to close all schools initially for a few weeks and latterly for three months from mid-January to mid-April created a policy context that universities simply had to respect.

Hong Kong universities were largely unencumbered by government bureaucracy because of their high degree of institutional autonomy. They could therefore act quickly to sustain instruction, research, and knowledge exchange.

Within each of the major public universities, a task force typically composed of senior management, and reaching out to deans for major issues, was originally set up to address the student protests of late 2019. In early 2020, no more than minor personnel changes were required for these core teams to go into action to address daily challenges of COVID-19.

The Greatest Challenge

From the outset, the greatest challenge was to maintain the quality of instructional delivery. The University of Hong Kong had to sustain course offerings for 30,000 students from 100 jurisdictions. It had to manage pressing issues of online access in many parts of the world. It had to respond to basic issues of internet penetration, especially when asking students to view and download quite large files of course materials.

As in most major universities, only a small proportion of academic staff had previously run online courses. Those few faculty who had created a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) were better placed, but they were a minority. Most faculty had experience conducting face-to-face classes supported by a website that stores course materials, videos, and Powerpoint presentations (PPFs), offers a chat room, and enables assignments to be submitted. The virus led to a rapid uptick in faculty engaging fully in online education, either grudgingly or enthusiastically.

There was some resistance, and even enthusiasts found that an entire semester of online teaching bereft of face-to-face teaching generated quite a challenge. Indications are that class attendance is the same for online as for face-to-face courses. However, teaching online requires more planning and follow-up.

To support faculty taking their classes online, the University of Hong Kong ran an ongoing series of webinars. It also offered on-demand troubleshooting services, with in-house experts reachable first through WhatsApp and then through Zoom. It made short videos covering an array of basic issues. It sent out bulk emails to all teachers on a regular basis to keep them abreast of developments. To support students, it issued regular bulk emails and maintained email accounts through which students could receive real-time responses to issues and concerns. Maintaining good lines of communication has been essential throughout the crisis.

Some universities in Hong Kong retained some campus teaching, provided it did not undermine the core objective of a low-density environment. The University of Hong Kong identified components of its undergraduate programs that simply had to be taught on campus through laboratory, studio, and other sessions, and drew up schedules for final-year students to return in small groups, take these components, and graduate on time.

A challenge yet to be fully confronted is assessment. Short-term fixes adopted at the end of the first semester in Hong Kong were not entirely successful, and both teachers and students lost confidence in the assessment system. In the second semester, universities are somewhat better positioned, but still not fully prepared. Oral exams will replace many written exams, and assessment tasks will be substantially diversified.

Asking questions in a real classroom carries more social pressure than asking a question online or with a text message. Many faculty and students reported an increase in participation through Zoom tutorials, one of a small number of positives to emerge. Trust matters because teachers have to trust that students are actually online beyond the electronic indication that they are attending, though parallel issues also arise in face-to-face teaching.

With the worldwide cancellation of academic conferences, keynotes, and other overseas meetings, blocks of work time were reallocated. Staff meetings were conducted online. Academics and students saved commuting time. But working at home in Hong Kong is a different matter, as most local students share small accommodations without a separate study space. For this reason, universities kept libraries and learning commons open throughout the emergency, advising entering students on health and hygiene protocols.

Inevitable Downsides, Unexpected Upsides

Undoubtedly, there have been downsides to this semester of online teaching and learning. Students have had only a partial university life, and have often felt lonely, demotivated, and cut off. Clinical placements and internships have fallen away. Exchange programs have been curtailed. Even proponents of online learning yearn to see the return of campus activity and vibrancy. Maintaining research projects has been hard, especially when reliant on fieldwork. Links with the community, with other institutions, and with the wider world have all suffered.

Upsides, probably less visible but nevertheless tangible, have been registered above all in the fresh engagement with teaching and learning that has taken place in this most unusual semester. This is not to argue that tertiary education will be transformed. It will not. However, a platform for dialogue about new ways forward for teaching and learning now exists on many campuses, and senior managers have the opportunity to work with that.

Similarly, at a time when governments are giving subsidies of all kinds to business, they might consider funding universities to explore new forms of educational experience for students. While there is no escaping the fact that the global pandemic has hurt universities everywhere, it has also diversified the educational experience. Drawing out the lessons from that will be a key task when campuses are again able to function properly.

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The current COVID-19 pandemic is posing several challenges to international higher education. In an age of rapid internationalisation, universities strive for global institutional cooperation, actively promote overseas student mobility, and form international academic communities. This togetherness, in return, has made them more vulnerable to external threats than ever before.

The South Korean Outbreak

Such is the case in South Korea, where the coronavirus outbreak has brought about unprecedented challenges to the higher education system, not even experienced during the 2002 SARS and 2015 MERS outbreaks. After the first case of coronavirus emerged on 20 January 2020, the epidemic spread at a rapid rate nearly levelling that of China, where the virus first originated. With over 160,000 international students studying in Korea, and thousands of foreign exchange students coming in on an annual basis, the Ministry of Education was quick to act by issuing a strict two-week quarantine policy on all incoming international students. This policy restricts the students to their dormitories and outlines firm measures to prevent the spread among local students. Universities quickly followed suit by cancelling all large gatherings such as graduation and enrolment ceremonies, and postponing the start of semester by two weeks. In addition, most universities made it mandatory for all classes to be taught online for the first two weeks, and have now continued online classes indefinitely due to the ongoing coronavirus situation.

