

Post Covid-19 Effects on the Future of Students in Higher Education



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ABSTRACT: Societies have been affected socially, politically, and economically due to the coronavirus pandemic. Education systems have been disrupted, impacting the future of students and global and consequently societal prospects over time. The aim of this study is to identify the effects of the covid-19 pandemic on the future of students in higher education. This study is carried out by means of a systematic literature review via a thorough literature search. The covid-19 pandemic has had a vast number of effects on students, particularly resulting from the implementation of lockdown measures and social distancing regulations. Mental health, teaching pedagogies, communication and financial stability have all been identified as factors affecting the future of students in higher education. This study had deduced that students face long-term effects as a consequence of the covid-19 pandemic. Thus, carefully devised strategies are required to progress students towards a prosperous future and through them societies at large with benefit.

KEYWORDS: Coronavirus, Future, Higher education, Students

INTRODUCTION

Over the past year, the covid-19 (coronavirus) pandemic has created a global upheaval. Societies have been affected socially, politically, and economically including the disruption of higher education systems. The deadly virus is transmitted when an infected person coughs or sneezes, projecting droplets of discharge, which is then penetrated by an uninfected person (WHO, Coronavirus, 2020). COVID-19 has affected the world (Ali, Baloch, Ahmed, Ali, & Iqbal, 2020) this includes two-hundred and ten countries and territories, and two international conveyances. The communicable disease has resulted in strict governmental legislations comprising of lockdown and social distancing measures. This was the consequence following the World Health Organization announcing a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, on 30th January 2020 (WHO, A Joint Statement on Tourism and COVID-19 - UNWTO and WHO Call for Responsibility and Coordination, 2020). This was in the hope that the number of covid-19 cases and deaths do not exhaust health systems and of public safety is maintained. As social gatherings were not permitted, educational institutions globally underwent physical closures. This event subsequently created a period of great uncertainty for students and educators compromising student learning.

It has already been proven that through education individuals in society learn morals, habits, values, and beliefs which are deemed normal to fundamental to societal development, simultaneously providing well educated global citizens (Braskamp, 2008). Concurrently, higher education systems contribute to large amounts to the economic output of a country thus their closures have impacted the global economy (Muscatelli, 2020). Education systems very quickly adopted technology as a method of imparting knowledge to their students, resulting in the continuation of education but not without challenges. Therefore, much destruction has been caused to educational systems globally resulting from the covid-19 pandemic. This has created an impact on student's which affect their future and consequently affect societies over time.

Objectives

The aim of this study is to identify the effects of the covid-19 pandemic on the future of students in higher education.

METHODOLOGY

This study is carried out by means of a systematic literature review via a thorough literature search. The literature sources are found through an electronic and manual search, entailing published literary works, grey literature, books, journals, and magazines pertaining to the effects of the covid-19 pandemic on the future of students in higher education. A well-planned process of searching extracting, analysing, evaluating, and interpreting relevant existing literature sources is utilised within the study, so that primary sources are identified. The following research questions are devised

Q1 What effects has COVID-19 had on students in higher education?

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Q2 What can these effects have on the future of students?

Q3 How can negative effects be minimised to help students in the future?

To answer the research questions, the following electronic databases are searched: Google Scholar, Science Direct, Gateway, PubMed, JSTOR, Medline, Web of Science and Blackwell Synergy. The following keywords were used during the preliminary search: 'Education', 'Covid-19', 'Students', 'Higher education'. This search has resulted in the identification a large quantity of literature. Therefore, to find the dominant sources leading to the primary sources within this study, the following exclusion criteria has been devised:

- Papers unrelated to students in higher education are not used
- Papers focusing primarily on education prior to covid-19 are ignored
- Papers written in languages other than English are excluded
- Papers not exhibiting enough technical information relating to their approach are omitted

A total of thirty-two literature sources have been identified for investigation, post-completion of the electronic search. Upon examining the literary works in more detail, four are duplicated and not used. A further three are excluded after reading paper abstracts and introductions, leaving twenty-five literature sources for further review. The full literature works are read, revealing a lack of implementation details within two papers subsequently leaving a total of twenty-three literature sources to be used as primary studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Covid-19 has had a vast number of effects on students particularly resulting from the implementation of lockdown measures and social distancing regulations. Mental health, teaching pedagogies, communication and financial stability have all been identified as factors affecting the future of students in higher education.

