

Part 5

Law and Education

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Covid-19, a Rumour That Became Reality: The Impact on Business Education Students of Using Online Learning

Abstract

This work is part of an ongoing research project and literature review on the role of art in education and the interrelationships between art, creativity and online learning (focused on Business Education students from a university in Mexico). This research looks at the experiences of international students studying a business programme in the UK of the move to online teaching and learning that was suddenly imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The first part shares the issues and challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic on international students studying in the UK based universities that were identified in a seminar organised by FLS and QC Media Team. The second part draws on a guest lecture delivered to Business Education students from a university in Mexico using online learning, which sought to ascertain their experiences and the support needed during the current Covid-19 pandemic. The methodology used was a focus group with the students, using a set questions focused on their experience of engaging in online teaching and learning, compared to traditional classroom-based, face-to-face learning. The findings of the research confirm that the move to online teaching and learning has had both negative and positive impacts on the Mexico students, in relation to creativity, arts and painting practice. Tellingly, both groups of students – from the first stage and second stages of the research – said they wanted to go back to classroom based face-to-face teaching and learning. All of the students indicated that they wanted more support from their teachers and their institutions.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, students, teachers, online learning, classroom contact, creativity, arts and painting

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected many institutions globally and society at large and it is obvious that the impact will take time for normality of life again. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has defined Covid-19 as Corona Virus, a disease caused by the new Corona Virus called SARS-Cov-2, the symptoms of which include, coughing, breathing problems, fatigues, loss of taste and smell, which can take up to 14 days to show the signs (Baum & Hai, 2020). Corona virus was first reported as a cluster in Wuhan, People's Republic of China on 31st December 2019 and became uncontrollable from then to date. Due to the speed with which the virus spreads, the WHO reported the threat of a Pandemic (WHO, 2020) and to prevent

the spread of the disease, individuals were asked by the government to maintain social distancing to limit the rate of transmission of the virus.

The rumour became a reality when some of the students from South East Asia who were studying in London could be seen wearing masks walking on the streets and in some cases to the classroom. People from the UK had not understood what it was all about until January 2020, when they began to realise that there was a serious virus that was spreading rapidly all over the globe. As the virus is generally spread through the respiratory droplets, face mask and hand sanitizers were recommended to help protect people from catching and spreading the virus.

The virus has caused tremendous damage to businesses, education institutions, and students as we altered the way we delivered teaching and learning using online support. In the UK, the spread of the disease became very serious with thousands of deaths announced on daily basis. The UK borders, airports and other means of transport were still in operation with more people coming into the UK. Globally there was serious panic as Covid-19 spread fast throughout Italy, the United States, France and the UK, with a high death rate, resulting in lockdowns that led to the move to online teaching and learning. This affected students around the world, including the Business Education students in the University of Guadalajara in Mexico who were involved in this research.

The purpose of this paper is to share the experiences of these Business Education students from Mexico. It arose from a guest lecture as part of the research project, working with Claudio Rafael Vásquez-Martínez analysing his work based on creative arts and painting (see Achinewhu-Nworgu (2017) for more on this work). The paper explores the challenges and impact of Covid-19 on Business Education students in a university in Mexico and evaluates the impact of using online delivery on painting and creativity.

Objectives

- Examine the challenges facing students in general in embracing online teaching and learning and the impact on their creativity, arts and painting.
- Share students experience of the difficulties faced in coping with the virtual learning delivery.
- Explore more effective measures to support students to embrace online teaching and learning at this tough time in creative arts, painting and creativity.
- Suggest strategies to support students to make the best use of virtual learning in creativity, arts and painting.

Literature

The challenges imposed by emergent of Covid-19, has had a drastic effect on businesses, education, the National Health Service and students at large. The pandemic has had a serious impact on businesses all over the world, resulting from government actions imposing strict policies and restrictions that all businesses have to comply with (Nicola et al., 2020). Covid-19 has resulted in uncertainty, hardship and increasing high unemployment due to business closures and lockdown restrictions. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to a world financial crisis pushing most

