Monitoring Online Learning During COVID-19 Pandemic; Suggested Online Learning Portfolio (COVID-19 OLP)

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Abstract

Under the unprecedented circumstances of COVID-19 pandemic and as a part of the social distancing measures taken to minimize the spread of the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, suspension of in-campus activities was declared in all educational institutions in almost all countries all over the world. Distance learning through different learning management systems and platforms totally replaced face-to-face learning, and tremendous efforts are being offered by all faculty to continue teaching and assessment of their courses. This opinion aims to highlight the importance of creating a monitoring portfolio that contains appropriate indicators, both quantitative and qualitative, to address the strengths and weaknesses of technology dependent learning from an educational and not only a technical perspective. Documents and data in such portfolios will possibly guarantee evidence-based and purposeful evaluation of the online learning experience and its outcomes during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Keywords: Monitoring; Online Learning; Portfolio; COVID-19

Introduction

As faculty, we will never forget that evening moment when suspension of in-campus events was declared as part of the curfew measures taken to curb the COVID-19 pandemic. Everyone was telling him/ herself; I've just finished a lecture or a couple in the morning and my students were there in my office asking, discussing and laughing.

At King Abdulaziz University KAU and all universities, emergency measures were taken to adapt for the sudden shift of face-to-face learning environment (that mostly used to be technology assisted) into totally online educational...
Many online workshops started immediately, and all faculty were pursued to attend. These workshops aimed to help faculty master the use of available technology in delivering their courses; conveying synchronous sessions, recording lectures to practice flipped classes, doing small group discussions besides to many others and most importantly running assessments and exams. Similar workshops were conducted to students to reassure them and support the use of learning management systems LMS.

Many LMS and platforms are being friendly used by both faculty and students all over the world for more than a month till now. All faculty are becoming more expert in online teaching and assessment and many courses and subjects have been successfully delivered. Of course, there will be sometime (hopefully not too far) that this whole experience would be judged, and outcomes be evaluated. This judgment needs to be evidence-based, and we must develop and record some indicators on the effectiveness of the currently running online learning and assessment.

Suggested portfolio

This brief aims to outline measures and indicators to be considered for monitoring online education and to be included in the suggested portfolio.

1. Monitoring Technology tool used/ LMS

Daily reports that contain numbers of the followings can be issued;

- Users, synchronous sessions and downloads
- Discussion boards and assessments
- Workshops for both faculty and students
- Number and response to communications with technical support team

2. Monitoring Faculty performance and satisfaction

- Self-perceived proficiency (using check lists with items on familiarity with options in the LMS, response to students’ interactions and even level of anxiety)
- Peer-assessment; colleagues can join as participants (although it was greatly implemented and appreciated between colleagues who needed support due to the sudden shift to complete online teaching, still it may be annoying to others and could be considered optional)
- Questionnaires for faculty satisfaction

3. Monitoring Student engagement

- Attendance rate in live sessions and participation in discussion boards and formative assessments
- Number of chats in live sessions and contributing students’ ratio
- Teacher-student interaction referring to video recordings

4. Monitoring Student Satisfaction

- Surveys containing items about software utility, engagement and assessment
- Online interviews/ focus groups

5. Monitoring Student achievement

- Pre/ post assessment to monitor effectiveness of individual sessions
Results of formative and summative assessments that can be used for both horizontal (other online courses taken by same students now) and longitudinal comparisons (with previous assessment of the same students)

We recommend that all faculty start preparing Portfolios for the COVID-19 Online Learning Experience [COVID-19 OLP], that contains but not limited to

- Reflections and self-report (strengths and weaknesses in using technology)
- Indicators concerning the technology tool (software and facilities)
- Indicators of students’ engagement, satisfaction and achievement

Surveys and rubrics in these portfolios may contain variable items according to the educational program, also the technology tool indicators might differ from a portfolio to another according to the tool used. Experts from the quality units and ICT departments can help in providing appropriate surveys and check lists for different portfolios.

These portfolios can be discussed in the time being in departmental / modular meetings to set a portfolio for each department, and those can be further assessed in higher board levels.

Take Home Messages

Great efforts are being done by all educational institutions under these unprecedented exceptional circumstances, we just need to record some indicators/ criteria of what is running on. Some institutions produce like daily reports that describe accomplished classes, exams, workshops and users’ numbers. Such reports which reflect technical aspect are extremely required, but we also need a monitoring portfolio with a holistic educational perspective.

Triangulation of information extracted from these portfolios would probably improve the efforts currently being carried out in online teaching and assessment. It would ultimately help educational institutions to define the pros and cons of technology-dependent learning over technology-blended learning to reach a reasonable consensus on the use of technology in education after we recover the COVID-19 pandemic.

Notes On Contributors

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Bibliography/References


Appendices

None.

Declarations

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