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Academic development through a pandemic crisis: Lessons learnt from three cases incorporating technical, pedagogical and social support

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Academic development through a pandemic crisis: Lessons learnt from three cases incorporating technical, pedagogical and social support

Abstract

Distance or online learning is more than simply uploading and delivering learning resources to learners but in fact, it is a process that provides learners with autonomy, responsibility, flexibility and choice. This can be a challenge for many academic teachers. In 2020, as universities globally shifted to online learning, in response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, a variety of staff have supported colleagues to develop e-learning techniques 'just-in-time' for effective delivery to students in fully online platforms. This has required a transformation of educational development and faculty support globally. This paper will reflect on mechanisms of support demonstrating tailored staff support to transform education in three case scenario contexts, during the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in three different countries. Our case studies illustrate that support lies beyond technological capability building to also incorporate the essentials of holistic well-being and resilience reinforcement. This paper demonstrates temporary solutions to a global crisis in online education and reflects on lessons learnt and how e-teaching and e-learning support may transform beyond the pandemic.

Practitioner Notes

1. To enable effective pedagogical practices in online delivery, prior experience in open, online and distance learning must be recognised. This will enable formal just-in-time training to be organised providing exemplars on new systems and what teaching online looks like with adaptable frameworks provided.
2. When transitioning to online, it is important to acknowledge the time required to adapt pedagogy to an online platform that is interactive and provides a positive student experience.
3. Administrative work should be limited to a minimum during online transition.
4. Collegial support is important and should be maintained and encouraged to enhance resilience and well-being among teaching staff.

Keywords

academic development, distance learning, pandemic teaching crisis, faculty support

Introduction

The World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 as a pandemic on March 12, causing a global crisis and forcing approximately 1.5 billion students to interrupt their formal education (UNESCO, 2020). Due to the threat of COVID-19, schools and universities were forced to suspend all face-to-face classes and transition to online learning in order to continue teaching and learning. Turkey, New Zealand, and Tasmania (Australia) adhered to strict protocols and closed schools and universities. Following a one-week break, higher education institutions in Turkey began online learning on March 23rd, 2020. (Higher Education Council of Turkey, 2020). Similarly, in Tasmania (Australia) borders were closed and the University of Tasmania moved to off campus delivery of courses from March 20th, 2020. Borders in New Zealand were also strictly closed on March 19th 2020, and the country entered a strict nationwide lockdown on March 25th 2020, with all universities shifting all activities online on the same day.

It is important to emphasise that open, online, and distance learning is more than just uploading and delivering learning resources to students; it is a learning process that gives students autonomy, responsibility, flexibility, and choice. To create an effective learning ecology, it is a complex process that necessitates careful planning, design, and goal determination (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). In this context, open, online, and distance learning and educational practices during the global crisis are different practices. Aydın (2011) defines distance learning as a learning process in which learners are separated from one another but continue to interact and learn through communication technologies. Online learning, however, is also linked to the growth in technology (Singh & Thurman, 2019). Current educational practice is referred to as emergency remote teaching in the context of this study. The term "emergency remote teaching" refers to a method of instructional delivery used by educational institutions (Hodges et al., 2020) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Context of paper

Academia is viewed as an occupation in which a number of skills are necessitated; discipline knowledge is essential but pedagogy, communication, creativity, digital transformation, leadership and empathy are also required to be an effective academic (Cadez et al., 2015). This has been particularly important during 2020 when the world was immersed in a pandemic that had immediate impact on higher education and the academic role. While pedagogical and technological skills were crucial in ensuring that higher education was delivered globally via online platforms during the pandemic, social and emotional needs of the academics were also clearly apparent as they felt isolated and lonely when delivering course materials from homes far away from peers. When Trust and Whalen (2021) asked teachers about emergency remote teaching situations, teachers' responses mirrored the lessons they had learned – that teachers require training and support as "whole teachers" in order to successfully adapt their practice during future crises.

