

Higher Education in Ethiopia post Covid-19 Pandemic: Immediate measures and Future plans

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Abstract: Most of the governments around the world have temporarily closed educational institutions in an attempt to control the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). These nationwide closures are impacting over 91% of world's student population according to UNESCO 2020. In Ethiopia, schools and universities are deploying a mix of innovative and renewed approaches to ensure the right to education. In view of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, universities need contingency planning. This planning should include preparation for efficient teaching and learning methods to reach students in a fruitful way. Innovative measures should be implemented in educational organizations to control spread of Corona virus. Present study is aimed to discuss some experiences of Bule Hora University and other Ethiopian universities during and after COVID-19 pandemic for continuing education for post-graduate and Philosophy of Doctor (PhD) students. Some future visions have been suggested to handle any type of situation in future with of hampering the education system.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, Post COVID-19, Higher Education, Bule Hora University, Online education

1. Introduction

Present study is aimed to explore different aspects of the pandemic, it has end up crystal clean that Covid-19 can-not be a perception of segregation from many conservative issues. One can now witness the fierce discussions how virus may have arrived from, and Covid-19 become transferred to human beings as like other coronaviruses (Jandrić et al., 2020). When corona virus busted in Dec 2019 since then many suspecting that virus is spreading due to some animals and others which are using as testing purpose for new medicines and vaccinations (Ahmed et al., 2020). But people did not stop consuming meat and meat packing facilities are remain high demand during lockdown. CO₂ emissions are drastically reduced, and internet usage has been increased by sharing fake news, images and videos about wildlife repossessing cities and other places. Current situation is indicating that it is first sign of iceberg for environmental causes and other consequences of COVID-19 pandemic globally (Burgess et al., 2021); study and analyses in these aspects are now popping up vastly in universities, educational sectors, and nonacademic circles as well (Correia et al., 2020) (Tahamtan & Ardebili, 2020).

Coronavirus disease was initially identified as a disease which caused due to unknown organism in Wuhan city, China in Dec 2019 (Moriarty et al., 2020). Coronaviruses are not new, and these are group of enveloped positive single stranded RNA family viruses. COVID-19 is a disease, and it is caused because of the coronavirus which is known as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARSCoV-2) and it is mainly transmitted by respiratory droplets and physical contact between persons (Madhuri et al., 2020). Then, COVID-19 was spread unexpectedly to many parts of the globe and then World Health Organization (WHO) had announced it is a public health emergency of global concern (Landi et al., 2020). Since then, COVID-19 cases were increased day by day and this pandemic become reality from all aspects. COVID-19 pandemic had been affected most of the countries (Peters et al., 2020). People who are in various fields had refocused their work and stated identify vaccine or other precautions to coronavirus (Petar Jandrić, 2020). Governments, NGO's, and health centers tried to control and spreading the coronavirus for almost nine months and now, pandemic become normalized to previous

conditions(Harris et al., 2020). This pandemic had changed the mindset of people as they shifted main attention from immediate struggle against the pandemic to its implications with the environment(Thanh Le et al., 2020). They are becoming mentally and physically strong to handle pandemics like COVID-19 in future.

Standard educational platform needs to develop for providing better education and there is a need to focus to create link or connection among the activities of past, present, and future states of the community and society(Daniel, 2020). This kind of activities can have capable to change the nature of mankind and societal status(Petar Jandrić, 2020). To be capable of apply this kind of dynamic and holistic perspective of the relationship between people and the surroundings, conceptualizations of fundamental education should provide complicated nature of real worldview(Beatty et al., 2020). Therefore, its necessities to combine activities of people with real world environments rather than separating both(Peters et al., 2020). So, it is recommended to Education sector should have dynamic natures of intersectional character to avoid dualistic natures of world by interlinking different issues.

2. Scope of the Work

Most of the countries faced severe crisis due to outbreak of COVID-19 in Dec 2019 and consequences are come to lockdown of entire nation(s). Present study focused to estimate and quantify the general awareness of COVID-19 disease among PG and PhD students in Bule Hora University during lockdown in Ethiopia. Some guidelines are also suggested to face similar in future and summery points are drawn based on the study.

3. Ethiopia Higher Education in the Pandemic Outbreak

The Ministry of Health (MOH) in the Federal Govt of Ethiopia officially announced the detection of the first COVID-19 case in 13th of March 2020 (WHO Africa, 2020)(Deressa & Duressa, 2021). After detection of first case, the number of cases had increased, and the government decided to cancel all social events and to close educational institutions and governmental agencies to control infection spread for third week of March 2020(Bekele et al., 2021)(Dereso et al., 2020). Federal government of Ethiopia has executed severe actions to control the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. Activities like face-to-face actions, handshakes, any other physical touching including teaching, have been banned(Bekele et al., 2021). Ethiopian universities, and other colleges and schools have suspended to un-predicted date(Tiruneh, 2020). Students were sent to their hometowns and they were not allowed to return to campuses without proper permission from higher authorities of University approval(Burgess et al., 2021). But universities were managed to conduct online classes for PG and PhD through online mode from the month of May 2020 and almost succeed to deliver courses through online with little disturbances due to lack of network in some areas.

