Designing Quality E-Learning Environments for Emergency Remote Teaching in Coronavirus Crisis

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Dear Editor,

According to UNESCO statistics, more than 1.5 billion children and youth in 188 countries around the globe have to stay home due to the closure of schools and higher education institutions following the Coronavirus outbreak (1). Many countries have shifted from traditional face-to-face methods to e-Learning in the light of the new states of emergency. Humans have the right to continue education in times of crisis, disaster, and violence. This is based on the assumption that each student is treated with equity and has access to education, which is not quite in consistence with the reality on the ground, especially in developing countries. Many countries have long used e-learning in emergency situations, including Palestine, Syria, Afghanistan, and South of Africa (2-4).

Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) is not usually planned in advance and involves a sudden shift from traditional teaching into a remote one in view of emergency situations like the outbreak of Coronavirus in different countries. This is a totally different situation compared to e-Learning in normal circumstances. After an emergency state, everything is supposed to go back to normalcy. Moreover, educators have to work in a highly stressful situation while having no knowledge of the end of the crisis. Nevertheless, after the Coronavirus crisis e-Learning will be in an entirely different state, especially in developing countries. Education leaders and policy makers in both public and higher education need to learn new lessons about education in crisis to develop their e-Learning systems. Due to unplanned nature of e-Learning in crisis situations, students, parents, teachers and faculty members may confront many obstacles in accommodating and embracing e-Learning in ERT. For instance, in most cases students complain about the inequality in education and the difficulties in gaining access to educational resources, while faculties complain about students' engagement in ERT environment.

Accordingly, one cannot merely focus on the benefits of adopting e-Learning in emergency situations, and must also

take account of the quality of the virtual courses delivered in these circumstances. In this respect, Khan (5) has developed an eight-dimensional framework that provides the educational technology community with the best guidelines and practices for the development of e-Learning systems. It was applied in a different context to evaluate e-learning projects and develop new paradigms such as microlearning (6, 7). Researchers considered the framework as an approach in instructional design that guides the process of developing content for e-learning purposes in public and private institutions, and helps with converting from traditional approaches to electronic formats. The eight dimensions of this e-learning framework are '(1) institutional, (2) pedagogical, (3) technological, (4) interface design, (5) evaluation, (6) management, (7) resource support, and (8) ethics' (7: p.45-46).

However, each of these dimensions raises a number of concerns or questions that need to be addressed in order to assess and develop an institutions e-capability. Khan's eight-dimensional e-learning framework is widely used by various organizations, such as governments, educational institutions, and corporate entities. This paved the way for another work aimed at analyzing the e-learning experiences of different entities based on the concepts in the framework. In a forthcoming book entitled "Challenges and Opportunities for the Global Implementation of E-Learning Frameworks", we will investigate e-learning globally by discussing the experiences in several countries including those regions already struggling with a crisis. In this respect, the E-learning Framework (http://asianvu.com/bk/framework) will be used as a guide to examine e-learning practices in countries around the globe in order to reflect on the challenges and opportunities for implementing quality learning.

Therefore, different e-learning concepts will be discussed including an evaluation of student performance in e-learning courses delivered in emergency situations as well as the most suitable pedagogical paradigms for this method of learning. Ethical issues and students' privacy are also a highly topical issue in e-learning. Sharing others' experience in these matters will be motivating for the newcomers in this field and guide them to the best practices, saving their time, money and efforts. Furthermore, identifying the similarities and differences between several countries and sharing others' experiences will be conducive to policy making especially in uncertain times. Finally, the presented ideas may appeal to different people or institutions, including but not limited to schools, universities, teachers and educational leaders, practitioners in e-learning, continuing education institutions, and government agencies offering academic courses. Regional and Global Experiences will be presented in a single source to help others develop their own systems with high quality.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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