Mental health

Pre-pandemic, mental health challenges have been present within societies amongst students in higher education. However, many students have not received the adequate support, resulting from a lack of societal education surrounding the issue and associated stigmas combined with healthcare system financial constraints involving time and resources (Moreno, et al., 2020). The primary causes of mental health issues experienced by students relate to course completion, exams stress and financial constraints (Somani, 2020).

During the covid-19 pandemic many students encountered a period of uncertainty regarding their futures, this resulted in feeling of worry, anxiousness, and stress. Their concerns encompassed their current educational status, fears relating to their health and contracting the virus, financial constraints, completing their exams and graduating. During past pandemics, a primary factor relating to psychological effects pertain to the implementation of lockdown measures (Leung, Ball, Sirl, & Britton, 2018). During the covid-19 pandemic students have been subject to lockdown measures leading to isolation, loneliness, inertia, leading to mental health issues like stress and anxiety due to academic institution closures, social and economic disruptions, daily routines disturbed, a reduction in social interactions amongst other factors. Therefore, results have found that approximately 83% of students are experiencing exacerbated pre-existing mental health issues (YoungMinds, 2020). While there has been a rise in mental health issues in students without re-existing problems by 25% (Cao, et al., 2020). The pandemic has evidently had a negative effect on the mental health and wellbeing of students. This will have an impact of the future of students education and society at large unless the issue is addressed in the present, particularly as mental health problems are already becoming a burden on public health services (Torales, Higgins, Castaldelli-maia, & Ventriglio, 2020) (Somani, The Role of Education During and After COVID-19, 2021).

Teaching pedagogies

According to the United Nations 98.6% of learners globally have been affected by the covid-19 pandemic in two hundred countries (UN, 2020). Traditionally, education has always been taught through face-to-face interactions within a group setting, however the covid-19 pandemic forced a transition to teaching students via online platforms (Somani, A TRANSITION FROM FACE-TO-FACE TO REMOTE LEARNING DURIN COVID-19, 2020). This transition requires students to possess the knowledge of hardware and software usage prior to commencing their education online, as the learning pedagogies during the covid-19 pandemic has used interactive videoconferencing software to educate students (Rapanta, 2020). This posed as a challenge to many students who then experienced added pressure to become familiar with technology prior to commencing the acquisition of learning their degree course material (JISC, 2020).

The successes of traditional learning pedagogies have been replicated onto technological platforms, facilitating a smooth transition for students to learn efficiently. Learning materials have been devised for electronic learning and uploaded for students to access.

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This provides students with the flexibility to access learning materials at convenient times for them. They have the options to serve their learning needs comprising of audio-visual learning, literary text availability and face-to-face virtual interactions, formal and self-assessments to facilitate learning. Students are being engaged in learning through virtual collaborative tasks using functions within the e-learning software, virtual polls, and questionnaires to gauge effectiveness (Edu, 2021). The success of these initiatives is based upon the educator's ease to navigate around the software and student's determination to learn and succeed. Technological difficulties can lead to demotivation and frustration, which can originate from poor internet connectivity and insufficient bandwidth or underdeveloped critical thinking skills. A blended learning approach is being utilised to educate students as they enter a 'new' normal world. Thus, the future of education will incorporate progressive technological advancements and students will have the opportunity to apply their technical knowledge derived from this pandemic, and apply it in their future learnings. Simultaneously higher education institutions have developed and strengthened teaching pedagogies during the pandemic, that will help future students.