Open, online and distance learning systems that are well-planned provide some support to their stakeholders, which include students, faculty members, and administrative staff. During crises, the support services provided in well-planned open, online and distance learning systems have not always been prioritised by higher education institutions. According to Lee (2003), these support systems include academic, administrative, technical, social elements. Academic support is generally in the form of increasing collaboration and the interaction among the learners (Bozkurt, 2013). Administrative support includes topics such as student enrolment, registration fees, financial and student affairs (Durak, 2017). It is referred as pre-program services in some resources. Technical support is defined by Abate (1999) as "monitoring the efficient operation of delivery media and providing technical assistance." In this context, it is critical to examine the types of technologies

students have, as well as the infrastructure of the institution (Tait, 2000). Lastly, social support covers a wide range of consultancy and guidance services (Bozkurt, 2013). Many services provided by higher education institutions can be included in this framework, from addressing anxieties of learners to career counselling. This service is provided in many distance learning systems with the goal of improving communication skills and providing a sense of belonging.

In 2020, faculty members did not have enough time to prepare for, or obtain support for, emergency remote teaching (Tobin, 2020). As a result of unplanned transition, faculty members received limited support when they needed it in terms of academic, administrative, technical and social support. Although higher education institutions attempted to provide support for faculty members, the majority of them had limited experience with distance learning because face-to-face teaching and learning has always been the main practice.

During the pandemic, there are a number of studies in the literature stating the importance of support for faculty members in emergency remote teaching. Maatuk et al. (2021) highlighted that in the implementation of online learning in higher education, issues such as technical and financial support, training, improved working conditions, technological background, skills, copyright protections, and professional development are always important and faculty members should be supported in this regard. Korkmaz et al. (2021) also stated that faculty experience some difficulties in emergency remote teaching including inability to observe their students' improvement, inability to use technology well and spending too much time on both lecturing and answering student questions. Lastly, Aytaç (2021) stated that the most common problems faced by the teachers during COVID-19 pandemic is the technical and hardware problems related to the internet connection. They also believe that their colleagues lack the necessary technological skills and are unmotivated to use distance education technologies.

Based on these arguments, it can be said that we know little about the transition process to emergency remote teaching for faculty members and how they receive support from their institutions in terms of academic, administrative, technical and social support. This study aims to contribute to an understanding of transition process of faculty members to emergency remote teaching and examine and compare the faculty members' access to support services in the universities in three different countries; Turkey, New Zealand and Australia. The findings may provide an overview of evidence-based best practices in emergency remote teaching, as well as pragmatic guidelines for institutions to successfully integrate these support strategies into their programs. This is despite the fact that online/distance learning is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

Method

This paper provides a collective autoethnography from three individuals positioned to support higher education staff in three different countries during the 2020 COVID-19 global pandemic. This methodology was appropriate to provide reflections of how academic leadership has influenced abrupt academic and faculty development as temporary solutions to transform online delivery of education. Reflection enables current beliefs to be challenged and teaching philosophies and pedagogies highlighted, impacting on decision making and thought processes in academic contexts (Cord & Clements, 2010). A reflective case study approach was adopted to illustrate tailored support provided to staff to transform education during the impact of the pandemic in three different contexts; one from an associate head of learning and teaching in a health discipline in an Australian university, one from an academic developer in a New Zealand university and one from a faculty member in the field of instructional technologies teaching supporting colleagues in online education in a Turkish state university. Authors from three different countries wrote individual reflections (case scenarios) on the transition process to emergency remote teaching in their specific contexts

and how faculty members were supported from their institutions in terms of academic, administrative, technical and social supports. Thematic analysis was used to identify common themes identified in each of the contexts during the pandemic and identify lessons learnt to enable transformation of digital teaching and learning beyond the pandemic.

