Original Research   **WALDEN UNIVERSITY**

The Continuing Influence of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Tertiary Education

We are pleased to publish the first regular issue (Volume 13, Issue 1) of *Higher Learning Research Communications (HLRC)* for 2023. While the World Health Organization and the governments and health departments in most of the world have ended the COVID-19 emergency, the effects of the pandemic on operations in higher education will likely continue for some time. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published a report (Abdrasheva, 2022) that globally examines the state of higher education two years after the pandemic began. The authors noted that in the area of teaching and learning, "slow adaptation to online tools, preparing class material, and engaging students to actively participate while being remote" (p. 6) resulted in uneven quality of instruction. They also note that in areas affected by the digital divide, these shortcomings were much more pronounced. In addition, internationalization was severely restricted, as students were prevented from crossing borders to study.

Several articles in this issue examine facets of these issues, including the shift to online exams; the use of educational technology; digitized learning resources that can be easily accessed on demand; and the shift back toward programs that promote internationalization. Each of these small examples represents larger shifts for the future as remote teaching and learning and the digitalized classroom assume a more prominent role. The post-mortem analyses on the pandemic will likely continue for some time, and we are proud to present the experiences of educational systems in both developed and developing countries. In this way, the HLRC continues to promote the global conversation that includes players from multiple views and perspectives on the impact of the pandemic on tertiary education.

The journal also publishes articles related to higher education and the public good, and one of the articles in the present issue examines a program designed to address challenges related to mentoring students of color in the United States. Doctoral mentoring of these students presents a number of challenges (e.g., see Burkholder, 2022 for an overview), and limited literature exists in this area. The authors provide more empirical evidence of the value of specific programs that match mentors and mentees and provide the structure needed to be successful post-graduation.

The focus of the HLRC is 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. We continue to seek empirical studies (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods designs); research briefs that describe in a concise form results of pilot or other limited studies that potentially have broader value; critical literature reviews; book reviews; and editorials/essays.

Summaries of the manuscripts for this issue are provided below.

Research Articles

- Abasli, Yakut-Ozek, and Mammadli, in their article *University Students' First Online Exam Experience: Is It Stressful or Joyful?,* examine student views of online exams during the COVID-19 pandemic. They interviewed 15 engineering students about their views of taking online exams for the first time. Results showed that students experienced various problems in the online exam process,

including the need and inability to solve the technical problems encountered during exams. Students also perceived that instructors did not have sufficient knowledge about the conduct of the online exams, which made it difficult for the exam process to be carried out effectively. Students did report positive experiences. The authors conclude that it is important to develop infrastructure and train human resources to easily adapt to different crisis situations that may arise in the future that require nontraditional assessment methods. As digital exams are likely to increase, findings can point out ways to make this process smoother for students and faculty.

- Osiesi, Omokhabi, Adeniran, Akomolafe, Obateru, Oke, and Aruleba, in their article *Stressors, Coping Strategies, and Achievement During Teaching Practicum in a Nigerian Public University*, examined pre-service teacher stressors, coping strategies, and achievement during teaching practicum in a Nigerian public university. Participants were 130 pre-service teachers from the education department in the university who had completed their teaching practicum for the first semester. Multiple regression analyses revealed that stressors and coping strategies, controlling for gender, did not significantly predict achievement in the teaching practicum. Several coping strategies and sources of stress were identified among student teachers. Results can be useful in curriculum planning to teach ways of coping with and overcoming the various stressors accruing from the teaching profession in general.

- Humphreys, in his article *Digital Intercultural Education: A Comparative Study of Self-Access Learning Experiences*, examined the learning experiences of students using self-access intercultural learning resources that incorporated Global English learning content. Two educational contexts in Japan, an English language major program and a nonlanguage major program, were the focus of the research. The author conducted qualitative interviews with 30 students across the two types of programs to see how the self-access content supported student learning. Results showed that the resources in both programs led to similar learning outcomes, showing that self-access resources can support intercultural and Global English learning. The study contributes to the discussion around digital resources for intercultural and Global English learning. Short-form resources integrating these areas may be more effective for self-access learning than resources requiring multiweek commitments in both language and nonlanguage major programs. Carefully designed short resources may lead to effective self-access student learning, particularly in resources involving collaborative work.

- Sakurai, Ishikura, Nakano, Nabeshima, Sengoku, Okada, and Kondo, in their study *University Administrators' Visions for the Recovery of International Student Exchange in a Post-COVID-19 World*, examined how international functions of higher education, such as exchange programs, can be resumed during recovery from a disruptive global crisis like COVID-19. They collected the opinions of administrators of international exchange programs regarding their plans to resume their exchange programs in the recovery phase and identified variations in the responses concerning institution type (public vs. private). They found that respondents indicated that they would rely on infection prevention experts at their institutions as sources of information for their decision-making. Public universities would rely more extensively on their staff's opinions whilst private universities would consult with external experts. Universities with a medical school indicated a greater likelihood of referring to the opinions of experts at their institutions. While higher education systems vary across nations, extant studies have shown some shared features, and the findings may have implications for higher education institutions internationally. Policy incentives and support may encourage public universities to participate in the global recovery of international education.

- Villarreal and Campbell, in their article *Scholars From Under-Represented Groups in Engineering and the Social Sciences (SURGE) Capacity in Disasters: The Benefits and Challenges of Mentoring for Racial and Ethnic Minority Graduate Students*, described a pilot of this program designed to

address the challenges that graduate students of color face in academic programs by promoting mentoring and professional development through its mentoring program for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) students. Using online surveys with mentors and mentees five months after the SURGE program's initiation, the researchers learned that most students found the SURGE mentoring program at least somewhat valuable. They did identify challenges such as a lack of swift responsiveness from some mentors, not enough guidance on navigating the mentor–mentee relationship, and little to no in-person interaction. While half of the students mentioned that some individuals within their mentoring team were hard to reach, a majority remained satisfied with the responsiveness of their mentors overall. The findings support previous research and show promise for mentoring as an effective intervention to the challenges that underrepresented students face in their academic programs and for their retention and representation. They stress the importance of understanding the mentoring needs of underrepresented students to provide the best possible help to them during what can be an extraordinarily difficult transition into academia.

- Koruga, Nainwal, & Kyerewaa Ayisi-Addo, in their article *Teachers' Perspectives in Higher Education on Using Educational Technology During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Observations for Ghana, India, and Serbia*, examined the significant changes and challenges regarding teaching experiences during the COVID-19 crisis in three universities, one each in Africa, Asia, and Europe. Using online surveys with open-ended questions, the teachers' adaptive mechanisms to the COVID-19 crisis could be described through the following steps: (a) identifying the teaching challenges, (b) developing awareness of personal learning challenges, (c) initiating the process of learning by doing, and (d) recognizing the lessons learned. The authors suggest the value of a global teacher's network that could encourage professionals from different fields of education to build conventional wisdom in awareness of the need to constantly try new strategies with cutting-edge technologies.

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