Online Teaching Experiences in Higher Education during the COVID-19 pandemic: a case study from the Department of Library and Information Science, University of Kelaniya

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Abstract

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, online education became a powerful platform in education globally. This situation is directly affected by the university system in Sri Lanka. As a result, teaching and learning methods converted into the online mode in the University of Kelaniya. This case study was objective to find out the Online Teaching Experiences in Higher Education during the COVID-19 pandemic concerning the Department of Library and Information Science, University of Kelaniya. Accordingly, the results were discussed under the training, teaching, assessment, and difficulties.

Keywords: *Online Teaching Experiences, Higher Education, COVID-19 pandemic, Department of Library and Information Science, Sri Lanka.*

Introduction

Due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the global education landscape converted to a distance learning mode (United Nations. 2020). During this phase, the Sri Lankan government ordered to close all educational institutions from 12 march 2020, with 15 state universities and about 40 other state and nonstate tertiary education institutions (Hayashi et al., 2020). At that moment, the Sri Lankan tertiary education institutions converted their mode of teaching and learning into Online. According to the university survey, nearly 90% of students accessed online education (Hayashi et al., 2020) under this situation. It is observed that the highest student ratio engaged with online education. As a result, fully online education was established at the University of Kelaniya between the years 2019 to 2021.

Background

The Department of Library and Information Science (DLIS) was established in 1973 as one of the professional subjects under the faculty of Social Sciences, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka. The DLIS has 12 permanent academic staff members and three temporary assistant lectures for undergraduate, postgraduate, and diploma programs up to 2021.

The majority of the teaching method for the above students before COVID-19 was based on traditional face-to-face lectures in the classroom; however, later on, in 2016, the university introduced the blended teaching methods even though it was hard to find out the engagement of all DLISC members, except a few. At this time, the faculty of social sciences provided staff training for Computer-Assisted Learning (CAL) Management System.

However, in 2019, the world identified corona viral disease as a global pandemic, and the University of Kelaniya also closed for students and staff. Then as a solution, CAL became the most convenient lecturing platform at the University.

All the members successfully conducted the lectures and online exams via the Learning Management System

called *e-Kelaniya.* As one of the DLIS teaching staff members, this paper is excepting to share Online Teaching Experiences in Higher Education during the COVID-19 pandemic based on a case study from the Department of Library and Information Science, University of Kelaniya.

Objectives

The main objective of this study was to share personal experiences on online teaching with particular reference to DLIS undergraduates. In addition, some difficulties faced by the students and researcher also found out.

Methodology

LEARN (Lanka Education and Research Network), as a specialised Internet Service Provider (ISP), was used for a zoom login. Moreover, the Learning Management System (LMS), e-Kelaniya, was used to conduct lectures. DLIS Bachelor of Arts honours degree undergraduates was selected as a sample for this case study. The researcher closely observed the first semester of 2019/2020 for this study under the training, teaching, assessments, and difficulties faced. Participatory monitoring was used to collect relevant information. And other staff members experiences were also obtained through the interviews.

Results

The results were discussed in the following sections. Namely, teaching, assessment and difficulties faced.

Training

With the rapid switch to online education being promptly spread all around the country due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the DLIS teaching staff also adhered to online teaching. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the DLIS members had experiences with blended teaching methods. However, sticking to online education happened within the COVID-19 period for the first time.

To overcome the knowledge gap in Online Teaching, the social science faculty provided training to the faculty staff during 2020. As I observed, Digital Teaching qualified DLIS members, namely senior lecturer Dr (Mrs) Namali Suraweera and her subordinator, senior lecturer Chamara Kuruppuarcahchi voluntarily conducted the training workshop series for all the members of the Social Sciences Faculty regarding online teaching to fill the gap. DLIS is one of the departments that participated with the other departments to train in 2020.

Teaching

At the beginning of 2019, pre-recorded lectures were uploaded to the Computer-Aided Learning (CAL) system by DLIS staff. However, later in 2020, undergraduates joined the online lectures according to the given timetable.

Different media such as *PowerPoint presentations, websites, videos, text, audio, pictures* and *diagrams* were used when delivering the lectures. As a result, there were great opportunities to explain theories connected to the websites related to the subject matter. i.e. when lectures conducting for the *LISC 31474 Internet and Virtual Resources* paper, the researcher shared the World Wide Web with students to teach the concepts via *videos*

and *full-text research*. Meanwhile, the university's main library granted us to log in for e-resources; these were actively used during the lessons.

Assessment

According to the relevant exam papers, assessments were also given. For these, *video presentations, debates, quizzes and discussion forums* were also used. i.e. Under the *LISC 41423 Digital Libraries, Software, Organization and Maintenance* paper, conducted a *debate* under the topic of "*Digital libraries are more important than paper-based libraries*" as an assignment. The performance of the students regarding this was at a standard level. Students profoundly used an online platform, and the department's teaching staff was an eyewitness to that. Further, *Kahoot* free game-based learning platform was also associated with measuring students' knowledge.

Difficulties

Several difficulties were observed and verified after discussing with students. Some students were affected by an Internet connection. As a result, they could not attend lectures regularly and had distractions performing online. Therefore, few students have gone through the recordings except participating in online lectures. It was observed that most of the students stayed at the lectures without switching on their cameras. Therefore, it was hard to observe their behaviours. Moreover, mics were unmuted without knowing them sometimes. Consequently, background distractions occurred when students presented their presentations.

CAL breakdown was happened on the researcher's side from time to time. Moreover, sometimes it could not host the lecturers due to network traffic and internet connection breakdowns.

Discussion/Conclusion

DLIS Lecturers and Students were more familiar with the *eKelaniya* Learning Management System. It can be login via https://ekel.kln.ac.lk. DLIS is successfully conducting online lectures as usual for BA honours degree students. For this, DLIS staff have received a faculty training programme. DLIS lecturers use *PowerPoint presentations, websites, video clips, text, audio clips, pictures*, and *diagrams* as modes of delivering online lectures. Relevant assignments are taken via the Learning Management System. Internet connection issue is identified as a common issue for lecturers and students.

Recommendations

As an Asian country, Sri Lanka is also moving through online education due to the COVID-19 world pandemic. To develop and overcome the existing challenges in online education in Sri Lanka, it is necessary to develop infrastructure facilities and implement the National Policy through the relevant body.

References

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