

COVID-19 AND FUTURE OF ONLINE TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF RAMA UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The outbreak of the COVID-19 triggered universities and other academic institutions to close their campuses, compelling them to shift to online teaching and learning process. This paper focuses case of Rama University's online education initiative taken and implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. This paper summarizes the online teaching & learning initiatives successfully implemented by the Rama University for the benefit of other university's faculty and administration who might find it beneficial implementing them in a similar circumstances.

The study discusses the high-impact factors and principles necessary for making online education effective and engaging:

- (a) Understanding relationship between online teaching & instructional design and student learning behaviour.
- (b) Understanding and evaluating the instructional components required for effective delivery of online instructional information.
- (c) Understanding the importance of faculty training in delivering the online instructional content effectively.
- (d) Understanding the importance of students' engagement and participation in improving the scope and level of student's learning.

Keywords: COVID-19, Instructional Strategies, Online Education, Instructional Design.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a shocking impact on world-wide education. According to UNESCO some 1.3 billion students around the world are not able to attend school or university causing more than 1.6 billion children and youth to be out of schools in 161 countries (around 80% of the world's enrolled students). The wide spread of COVID-19 across the world has forced more than 61 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, North America, and South America to close their schools and universities - (UNESCO, 2020). [1]

The COVID-19 pandemic has compelled Indian Universities for an unprecedented massive transition from traditional face-to-face in – class education to online education. Across the world there was a temporarily closure of educational institutions so as to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic that has impacted more than 70% of the world's student population. In order to regulate control and monitor the widespread of COVID-19 Coronavirus disease in India the government of India initiated a complete lockdown during April 2020. In span of days most of the universities were constrained to go for online teaching and learning platforms. Millions of faculty members have started to teach online as their students have to stay at home because of

lockdown, ensuring that students suffer no loss of studies and their progress is tracked simultaneously with timely evaluation. It is probably a first for India to experiment with the education system and make a paradigm shift to the virtual world, blending classrooms with online learning. [2-3]

The educational reform in India in the COVID-19 era is a perfect example of how need truly is the mother of invention or reinvention. The pandemic has compelled the educational institutions to adopt online learning and infuse a virtual study culture is steering the education sector forward with technological innovation and advancements but at the same time the Institutions and students are under pressure to re-invent their teaching-learning by going completely online. [4]

In this paper we have tried to focus on identification of the high-impact principles influencing the online higher education by providing a case study of Rama University for colleagues at other universities to consider as they are conducting online education in similar circumstances.

Context

In the 3rd week of March, state governments across the country as a measure to contain the

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spread of the corona virus began shutting down schools and colleges temporarily. March to May is a crucial time for the education sector as admissions, entrance tests of various universities and competitive examinations, among others, are all held during this period.

The first to be affected by these closures were the structure of schooling and learning, including teaching and assessment methodologies. Some of the private schools adopted online teaching methods however the government school have to completely shut down for not having access to e-learning solutions.

As the forerunner of online education amongst Indian Universities, Rama University quickly migrated to offer hundreds of short term courses online. The outbreak of COVID-19 was unpredicted that compelled Rama University to launch live online teaching and learning for all UG and PG courses in order to ensure the normal teaching operation.

Online teaching transformation was a massive, disruptive shift where all the existing courses were organized and conducted online in a matter of days. A complete online course teaching and learning requires a rich lesson plan design, quality and engaging teaching content well supported by audio and video contents with strong technology support teams.

With sudden outbreak of the COVID-19, most faculty members are facing the challenges of lacking online teaching experience and preparation of courses for online delivery.

Not only that the Indian college students also, do not have a clear future career goals and they lack active academic engagement as they spend more time in-class study compared with out-class study.

Through this case study we will be focusing on the issues mentioned above, and will be discussing how Rama University faculty, Staff & Administration implemented effective instructional strategies and have accordingly prevented the adverse learning attitudes and behaviour of students for strengthening their effective online education.

Instructional Policies

This paper categorizes instructional policies that are based on observations of online teaching at Rama University for strengthening the students' learning participation and engagement with the objective of achieving smooth migration to online teaching & learning.

