The challenges of higher education students learning online during the major health event

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Abstract: The major health event is one of the deadliest outbreak in history. Due to the outbreak, the teaching method has changed from the traditional classroom model to the online education model. However, students were not prepared for online learning before. Students have a hard time adapting to an online education model that is completely different from traditional education, which creates many challenges for them. These problems lead to negative academic performance. Accordingly, there is a need to pay attention to the challenges of online learning for higher education students during the pandemic and it is important to recognize these challenges for higher education online learning.

Key words: online learning; the major health event; higher education students

1 Introduction

Due to the stagnation of education caused by the epidemic, this paper takes "What are the challenges for higher education students to learn online during the major health event?" as a research question, aiming to raise the attention of policymakers, students and teachers on the challenges of online learning for students during the closure period of the major health event. It is important to recognize the current situation and have a clear overview of it to address the challenges that arise in the learning process. Another reason for us to understand the challenges of online learning is that online education is becoming one of the main trends in the development of education by 2025. Therefore, it is critical to examine the current state and challenges of online learning in higher education.

In this essay, I will argue some of the challenges students faced when learning online during the outbreak and will begin with the discussion and critical analysis on the three main challenges students face: technology, self-management and limited interaction. Based on the findings, implications are provided for stakeholders to address the challenges experienced by students, followed by a conclusion and ended with references.

2 The challenges of technology

Among the obstacles, the technical aspects of online learning are one of the obvious ones. First, the high cost of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) equipment affects the uptake of online learning [1]. Another challenge for students to effectively conduct online learning is that students with low digital skills can easily fail to keep up with their studies in online learning [2]. For instance, students are not familiar with using learning software. They need to convert from different platforms and programs, which confuses students when they use them. Opponents of this idea claim that online education can provide students with a huge resource of knowledge and take them to different areas of knowledge

and information. For example, students can search how to use learning software online. However, when commenting on the pandemic and online learning, Yamamoto said that some of the technical requirements of online learning are difficult to meet by students with poor equipment [3]. Although we live in this jet age, Adedoyin and Soykan argued that not all digital natives possess digital competence. Some students even do not know how to use technology to get the information they want effectively. Therefore, the supply of technology devices and the digital competence of students are some of the main challenges when higher education processes online learning during the pandemic. Students face not only technology problems but also self-management challenges.

3 The challenges of self-management

The low self-management of students is reflected in online learning during the outbreak. On the one hand, most students still maintain passive learning mode, and they still need support by face-to-face supervision and guidance [4]. Students can easily turn off the camera and choose whether they can be seen during synchronous teaching [5]. Those against the ideas above may assert that online education helps learners work at their own pace and enables them to achieve self-discipline [6]. However, Zhou argued that university students are now adults, and parents do not manage them as strictly as they do with children. This results in a lack of adequate supervision and encouragement of students' learning status.

On the other hand, an unstable environment will disrupt students' attention to learning. Because there are too many electronic devices around, leading to inefficient studying [7]. Some people may disagree with this idea, Paudel asserted that informants in his study indicated that online courses somewhat increased the independence of students' learning. However, the personal space can be easily interrupted by family members, participants' friends, and /or pets that may cause a break-in or distraction from online learning. In summary, internal and external factors challenge students' self-management, which seriously hinders students' online learning during the outbreak. Another key challenge is limited interaction between students, between students and teachers.

4 The challenges of limited interaction

Students may take a longer time to ask questions and wait for teachers' feedback and classmates' answers. If students' response is delayed, teachers cannot adjust and modify other teaching activities to promptly meet the needs of students. However, Zhou may have an opposite opinion. They consider that the most significant advantage of online teaching is timely feedback. The teacher can make corrections on the same day and provide timely feedback to students on sections that need to be corrected. While, Dumford claimed that over-reliance on summary feedback from exams might limit the formative feedback provided to students during the learning process, which may cause problems during online learning [8]. In brief, unreal communication with teachers and classmates and delayed feedback from teachers are the difficulties for students when they endeavor to study online.

5 Implication

This study for policymakers implies that, it is possible to build a framework for each level of education, focusing on the implementation of online education. Moreover, it is useful for the Ministry of Education to cooperate with educational technology companies. For example, they can collaborate to build a learning platform and solve the problem of insufficient online exam supervision. Finally, it is effective to set up a system for evaluation and inspection to manage online learning.

For students who take online learning during the major health event, in terms of technology, it is useful for students to take advantage of all available resources, especially online libraries, online instructional tools, and trusted websites. For self-management, a flexible routine may be established by students to organize limited time and important tasks. Moreover, it is better to choose an environment where one can manage distractions. For limited interaction, it is quite effective for

students to ask teachers questions as soon as they have any unclear points to acquire some good advice. Besides, making a collaborative group with classmates is a practical way to enhance communication and improve student learning effectiveness.

For teachers, in light of the above challenges, while it is important for students to change, it also requires the cooperation of teachers. First, teachers can record lectures to make video teaching asynchronous, allowing students to watch lectures at different times and spaces. Next, teachers may be able to interact with students in more creative ways by providing flexible time for student assessment. Finally, adopting an inclusive approach by teachers will make online education smoother.

Future research will focus on the dimensions of online education that can be reformed for better development and dissemination to help students to learn, so as to achieve better academic results, and contribute to the development of society.

6 Conclusion

The emergence of the outbreak has forced the traditional classroom model to shift towards online education, posing three main challenges for higher education students: technology, self-management and limited interaction. Based on the findings of the study, recommendations are made in three areas including policy makers, students, and teachers to facilitate healthy and effective online learning for students during this period.

Through the above research and analysis, this paper hopes to promote the development of online education by specifically targeting the improvement of the efficiency and quality of students' online education. Students who clearly recognize the difficulties of online education and address them properly will largely improve their online learning ability.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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