An interpretivist research approach (Erickson, 1996) framed this study that explored the three reflections in this paper. In line with the broad interpretive approach that framed and governed our approach to this reflection, the 'data' was analysed shortly after they were shared. Analysis of the data contributed to the development of ideas about the reflections held by the authors, in the light of social, pedagogical and technological aspects. This iterative and inductive approach (Thomas, 2006) involved thematic analysis (Silverman, 2001) and the capture of major and common ideas (Mayring, 2000) expressed by authors about academic and faculty development amid a global pandemic crisis. This approach helped to operationalise a process of co-construction among the authors. The outcomes of the analysis process were a series of assertions about the ways academic and faculty development were established during the pandemic.

After the northern hemisphere Fall 2020 semester, the authors from three different countries wrote their individual reflections on the faculty members transition process to emergency remote teaching in their context and how they were supported from their institutions in terms of academic, administrative, technical and social supports. Common points in reflections were then discussed to create themes in terms of pedagogical, technical and social support. This is important in terms of increasing the internal validity by using both data and researcher triangulations.

Reflections from Three Different Cases

Case scenario 1: Academic developer in New Zealand

Designing and developing academic workshops is part of my day-to-day work as an academic developer. While these workshops are 'one-off' pre global pandemic, they actually entail the 'starting point of conversations' or even 'planting the seeds' for the topics (e.g., assessment practices), especially when I am establishing relationships with individual academics after the workshops by guiding and supporting them through the course re-design process for the benefit of student digital teaching and learning experiences. This is significantly apparent when I received quite a number of emails during global pandemic-lockdown when COVID-19 deemed communal spaces in universities out of bounds virtually overnight, disrupting practices that had long been considered stable and reliable in higher education institutions. It is worth noting that these emails were not only from academics but also professional staff who had attended the workshops. Two of them read:

"Last year I had an opportunity to attend one of your courses on Advanced Features of Blackboard, and I was contacting you to see if you might be prepared to share some of your teaching notes? I took some information down, but not - apparently - as much as I had thought. The reason for the request is that we are moving to more digital learning environments to allow resilience in our teaching in the face of possible COVID-19 quarantines or University shutdown. I remember that Blackboard had some neat features that might allow some aspects of our tutorials to be run online, but my notes don't give me enough information to set up and try these features." (Senior Lecturer)

"I've attended a couple of your Blackboard sessions which have been very helpful. I am part of the X Team and we are gearing up for Y for T2! It will predominantly exist on BB. I am interested in creating personal folders for each of the students on our Blackboard site. I want these students to be able to access their folders only and upload JPEGs, word documents, screen shots, etc. to their folder so at the end of Y, I can go into their folder and review their work." (Professional Staff)

These emails indicated the positive impacts of workshop teaching (i.e., learning outcomes) among university staff in the long term even though the influence might not be evident at the particular time and/or straight after the workshops.

Due to the global pandemic, academics were eager to participate, and attendance was extremely increased. Following a series of regular face-to-face workshops in March 2020, I ran 15 online workshops in April and May 2020, with a total of 143 participants. This encouraging online attendance excludes my individual virtual consultations, weekly virtual drop-in sessions and faculty based online workshops within these two months. Two of these online workshops were newly developed timely topics during and upon releasing ourselves from the global pandemic-lockdown, namely:

- Shifting Online and Sustaining Wellness (To discover ideas for teaching and learning that are learnt from the global pandemic-lockdown crisis and how these ideas could be applied for teaching and learning from now on; To explore different tips and mechanisms in order to sustain the effectiveness and efficiency of teaching and learning in any circumstances.)
- Teaching & Learning: Beyond the 'Experiences' and Moving Forward (To discover how shifting online might have led to digital anxiety or even digital fatigue; To explore different tips and mechanisms in order to sustain digital wellness, especially during this global strange time.)

These workshops were not only applicable for academics but also professional staff who support teaching and learning. As an expert in this field, teaching innovation and curriculum development are constantly in progress, especially when the targeted audience is university staff as illustrated thus far and the use of digital technologies is proven to be ubiquitous as well as seem-to-be the sole and inevitable solution to unexpected or sometimes unavoidable disruptions (e.g., natural disasters) of face-to-face experiences.