of the industries to closure (Goolsbee & Syverson, 2020), although with some companies such as Amazon have benefitted. In the area of the health sector, the pandemic has resulted in increased workload with increased patients admitted with Covid-19 which has drastically affected the sector to cope with it all (Johnson et al., 2020). COVID-19 has brought about many changes to our society. In education, teachers and students have had to embrace a switch to online teaching and learning (Achinewhu-Nworgu, 2020). In addition, the lockdown has led to teaching and learning from home resulting in isolation, leading to big challenges for the students and their teachers at large, and the obvious challenges of a sudden embracing of technology for online teaching and learning. The pandemic has also had a big impact on the Business Education students in their creativity, arts, painting and drawing, comprising positive and negative impacts. Some other psychological impacts identified in the first stage of this work carried out with the international students studying in the UK, includes: home distancing and online studying (Nguyen, 2020); financial difficulties resulting from job losses (Mao et al., 2020); embracing virtual learning/technical problems; loss of friends and families, isolation, stress, home sickness, panic and inability to cope with coursework due to worries and stresses of the unknown (Achinewhu-Nworgu, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic has kept a mark of uncertainty and unrest for global businesses, resulting in a plan of actions (Tison et al., 2020). The lockdown has also imposed serious challenges for organisations of which education institutions were highly affected, not least in the areas of creativity, painting and arts for the Business Education students. The panic of pandemic got all confused and stuck with the lockdown, resulting in institutions having to embrace online teaching – as failure to comply with the signed contracts with students, may result in recovery of fees, leading to more financial loss by the universities in the UK and around the world (Achinewhu-Nworgu, 2020). The impact extended to international students in the UK. Evans (2011) reports that “UK universities educate about 2.5 million students annually, with a 28% increase in student numbers overall in the past 10 years”. These data suggests that studying in the UK is a popular choice for international students. Most international students come to study in the UK for the following reasons: gain practical experiences, new skills; opportunity to study in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural setting; pursuing courses of study in English; besides, English is often referred to as ‘the language of business’, and if business is to drive economic growth, then it is vital for overseas students to have ‘English’ qualifications and value and quality attached to UK qualifications (Achinewhu-Nworgu, Shotte & Nworgu, 2012).

The first stage of the work on challenges of Covid-19 centred around sharing the international students’ comments on challenges they have faced in trying to embrace the online teaching and learning resulting from the emergent corona virus. It is on that notion that the stage two work came about to extend, compare and share the experiences of the Business Education students from one of the universities in Mexico. The review of the literature has provided an ample knowledge on the nature of the problems students are facing embracing online teaching and learning, mainly on creativity, arts, painting and drawing.

Methodology

The approach to this research has utilised a mixed methods approach – the acquisition, analysis and combination of qualitative and quantitative data in a single or multiphase study that allows the researcher to gather rich data from multiple perspectives and paradigms (Creswell, 2003). The work aimed to involve a group of more than 5 students, however with the language barriers, most students being taught in the native language, the study was able to engage 5 English speaking students as participants with the second stage of the research. The data gathered was sufficient for this small-scale research and the information collected was rich enough to inform an opinion about the positive and negative challenges faced by the students. The research aim was to examine the difference in perceptions of the students on the impact of online learning resulting from Covid-19 pandemic, and the impact on their creativity, arts and painting. Data was collected from an online guest lecture using zoom and a discussion using open questionnaires where each student was asked the same questions. The approach adopted was very relevant at the present time and also considering the distance in travelling to Mexico for the guest lecture, gathering the information from the guest lecture using zoom was very useful, less costly, and rich data was gathered as summarised below.

Students' comments

The section presents a selection of the comments from the students based on their experience using online learning compared to their experiences of face-to-face classroom contact. The comments are presented using coding for confidentiality and protection of identity, in compliance to research ethics and code of practice.

The lockdown has led to us learning online. It is good in a way, but also has its negatives. On the question regarding the online teaching and learning and the link to creativity, arts and painting, it has had a positive and negative impact for me. On the positive side, I still do my painting and drawing online as it has not made any difference from what I already know. It has enhanced my knowledge in drawing and being more creative, learning new ways of doing things differently through digital technology, a gain from the pandemic era in my experience embracing an online learning. On the negatives, I have not seen my teacher; it will be nice to see who is teaching you face-to-face as you learn more on face-to-face contact. I am use to face-to-face teaching; online can be stressful and not something I would like for a long time. (M1)

I am not a digital technology learner, although we have to use IT in accessing course materials for completing course work and submitting online. It is not the same as what we are presented with now. It is not the same as sitting online for lessons, sometimes with problem connecting to the system and when you do, may not know who is talking to you and some teachers or students would not have their cameras switched on. I hear my colleagues' voice but don't see them on a face-to-face, compared to the classroom meetings. I will suggest that students are given more support at the current time in accessing course materials and some of the technical IT issues to be more supportive. (M2)

The current pandemic has also brought good things except for the number of deaths all over the world. It has exposed the students and their teachers to a new learning environment and helped to develop our skills more using virtual team and all

available means of technology to improve teaching and learning, which I may not have had the opportunity to access. (M3)

I cannot see any creativity in my arts and painting at present because, I have not attempted to do this online. I would prefer the normal classroom artwork to see what I am doing with my teacher on face-to-face contact. The current teaching online has not offered much on this. However, I still want to go back to our classroom face-to-face learning. We need our teachers in the classroom as usual and it helps us learn more when we interact face-to-face with teachers and colleagues. I hope it comes to an end soon to be back to the classroom learning. (M4)