Communication

A vital element of student success is good communication that occurs between students and educators within higher education institutions. During initial stages of the pandemic, there was immense uncertainty and disruption for both students and educators. Good communication between governing bodies, institutions, educators, and students have played a key role in formulating strategies to resolve many challenges within higher education institutions. This has been made possible through utilising interactive video conferencing software, deemed closest to face-to-face interaction (Somani, EFFECT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON COMMUNICATION, 2020). It is also the method through which education has been acquired during the pandemic. Communication has also taken place through written literature forms, visual and audio forms through social media, trusted and untrusted sources. Therefore, the reliability of distinguishing authentic literature sources communicated to the public including students, has caused confusion and anxiety. There were unclear expectations set for students from the pandemic outset until traditional classroom settings were replicated to online platforms. This is when classroom etiquette was applied on a virtual setting, where software functions were utilised to ask question by 'raising hand', group discussions through 'breakout rooms', muted microphones and highlighting different ideas through the 'chat' function.

Communicating with students effectively through accessible learning materials is important to their educational progression. It is probable that international students from various time zones would participate in scheduled learning sessions, thus requiring timely communication. Many students require flexibility to consolidate their knowledge through re-visiting live sessions. Educators can assess verbal and non-verbal communication through body language by selecting the 'gallery' view of all students with their camera's on. Through a blended learning approach it is probable that this will still be the case in the future. Therefore, education institutions are required to provide a rapid response to their intentions and provide options to offer student support. This is not only applicable during the pandemic but must be extended to post pandemic situations, as the communication of genuine knowledge is important. It will provide students the confidence in their futures and trust in the educational institution.

Financial stability

The economy has been deeply affected because of covid-19 lockdown measures, where individuals have been unable to attend their places of work. This has resulted in numerous company closures and redundancies. Although numerous companies have resorted to utilising technological platforms to carry out their transactions. Countries have endured vast financial losses where GDP is predicted to have dropped by once third resulting from the covid-19 crisis, and the implementation of a national collective initiative to rebuild the current economic state. Education institutions will be a large contributing factor of this, however higher education institutions could have lost large amounts of revenue threatening its sustainability (Muscatelli, 2020).

As learning with technology has become a 'norm' within societies, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds enduring financial constraints do not have the appropriate technology or connectivity to acquire and continue their education. As a result, many students have had to defer their year at university or terminate their degree courses on a permanent or temporary bases (Aristovnik, Damijana, Dejan, Tomaževi, & Umek, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study had deduced that students face long-term effects as a consequence of the covid-19 pandemic. The world has not returned to normality but has naturally emerged into a 'new normal' situation. Society has been conditioned to adhere to safety precautions using personal protective equipment like mask and gloves. The virus has not been eradicated although there are vaccines now available. Mental health has affected the wellbeing of numerous students and heightened pre-existing mental health issues. This is creating a burden on healthcare systems globally. Therefore, education institutions can provide additional support where mental health issues can be identified and managed locally prior to medical intervention. As many issues are centred around isolation, loneliness, communication, examinations, and assignment pressures. Thus, many educational institutions have provided basic information for students to identify and act upon mental health challenges reducing the healthcare system burdens.

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Teaching pedagogies are likely to take the form of the blended learning approach due to the immense technology used during the covid-19 pandemic. However, this is proven effective when there is financial stability providing access to appropriate hardware, software, and a stable internet connection. Communication methods have broadened using technology, creating another medium for students and educators to communicate with each other and society at large.

Recommendations

The notion of change has been a large contributing factor to the effect of the covid-19 pandemic on students. Understanding this change that will facilitate shaping student futures, therefore it is recommended that education institutions teach the concept of change to their students and provide adequate support to help future transitions as the world will not remain static. This will provide students with a better understanding of how to tackle fluctuations within education systems and societies, aiding their future development. Effective communication between education institutions and students are vital to provide students with the confidence to face the future with a positive outlook. It is vital that higher education institutions are provided with the adequate funding, creating a sustainable future to education the future leaders of countries globally. Students have access to higher education institutions where they can become learned global citizens and consequently create a prosperous future for societies in which they live.

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