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Educational Journeys in times of uncertainty:
Weathering the storms

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Abstract: This Edition of the Journal comprise eleven papers, of which six are related to the COVID- 19 pandemic. The papers are balanced between those mainly concerned with media or online pedagogies (four), staff development and experiences (three) and strategic university wide policy or institutional change (four). The papers continue to reflect a varied range of participant countries both in terms of the authors, but perhaps more importantly the study sites, (Colombia, Italy, Indonesia, Iran, Lebanon, South Africa, Spain, and Turkey). Universities from both the state and private sector are represented, either through individual case studies or via multi-site studies in subject areas, departments, or institutions.

What is fascinating, and perhaps unsurprising, is that common themes emerge from different countries. From the papers in this edition, several issues emerge. First, we can conclude that with distance learning there was/is a particular challenge of dealing with cheating and plagiarism- and exhibited during the pandemic. Second, responses, or readiness to change, with respect to new initiatives and pedagogies can vary by discipline within the same institution, between institutions and within a country. Third, it was noted that when change is made, either planned or in an emergency, the extent of the impact is related to the prior experience and expertise of both teachers and students and the available infrastructure with respect to the new situation. Several papers raised concerns about the pedagogical competences of the teaching staff and how, when this is limited in relation to a required change in

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pedagogy, stress and workload problems are encountered by both teachers and students. Furthermore, the learning experience is hindered and, where technology changes are involved, students can become isolated and demotivated. Accessibility and equality e.g. (gender, age, income, access to resources) issues were also raised, most evident during the pandemic and emergency remote teaching. The conclusion is perhaps that universities need to plan more carefully for emergency situations taking account of their demographic and socio-economic community – whether teachers, students or other stakeholders.

Keywords: COVID-19; staff development; on line support; higher education strategies; institutional change.

Our first paper *"Shifting the scientific paradigm for the transformation of higher education: Experience at State Islamic University (UIN) in Indonesia"* by Ahmad Muthohar, Abdul Ghofur, M. Muksin Jamil, and Muhammad Sulthon, offers an intriguing perspective on the recent ten-year transition from a national system of State Islamic Institutions to one of State Islamic Universities (UIN). Private universities, the predominant provider, co-exist alongside the national provision with state provision comprising 6.7% (58 universities) of the total Indonesian provision of Higher Education (HE). Two aims underpinned the national change, namely the transformation of HE and better integration of the sciences in its Islamic context. Through four UIN qualitative, narrative case studies, the authors analysed this significant transformation with particular emphasis on how the scientific paradigms from old to new change, give rise to anomalies, how these anomalies are managed and to explore the nature of the new paradigm. The paper offers helpful analyses on the general transformations happening globally within HE, the specific nature of scientific paradigms in HE and their connections with Islamic concepts in comparison with Western traditions of science. One difference noted is that Islamic scientific traditions may add textual and intuitive methods as well as rational methods. For readers unfamiliar with the history of these developments, and the Islamization model of the general sciences versus the choice model between Integration and Interconnection science, this paper is very informative. The paper includes comparisons with other Islamic countries that have made comparable transitions in the past.

The main finding was that in Indonesia, the Integration of Science model encouraged former Islamic religious institutes that were restricted to one discipline, religious studies, to become universities when they were authorised to deliver and conduct multidisciplinary studies. The case studies portrayed the challenges and successes of these transitions and proposed a model of

implementation that may be helpful to other HE providers in a similar situation.

The introduction of video-based formats as a pedagogic strategy is now well established. In the second paper by Luis Navarro-Ardoy, Antonio Castro-Higueras, and Carmen del Rocío Monedero-Morales. The authors outline a pilot study that compared the video format with traditional text-based guides for students in their paper *"The use of the video format as a teaching guide in university studies"*. Teaching guides in this context refer to course information concerning the learning, teaching and assessment experiences, expectations and opportunities students can encounter on their programme journey. In addition to the investigation of the two modes of delivery (written versus video) the team were interested in the retention and relevance of the information provided in the guides. Three subjects were chosen from Journalism, Audiovisual Communication, and Sociology degrees from two universities in Malaga, Spain. The paper provides a detailed account of the research design, including that of the video and written materials themselves, together with rationale for the content of the guide. The experimental and control groups were compared using a quantitative survey that included generic questions and aspects specific to the respective video or written guide.