Being an academic developer with a focus on e-learning in a teaching and learning development centre, I have had the privilege of conducting academic activities in the area of educational technology. I have encountered both academics and students talking about their experiences of using ICT (Information and Communication Technologies). For many of them, especially the academics, ICT can bring either joy or challenge to their well-versed academic practices, and either create barriers to their development or be the answer to their needs. While some grasp and pursue opportunities to make use of various ICT for teaching and learning processes, others struggle. Despite documented and anecdotal positive and enthusiastic urges to adopt ICT to reap benefits for increasing and improving efficiency and effectiveness of academic practices, academics and students who struggle experience ICT is seen as an unnecessary impediment to their daily activities, and it is difficult to learn and use, some participants believe that incorporating ICT into the teaching and learning processes will have little impact on practices. The support was so strong during the global pandemic lockdown that both academics and students had no choice but to reposition themselves regarding the use of ICT as the only solution to continue their academic practices due to the circumstances. However, the assistance extends beyond the development of technological capabilities to include the fundamentals of holistic well-being/resilience reinforcement.

Further, being empathetic to views such as those expressed by Castañeda and Selwyn (2018), I do not approach these encounters with academic experiences from a stance that assumes that ICT are the natural and needed solution to problems related to improving, as well as facilitating, effective and efficient teaching and learning processes. Rather, I have taken a more neutral stance, wishing to explore the experiences of those involved, academics in particular, through workshops via discussions about their practices and views, and with a specific focus on ICT integration in the

process of teaching and learning. Nevertheless, it seems like my experiments have not met this aim quite yet. This channels me to ask the question if there is a process of teaching and learning ICT use to achieve learning outcomes of ICT literacy within academic domains.

Case scenario 2: Faculty member in instructional technologies in Turkey

Due to the threat of COVID-19, schools and universities suspended all the face-to-face classes and made a mandatory transition to online learning to continue their teaching and learning. Turkey as many other countries, followed strict protocols and shut down schools and universities.

“In Turkey, there are roughly 18 million students and 1 million teachers in compulsory education levels and 7.5 million students and around 170 thousand faculty members in higher education. In primary and secondary education, the total student population constitutes 21% of the overall students while students in higher education constitute 10%. Roughly, 30% of the citizens are students and they have been affected by Covid-19 pandemic” (Bozkurt et al., 2020, p.83).

To minimize the impact of pandemic on education, higher education institutions have started online learning after a one-week break (Higher Education Council of Turkey, 2020). There are three dual mode universities including Anadolu, Atatürk and İstanbul Universities and those universities in Turkey offer fully online programs before the pandemic. Other universities in the country have not seemed to be ready to support their faculties and learners regarding academic/tutorial, administrative, technical, counselling and library supports.

As an expert in the field of open, online and distance education, I can say that faculty members and learners in traditional higher education systems did not have time to prepare or get supported for emergency remote teaching. In our case, in terms of technical support, it is observed that the preparation process for the online courses varies according to the open and distance learning experiences of the faculty. If the faculty had prior experience on teaching online, the transition process went smoothly. On the contrary, if they did not have it, they felt anxiety about it. On this point, one of my colleagues expressed himself saying “... at first, there was a problem of adaptation of the new system. It took time to get used to a new platform, to understand how it works. About two weeks later I got used to the system such as how to upload materials to this system, what's it like to set up meetings, marking the class ... technical issues have created a bit of anxiety.”

To help faculty to reduce their anxiety, there is a need for user training/guides on new systems, which is important. The technical supports received by the faculty from our institution during the emergency remote teaching process are examined, it is seen that this happens in two ways. First of all, it is seen that the university provided support to faculty with pre-prepared video guides for the problems faculty members may encounter in the preparation of learning materials and assessment of learners. Secondly, technical support is provided by representatives who are selected from departments for the possible technical difficulties. Those representatives are comfortable with technology and eager to help others.

