Chapter 63

A Virtual Inclusive Community of Practice as a Technological Intervention Strategy to Enhance Student Inclusive Teaching and Learning

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ABSTRACT

Creating virtual inclusive teaching and learning was given momentum by the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the support of students to access pedagogical content knowledge on a distance curriculum delivery mode has become the priority of most institutions of higher learning. This critical collaborative action research study reports on the experiences of 10 higher education instructors and 10 doctoral and 10 master's students in developing an inclusive virtual supportive community of practice for enhancing the teaching and learning process during the delivery of education in a distance mode in one of the universities in Kazakhstan. A community of practice theory is used as a compass and lens for the study. This article proposes the formation of a virtual community of practice as a vehicle to limit the impact of ability and disability among students on a distance mode of education.

INTRODUCTION

Kazakhstan has adopted the philosophy of inclusive education. The adoption of inclusive education starts with article 14 (2) of the constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Law on Education (2007) which guarantees non- discrimination with regard to education. The contribution ensures that education provision for all citizens of the country. Kazakhstan is also a signatory to the Salamanca Statement, a document which many countries committed themselves in making education inclusive. Following that was the State programs 2011-2019, 2016-2020 which aimed to have all schools 70% inclusive by 2020 and State Program 2020-2025 which aimed to have 100% of Schools inclusive by 2025.

Recognizing that inclusive education has become a global phenomenon at all levels of education including higher education, educational institutions with diverse students, staff and faculty, are obliged to provide equitable and equal educational services which cater to the educational needs of different groups

in the way that ensures physical, material and epistemic access to all. They therefore, have to endevour to create a safe, all-inclusive environment that ensures the protection of the rights of all. As a result of the inclusion of students with disabilities and special needs in secondary education, more opportunities have been created for them to enter higher education institutions.

Higher education institutions are required to provide opportunities through inclusion of students with special educational needs and disabilities in their lectures. The advent of the Covid 19 pandemic made the concept of inclusion even more complex as students have to study virtually and still be supported to make a success out of their learning. As a results more ideas about alternative support for students were put into place. This study though explored the formation of a virtual community of practice as a vehicle to enable student ability and limit the impact of disability of students in learning on a distance mode of education. This study therefore aimed at the following objectives:

- Through the literature conceptualize the notion of community of practice, by discussing its nature as a virtual platform and explain in relation with inclusion;
- Through empirical research the study explores the benefits and challenges thereof.

Therefore, this study occurred in the context of the advent of the covid 19 pandemic which gave momentum to the creation of inclusive virtual inclusive teaching and learning environments. Since, the Covid 19 pandemic the support of students to access pedagogical content knowledge on a distance curriculum delivery mode became the priority of most institutions of higher learning in Kazakhstan.

This critical collaborative action research study reports on the experiences of ten (10) higher education instructors and ten (10) doctoral and ten (10) master students in developing an inclusive virtual supportive community of practice for enhancing the teaching and learning process during the delivery of education in a distance mode in one of the universities in Kazakhstan. A community of practice theory is used as a compass and lens for the study. Data was collected through the four stages of collaborative action research in form of interviews, focus group interviews, discussions and diaries. Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis.

Among the findings collaboration through continuous interactive student monitoring and support through virtual technologies was important for inclusion of students in the teaching and learning process. An inclusive community of practice built supportive bridges between able and disabled students as well as between skilled instructors and less skilled instructors regarding the use of technology to aid teaching and learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing of Community of Practice

The notion of community of practice (CoP) is understood as a concept whereby a group of people come together to share ideas and challenges in order to improve their practice. Wenger (1998) identify several characteristics of such a community. Firstly, there is an element of collective learning, which is at the center of a CoP. Secondly; there is a process of reflection about what needs to change or to be learned. There is always a triad involved (i.e.)

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