Results demonstrated that, perhaps as suspected, most students tend to either not read, or skim read, text-based guides. In contrast the video format, improved student understanding of the contents, and was rated more highly than the text format (despite some technical quality improvements that were needed). The authors suggest that there could be some form of corporate element to the video guide. They propose keeping the text version as a reference document augmented by the video guide that is more attractive, accessible, and dynamic for students.

Another form of student guidance forms the basis of the next paper *"Improving undergraduate students' learning through Online Educational Guidance Meetings (OEGMs)"* by Begüm Ceylan and Bünyamin Bavlı. While the context was during COVID- 19, the paper is in this section of the Journal due to its link with student guidance in the previous paper. The setting is an English preparatory programme in Istanbul, Turkey. The Online Educational Guidance Meeting (OEGM) in this study comprises a voluntary meeting between teacher and student. Its purpose is to address low student achievement in learning English- the teaching language of this university, can be improved by revealing the instructor's and students' experiences and perspectives during their first year at university. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with 12 students and 8 English Language instructors

teaching at the same school. Students' ages ranged between 17 to 21 and all of them attended at least one educational guidance meeting with their instructors. Qualitative data yielded two impacts, psychological and academic. Psychological benefits of the guidance sessions included, increased motivation, student self-awareness of their learning habits, enhanced self-confident and improved performance. In addition, during COVID- 19 their anxiety was reduced, they felt valuable, and the session improved the communications between staff and students.

Academic benefits of the sessions included a better orientation to online education, learning how to improve their own language skills through the exploration of their individual learning needs and characteristics. The instructors stated that they made some positive changes in their teaching in response to their improved awareness of the students' individual needs and characteristics. The paper is of course limited by the sample size; however it does provide useful points for reflection.

This next paper by Monica Fedeli and Edward W. Taylor *"The impact of an active-learning designed faculty development program: A students' perspective of an Italian university"* shows how change can be enhanced through active learning strategies employed with Faculty members. A particular point of interest in this paper is that in the context of a national system, an individual case study of a representative university addressing change has generalisable features of benefit to other universities in the same country. This multilevel study analysed the extent to which enabling Faculty members to experience active learning strategies helped them to have a positive impact on students who hitherto had very traditional teacher led, rather than student led education. The authors explain the Italian context, the transmission mode of education, and the passivity that has emerged amongst the student population over many years. For example, students are allowed to resit examinations as many times as they like and for many courses, the final examination is the only assessment of student performance.

The theoretical lens informing the case study included communities of practice, constructivism, and active learning- concepts well explained and applied to the context. Following five years of running the development programme, University wide data were analysed comprising surveys addressing student satisfaction and experience of teaching and course organization. In addition, the effectiveness of the training programme upon student pass rates at the final examination was also analysed to see if students who had been taught by trained teachers had a higher pass rate/score at the first attempt. The study generated a huge data set and outlined limitations that included the transition to online learning due to the pandemic. None the less,

interesting findings were that increased student satisfaction and pass rates were related to individual programmes/disciplines particularly, and perhaps unsurprisingly, in face-to-face settings. Nuances of the Italian context included inherent resistance to new teaching methods. The study revealed the importance of faculty learning communities in promoting active learning- an area for further research.

Our next paper, *"An exploration of the role of transformational leadership in times of institutionalization of change"* (Ursula El-Hage and Dina Sidani) takes us to a private university in Lebanon engaged in accreditation. Adopting a qualitative methodology, the date comprised semi structured interviews with fifteen senior university executives, eighty-five Faculty members in fifteen focus groups drawn from four disciplinary fields. The study explored four dimensions associated with transformational leadership in times of the institutionalization of change. Findings highlighted that two dimensions were critical, namely intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation. The other two, idealized influence and individualized consideration, were of limited value in the case study site. The authors acknowledged the instability of the Lebanese socio-political environment. They discussed the role of charisma and inspirational motivation to enable the entire accreditation team to meet the institutional goals. From their data, the authors gained insights into the skills transformational leaders require to overcome resistance to change, institutionalise the change, and hence improve performance within the university. Readers interested in how to apply the principles of transformational leadership to their academic setting will find the literature review and study of benefit.

