

Editorial: Facilitating our Students

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Greetings and welcome to Issue 4, 2021. We have published four Issues this year, with Issue 2 being a Special Issue. We are on the cusp of a new year, which will effectively be our third year of the “new normal” in HEIs and our respective education systems. Our themes hold constant, but our narratives have continued to evolve while we reflect, analyse data, and roll out the strategies needed to sustain our institutions. This is occurring even as we heed the call to provide support at all levels to quality assure our online teaching and learning responses to COVID-19.

In this Issue we present articles from or about India, the Russian Federation, Georgia in the United States, Algeria, China, Nigeria, and South Africa. Among the themes covered, the articles in this Issue focus on e-learning policies; adapting courses for virtual delivery of content; impact of COVID-19 on HEIs; using social media and incorporating ICTs for teaching and learning; student attitudes to and readiness for use of ICT; blended learning; and a cross cutting theme of facilitating learners during the pandemic.

Refereed Articles

Our first article in this section focuses on **Dominant discourses informing e-learning policies in Higher Education Institutions in South Africa**. The authors **Chikuni, Makwambeni and Chigona** use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) Feenberg’s typology of e-learning discourses to analyse the dominant discourses that underpin e-learning policies in HEIs in SA. The study’s findings show the dominance of deterministic and instrumentalist discourses in the e-learning policies. The authors contend that the dominant discourses in the e-learning policies analysed offer narrow technological fixes to nuanced educational problems in South Africa. They suggest that their findings indicate the need to embed critical discourses in e-learning policies.

In an article that presents a view of the pivot to remote instruction because of the COVID-19 pandemic, **Mitchell R. Bradford Jr.**, discusses how intercultural communication (ICC) and Spanish classes at the Sydney Institute of Language and Commerce (SILC)-Business School at Shanghai University were adapted to be conducted virtually. The author discusses the use of Zoom, WeChat, and pre-recorded videos of lessons. The results of the study conducted indicate that each of the platforms have their strengths and weaknesses but could be used synchronously to achieve the best outcomes. The author offers suggestions on how these methods can be used for classes after the pandemic, whether they are conducted online or in person.

We continue with the contribution from **Yunusa et. al.**, on **The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Higher Education in Nigeria: University Lecturers’ Perspectives**, a study that investigated the COVID-19 impact on the higher education sector in Nigeria. The authors conducted interviews with seven lecturers across five universities in three geographical locations of Nigeria. The authors identified six themes with corresponding sub-themes and the results confirmed the negative impact of COVID-19 on several universities. The authors posit that the study results present opportunities for responding to issues, problems and trends that are currently arising and will arise in the future due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Nigerian higher education system.

Continuing the theme of institutional adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic, **Ofori et al**, discuss social media usage in the article **Social Media Usage and Transitioning into Online Classes During COVID-19**. The authors conducted a survey of undergraduate students in Georgia, United

States to assess the association between social media and the ease of transitioning to online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their findings indicated use of Snapchat and Instagram as the preferred social media sites among the students surveyed, with relatively lower odds of ease in transition to online studies if the students felt that social media increased their stress. The authors suggest that use of social media for formal academic communication could stimulate an interactive learning environment, foster social presence, and enhance learning outcomes.

Moving to the theme of student attitudes and its effect on learning in a technology enhanced environment, **Singh and Sandhu** in an article entitled, **The relevant social group analysis of the SCOT theory for gender differences among Teacher Education students' attitude towards using the Internet for their learning potentials**, used the social group factor of the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) theory to examine the relationship between gender differences and tertiary education students' attitude in India towards Internet use for their learning potential. The authors utilized an existing survey instrument in which they partially adopted forty-six items. They obtained responses and analysed data from 1000 tertiary education students in India and report a significant gender difference among tertiary education students in using the Internet for learning potential.

