Academic Practices before, during and after Covid

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Abstract

A reflective paper talks exclusively about the experiences of a person and the learning that is derived from it. This paper gives a detailed insight into the experiences of self before, during and after the pandemic. The Psychological impact of the Covid and the aftermath of the Covid is discussed as well. The issues are looked at from three perspectives – the student perspective, Staff perspective and the institution perspective as well.

This paper is more of a reflection of how a teacher has handled the different situations before Covid, during Covid and post Covid as well.

As a teacher I have had the opportunity to handle many different situations, particularly during the COVID period. It was in fact an eye opener, an answer to many questions about the adoption of various methodologies during the given time period. Since the start of Covid A Reflective report on the previous academic year and what I was able to do through the year will help me to analyze what I have done and how I can proceed further to develop a better teacher in me.

Key Words: Observation, Psychological Impact, Social Isolation, KKK, Emotional Stress, Technological development

Introduction

"Educating and training human is a laborious process, yet it is a necessary process. We shall, for our part spare no effort to provide opportunities for the training of Omanis at all levels of education"

His Highness Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, 2ⁿᵈ Batch Graduation – SQU, 1991

The World Health Organisation on March 11 2020 declared COVID 19 as a pandemic. It was a very emotional two years when the whole world was tossed about. There is no specific sector that has not been affected by the COVID pandemic. The effect of the pandemic set in very quickly and took everyone by shock. Even after the Covid fear has been handled by bringing in vaccinations and Covid specific rules and regulations, the aftermath of Covid still continues. Many strategies have been followed to bring about a sustained relief. (Sarkar, et al., 2021). The biggest challenge that humanity faced was to live the next day. The other challenges were in the daily operation of the industries and the companies. The

As against the existing practices, when the Covid struck, the most important aspect was the changes that happened in the mentality of the students and the staff. "Teachers now need to concentrate on restoring confidence and embedding the skills and knowledge that children need in order to progress with this year's learning. The temptation to accelerate the pace of teaching is likely to be strong but securing children's understanding of prior learning is critical for their progress, attainment and engagement in the longer term." (Ruttle, 2008)

Level of Education	Pre Covid	Post Covid
Pre-school learning	Personal in class teaching with more Montessori the researcher methods including the touch feel and learn	Online teaching with activities continued. More involvement from the family. Many families stopped online education and moved on to home education.
Elementary learning	In Class teaching with manageable strength in every class. More activity oriented	Online teaching with activities continued. More involvement from the family. Many families stopped online

		education and moved on to home education.
Secondary Education	In class teaching in small groups. Pre fixed syllabus and assessments across the schools	Online teaching using platforms like zoom without compromising on the syllabus and not having any assessments
Undergraduate learning	Mass delivery of lectures across the specializations and continuous assessments are also part of the final assessments	Mass delivery using online platforms like Google Meet, Zoom etc. Limited assessments that were predominantly individual assignments and online research reports
Post graduate learning	Mass delivery of lectures across the specializations. More research oriented assessments and projects	Only research based assignments and projects were possible. Online classes were also happening.
Professional Education	Depended on the apprenticeship model, requiring close, physical contact between instructors and learners	Most challenging as the apprentice model cannot be replaced by online education

Figure 1

Source: Education and COVID-19: challenges and opportunities

This paper is more of a reflection of how a teacher has handled the different situations before Covid, during Covid and post covid as well.

As a teacher the researcher had the opportunity to handle many different situations, particularly during the COVID period. It was in fact an eye opener, an answer to many questions about the adoption of various methodologies during the given time period. Since the start of Covid A Reflective report on the previous academic year and what the researcher was able to do through the year will help me to analyze what the researcher has done and how the researcher can proceed further to develop a better teacher in me.

Looking back at the previous academic year, it has been a very eventful year, with full-fledged classes in person classes starting. Becoming the program manager for the most prestigious Logistics Management Programme in Spring 2018 was quite a challenge and an accolade. The first batch of Bachelor students graduated in Fall 2021. During the subsequent semester, The Researcher stepped down from the responsibility of program manager and took up to full-fledged teaching.

Methodology adopted

The study was based on the experiences of the author and hence the research design adopted was the Experimental method of research. The author wanted to identify and understand the various aspects that affect the performance of the staff and the students due to change in the learning situations because of Covid -19. Observation and self-study was the methods of data collection that was adopted. The hallmark of experimental research is **randomly assigning participants to different treatments**. In this example we identified the design that users correctly selected and were most confident in making their selection. (Sauro, 2013). The data for the study was collected using Observation Method. The observation method is quite appropriate in this research as it is a more direct method of collection. It enables the researcher to be a participant and work closely to understand the problem and come up with solutions.