Suphi Önder Bütüner and Serdal Baltacı's study," *The effects of online learning self-efficacy and attitude toward online learning in predicting academic performance: The case of online prospective mathematics teachers"*, aimed to discover if Online Learning Self-Efficacy (OLSE) and attitude toward online learning (AOL) significantly predicted the academic performance (AP) among Turkish prospective mathematics teachers. This was a gap found in the existing literature. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. The study comprised 1106 prospective mathematics teachers' responses from 76 universities across the seven regions of Turkey. 2 convenient Faculties of Education from each region were also included. Additionally, to gain deeper knowledge within the scope of the study, the written opinions of 118 volunteers added to the richness of the data. To ascertain academic performance, course transcripts were analysed during from the pandemic period (2019–2020 spring and 2020–2021 fall terms). Of note, is that there was a return to online distance learning during the earthquake of 2023 that affected ten provinces.

The detailed literature summaries in this paper are particularly helpful, namely the topics themselves (self-efficacy, attitude to online learning, and academic performance), and the instruments/scales deployed to measure these three dimensions. The authors carefully explained the statistical tools employed and factors limiting the study. In essence, they found that the level of academic performance could be predicted by online learning self-efficacy and attitude toward online learning. The authors debated the implications of these findings for teaching staff. They advocate the importance of motivating students through a variety of strategies to strengthen communication and interactions through the virtual platforms. They noted factors that influenced the students' concentration and participation before, during and after the session with respect to the communications of teachers and/or students. They advocated that the online course, and its delivery, should be organised in ways that attracts students' attention and motivates them. They emphasised how the learning environment can positively (and of course negatively) influence the attitudes and self-efficacy of the prospective mathematics teachers. Their critical reflection points out the challenges of generalization when different countries (including the students and teachers) vary in their access to technological tools, familiarity with distance education process, and their technological infrastructures. They also suggested that results may vary by discipline. This point was raised by Fedeli and Taylor in the study above with respect to teacher development.

The next two papers, from Colombia and Spain respectively, focus on the experience of the academic teachers during the pandemic. Together they form a helpful overview of the trends that emerged during the pandemic, together with some informative literature summaries. Due to the lockdowns and infection control measures required by the pandemic, universities were required to deliver suddenly- without, or with limited, preparation- new or augmented modes of teaching, learning and assessment especially through online or virtual formats. The expression *'Emergency Remote Teaching'* is now a widely accepted term used to describe this phenomenon and its associated challenges.

First, Lina Sofia Valenzuela, Yeny E. Rodríguez, Henry A. Taquez, José Roberto Concha, Ana M. Ayala Román, and Laura Romero-García explore the situation in a private Colombian University, *"Emerging strategies and challenges faced by professors during Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) at a Colombian university"*. The speed of transition from face to face to ERT happened within a week at this university with 7500 students. Normally, the university adopted an active learning and constructivist approach to its pedagogical strategies. Of significance, over 60% students came from low-

income families with the university having a strong social inclusion policy. However, the quick transition to remote teaching, accompanied with home quarantine soon afterwards, meant that these students were more likely to have problems with access to internet networks and computer equipment. The authors sought to establish any relationships between how faculty (academic teachers) experienced the transition and the emergent strategies deployed. They were also interested in any differences between teachers related to demographic variables and departments. The paper has drawn on existing literature throughout the design and analytical phases of the research.

An online survey was conducted involving 725 university professors from five different schools, with varying response rates and some staff answering more than one survey if they taught in more than one school. The questionnaire inquired about the teaching strategies used and their challenges: technical, academic, emotional, or affective during the early stages of the pandemic. The data were analyzed using correspondence analysis to consider both data content as well as the interactions between professors and students. It emerged that only a few teachers had pedagogical background, so most found themselves challenged when they had to change delivery mode quickly. Consequently, most of the staff simply transferred their previous lesson content into a format suitable for uploading, rather than adapting the material for more interactive strategies on line.

Professors identified emotional challenges in 45.5% of the courses. These challenges were related to feelings or emotions that the teachers identified in the students or within themselves and the perception of a more significant workload from both ends. Examples of this were their fears (shyness, for example), the lack of demarcation between work and personal environment (since work moved into the house) and changes in the interactions employed with the students. Unsurprisingly, Technical aspects, such as connectivity and information and communication technology (ICT) knowledge, were also critical challenges. There were differences between staff from different schools based on gender and age. For example, older female teachers expressed more problems due to ICT literacy with engineering having the least difficulty. Women reported more strongly concerns with workload- this required further research.