In **The Effect of Implementing the Blended Teaching Approach in ESP Courses on Students' Achievement and Attitudes**, **Aleb and Labed** test whether implementing the blended teaching approach in ESP courses positively affects students' achievement and their attitudes toward the blended approach. The results of their study indicated statistically significant differences between a control and a treatment group in achievement and attitudes. They report that the educational experience was satisfactory for the students taught within the blended learning environment, which positively affected their academic outcomes, and the perception of satisfaction is positively associated with the marks obtained in the ESP subject. The authors recommend the implementation of computerized teaching, in addition to the traditional approach. To facilitate teachers' mission, they suggest that the stakeholders in Algerian higher education take serious steps in improving teachers' information technology skills through providing specialized training programs for the teachers to implement blended learning efficiently and effectively.

In an article that offers an extensive review of the literature, **Bhatt et al.**, attempts to identify the key factors which enable students' readiness for online learning (SROL). The authors use an Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM) approach to identify contextual relationships among the enablers of SROL, and cluster the relationships using Matrix of Cross-impact Multiplications (MICMAC) analysis. Their research identified personality traits such as 'Open to experience', 'Agreeableness' and 'Extraversion' as driving enablers while; several factors like academic performance, prior exposure to online classes, self-efficacy in online settings, learner control, self-directed learning and motivation for learning were identified as linkage enablers that impact student 'willingness for future exposure to online classes'. The authors opine that understanding of these enablers can help instructors to customize their online course delivery and counsel students based on their levels of readiness for online learning.

From the Field

In an interesting article From the Field, **Fokina, Antunes, Crocetta, Tkacheva and Belonozhko** present data from a 2014-2015 survey of a University in the Russian Federation, the findings of which are instructive for educators in the contemporary period. In their study they examined the level of student readiness for changes in an educational space and their views on utilizing ICTs in the educational process. The authors noted an association between student age, their mode of study, and their level of proficiency in use of computers and the Internet. Further, they noted an inverse association between age and level of proficiency in use of computers and the Internet, while there was no association between the mode of study and their perspective on the level of proficiency in personal computers and the Internet. The students surveyed identified weaknesses

in the organization of the virtual educational space, professional preparation of teachers, and noted problems, such as lack of self-organization skills, and low level of proficiency of ICTs.

Notes from the Field

In our Notes from the Field section, **Okoye** presents some interesting questions in an article that is intended to spur discussion on how higher education (HE) learners who are struggling or failing to cope with the COVID-19 teaching and learning challenges in the South African context can be facilitated. Okoye notes that the sudden imposition of e-learning on curriculum content designed for face-to-face contact learning due to COVID-19 has exposed how unprepared developing nations are towards embracing the predictable future of education. The author suggests that the indications that the post COVID-19 teaching and learning environment will possibly maintain the current e-learning practices will require the rethinking priorities to support struggling learners.

In our final article in this section, **Banagiri and Kumar** present definitions and discuss issues surrounding the incorporation of information and communication technology (ICT) into vocational and technical education. The authors identify multiple consequences for teaching and learning and the potential for developing vocational and professional teaching and learning content. They posit that educators must be mindful in incorporating ICT into the educational transfer framework and carefully observe the guidance problems that come with reform, alongside efforts to balance the advantages and disadvantages of embracing ICT as a tool.

Thank you from the Editorial Team!

We continue to thank all our authors for your patience during the long delays, while our peer review panels, and our journal managers continue to juggle tasks in an environment of changing responsibilities and new and seemingly chronic states of exhaustion as we learn to live with the COVID-19 variants. Here at IJEDICT, we pledge to continue in service to you our valued stakeholders, and we look forward to learning about and doing more to share best practices. Our continued best to you in 2022 and beyond.

We take the opportunity once again to remind potential authors of our journal guidelines that should be observed when submitting articles for publication. Your attention to the author guidelines at: <http://ijedict.dec.uwi.edu/submissions.php#guidelines> will enhance our review process and improve the time to completion by our review panels.

Stay Safe and continue to be well in 2022!

Denise Gaspard-Richards
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