In terms of academic support, the most important observation related to the emergency remote teaching is that faculty members tended to carry their face-to-face teaching methods to distance teaching. There were some differences in the process including course timing, learning resources and interactions, however, it can be said that faculty ignored those and tried to use their face-to-face teaching habits such as uploading the same teaching materials. This is because the university did not provide academic support to the faculty. For this reason, it can be said that the university was insufficient in terms of providing academic support to the faculty. When the different needs of instructors of various subjects such as mathematics, engineering and business administration are taken into account, the importance of providing academic support becomes indisputable.

Another observation related to the experiences of the faculties reveals that the workload of the faculties have increased during the emergency remote teaching. They may have taught the same courses as they taught in face to face, but the amount of time they spent developing interactive learning resources grew. They also used a new learning management system or digital tool for the first time, which caused technical problems. It can be stated that having less course time than face-to-face courses (20 minutes for online learning instead of a one-hour face-to-face learning), design and development of digital content in open and distance learning, and the copyrights of the resources used in the content caused issues for faculty.

Bozkurt and Sharma (2020) stated that people are under trauma, stress and psychological pressure, so they will remember how they felt, how we cared for them, and how we supported them. For this reason, caring and supporting both faculty and learners at such times is important. Higher education institutions should remember this and they need to plan the counselling support as well as academic, administrative and technical supports.

Although it is not included in the open and distance learning literature for faculty, peer support can be shown to be the most prominent type of support in the emergency remote teaching. The observation of the peers revealed that the faculty firstly contact with their peers regarding administrative, academic, technical and social support and then inform the university administration if they cannot solve their issues.

Last but not least, when faculty members' experiences with interaction during emergency remote teaching are examined, it can be stated that students did not attend the synchronous online courses as much as they do in face-to-face courses, and those who do participate in classes do not interact during online courses. It can be understood that the digital tools and synchronous courses are insufficient to provide learner-instructor interaction and do not give the learners opportunities to reflect what they think. So, both learners and faculty members should be supported to maintain interacting.

Case scenario 3: Associate head of learning & teaching in Tasmania (Australia)

When the pandemic affected the on-campus delivery of learning and teaching at our university, staff were required to quickly adapt lecture, tutorial and practical content into an online platform as well as provide communication channels that could be accessed by both domestic and international students still located 'in country'. This required innovative but quickly adaptable solutions to ensure that the student experience was not negatively impacted. As the leader of learning and teaching within our School, I quickly realized the need for me to lead staff (particularly those who were not comfortable in the online world) to deliver quality online curriculum while also maintaining a positive learning experience for students enrolled in the units that I teach. This was challenging as our curriculum involves laboratory teaching and clinical placement as identified by other colleagues teaching health courses in Australia (Seymour-Walsh et al., 2020).

As we were all moved rapidly into a 'working from home' environment, opportunities to connect online relied on videotelephony software platforms such as Zoom. Staff who taught students based 'in country' were encouraged to set up weekly Zoom Drop-In sessions for students to connect with relevant teaching staff on a regular basis. Additional online communities were set up both synchronously and asynchronously using discussion boards and web conferencing platforms to engage students with staff and establish a teacher-student dialogue online.

I immediately implemented a weekly Zoom 'drop in' session for all staff (academic and professional) to ask timely questions as we were now all based online. The philosophy behind the sessions was to provide a 'safe' environment for all staff to ask questions about learning and teaching (L&T) strategies and processes or highlight issues that I may not have been aware of. The motto

for these sessions was “No question is a silly question!” and staff have continued to connect with these sessions to raise issues, ask questions or ‘lurk’ to hear from others. Throughout these sessions, as a leader, I have strived to provide an environment which is empathic yet encourages productivity (Nugruho et al., 2021) and aligns with the university requirements.

As an Associate Head (L&T) in my School, I introduced L&T forums in 2019 prior to semesters and at the end of the year. These forums (prior to semester) were of immense importance in 2020 in relation to COVID updates and the impact on teaching as well as ensuring that staff were aware of all key L&T processes currently activated at our university. The end of year L&T forum provided a platform to enable staff to share innovative online strategies in L&T and “Lessons learnt from COVID” as well as engage in professional development to enhance their digital capabilities moving towards 2021. This has enabled staff in 2021 planning as COVID continues to impact on our ability to delivery courses.

