

Resilience and responsiveness in challenging times

General Introduction

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Editor

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Abstract: The papers in this Edition of the Journal comprise five ‘general papers’ and five in the COVID 19 section. Together, the papers clearly illustrate our theme of ‘Resilience and responsiveness’. The general papers mark states of transition, whether student, staff, or institution; the capacity and ability of stakeholders to be responsive to trends and more importantly their resilience to unfolding circumstances. Examples of these transitions include, academics learning new ways of education (outcome-based education, measuring aspects of the Bologna Process); institutions sustaining historical models of education, mission, and strategies; students experiencing and reacting to changes in the educational experience as pedagogies, processes, modes of delivery and philosophies change around them. In the COVID-19 section, resilience and responsiveness are evident driven by the need to face the challenges of the moment and times.

Keywords: elitism; reputation; outcome-based education; COVID 19; lifelong learning.

The five papers that comprise the general part of this Edition represent not only a diverse range of countries (Chile, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Turkey) but also themes, namely issues of brand and elitism; the application of different aspects of outcome-based and credit-rated curricula; and post-graduate experiences with learning management systems (LMS).

The first paper ‘*Elite universities in Chile. Between social mobility and reproduction of inequality*’ by Maria Luísa Quaresma and Cristóbal Villalobos presents a fascinating historical account and contemporary analysis of the Chilean system of Higher Education with respect to the concept of ‘elite’ universities, the massification of education, and the mixed

model of private and public universities with most students attending the latter. For those unfamiliar with the Chilean Higher Education system this is an enlightening and informative read. Using eight case studies of 'elite' programmes/universities, the authors sought to analyse the ethos, mission, and selection of students with an emphasis on student entry characteristics. Using a detailed and comprehensive mixed methods approach, the authors found that, perhaps unsurprisingly, not only did these universities distinguish themselves as a group from other universities, but the elite also differentiated themselves from each other through their ethos. While these 'elite' universities retain their own mission, culture, and structures, their ability to promote social mobility was questioned.

To some extent, this account resonates with other countries where the so called 'elite' endeavour to reproduce their mission and values through the organisation of the university and the recruitment of students. Inevitably, admission requirements and funding mechanisms influence the ability and capacity of students from a range of diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds to be successful applicants and, importantly, graduates. In this example from Chile, we see the legacy of history influencing the present. The route whereby approximately 50% of eligible young people are admitted to universities over the past thirty years through changes in political policy is analysed. From the founding of the Universities in the mid- 19th Century, the aim of university education was to train and education the 'elite', with only eight universities existing until the 1970s. Augusto Pinochet ruled Chile from 1973- 1990. Prior to Pinochet, tuition was free; post Pinochet reforms meant that the higher education sector expanded with both private and public universities and a fee-paying structure that prevented many from accessing higher education without incurring serious debt within families. This led to political unrest by students and a change in policy. Meanwhile the elite universities sustained their mission leading to a two-track system despite recent attempts to offer financial support to the lower- and middle-income families. This paper tracks these transitions and offers a detailed analysis of relevant international literature which is highly discursive and interesting for those unfamiliar with the topic and Chile. The research gap addressed claims that the 'elite' universities, despite massification of education, were inhibiting social mobility and maintaining inequalities. Following extensive fieldwork including secondary data, observational studies and interviews, the study concluded that the elite universities in Chile still 'perpetuated' their role in social reproduction, despite initiatives to enable access to the elite universities by the institutions themselves. The authors identified areas for further study, including international research to discover the extent to which elite

universities can contribute in a meaningful way to the reduction of inequalities and the promotion of social mobility. Political and policy strategies to enable this merit further discussion in the educational literature, particularly with respect to subject areas ‘renowned’ for their association with class reproduction from recruitment to the point of entry to the professional labour market.

The second paper similarly contributes to our understanding of the strategic impact of Higher Education, this time in the context of Malaysia where Osama Haniya and Hamdan Said turn the spotlight on international students and the rationale behind their choice of Malaysian High Education (*Influential factors contributing to the understanding of international students’ choice of Malaysian higher education institutions: Qualitative study with focus on expected benefits*). This small -scale paper, comprising eighteen participants, offers insights into student perceptions of the university, country, and programme (Business studies) and discusses the extent to which these perceptions are realised.

Haniya and Said’s literature review provide a helpful summary on the reasons students seek Higher Education in another country and the economic impact of the students upon the country of destination. The low cost of education in Kuala Lumpur (the capital city) and the investment in Higher Education means that Malaysia is a particularly attractive destination not only in Asia but globally. The paper points out that during recent years, the country has invested not only in the tourist and investment industries, but also in Higher Education and a development strategy that included global recognition that has now been achieved. While there had been Country – based research on the expectations of these international students, there was little evidence concerning the reality of the anticipated benefits, particularly at undergraduate level. The authors clearly articulated the influence of previous researchers in the field and identified that there was a gap in the literature concerning the model of Zeithaml et al.¹ The research sought to address this gap through interviewing international students from different countries, within one university until data saturation was reached. This strategy recognised that international students are not a homogenous group.

The paper offers a very detailed, practical, and theoretical account of the research methodology. For readers unfamiliar with qualitative research, that deals with apparently ‘small’ samples, thematic analysis, and evaluation,

¹ Zeithaml et al., *Delivering Quality Service: Balancing Customer Perceptions and Expectations* (New York: The Free Press, 1990).

Hanyi and Said have provided an example of how to produce a research account that others could replicate. The findings were detailed, covering a range of topics that were linked to existing research and the factors from the literature like reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy, and responsiveness. Key elements of the study findings related to local factors that could improve the offer to international students, namely the physical appearance of the institution's campus, the accuracy of marketing materials and the academic quality of the education. The paper illustrates how these data can help inform decision making at institutional and country level.