Thus, the college scene has changed drastically. Whereas normally, at this time of the year, newly admitted freshmen roam college campuses, and faculty and staff prepare for the new semester, university campuses have in a sense come to a halt. Overnight, college towns have become ghost towns, most university facilities have been shut down, and foreign exchange students are cancelling commitments and registrations left and right in order to leave the country. International students, once seen in a positive light as new sources of enrolment (due to Korea’s declining student population) and as a way to diversify student bodies, are now being seen as possible threats to campus safety, especially those returning from their winter break from heavily affected regions such as China.

Despite suffering the worst outbreak outside of China for some time, South Korea managed to rein in the spread of COVID-19 till the end of April 2020. It was praised for its apparently effective model of rapid testing and contact tracing. Just as the government started easing restrictions and reopening schools and businesses, in response to the apparent absence of new infections in the community, a second wave of COVID-19 infections has started to hit the country. At the time of writing, how this second wave will impact the reopening of universities remains to be seen.

Even traditional faculty members who long believed in the superiority of brick-and-mortar institutions and face-to-face teaching, are now “forced” to adapt to the changing times.

### International Students in Higher Education in Korea

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>(persons)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>22,526</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>83,842</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>104,262</td>
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<td>2020</td>
<td>140,000</td>
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<td>2032</td>
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Unprecedented Changes

Nevertheless, amidst these unprecedented challenges, several unexpected silver linings have emerged in the South Korean higher education system. In a short period of time, an educational revolution has erupted in terms of teaching and learning, as faculty members across the country are experimenting with new ways to interact with and teach students, as they simply cannot physically meet with students. From part-time adjunct instructors to senior professors nearing retirement, they have all been “forced” to try out new educational technologies and innovative methods of teaching. Even traditional faculty members who long believed in the superiority of brick-and-mortar institutions and face-to-face teaching, are now “forced” to adapt to the changing times. Therefore, to make things easier, universities such as the Korea University in Seoul have provided week-long seminars for all faculty members on how to successfully live-stream classes, pre-record lectures, and teach students through online platforms.

However, due to the coronavirus outbreak, policy-makers at the Ministry of Education have been “forced” to modify a policy that previously prevented all universities from providing more than 20% of classes online.

Staff members have also been “forced” to come up with innovative ways to carry out administrative tasks in response to the changing tides. Ewha Women’s University, the first women’s university in Korea, recently made national headlines when, for the first time in its long history, it conducted its graduation and enrolment ceremonies fully online via YouTube live streaming for all graduates and incoming freshmen. It was a huge success with over 2,000 parents and students in attendance and a programme that included a university presidential message, a live talk show, and a welcoming performance from alumni and faculty members. These “forced” changes have also been felt at the government level. Since the dawn of the fourth industrial revolution, scholars and higher education practitioners have demanded that government officials change obsolete regulations and restrictions on higher education institutions so that they may compete in a rapidly changing world, with little to no effect. However, due to the coronavirus outbreak, policy-makers at the Ministry of Education have been “forced” to modify a policy that previously prevented all universities from providing more than 20% of classes online.

Moreover, the threat posed by COVID-19 has unexpectedly created a new sense of solidarity between domestic and international students, university administration, and local businesses and communities. Chinese students, researchers, and professors at the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST) in Daejeon recently garnered regional and national praise for their contributions to coronavirus prevention. After initially mobilising funds to donate to China’s coronavirus prevention, as the situation in Korea rapidly worsened, the group decided instead to send the donations and medical supplies to the city of Daegu, the most heavily affected region in Korea, where the majority of coronavirus cases have been reported.

Furthermore, universities such as the Kyungsung University in Busan have lent a helping hand not only to patients, but also to many local businesses and communities affected economically by the coronavirus outbreak, by drastically lowering rent on university facilities.

Lessons for South Korean Higher Education

At the end of the day, Korean universities and policy-makers must ask themselves how they will view this inescapable global pandemic: solely as a threat, or also a stimulus for positive change in higher education? As mentioned in Altbach and de Wit’s article in University World News, 13 March 2020, “The coronavirus crisis is a serious problem for societies, individuals, and for higher education. But the crisis will eventually pass.” And I also agree with the authors that “universities worldwide are doing an impressive job of crisis management in difficult circumstances, but learning longer-term lessons and effective strategic planning have not been a strength of the academic community.”

Therefore, Korean universities and policy-makers should be commended for the work done so far and continue to act with caution against the threat; but at the same time, they should use it as an opportunity to learn longer-term lessons in managing internationalisation and student mobility, and adequately utilising online delivery and educational technologies.

Final Remarks

This being said, even as I write this article, I sincerely hope for the world’s quick recovery from the coronavirus outbreak, and my deepest condolences go out to all countries, institutions, and people devastated by this pandemic. Furthermore, I hope that, all in all, the international higher education community will come out on top of this setback more innovative and forward looking, and stronger than ever before.

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Center for International Higher Education

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