

Higher Education and COVID-19

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Contributor: Maria José Sá, Sandro Serpa

The COVID-19 pandemic had profound consequences on the educational dimension, with the temporary closure of educational institutions, as well as the impediment of face-to-face classes. These challenging conditions can be a critical moment of opportunity to reshape education in higher education, with the implementation, development, and diffusion of digital technologies.

Keywords: digital sustainable development ; COVID-19 ; teaching ; higher education ; transformation ; university performance ; leadership ; sustainability

1. Introduction

Following Sá and Serpa (2020), as a way to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, measures of containment, social isolation and confinement have been taken in many countries, with a profound impact also on higher education, as one of these measures is the suspension of face-to-face classes and tutorial support for students (Cheema, 2020). Consequently, higher education has been faced with the pressing need to move rapidly from face-to-face programs to online alternatives, changing the process and format of teaching and learning undertaken over many decades before the pandemic, as part of the 'new normality'.

Teaching and learning activities are now much more developed through the Internet, and higher education institutions (HEIs) are using their specific Internet platforms (e.g. Moodle) or other online tools, such as Zoom or Google Classroom, for example, and e-learning has, in many of them, become the only possible way to learn (Sá & Serpa, 2020).

2. Digital transformation in higher education

The higher education system is increasingly aware that digitalization is inevitable to attract more and better students and to improve the quality of the study programs they offer, as well as teaching materials and methods, i.e., digitalization tends and will tend, in the near future, to integrate the whole educational process.

The use of digital technologies in education allows the transition from learning as an individualized and passive process to learning as co-creation of knowledge involving various institutional actors.

HEIs have a leading role in promoting distance learning using digital tools. Although this turbulent pandemic context poses many obstacles and challenges to the learning and teaching process, it should also be an opportunity for change.

Academics and students are, thus, faced with a new way of interacting with each other. Like all forms of interaction, the online teaching and learning process has its advantages, but also some drawbacks.

Above all, it is a challenge for all involved. Educational institutions in general, and HEIs, in particular, need to reinvent themselves and reformulate the learning and teaching process. For many of them, this may be the ultimate test of their ability to survive.

3. Conclusion

COVID-19 poses challenges but also opportunities for higher education, at a time when it needs to redefine its teaching methods, through digitalization for the improvement of the sustainable development of its teaching. These conditions can be a key moment of opportunity for the reshaping of higher education, including the implementation, development and dissemination of digital technologies among academics and students.

There is certainly not a “one size fits all” solution, but aspects such as training, the existence of Internet access infrastructures, hardware and software, the promotion of digital literacy and the implementation of new teaching and learning strategies that do not limit the reproduction of the classical culture of a substantial part of HEIs will be critical in this transformation ^{[1][2]}.

Note: This text is a short version of Sá, M.J.; Serpa, S. The COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to foster the sustainable development of teaching in higher education. *Sustainability* **2020**, 12, 8525. For further developments, see this text.

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