The third paper '*Learners' attitude towards outcomes-based teaching and learning in higher education*' by Ruth Ortega-Dela Cruz maintains a focus on student perceptions. This study was concerned with any student attitudes related to the introduction of Outcomes Based Education (OBE) in the Philippines. Located in a state university, the aim was to discover the extent to which learners were accepting and/or resisting the introduction of Outcome Based Education (OBE) and whether there were student or degree level characteristics that influenced any such attitudes. This was investigated using a descriptive cross-sectional research design with correlational statistics. One hundred participants (53% of the population) from the three levels of education (bachelors, masters, and doctoral studies) responded to the survey that was a modified and validated version of a previous tool designed by the author. Free text responses were analysed thematically. The results produced some interesting findings. First, most of the respondents welcomed OBE. For example, they liked the new pedagogies, thought OBE would be better for them academically and help them in the job market. This finding was like other studies in the geographic region. The students reported active engagement with the more 'adult'-centred education strategies accompanying OBE. However, students expressed concern that OBE may not promote values sufficiently as they perceived OBE as being more focussed on skill development.

By providing an in-depth analysis of student attitudes and engagement, the paper shows how eliciting student experience data can be crucial in understanding the enablers and barriers to the introduction of new approaches to education. The students offered a range of perspectives on how OBE required staff to be committed to OBE in practise not just in rhetoric. Crucially, the student comments revealed the extent to which further staff development and student awareness of OBE was necessary if OBE was to be rolled out successfully across the country and different higher education institutions.

Paper Four, by Haşmet Sarıgül, Hakan Eren Şengelen, '*A comparative analysis of the first cycle degree programmes in business in Turkey in terms*

of the number of course units and the student workloads', continues the theme of outcomes-based education through a critical analysis of the impact of the Bologna process upon the curricula within one hundred and forty seven Business Schools in Turkey. The sample represented the different modes of higher education institution, type of curricula and language of instruction at bachelors and masters degree level. Through a comparative process, the authors analysed data concerning programme design with respect to modular content, type, credit rating and the student workload. Comparative analysis included features of difference between public versus foundation business schools and the language of tuition. The methods involved document review, curricula content analysis, and multivariate analysis.

The authors give a useful outline to both the Turkish Higher education system and the European Bologna Process; the latter forming the bedrock of criteria for the analysis. Historically, the credit system used in the Turkish higher education system was based on theoretical or practical class hours per week in which one credit stands for one lecture hour a week. This contrasts with the Bologna model, now being implemented, where one ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) credit stands for 25-30 hours of learning activities linked to the achievement of specified learning outcomes. Data analysis revealed many similarities and differences between the different programmes and the relative composition of accounting, economics, and financial management. For example, data revealed that Foundation Business Schools required more student workload than the public universities. Differences were also found between business schools using Turkish as the language of instruction and those using a foreign language. Turkish education policy determines that all undergraduate programmes should have 25% of the programme in ECTS as elective modules to provide cultural and other opportunities to students. This naturally impacted upon different courses and their composition of core modules- to some extent depending upon the nature of the elective modules.

The paper offers a clear mechanism for conducting such quantitative analyses from the perspective of student workload and experience within a subject area and between different programmes and universities. It also shows how the benchmark of the TUNING subject area competences form a benchmark from which such evaluations can be framed.

Our final paper, returns to public universities in Malaysia where the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) model is used to investigate post graduate students' intention to use Learning Management Systems in '*Factors influencing postgraduate students*'

intention to use learning management system' by Jeya Amantha Kumar, Kamaludeen Samaila, Mas Nida Md Khambari, and Mona Masood. Key elements of the UTAUT model are three concepts; performance expectancy (PE), social influence (SI) and effort expectancy (EE) that are thought to influence students' behaviours and intentions (BI), in this case using the Learning Management System (LMS). The authors summarise the evidence concerning technology platforms and their pedagogical efficacy- factors that are evidenced in the COVID-19 section where studies report on the increased adoption of remote learning during the pandemic. Another model employed to evaluate access and acceptance of technology is the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). This study builds upon the work of Murathy et al. (2017) who found that Malaysian students preferred conventional learning due to their perception that the LMS could not offer physical- emotional interaction, particularly when there are large classes. Acknowledging that most work in this field has been conducted with undergraduates, they focussed on post graduate students.

The sample was 297 students from a population of 921 postgraduate students undertaking a Master of Education programme, the majority of whom were female (76.2%) with 52% in the age band 26-35 years. These students were required to use LMS as part of the programme. A forty-one item survey was distributed to the students based on six core concepts within TAM and UTAUT, but the moderating variables like age and gender, although data were collected, were excluded for this study. Findings revealed that the three concepts of the UTAUT model did influence behavioural intention to use the LMS with Performance Efficacy having the greatest influence. Unlike some other studies, facilitating conditions did not have any significant influence: this was attributed to the financial standing of the postgraduate students in this study who had access to mobile and other technologies. This study generates relevant information for programme managers who can establish which factors apply to their students and can therefore make pedagogical or other adjustments to support technology adoption. However, generalisability is a problem as the evidence comes from a single programme within a broader university context.

In conclusion, these five papers demonstrate both the micro and macro nature of Higher Education where responsiveness and resilience are key components of not only survival but also quality education. The drive to understand situations, contexts, and institutions is matched only by the importance of understanding student perspectives, and their role in perpetuating current systems or encouraging new modes of education. Our selected papers from this edition give insights into all these dimensions.

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