

Chapter 6

From Face-to-Face to Digital Learning: Implications for Pedagogy, Learning Design, and Instruction

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ABSTRACT

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, universities worldwide were forced to close their campuses and move instructional delivery to a digital mode. Many argued that this massive emergency digitalisation of instructional delivery was a major move of higher education toward online learning. However, this view overlooks considerations of pedagogy and of online learning design and delivery. Online learning is not just about uploading content to an online space or about moving all lectures online, and there is a whole theory behind designing online learning environments and delivering online learning. This chapter will discuss key theoretical considerations behind online learning design and delivery in relation to the digitalisation of higher education during COVID-19 with a view to make recommendations that will help universities design fulfilling and effective online learning and teaching experiences for their students and faculty.

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INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a major shift to remote teaching in higher education, from the outbreak of the virus to the current date. Many universities worldwide had to suspend their face-to-face teaching and ask academics to use technology to transfer all instructional delivery online. School closures have been implemented across all levels of education and according to UNESCO (2020) the closure of educational institutions impacted “hundreds of millions of students”. Remote delivery was seen as the only option during the outbreak and subsequent waves of the pandemic to protect students and faculty and to halt the spread of the virus. At first, many thought that remote teaching would be a quick solution for the Spring of 2020 and that teaching would go back to normal as the new academic year begun. However, as several countries experienced a second and even a third wave of the pandemic earlier than expected, remote teaching soon became a necessity for the 2020-2021 academic year as well (BBC News, 2020a; BBC News, 2020b; ICEF Monitor, 2020). At the same time, several Universities discovered the potential that digital technology is creating for higher education and saw this shift to digital education as an opportunity for years to come.

During this major shift to digital instruction in higher education, many spoke about higher education going online and embracing online learning, and about a radical move to online education which is going to revolutionise higher education for ever (Kandri, 2020; Li & Lalani, 2020; Zimmermn, 2020). However, in its majority, the digitalisation of instructional delivery as a response to Covid-19 does not qualify as online learning. The term, used by Hodges et al. (2020), that better describes this massive digitalization of education is emergency remote teaching. Online learning is not just about uploading content to an online space and moving all lectures online and it is not about transferring what would otherwise take place in a physical classroom to an online medium (Hodges, et al., 2020). Just like with face-to-face learning, there is a whole theory behind online learning, and online learning environments and effective online courses are designed according to pedagogical principles in order to offer learners and teachers an effective and fulfilling learning and teaching experience. Teaching methods and tools that may be traditionally used in the physical classroom may not be equally effective or even relevant in an online learning environment. For example, a two-hour lecture, which is the traditional method of classroom teaching will not be effective in an online learning setting. Also, just like campus learning, online learning should be supported by additional resources, like for example, access to study skills resources, access to expert technical support, a resourceful online library, media production support, etc. in order to create an integrated virtual campus experience for online learners (Picciano, 2006; Hodges et al., 2020; Woldeab & Yawson, 2020; Tzavara, 2021).

According to many, the emergency shift to remote teaching in the Spring of 2020 was successful in keeping the academic year going. The massive digitalization of instructional delivery that we are experiencing was not planned and all parties involved did the best they could under the circumstances. Emergency remote teaching was effective in keeping students connected with their programmes of study and offered students and academics an opportunity to complete the 2019/2020 academic year and to keep the 2020/2021 academic year going. But there was also a lot of criticism as well regarding the level of engagement from academics and students as well as the effectiveness of remote teaching in supporting desired learning objectives (Watermeyer et al, 2020; Moules, 2020; Batty & Hall, 2020; Aguilera-Hermida, 2020). However, the disappointment that many experienced from the remote learning and teaching experience and the concerns expressed about the success of online education did not take into account the digitalisation of education as a response to Covid-19 was not a planned movement to

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