

Dr Latha Ravindran Transcript – Malaysia –

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Pedagogical approach with an intent: Focusing on interaction, time and pace during COVID-19: Lessons learned.

Purpose and context of the presentation

The presentation discusses a study of the patterns of interaction in online education since the disruptions caused by COVID-19. In this time, classroom discourse has undergone a huge paradigm shift with online teaching taking the place of traditional, face-to-face teaching. The study is intended to help educate lecturers in their capacity for decision making and autonomy and to promote students' responsibility and accountability for their own learning, to realize their self-efficacy.

The objectives of the study were to examine the pedagogical approaches used by the lecturers to address the social challenges of online teaching, and to underscore practitioners' perspectives on interactions, time and pace in the facilitation of collaborative learning.

Eight lecturers participated in semi-structured interviews and by having their online classes observed.

There were four main findings: opportunities for change; instructional support and online resources; building rapport; and perceived anxieties.

Finding 1: Opportunities for change

- Lecturers were not ready to transition to online education, being inexperienced with using technology such as Teams and online pedagogical tools to deliver teaching.
- Lecturers also took charge of the time and pace of their lessons, to allow students to adapt to online education and learn to cope with the pace of the lessons, as many learners also were not ready to learn online. Lecturers used online databases, videos and chat groups, and adjusted the pace of their lessons to support learners with different proficiencies and at different levels in one class, in the online environment.
- Some lecturers could adapt more easily to online education, e.g. lecturers in mass communication subjects, as they were already using technology in their teaching.
- Students also faced challenges in coping with online lessons because they found it difficult to maintain attention and concentration.
- Lecturers had to support students to become more aware of their responsibility for their own learning, to engage in reflection, to enhance their capacity for decision making and to be autonomous learners. In the online environment, it is more important than ever for students to take charge of their own learning because collaboration and dynamics between students online was quite different. For example, there were students who were willing to participate and students who were very unwilling to participate, even to turn on their cameras.

- Lecturers particularly noted the many ‘on-the-spot’ decisions they were forced to make, and the strangeness of feeling as if they were talking to themselves, especially when students would not turn on their webcams.

Finding 2: Instructional support

- Lecturers used group chats and linked to videos, websites and readings to maintain interest. They used Microsoft Teams and an LMS known as CS (Course Networking).
- Online discussions were encouraged to promote social skills development. These allowed screen sharing as well as drawing, writing and sharing notes.
- Lecturers made use of both synchronous and asynchronous activities.
- Lecturers mentioned the importance of IT training and support as well as informal support networks including friends, colleagues and family.

Finding 3: Building rapport

- Effective classrooms are task-oriented but also characterized by mutual respect and rapport. Lecturers therefore had to try to build connections with their students online through small talk before class, and asking about the students’ personal situations, how they are coping with the sudden changes, and how they are coping with online classes. These efforts helped to improve students attitudes towards online education.
- WhatsApp groups, class monitors, humour, online games, sharing stories of success, predictable routines and structures, clear communication of expectations including on assessment, relating learning to real life experiences, maintaining a more friendly tone, real-time feedback and peer interaction also supported positive attitudes.

Finding 4: Perceived anxieties

- A major challenge for lecturers was ensuring students at all levels of competency could engage with the online teaching and learning. Attendance could not always be confirmed if students kept cameras off, and connectivity issues disadvantaged some, especially if the lecturer did not know enough to help them. Lecturers called attendance by name to ensure all students were present and participating.
- Lecturers had to promote self-reliance in students, to have ownership in their learning, to ask questions and be responsible for finding information.
- Lecturers managed slower learners by allowing them to self-pace through activities, monitored by the lecturers.

Conclusions

Educators have learned to cope well and understand the implications of using time and pace to promote social interactions in online classes. Effective online teaching depends on the lecturer's preparedness and institutional support. Educators have to adapt to the challenges according to the nature of their subject and practical considerations. Future education will require a national distance education plan on the preparation of courses and content support, the preparation of home learning support, and the preparation of monitoring and evaluation.