The lockdown has presented a lonely life working on your own compared to working with the colleagues. I became worse living alone. I have not seen the people I am studying with or my teachers than hearing their voices. It will be nice to meet my colleagues in the class to learn together. Learning is about working with your colleagues and it can be very demanding and frustrating working on your own. I am not definitely finding it comfortable and enjoyable. However, our teachers are doing their best to teach us online, but I still prefer the classroom learning on face-to-face. (M5)

The findings of the mini research seem similar to the first group of the international students who shared their experiences using an online learning imposed on them by the Covid-19 pandemic, for instance sharing two of the comments from the stage one of this work:

The lockdown due to Covid-19 has not done much good at all. It was unexpected and the sudden embracing of an online teaching which is not a joke, more so, when you have a whole day class from 9-5pm, it can be daunting, sitting in front of your laptop day in day out. I have developed swelling feet due to lack of exercises as most gyms are shutdown. It is very stressful for me to cope with it all. I feel like dropping out to be quite honest, but don't want to waste the fees. (P8)

I see myself unlucky coming for the first time in the UK and to face this horrible period. I have not used computer to learn except for searching for information. Due to the law prohibiting free movement to stop the spread of the virus and with compulsory social distancing, I am receiving lesson online. The question I ask myself is: Why did I come here to study? My Mum calls every single day to check on me and sometimes I cry when she drops the phone. It is a tough life and not sure if we will ever get back to our normal life again. The worst is isolation, you are alone and alone. It is not easy. (P4)

Discussion

The first stage of the research was presented in October 2020 at the FLS and QC Media conference UK and it focused on the international students studying in the UK, sharing their experiences embracing online teaching and learning. In the current stage two of this work, which focused on students from a university in Mexico derived from a guest lecture presented as part of a research project organised by Prof Claudio Rafael Vásquez-Martínez, the majority of the students seem to be receiving their lessons online with their teachers and have benefited from their learning online, with limitations compared to the face-to-face classroom teaching. When asked how they have used the online learning for creativity, artwork and painting, the majority admitted that it is not same using online learning compared to their classroom face-to-face. Although, one of the students said they had added new knowledge and skills

from online learning in creative arts, painting and drawings, which has enhanced his learning, most of the students would prefer doing their arts' work more in the classroom than using digital technology to draw and paint. Others have experienced some technical issues in logging into their online classrooms, not hearing their teachers or colleagues in some cases, whereas others have had some good experiences working from home, saying that it is easy working from home in saving transport; besides, it is all about embracing what works now to learn, which they have no choice or alternative to what they want such as the face-to-face classroom contact. The findings indicate that most of the students have had difficulties in coping with the virtual learning delivery, particularly the international students coming to the UK to study for the first time compared to the students from Mexico. All the students have emphasised the urgent need to go back to their face-to-face classroom teaching and learning which works for them better. The worries to them are when should this be over for a normal life again?

Conclusion

The research draws from the previous work on impact of Covid-19 on international students studying in the UK and shares the comments of the Business Education students from a university in Mexico on the positives and negative challenges faced in their online learning imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact on their creativity, arts and painting, derived from a guest lecture organised by Prof Claudio Rafael Vásquez-Martínez as part of his research project on creativity, arts, drawing and painting. The work has the literature relevant to the nature of online learning imposed by Covid-19. The impact of Covid-19 has led to: home distancing and online studying (Nguyen, 2020), financial difficulties resulting from job losses (Mao et al., 2020), and embracing virtual learning with technical problems (Achinewhu-Nworgu, 2020).

Based on the findings from stage one of this current work, the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly altered teaching and learning practices with the move from face-to-face teaching to online delivery. The lockdown imposed by the government to reduce the spread of the virus (Nicola et al., 2020) still remains a big worry for all. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is not limited to the students or education sector alone; it impacts on the world's finances and businesses (Goolsbee & Syverson, 2020). The 2020 pandemic has resulted in a plan of actions (Tison et al., 2020) in which all have had to adjust: it is embracing the digital world for service delivery of which, all institutions over the globe are looking for alternatives to deliver their services. For the education sector, the priority is about effective teaching and learning and to make the most use of the software for online delivery, whilst ensuring that students are supported, practically, academically, and pastorally, to successfully adapt to this new model of teaching and learning.

Recommendation

The work recommends more support for all students and their teachers in relation to effectively managing online teaching and learning, in terms of welfare, wellbeing, health and safety. Universities and colleges need to provide the training and development opportunities to support their students and staff to adapt to the new

reality and cope with it all. The work is open to further research with larger groups and to extend it to other universities in Europe, and in Africa as well, to explore the difference in students' perception of the impact of virtual learning era imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

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