Considering their findings, the authors recommend that teacher training programmes should include the management of emotional challenges with students and personal time management. The differences in responses associated with gender, age, and the school or discipline of the teacher indicates that staff training and support may need to have a local faculty-based element to accommodate the diversity of the professorial population.

From Colombia to Spain, with Lucía Sánchez-Tarazaga, Aida Sanahuja, Carla Colomer, and Reina Ferrández-Berrueco similarly seeking the perspectives of university faculty, *"Teaching in a COVID-19 pandemic: perceptions and practices of university faculty in Spain"*. Face to face teaching was suspended in Spain from March 2020, with blended learning being introduced from the academic year 2020/2021. This paper reports a third phase of a larger project by the authors. In this case, the focus is on the teaching staff's point of view, gathering information about their experiences during the pandemic through a focus group methodology. The main goal was to explore the challenges and reactions faced by Spanish academics during emergency remote teaching and later, in the discussion section, to triangulate these results to the answers provided by students. Video focus groups were conducted with twenty Faculty members from four sites in Spain. Questions addressed both the academic and personal dimensions of the teacher.

The findings showed how peer support by the staff and training enabled the teachers to become more digitally competent as they developed alternative ways of teaching and learning using technology (mainly to encourage student engagement and communication). In contrast, their earlier study had revealed that the students considered that most of the teaching staff did not adapt to the new situation, even though they may have been digitally competent. This finding is different to the literature where most teaching staff adapted teaching materials without changing the curriculum or the methodology in a planned way. Also, the staff in this study indicated that they had significant pedagogical knowledge that they applied to this sudden emergency. As reported in the other studies in this edition, assessment was challenging for these teachers. On the personal side, workloads were perceived as high and, in many cases, involved certain difficulties in work–life balance. Staff described that they felt like psychologists as they were required to support students in distress and who had a lack of personal resources. This observation aligned with student comments that they often felt alone and thought that online lessons were not enough. Students had also raised concerned about work placement management: an area for further exploration. The study concluded that institutional support was crucial so that a sense of belonging could be fostered. Professional development could assist staff to adapt their pedagogical skills not only to new situations (as seen by the pandemic), but also to address the full spectrum of student experience whether learning and teaching, assessment challenges, or the socio- emotional wellbeing of both students and staff.

The next paper is one of two studies that involve engineering studies during the pandemic, the first in South Africa and the second in Iran. Both

studies address aspects of the move to electronic and virtual models of delivery. The South African study seeks to look at the education systems themselves, involving eight universities, whereas the Iranian papers singles out a particular aspect of pedagogy, the learning of mathematical concepts.

Olutayo Oyeyemi Oyerinde and Ada Mukanya Dienga's study, *"Immediate and long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on South African higher education"* analysed the experiences and perspectives of engineering students and lecturers at eight universities in South Africa between November 2020 and January 2021. The authors were interested in (1) whether the new technologies/tools enhanced teaching, learning and assessments during the pandemic; and (2) the extent to which these pedagogies might endure beyond the pandemic. They adopted a mixed method study comprising qualitative and quantitative surveys.

The quantitative survey invited teachers and stakeholders to rate factors like impacts of the pandemic on student commitment, accessibility, ability to use the virtual platforms, student support and ability to ask questions. Student preferences between the new and traditional models of teaching and learning were sought, together with teacher views on the pedagogies deployed. Data were then explored in more detail through the open-ended qualitative surveys, for example student and teacher views on assessment strategies. The final total sample of respondents was 280 students from five named universities (of whom twenty-six did not identify their university) and 44 lecturers from six universities. There is a wealth of statistical data and qualitative findings embedded within the paper, with some of direct relevance to the South Africa experience (e.g. impact on loans, infrastructure, accessibility for second language English speakers and those with disabilities). More generalizable conclusions include that most of the interventions deployed during the pandemic will remain relevant, and in the case of disciplines requiring face to face tuition associated with practical learning, blended learning is becoming the new 'norm'. The study confirmed that both staff and students require training on the new virtual learning platforms, particularly with respect to assessment literacy and efficacy.

The security of online assessments, management of remote centres, and invigilation strategies were highlighted as requiring further investment and attention to ensure there is confidence in the systems. From a policy perspective, the authors noted that traditional funding mechanisms may need review to accommodate the balance between traditional and the 'new' virtual/remote pedagogies with their accompanying infrastructures.

