



### Editorial

## CHALLENGE OF GOING ONLINE: PRACTICES AND PEDAGOGIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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The year 2020 started with an unprecedented wave and outbreak of COVID-19 and its massive spread has led to compulsory lockdown and forced social (or physical) isolation across the globe. This pandemic emergency resulted in closure of all, among others, the educational institutions including universities, followed by the government's urging demand of "nonstop teaching and learning" (Bao, 2020). Therefore, most of the universities around world have started online education. Latest statistics by the UNESCO reveals that about 1.6 billion learners in 192 countries from six continents are forced to stay at home after closures of education institutions. Universities and education institutions are now experiencing an enormous and unprecedented shift from face-to-face teaching in classrooms to online teaching and learning. Within no time, millions of teachers worldwide started teaching on computer screen using Tixeo, Zoom, Google classroom, MS Teams and many other software of similar kind, offering video conferencing facility. Students, while staying at home, have to take their courses using these resources on the internet.

This urgent shift to online teaching by the universities within a-few-days, however, was without apt preparation, which was verily needed in fact. Consequently, delivering their lessons remotely has become a trial and challenge for the teachers over the globe; there has been, thus, evidenced a great transformation in pedagogy and course design. This paradigmatic shift stresses upon the accessibility of a robust and strong network infrastructure, and a voluntary willingness and shift in mindset of students, teachers and the educational organizations. This hasty shift to online teaching has been hailing with perplexingly complicated set of *socio psycho professional* challenges even for experienced educators. The biggest issue faced by the teachers and the faculty members is their inaptness and the absence of their readiness to online teaching; so, they are to face the difficulties in this occurrence of unexpectedly demanding online teaching. Universities with no exception are now to use the Learning Management System (LMS) for providing an online education platform, which demands an elaborate lesson plan/design, teaching materials in power point presentations along with audio and video contents. Today, Teachers do need to adopt for unique pedagogies, and subject specific technical competencies besides a plethora of generic ones for their effective online delivery to the students. European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators could be a useful guideline for the teachers to get themselves aptly well versed in this digital environment. Most of all teachers need help and support of technology teams for their online courses.

This situation of teachers' transition to online teaching, however, signposts towards their

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acceptance of new expectations and adjustment in a changing role, by tuning their course planning, redesigning and creating course content, developing learning resources for structuring their online courses. The process of acclimating to online teaching demands investment of time by the teachers for maintaining their presence, uploading files, collecting instructional materials for online courses and creating online evaluating tools.

This large-scale online teaching has fetched a number of unique challenges for the students especially those from the developing countries. The online learning has got prone to a frustrating experience for students due to frequent internet connectivity issues and abrupt power breakdowns, who frequently complain about the ambiguous communication from the teachers. Additionally, they are possibly facing troubles due to lack of readiness, appalling learning attitude, lack of self-discipline, and unsuitable learning environment at home, when they are self-isolated with non-academic family members.

Students are also likely experiencing stress and anxiety due to this unique exercise of human-machine interactions during their online classes. This stress is expressed through various undesirable practices during online classes such as some students just log-in for getting their attendance marked but in fact they are not taking the class seriously. In order to make this online activity more profitable the teachers may adopt modular teaching method or may use interactive, project-based, and collaborative teaching methods for seeking students' involvement and engagement in the online teaching learning process.

Online teaching urges for active learning strategies and methods to be implementable on the part of the teacher for making the process of learning more effective. Teachers may plan and implement a student-oriented approach to their learning. Teachers may develop hands-on activities for active participation of their students and creating an eloquent dialogue among them for healthier student-teacher relationship. Teachers may use various approaches and methods to modify students' assignments and tasks to reinforce students' active learning and (Bao, 2020) for increasing the amount of students' class participation. They must involve students in discussion for reducing their boredom and monotony in the lectures by using meaningful examples.

The quantity of lesson, difficulty level, and length of teaching time should be appropriately in accordance with the readiness level and receptive attitude of the students towards online learning. Teachers also need to make contingency plans for dealing likely technical difficulties especially the connectivity issues by making use of both synchronous and asynchronous modes, and by using blended learning techniques to deliver the content effectively. Teachers may allow their students record their lectures for later consultation (asynchronous mode) if they remain unable to attend their lecture or have missed some part of it. Faculty may resolve such problems by assigning the students course specific literature for offline self-learning before (and also after) the online teaching. They should provide feedback to students for this offline activity and re-plan their future course of action continuously.

Body language and facial expressions that are integral component of face-to-face classroom teaching and convey a big part of the message in traditional classrooms have become irrelevant in virtual environment. Therefore, teachers should aptly slow down their speed and communicate with them in more thoughtful, considerate and personal way to allow students grasp key points in online teaching. Teachers, instead of reinventing the wheel, should have

updated knowledge about open access teaching resources. Addressing students' readiness level, providing scaffolding and increasing their intrinsic motivation could be a good starting point for creating an effective learning environment. Teacher must realize that the students would have had higher anxiety level among them while being in an online session; and their anxiety is needed to be relieved for effectively engaging them in the online learning. Students may be supported by giving them orientations and by knowing their expectations. Providing them meaningful examples for creating vital connections within the course content, and some choice or control over their learning, may help a lot in effective online learning. Teachers may face different dynamics in this online environment that suggests them to keep on revisiting their role as a guide from the side.

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