The Importance of Digital Learning and Teaching in the Era of COVID-19

We are pleased to publish the second regular issue (Volume 12, Issue 2) of *Higher Learning Research Communications (HLRC)* for 2022. This year, we published two regular issues and a special issue, *Education Technologies and COVID-19: Experiences and Lessons Learned*. COVID-19 and the implications of the switch to emergency online teaching continue to capture the interest of researchers. In the present issue, some of the manuscripts focus directly on COVID-19; still others examine different aspects of digital teaching and learning. As is typical with the HLRC, articles represent the voices of academics from various parts of the globe, demonstrating the importance and reach of digital education. The focus of the HLRC is on digital teaching and learning, higher education and the public good, and the preparation of students in key 21st-century employability skills, and the present issue reflects each of these focus areas. Summaries of the manuscripts for this issue are provided below.

Research Articles

- Akansksha Ghai and Urvashi Tandon, in their article, *Analyzing the Impact of Aesthetic Visual Design on Usability of E-Learning: An Emerging Economy Perspective,* examined various dimensions of aesthetic visual design and their role in predicting usability in e-learning in higher education institutions of northern India. A survey questionnaire was developed through focused group discussions with field experts. Results confirmed consistency, typography, graphics, grid, and layout as factors responsible for predicting usability of e-learning. Surprisingly, color and compositional guidelines emerged as insignificant. The study has implications for teaching and learning activities that promote effective learning and are beneficial for course-design faculty who develop modules by considering visual design elements that can facilitate interaction with and understanding of content by students learning in an online modality.

- Jeffrey Kuznekoff and Steve Munz, in their article, *COVID-19 and the Transition to Online Learning in the Basic Course: Examining the Effects on Student Learning*, examined how the transition to remote delivery during the spring of 2020 affected student learning in a basic communication course. Participants in three different course delivery modes (face-to-face, online, and live interactive) were enrolled in a public speaking course with standardized adaptive reading quizzes, exams, and speech assignments. Participants completed several measures over the course of the semester and had their responses paired up with their end-of-semester grade book data. Results indicate that students who were enrolled in a face-to-face course and transitioned online during the COVID-19 pandemic were outperformed by online and learning interactive students in several of the standardized assignments in the course. Face-to-face students performed four percentage points lower in the course than the learning interactive and online groups while also demonstrating more emotional interest in the course than the other two groups. Face-to-face students may experience greater disruption than existing online students. Instructors should be mindful of this finding in transitioning to remote learning during the semester.

- Bonnie Covelli and Sudipta Roy, in their article *Emergency Remote Teaching Versus Planned Remote Teaching: Narrowing the Gap With Targeted Professional Development*, reviewed faculty member comfort level with remote teaching in the Fall 2020 semester to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development workshops. Following the training, faculty reported high planned usage of various online teaching tools and greater comfort with using them. The data reveals some differences between part-time and full-time faculty members. The experience gained in the emergency semester, combined with the targeted professional development workshops offered, eased the stress of planned remote teaching in the following semester. For institutions planning to incorporate educational technology in the future, the implementation and evaluation of the targeted workshops may serve as a replicable model and may also help institutions be better prepared for emergency remote teaching in the future.

- Serena Gumusoglu, Maria Soulinthavong, and Jennifer Barr, in their article A WINning Approach: Teaching Science Communication Skills Through Small-Group Workshops, describe a voluntary writing initiative called Writing Initiative in Neuroscience (WIN) for biomedical students at a research-intensive (RI) university in the midwestern United States. They designed, implemented, and evaluated the intervention that consisted of didactic and workshop components. Analysis of student self-assessment of writing skills before and after programming revealed improved scientific writing competency with medium or large effect sizes. Qualitative self-assessments indicated perceived improvements in writing competency and confidence. Collectively, students who participated in WIN improved their writing and communication skills and gained experience in providing and receiving feedback. Peer-led writing initiatives, such as WIN, may enhance scholarly training and lay a foundation for future trainee writing success across scientific disciplines.

- Stamatis Elntib and Lucy Edwards, in their article *Availability of Social Support, Coping Strategies, Student Stressors and Wellness Among Older Women Studying Online During the Pandemic*, explored the association between older women's subjective perceptions of available social support, coping strategies, self-reported wellness, and stressors experienced as online students studying during the pandemic. A convenience sample of 115 older adult women learners (Mean age = 40.88, SD = 11.27) studying online in March 2021 in one of the world's largest providers of higher-education distance-learning courses was gathered using a survey methodology. Using structural equation modeling, the authors showed that perceptions of social support were associated with a higher use of positive coping and a lower use of negative coping strategies, ultimately improving markers of wellness and reducing student stressors. The study highlighted the importance of embracing older students' own capacity to cope with adversity and emphasizing that one-to-one support can be available if needed.

We would like to thank the following scholars who reviewed manuscripts for this issue: Mohammed Afify, Fatima Azmi, Sandra Bever, Abdeighanie Ennam, Lauren Esmay, Senta Goertler, Gregory Hickman, Elizabeth Johnston, Alice Motion, Michael Ralph, Donna Russell, and Kristi Trapp.

Gary J. Burkholder, PhD
Walden University, United States of America
Editor
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5084-8099

Erwin Krauskopf, PhD
Universidad de Las Américas, Chile
Managing Editor
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4082-5758

Burkholder & Krauskopf, 2022

Open Access

Contact: hlrceditor@mail.waldenu.edu

Submitted: December 30, 2022 | **Published:** December 30, 2022

Recommended Citation

Burkholder, G. J., & Krauskopf, E. (2022). The importance of digital learning and teaching in the era of COVID-19. *Higher Learning Research Communications, 12*(2), i–iii. https://doi.org/10.18870/hlrc.v12i2.1389

The *Higher Learning Research Communications* (*HLRC)* is a peer-reviewed, online, interdisciplinary journal indexed in Scopus, ERIC, JGATE and Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). It is an open access journal with an international focus published by Walden University, USA. Its aim is to disseminate both high quality research and teaching best practices in tertiary education across cultures and disciplines. *HLRC* connects the ways research and best practice contribute to the public good and impact the communities that educators serve. *HLRC* articles include peer-reviewed research reports, research briefs, comprehensive literature reviews, and book reviews.