One of the key platforms that I could support staff in the use of was Lt, an online learning platform provided by AD Instruments, which I have used successfully in online teaching (Douglas, 2018). This online platform (which we had a licence for but became more freely accessible during 2020 as result of the pandemic impact) provided an opportunity for staff to engage students in self-directed interactive practicals, particularly in the areas of anatomy, histology, and physiology. This platform was implemented in 5 units (subjects) in our school and is continuing to be used in 2021. Student feedback has been encouraging and online activities can easily be edited and updated within the platform on an ongoing basis with assessment opportunities also available.

As we were transitioning at a rapid pace, I worked on a ‘Just-in-Time’ philosophy (Vokurka & Davis, 1996), ensuring that staff had access to resources that were timely and relevant. All face-to-face written (and some practical) exams moved into the online space and so I offered a “Developing an Online Exam” workshop for staff, a guided peer review process and a number of resources to assist staff which was welcomed. The university also supported staff by providing online resources and specific MasterClasses to engage staff in relevant topics in L&T practices. As a leader in L&T, I was invited to present at one of these sessions and attended all sessions to provide relevant materials to staff in my school.

Online communication for staff became of paramount performance as we transitioned to outside of our ‘silo’ buildings in the university and into our own homes as our workplace. A specific School Learning and Teaching Microsoft Teams was established to enable updates, resources and required reporting spreadsheets during the pandemic. The site offered a ‘one-stop shop’ for staff to locate resources in designated folders while enabling an approval process for any changes to teaching and/or assessments in individual units due to the impact of the pandemic. The Microsoft Teams site became a useful repository for L&T resources that staff could tap into to re-imagine their unit content. Information from webinars offered nationally and globally, relevant online resources and professional development activities offered by our university were uploaded into the site for staff use.

The pandemic and connectivity options provided by Zoom also enabled me to support staff engaged with staff throughout my university who were interested in scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). I was keen to ensure that staff now isolated could share SoTL activities or achievements across the university and engage with like-minded colleagues. This provided an additional platform to share “Lessons learnt from COVID” and showcase initiatives in online learning and teaching. I received positive feedback from the sessions which continue in 2021.

In summary, this scenario captures some of the L&T support initiatives that I implemented in response to a pandemic in the School of Health Sciences at the University of Tasmania (Australia). Staff were appreciative of my support and nominated me for a COVID-19 Vice-Chancellor’s award

in recognition of my leadership through a transitional time in our L&T. In reflection, I was aware that I needed to connect to staff and support them in a world that was unknown and enable them to focus on the student experience at all times. In 2020, we did not always provide ‘perfect’ online teaching and learning materials, but we were always accessible to our students and for that, they were grateful.

Findings

The three case scenarios highlight a number of similarities with respect to leadership initiatives required to transform higher education during a pandemic crisis. The three themes that are evident within each relate to pedagogical, technical and social support.

A shift in pedagogy was imminent as a result of rapid change. The pedagogical lens across these three scenarios indicates the following:

- Confusion of shifting online is equivalent to online or even distance education;
- Support shows a high indication of unfamiliarity in virtual teaching and learning;
- Demand of support in re-designing accessible teaching and learning activities is high, especially in terms of assessments;
- Conflict between being pedagogically sound and ‘just in time’ adjustments.

Technologically, staff in higher education have been challenged by the rapid shift to full online delivery of learning and teaching. The common theme identified in the three scenarios from a technical aspect include:

- Rapid implementation of new platforms such as Zoom, Classroom, etc.;
- Implementation of new guidance/weekly drop-in sessions for staff on user training/guides on new systems;
- Providing technical support by representatives who are selected from departments for the possible technical difficulties;
- Providing online resources / making resources open access.