The social responsibility of universities is a crucial aspect of modern Higher Education. In their paper "*Areas and dimensions of universities*

response to COVID-19: Diversity, trends, and evidence from the University Social Responsibility Network", Fernando Palacio, Paola Sanoni, and Nikan Sadehvandi explored how the concept of University Social Responsibility (USR) was implemented and understood during the COVID-19 pandemic. USR is understood to be the way Universities contribute to society, communities, and the environment. The Tailloires network is a global network of universities committed to strengthening the civic role and responsibility of their institution (see https://talloiresnetwork.tufts.edu/). The network has a set of principles underpinning its actions including access, equality, the provision of curriculum-based opportunities for students to foster their engagement in civic roles, outlining the institutional role of the university in social engagement. One example of USRN actions was the decision in 2018 to develop a four module MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) titled an *Introduction to University Social Responsibility*. Two universities (Kyoto University and The Hong Kong Polytechnic University) lead this initiative. In July 2020, as the pandemic developed, the course was extended to include a fifth stand-alone module showcasing the response of universities to address COVID-19. Thirteen universities from ten countries engaged with the MOOC and it is the experiences of this module that forms the basis for the paper. A Special Session of the MOOC gathered information from the participating universities concerning policies, initiatives, challenges, and responses that universities experienced prior to the MOOC production phase in December 2020. This included information on how they variously engaged socially through both academic and non-academic activities during the pandemic.

Textual data were gathered voluntarily, according to an agreed ethical framework. The narratives were clustered into broad themes, analyzed for sub themes, dimensions and trends. The wealth of data collected and analysed in this study is substantive, with the authors finding new ways of organizing these data. Readers with little experience of USR, will find the paper offers sound literature reviews on the nature of USR, the response of the universities to the challenges of the pandemic, especially in innovative ways beyond traditional academic work. The paper captures the policies, projects and COVID-19 related initiatives and innovations demonstrated by this sample of USRN institutions. Its open-source data provides information for other universities interested in how civic engagement can be fostered. The data exposed a key aspect of USRN activity, namely the value and impact of non-academic engagements that were hitherto underexplored and represented. The authors provide a critical discussion on how these data and findings provide challenges to existing theories and models of USR. The authors offer an honest critique of the study limitations and the possibilities for further research in this field.

Fateme Moradi, Zahra Rahimi, and Zohreh Nekoue investigated whether, within an engineering course, the teaching move to virtual delivery, some mathematics content may not have been appropriately understood. (*Analysis of Engineering students' errors and misunderstandings of integration methods during the COVID-19).* The literature on errors, mistakes, slips and lapses is well known in several subject areas from mathematics to health sciences. Morade et al. provide a fascinating account of theories concerning errors and mistakes within the field of mathematics education. As they note, an error can lead to false concept understanding with subsequent negative implications for further mathematical application in the future. One of the roles of the educator is to elicit common misconceptions so the teacher can evaluate their teaching and students 'errors' can be addressed constructively. During face-to-face teaching this sometimes happen as the session develops through concurrent interactions between students, teachers, and their task. In this case the virtual nature of the learning inhibited this. The research team were therefore interested in any errors made through this mode of delivery-particularly their typology. During a core mathematics series of six sessions for both engineering and mathematics students, the programme was run virtually for forty students. After each session a three-step formative assessment was undertaken by the students and analysed by the research team using an existing framework. For mathematics educators, the data presented in the paper would be of particular interest showing the different types of conceptual error that emerged within the student group. As the authors concluded, conducting this type of analysis for both classroom-based, and virtual learning, enables teachers to identify common student errors with specific curriculum content and thus teaching strategies can be reviewed to help prevent such misunderstandings developing in the first place.

About the author

MARY GOBBI (mary.gobbi@deusto.es) is Emeritus Professor (University of Southampton, UK) and Editor of *Tuning Journal for Higher Education* since 2019. Professor Gobbi (PhD, MA Ed, Dip N, Dip Ned, RN) has been Tuning Nursing co-ordinator since 2003 and is an expert educational developer and evaluator, with extensive national and international experience. These include projects within the European Union (e.g. technologies in healthcare training, on Sectoral Skills Councils for Nursing'; role and training of health care assistants; developing a European MSc in Advanced Rehabilitation Technologies,); South Sudan (developing standardized in service midwifery training)'; Germany and US (Leadership Competences for executive nurse leaders); Republic of Georgia

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