

Adapting to Changes in Higher Education posed by COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract:

The novel coronavirus has spread to almost every nation globally and impacted every sector of the economy. It has disrupted the delivery of services offered by schools and tertiary institutions leading to the short-term closure of these organizations in Fiji and other parts of the world. Developing nations are tremendously obstructed by the pandemic due to a lack of proper infrastructure to cater to other modes of conveyance of classes apart from face-to-face. The pandemic mandated online delivery of classes at all levels of educational institutions from primary to tertiary levels to effectively deliver the course or subject content. Online meeting platforms such as Google Meet and Zoom coupled with the existing resource hub for all courses offered; Moodle and other learning and teaching platforms eased the delivery of classes but with potential challenges such as connectivity issues and financial constraints on students as well as the institutions. Some of these challenges are overcome by using Artificial Intelligence (AI) which allows personalised experiences to students in learning at the own pace and cater to individual needs. This is particularly relevant in diverse learning environments such as online or hybrid learning. Data on at-risk students is easily identified with AI powered tools by analysing students' engagement and performance in the respective courses. The early detection of low performing students' enables the relevant stakeholders to take proactive actions and minimise the number of failures in class. Not only this but AI plays a critical role in offsetting the shortcomings in infrastructure such low bandwidth through cognitive compression. This study provides an account of the strategies used by academics during the COVID-19 pandemic to deliver classes effectively in Fiji. It also captures an analysis of the number of students who have failed to resume studies during the pandemic in one of the Universities in Fiji, evincing the adversity of this event on the lives of students at the tertiary level.

Keywords:

COVID-19 Pandemic, Higher Education, Online Learning, Cognitive Load Theory, Faculty Dropouts, developing countries.