Finally, the social lens across the scenarios highlights the importance of communication and collaboration during times of a pandemic when staff may feel more isolated than normal. Common social themes identified included:

- Connectivity between colleagues is essential when all online and off campus;
- Disrupted practices led to instability in higher education; collegial support is important to deliver quality L&T;
- Sustainment of wellness and social opportunities is important while working off campus; Providing social connect opportunities contributes to holistic well-being and reinforces resilience and reduces anxiety or perceived anxiety;
- Peer support is most important; learners and faculty members need to maintain positive engaging interactions;
- Synchronous and asynchronous forums provide important platforms for social interaction.

Discussion

Pedagogical lens

The pedagogical challenges faced, and the overwhelming support requests from the academics during a global pandemic indicates that professional development in developing a shared understanding about ‘online’ and/or ‘distance’ education is needed (Barbour et al., 2020). As stated by Ouma and Nkuyubwatsi (2019), the faculty is under-supported in this regard, and the findings related with academic support reinforce this. At the same time, there is a need for upskilling academics in terms of digital competency via regular workshops. However, such support which is mainly provided by central units could be another challenge when the central unit at most institutions is unsettled (e.g., restructuring and even closing down). Moreover, we need to be aware of the academics’ as well as the students’ well-being aspect due to the disruption. It seems like there is no capacity for this domain as it is not the priority of the support being provided.

Additionally, the lack of shared understanding of virtual teaching and learning (Stein & Sim, 2019) means that every academic defines their own assessment practices, engagement activities and support affordances in order to carry on the daily academic life. Consequently, there is an overload of virtual resources in this area and the situation can be overwhelming (Valika et al., 2020). Most importantly, it appears that we are trying to ‘cope’ with the situation rather than working on a well-planned pedagogically sound practice. Appropriate pedagogical frameworks need to be clearly communicated to teaching staff to ensure quality learning and teaching practices are developed. This needs to be supported centrally within an institution enabling collaboration rather than isolation in course delivery (Gantner & Campbell, 2021) and the provision of effective e-learning platforms (Rafi et al., 2020).

Technical Lens

Findings regarding the support systems in the time of emergency remote teaching provided by the universities showed that technical support was well-provided by the university administration. Creating courses, registering learners in these courses, preparing exam schedules and delivering these schedules and other announcements to learners worked smoothly. Institutions provided technical support to faculty with pre-prepared video guides for the problems encountered in the preparation of learning materials and assessment of learners. In addition, technical support was provided by representatives who were selected from departments with expertise for the potential technical difficulties.

Teaching staff are at the forefront of online delivery and need to be technologically supported particularly during online/remote teaching impacted by a sudden transition (Pedro & Kumar, 2020) as there are a number of practical barriers to overcome (Seymour-Walsh et al., 2020). In terms of technical support, it is observed that the preparation process for online course delivery varies according to the open and distance learning experiences of the faculty. If the faculty had prior experience on teaching online, the transition process went smoothly. Faculty may or may not have prior experience in open, online and distance learning, which needs to be considered by faculty administration. Based on that, formal training should be organised on how the new system works and what teaching online looks like. Staff development is critical to ensure that specialist support is provided for technology enhanced learning to upskill staff in digital delivery and enhance the student experience (Almpanis, 2015).

Social lens

A move to off-campus and online requires enhanced relationships between academic colleagues as illustrated in each of the case scenarios. As disrupted practices (due to the pandemic) led to instability in higher education, collegiality was central to the delivery of the best L&T practices possible in the current context. The social needs of academics were met through a variety of initiatives across the case scenarios including synchronous online forums, workshops and drop-in sessions as well as asynchronous Q&A opportunities which enabled capacity building but also provided social networking opportunities for academics. Importantly, these contributed to holistic well-being and reinforced resilience. Peer partnerships were important to reduce perceived and in-place anxiety as informal online sessions provided a social context to replace typical on-campus social interactions. Empathy towards one another was evident as academics constructed supportive partnerships to reinforce wellbeing and collaboration. The emotional impact of COVID-19 on faculty staff has been similarly identified in other studies (Casacchia et al., 2021; Meishar-Tal & Levenberg, 2021; Seymour-Walsh et al., 2020)