Before the Pandemic

The start of the pandemic was one year after the programme commenced in Spring 2019. Since the program started in Spring 2018, there were constant training programs for all the trainers. The faculty members were sent to Breda University every semester based on the new modules that was offered

in the upcoming semester. The assessments in every module were reframed/ rephrased as per the requirement. As the programme manager of the programme, the researcher had the opportunity to assess the module and all module related aspects. Along with programme manager ship, the researcher was also the module leader of certain modules, which included internships and Project. It was more of a learning phase and the difference in the T&L methodologies was analyzed and understood. The underlying challenges in adopting the BU methodologies was the practicality in the assignments and the timeline available to complete the assignment. However with continuous monitoring and regular follow up, the staff were able to handle them effectively. Here the highlight is the face to face interactions and the group discussions that were very helpful in handing the assessments and classes.

During the Pandemic

When there was a sudden transition due to the Pandemic and it became all the more challenging. The main challenge was the continuance of education in the online mode. All the assessments were converted to online individual assignments. The challenge here was to not compromise on the quality of the assignments by reducing the number of assignments. Another challenge was in eliminating the group discussion aspect in teaching. Since the onset of Pandemic, it was also very difficult to administer the assignments and resort to discussion. The industrial visits were also not happening. Guest lectures and seminars were also not happening. The entire onus of learning was on the students and the staff equally. The pandemic extended for two years and all through the crisis, the learning was adaption to newer techniques in the Teaching and Learning.

After the Pandemic

After the pandemic when regular classes resumed, Hyflex mode of teaching was adopted (Liu, Chen, & Pugh, 2021). The Hyflex method was extremely helpful in encouraging the students to slowly get back to the physical classes. Although the restrictions still existed, the guest lectures were conducted with minimum participation. The Internships, projects and Industrial visits were still a challenge. The assessment pattern still remained as alternate assessments that were followed during the COVID period. This was until the Spring 2021 semester. During that semester, the following were the aspects that the researcher would like to highlight.

- Having taken up the module leadership for the module – Quality Management for the first time and having both the full time and part time sessions with me, gave me a good opportunity to experiment new methodologies for teaching. The researcher adopted the case study method for teaching six sigma – which was the core concept in the module. Every student was asked to choose one company (Preferably a MNC) and do an in depth study which will be the basis for both the course works in the module. This enabled the student to have an in depth consensus of the quality adoption in an organisation. This method also helped the students to compare the quality standards adopted in the organisations during the in class discussion on the Individual Assignment. The second course that was on the TPS also helped the students understand and compare the adoption of six sigma by leading companies like Toyota with the example that they have chosen.

- Another module for which the researcher was the module leader was the Project - 3 module (PROJ-B 3001) of Breda University. A poster presentation was organized for the first time for the BU Project module. Representatives from the industry were invited and the posters along with the presentation of the students was evaluated and feedback given to develop their final presentation. This was the first time that such an event was held for the BSc (LM) programme.

- For the other two modules, BUSS-B 2003.1 – Procurement Management and PROJ-B 2002 – Internship led Project – 2, the researcher was only the Session instructor. Along with the module team, and guidance from the module leaders, the sessions were handled accordingly.

- With the aim to improve and turn her efforts towards research, the researcher started collaborating with other researchers and became part of their research work. With these collaborations, one publication was made
  - Internal and external organisational strategies: repercussion of information management on relationship selling behaviour and

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- Other than the paper publication collaboration, other collaborations include discussion with the Partner University for Specific modules to keep on pace with the developments at Breda.
- Two proposals for funded projects have also been submitted, ORG Proposal and one strategic funding.

All the above said are the academic performances that were done as a part of academics. But having gone through an ordeal in the past one year, away from academic administration and involving completely in delivering lectures to the students, the researcher was able to understand how much COVID has changed the T & L aspects.

There was a sudden switch over in technology and there was no delay in the switch over. All the organisations quickly adapted to new technologies. There was a good level of support from the institutions and from the government by providing technical and academic assistance.

