Chapter 3

Challenges for Online Learning in Higher Education:
A Developing Country Perspective

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ABSTRACT

There are several factors that compel students, teachers, and management to adopt e-learning instead of physical learning. COVID-19 is a key reason for adopting e-learning, particularly in higher education institutes. E-learning is considered the best choice to continue the transfer of knowledge and to stop the spread of diseases such as COVID-19. Despite several advantages of E-learning, there are a number of challenges of E-learning. The focus of this chapter is to discuss the challenges of e-learning, particularly in developing countries. In the last part of the chapter, the authors will discuss the recommendations to improve the e-learning strategies in developing countries as well as some opportunities for E-learning for developing countries.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past few decades, the landscape of higher education has remarkably transformed, driven by technological advancements and the growing demand for flexible and accessible learning opportunities (Barrot, Llenares, & del Rosario, 2021). Online learning has emerged as a promising approach to learning different subjects, from languages to sciences (Anshari et al., 2016; Elaish et al., 2019; Garcia et al., 2018). Teachers can now deliver interactive lessons, easily exchange resources, and encourage student cooperation and interaction in these novel online learning spaces (Yuhanna et al., 2020). Although the

education community has widely recognized the effectiveness of online learning (Barrot et al., 2021; Nguyen, 2015; Sheshasaayee & Nazreen Bee, 2018). In March 2020, to stop the spread of coronavirus (COVID19), governments around the world put limits on individuals' freedom of movement and participation in social gatherings. Universities and other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were forced to adopt online learning temporarily, exacerbating the challenges in implementing effective online education (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023). All the learning activities like lectures, library services, lab work, learning support groups, and extracurricular activities like campus sports were all affected by changes (Laato et al., 2020; Walsh & Rana, 2020). HEIs used technology and the Internet to continue operating under the new conditions as students and staff began working from home.

Online learning is fundamentally different from traditional face-to-face education, requiring teachers and students to adapt to new methods and technology (Volery & Lord, 2000). Students also encounter challenges such as self-regulated learning and difficulty in maintaining friendships with their peers. The restrictions on social interaction had an impact on staff meetings, exams, and support services for HEI-management (Laato et al., 2020). During the COVID-19 clear communication from the top-down was essential to alleviate the cognitive burden on students caused by significant life changes and the ongoing pandemic (Shaheen et al., 2022). Therefore, HEI administrators had to quickly understand the situation and provide timely information to both students and faculty. This is even important in the post-COVID times that HEIs must plan to address the challenges associated with online learning on priority basis to address the well-being of students, staff, and the broader community (Dhawan, 2020).

Before the pandemic, distance and online education primarily catered the individuals unable to attend traditional physical institutes. However, the pandemic has transformed its audience and learning environment, in post-covid-19 era online learning offers many benefits as inaccessibility, flexibility in learning schedules, the ability to reach a wider audience, personalized learning experiences, integration of multimedia resources, and opportunities for collaboration and networking in virtual environments (Jamilah & Fahyuni, 2022). The benefits of online learning are evident; it is important to note that its successful implementation is often more compatible with higher education in developed countries (Shaheen et al., 2020). The availability of advanced digital infrastructures, reliable high-speed internet connections, and access to necessary technological resources for instructors and students is crucial for effective online learning experiences (Zarei & Mohammadi, 2022). In addition, most students have modern laptops or computers for digital classes. In contrast, developing online learning for universities in developing nations was difficult for all stakeholders involved, including learners, mentors, policymakers, and technology experts (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Muzaki & Mugisa, 2006). The quick shift from a brick and mortar setting to an entirely online one presented difficulty in implementation of online learning (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023; Brem et al., 2021; Dhawan, 2020). Online learning environment has created a range of challenges for developing countries that must be navigated to ensure its success in higher education settings. In developing countries, these challenges are often amplified due to resource constraints, technological limitations, socio-cultural factors, and educational inequalities (Zarei & Mohammadi, 2022).

This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of challenges associated with implementing and accessing online learning within the context of higher education in developing countries. The teachers, administrators, and policymakers involved in developing and designing curricula for online learning environments will find valuable insights and practical strategies. By understanding these challenges, the quality and effectiveness of online learning can be improved, and benefits can be obtained by unlocking its transformative power. Continuous improvements in program design, learning and delivering strate-

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