The social lens illustrated in our case scenarios also considered equity, ensuring that teaching contexts met the needs of the current crisis (Corbera et al., 2020). Communication was key to meeting social requirements of academics in isolation as reported previously by Sahu (2020) and Sobaih et al. (2020) who reflect on the importance of communication to address both pedagogical and mental health impacts on academics. The acceptance of the challenges of individual contexts in meeting workplace requirements and therefore the delivery of online education was acknowledged and supported across all three scenarios. This has also been identified in other studies where self-care needs have been identified when academics are disconnected due to sudden work-at home arrangements (Seymour-Walsh et al., 2020). A key lesson learnt from the just-in-time delivery to online education was the recognition of academic wellbeing and the need for collegiality to provide social connections and sharing opportunities.

Lessons learned during the pandemic

The support provided by leaders as well as colleagues during the pandemic were often ‘just-in-time’ temporary solutions to enable online delivery of curriculum. Distance learning is more than simply uploading and delivering learning resources to learners, rather, it is a learning process that provides learners autonomy, responsibility, flexibility and choice. To achieve this, academics need to be well supported and achievements should be viewed as a temporary solution to a global crisis and different from distance learning.

Synchronous opportunities provide connectivity for staff-staff and staff-students during a crisis, such as a pandemic, providing opportunities for peer support, collaboration, and collegiality; sharing “wins and losses”, “lessons learnt”, and innovations/initiatives in learning and teaching, which contribute to the social context of higher education during the pandemic. The rapid changes made in 2020 have made an ideal platform from which to evolve quality online teaching and learning activities rich in pedagogy and appropriate technology. Furthermore, the importance of social networking within and between institutions is essential to share successes and failures and strive towards teaching excellence. Significantly, it is time to make sure the higher education sector is prepared to service students as well as academics going forward, not just to be prepared for a possible ‘next wave’ of the pandemic, but also to enhance learning and teaching practices.

In summary: Support beyond the pandemic

As higher education has been transformed due to the impact of the COVID-9 pandemic, it is important to retain the levels of technical, pedagogical and social support for academics beyond

these times. The ‘new normal’ will include a shift to online/distance deliveries with face-to-face active learning activities incorporated as appropriate within blended deliveries of the curriculum. Caring and supporting both faculty and learners will continue to be important as we evolve learning and teaching practices in higher education. Supporting faculty staff and students by effective and efficient forms of infrastructure and offering professional development to staff in a timely manner is important beyond this COVID-19 era to ensure that quality learning and teaching practices are delivered globally in higher education.

The following are the support guideline in open, online and distance learning to lead faculty for post pandemic times in reflection of the three scenarios:

- Teaching staff may or may not have prior experience in open, online and distance learning, so no matter what their experiences are, administration should consider them as if they do not have prior experiences. Based on that, formal training should be organised on how the new system works and what teaching online looks like with adaptable frameworks provided.
- Faculty may transfer their face-to-face habits to open, online, and distance learning systems, so they should be also supported on the pedagogical differences between face-to-face and online teaching.
- Faculty members workloads may increase when transitioning to emergency remote teaching, even though synchronous course time may be less than in face-to-face delivery. It is important to acknowledge the time required to adapt pedagogy to an online platform that is interactive and provides a positive student experience. Administrative work should be limited to a minimum during online transition.
- Peer support is important beyond the pandemic; networks established during the pandemic should be maintained and encouraged to enhance resilience and well-being among teaching staff.

As we move to the “new normality”, some argue that we will never return to the ways of the past (Tesar, 2020) but rather, due to the accelerated process of transitioning to digital delivery of higher education, we will transform to a “new normality” in which lessons learnt from the pandemic will enrich the delivery of higher education globally. Reflecting on our contexts illustrated in this paper, it is clear that support is required for staff to transform education with sound pedagogical foundations while addressing technical and social needs, particularly during a pandemic in which staff are forced into an isolated working environment. This can enable quality e-learning and e-teaching while reinforcing holistic wellbeing and resilience.

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