During the online classes, the students and the staff also faced quite a lot of issues. They are as follows

- o Updating their technical knowledge in a very short span of time
- o Handling the online classes without seeing each other face to face
- o Attempt to complete the assignments without face to face help
- o Not indulge in In class discussions

So in the past academic year, there has been a very distinctive change in the students. The students were given the option to attend classes online provided they were sick. The students were also given the liberty to listen to the recordings and additional support was given to the students who were suffering from the aftermath of COVID.

Resuming face-to-face classes post Covid, brought back the regular systems. The technological advancement stuck back and so did some other difficulties as well. One of the main challenges that the Academics face now is the mental well-being of the students.

Not only the mental well-being of the students was a point of concern, but the well-being of the faculty involved was also a point of concern. All my classes were oriented towards handling this aspect of Teaching and learning - Providing the students with all the academic support without straining their mental well-being. In all my classes, students were given more scope to open up and discuss. All the lectures always followed a pattern.

1. Pre-class activity uploaded in the moodle – the students were guided to go through the pre class activity and come prepared for the class
2. In class activity – All the lectures were handled in the class using examples and case studies from real life.
3. Group Discussions – Topics from the classes handled during the week was given to the students to discuss in groups and come up with inputs.

Emotional /Mental issues faced

By the students

1. Social Isolation - There are quite a lot of mental issues that a student undergoes when they are part of online classes. These issues cause a long term stress and also impacts the well-being of the student. The study reported by Aristovnik et al. concluded that online learning students were more likely to interrupt their studies and felt more socially isolated, compared with students receiving traditional education (Aristovnik A, KerŽič D, & TomaŽevič N, (2020)).
2. Depression – Some of the students are also going through depression. Social isolation and loneliness increased the risk of depression and anxiety (Loades ME, Higson, & Reynolds, 2020).

By the teachers

1. Emotional stress –The teachers also faced quite a lot of stress during COVID, particularly when they had to balance between home and working from home.
2. Depression – The stress lead to a state of depression for which they needed medical care as well.
3. Return to normalcy - Returning to the normal state was a challenge as it was not full normal and the adoption of different technologies was equally difficult.

The researcher was equally a victim of COVID – both physically and mentally. But the issue that the researcher is referring to now is not about COVID stress, but the after math of the negative effects of COVID. The after math includes financial crunches faced due to additional expenses that had occurred due to additional purchase of computers and increased medical expenses. Another impact is the deficiency in the mental ability of self and students.

Handling the financial crunches was a little easier than compared to the deficiency in the mental ability.

So how were the issues handled???

The researcher accepted the fact that it is going to be a herculean challenge for the students to move on from the online mode to the face to face mode. The challenge is in the change of assessments, participate in in class discussions, move from the comfort of home learning to a physical class, and meet up with friends and also the challenge of maintaining the physical attendance.

Once the researcher accepted the fact, then the researcher decided to act accordingly. The researcher should also remember that she is going through similar mental disturbances, which will have to be handled simultaneously. The researcher started following the KKK approach when handling the students in class

KISS-KICK-KISS

The researcher identified the students who did not lack motivation and started asking them questions in class and brought them out in the front for discussions. When they started discussing, appreciations followed and this motivated the other students to start volunteering to participate in group discussions. One class every week was set apart for this. Group discussions were mostly using the TPS methodology.

The THINK –PAIR – SHARE, allows individual thinking, sharing the discussion with a friend and then discussing in groups (Jurkowski & Lukas, 2021). This methodology was adopted in the Quality Management classes and it proved quite a success as well.

Having discussed my approaches, that have proved quite participative and successful, the researcher am planning to implement the same in all my future classes as well.

Findings of the research

Although the research was more of an observational experience, the inferences are applicable to the others who are facing similar issues during the entire Covid scenario. The findings can be elucidated are as follow

1. The staff and students are equally affected by Covid and are faced with quite a lot of challenges
2. Using of specific techniques to encourage students in different situations
3. Every teacher should take up research as a part of their career
4. Handling stress can be done by all in a way that is accommodative for them
5. Technological changes are quite a norm and it is better for the teachers and students to be prepared with.
6. If new techniques are adopted, then any sudden changes can be easily dealt with. This is applicable for both the staff and students

Conclusion

The observation mode has given a very good scope to understand the situation. One of the most important advantages of using the observation method is that the researcher can be a participant in the research itself. The adoption of the techniques that were used by the stakeholders during this COVID period can be used in other similar situations. Although the world has faced similar situations before, this Covid Scenario, is different in the sense of technological advancements and overall developments. Hence it was comparatively easy for the adoption and at the same time, it was quite a strategic move in every aspect of adjustment.

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