1. Re-grouping and re-arranging the course contents into smaller more comprehensible units helping students to focus and comprehend

Considering the Indian college students slackness in active academic engagement it is being noticed that college students showed weak determination in online learning that has seriously constrained their learning effectiveness. In ensuring that students focus on online study, faculty at Rama University have subdivided the content for the online teaching into different topics and adopted a segmental teaching method using variety of instructional medium such as videos and case study studies involving team work and participation. The faculty at Rama University sub - divided the instructional content into several small comprehensible modules.

2. Accentuating the use of “voice modulation, inflection, pitch and timbre” in online teaching

In a typical class teaching, body language, facial expressions, and teachers' voice are the important tools of effective delivery of instructional content. However in online teaching, body language and facial expressions are very restricted, and only “voice” could be fully functionally effective. Faculty at Rama University realized that in online teaching, faculty should appropriately slow down their speech to allow students to grasp the important aspects.

3. Faculty Training

The technical specifications of online teaching are much higher than traditional class teaching for inexperienced faculty members who are delivering online instructional content for the first time.

Most of the faculty at universities are insufficiently trained or supported to operate online education platforms. It thus becomes imperative on part of the administration & management for organizing such technical training sessions for the faculty so that they understand the objectives, knowledge framework, and teaching activities of each class.

Converting class-notes into PDFs and creating digitized content is NOT the only aspect of online learning rather these must be contextualized and made to sizable in making learning interesting and engaging. Doing this takes a rare skill set which few of us have mastered and rest are still struggling. Universities need to train their faculty and create an academic task force that keeps check on the quality of content produced and shared by the faculty.

Rama University organized live online training sessions for their faculty members that helped in delivering the Instructional content and engaging

students effectively.

4. Reinforcing Students' Active Learning Aptitude

Compared with traditional classes, faculty have less control over online teaching, and students are more likely to avoid the classes. This makes the progress of online teaching and its learning effectiveness dependent on students' participation and engagement.

Faculty at Rama University used various alternative methods by modifying the assessments, homework and reading necessities for strengthening students' active learning participation and engagement.

5. Nurturing The Concept of Online and Offline Self-Learning

Very limited class participation in discussions along with ineffective and insufficient before hand-class preparation are the common students concerns in traditional class teaching.

In resolving these problems in online teaching, faculty at Rama University considered two phases of teaching & learning,

a. The offline self-learning phase and b. The online teaching phase

In the offline self-learning phase, students were asked to read the course-specific material and submit brief synopsis based on their reading before the class. Faculty then provided the feedback to students' based on their submitted synopsis. This helped faculty of Rama University in understanding learning cognitive levels of each and every students and accordingly they have made adjustments in their teaching pedagogy and content.

In the online teaching phase, faculty discusses the section related to the topic with students to exchange their understanding based on their reading. This helps students in experiencing deep learning during the online classes.

Case Take Away

This paper highlights some of the important principles of teaching practices that Indian universities can follow using Rama University case for effectively delivering large-scale online education.

The Learning s from the case of Rama University can be summarised as follows:

1. The suitability and applicability of the course content matching with the readiness and online learning behaviour of students is major factor influencing the effectiveness of online

delivery of instructional contents.

2. The online delivery to be effective it is essential to adjust the teaching speed for ensuring the effective delivery of teaching and instructional information.
3. The faculty training plays a major role in making the online classes engaging.
4. The factor of students' engagement & participation necessitates the need for adopting measures in improving the levels of students' online and offline class participation.

Furthermore the online teaching migration was instantaneously implanted during the outbreak of COVID-19, so the students' anxiety also needs to be addressed in ways for ensuring their active and effective engagement in online learning.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest between the authors.

Conclusion

To Conclude at the end, we can elaborate the full context of this case study is that it is based on behaviour of students as major factor and secondly while dealing them online it ensures effectiveness in delivery of teaching with faculty inner consciously trainings which carry major factors in between students and them. Apart from students side their overall engagement and participation also needs as pre-requisites which can gives more embezzlement at this hour of crisis. We hope, with the help of this genre we can certainly achieve tremendous result from it.

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