

Chapter 1

Impact of the COVID–19 on Higher Education: An Experience–Based Approach

Francisco José García-Peñalvo

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9987-5584>

University of Salamanca, Spain

Alfredo Corell

University of Valladolid, Spain

Ricardo Rivero-Ortega

University of Salamanca, Spain

María J. Rodríguez-Conde

University of Salamanca, Spain

Nicolás Rodríguez-García

University of Salamanca, Spain

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 outbreak has a considerable impact on all business domains worldwide, almost with negative consequences. The digital transformation was already a requirement for all governments and institutions that this pandemic has accelerated to solve the confinement and the limitations to work and share the same spaces. Face-to-face higher education institutions moved towards an urgent and unplanned online teaching. After having closed one of the processes that has had the most significant impact on universities, the time has come to reflect and draw conclusions that will serve to face these institutions' future. A crisis always represents risks but also opportunities to change from a disruptive situation. This chapter reflects universities' futures from a strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats approach with the perspective of the experiences lived during the end of the 2019-2020 academic year by some face-to-face universities in Spain.

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INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 has caused the COVID-19 disease worldwide pandemic that affects both health and economy. Besides the severe problems for the people's health and the hospital systems' management, the restrictions to control the virus spread cause terrible effects in the national governments, businesses, and public and private organizations. All the activity sectors have their ability to function impaired (Nicola et al., 2020). Globalization induces a chain effect among the different production domains that obliges to maintain a very tricky balance between controlling the COVID-19 disease and achieving reasonable economic productivity.

Education is one of the fundamental rights of humanity. As presented in the United Nations' (2019) fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), everyone must have access to an inclusive, equitable quality education because education enables socioeconomic mobility upward and is a key to escaping poverty. COVID-19 disease has had a devastating effect on the educational activity (Daniel, 2020) that could have very harmful consequences for future generations, never before so many youngsters were out of the educational centers at the same time, causing more significant gaps between who have enough economic support and access to the technologies and those who are more vulnerable and marginalized (Beaunoyer, Dupéré, & Guitton, 2020). In March 2020, a majority of countries announced the temporary closure of schools (Azevedo, Hasan, Goldemberg, Iqbal, & Geven, 2020; Viner et al., 2020), impacting more than 91 percent of students worldwide, with close 1.6 billion children and youth out of schools, and nearly 369 million children without their daily nutrition source because they depended on the school meals (UNESCO, 2020; United Nations, 2020).

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have also seen all their missions compromised, especially teaching and learning activities (Fardoun, González-González, Collazos, & Yousef, 2020; Watermeyer, Crick, Knight, & Goodall, 2020). When face-to-face lectures were suspended, the teaching activity was migrated to some kind of distance education modality. The first goal was to allow students to finish the 2019-2020 academic course, including the assessment (García-Peñalvo, Corell, Abella-García, & Grande-de-Prado, 2020a, 2020b), not to disturb the future plans and academic career of thousands of the university students worldwide.

As a first conclusion at the macroscopic level, we could summarize that, in a more or less dignified way, it has been possible to teach the subject and evaluate most of the skills, all thanks to the institutional technological ecosystems (García-Peñalvo et al., 2017) of the universities and a collective (but very unequal) effort of the entire university community, that is, faculty, students and service personnel.

From this global perspective, with the feeling of having passed the test, there is a particular optimistic perception of a significant advance in the adoption and acceptance of learning technologies (Briz Ponce & García-Peñalvo, 2015), which also increases the distance with the group of teachers that Rogers (2003) calls laggards. However, being aware that it has been carried out in an urgent and supervening way, far from comparing with initiatives specifically designed from their conception to be delivered online (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bond, 2020). The effect of disaffection towards learning technologies is not negligible emerging in a sector of teachers, not necessarily included in the group of deniers or laggards, due to the over-exertion that has required them to attend to teaching activity during confinement (Corell, 2020).

However, if an analysis is made with a little more depth and some doses of self-criticism of the process, including all affected sectors, this apparent acceleration towards technological adoption caused by the conditions of the pandemic is questioned when problems arise from the technological gaps in society,

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