Higher education universities had taken initiative on end of April 2020 to conduct the classes through online mode for PG and PhD students. The direction involves supporting and encourage different colleges under universities, along with the rest of the society and communities to start the online education(Dereso et al., 2020). Ministry of Science and Higher Education (MOSHE) had also directed that new online courses be of the same quality as previously delivered face-to-face courses(Tamrat, 2020). It demands that teacher workload in delivering online courses should be recognized as equivalent to teacher workload for conducting face-to-face lectures. These activities were also motivating the students towards self-directed learning mode. The universities urge colleges under it to organize classes in multi-dimensional learning and evaluation, and to give credits to students for their online achievements systematically(Toquero, 2020).

4. Colleges of Bule Hora University for Higher Education

Most of the Colleges in Bule Hora University (BHU), Ethiopia started its new semester with online classes for post-graduate and PhD education. The campus is vacant, yet online classrooms are full. Several new courses have also been planned for spring semester 2020, involving number of students. Since the establishment of BHU, first is the first attempt that all of the colleges in BHU, delivered online classes for higher education courses. This historical move successes due to combined efforts of faculty, staff, and students, in equal measure and high-end support of BHU higher management. BHU has responded very quickly and planned to conduct and organize online classes, internal assessment, and final examinations as well efficiently. Teachers and professors from all the colleges under BHU had encouraged to choose proper learning platforms which they are accustomed with. In order to help and support teachers and professors for effective conduction of online teaching and assessment, BHU has taken the following measures:

i The popular online education forums such as Zoom, Google meet, Go-to-meet, etc., which are introduced through university internet.

ii To make online education productive; necessary measures have been given to both teachers and students by taking feed-back from all.

iii Meetings have been conducted with various management level persons with college Dean, Head of departments, post graduate coordinators and necessary support related to online education have been provided to all teachers.

iv Some of the students have been faced problems to attend online classes due to network issues in their areas, hence, for such student's telephonic guidance are arranged with teachers.

v Special attention has also been provided to students coming from poor regions and difficult family backgrounds.

vi The Higher Management of BHU has taken all necessary measures by collecting information and suggestions from different sources and provided all necessary provisions to conduct online education in effective manner.

Following to these activities, on April 2020, various colleges under BHU has successfully implemented online education through online systems. Almost, all the courses across the colleges seems to be successful and both teachers and students were enjoyed the online teaching and learning. From the student's good feedback was received and they mentioned that they were all more actively participated in online classes as compared to earlier physical classrooms.

BHU has collected feedback from teachers and students on various issues faced in organizing of online classes and transition of better teaching and learning environment with the aim of developing efficient resilient education platforms for the future needs and which helps in making BHU is one of the premier education institutions in Ethiopia and Africa continent as well. Online education is basically defined as learning platforms in synchronal systems across various smart devices or gadgets such as mobile phones, tablets, laptops, and desk top computers with Internet connection. Through the mentioned media environments, all the students from various places can learn and interact with teachers. The simplest thing about the transition for teachers of BHU were arranging and providing systematic online teaching platforms. But university also faced some insistent obstacles and challenges during the conduction of online education. Problems faced during online education are lack of stable digital infrastructure, lack of internet in remote places, lack of experience of self-disciplined and self-directed active learning of students and teachers. Current pandemic has taught that quality education means developing students with awareness of social and emotions about their communities along with achieving learning outcomes.

5. Vision for Future

Teaching and learning activities in physical way had been suspended during lock down which imposed due to outbreak of corona virus pandemic. Academicians are accelerated alternative ways like online education by cloud-based systems through internet. Online education platforms are developed based on internet, artificial intelligence, Big-data, and other related technologies(Vaishya et al., 2020). These tools can be used to conduct online education in flexible manner. Online education is different paradigm which transform traditional education actions such as teacher centered and lecture based into student focused activities like group discussions, hands on experience by eliminating outdated traditional lecturers(Jandrić et al., 2020). This required sophisticated educational databases which act as bridge between teachers and students.

Systematic integration of online teaching and learning activities into university curriculum indicates the improved education processes(Clark, 1930). COVID-19 pandemic had hampered teaching learning activities in higher education organizations in Ethiopia. By the end of November 2020, most of the Ethiopian universities have been developed important guidelines and those are given as follows(Aaron, 2020):

i Higher education organizations and universities are required to develop standard online education platforms for providing necessary access to students and teachers for high quality education.

ii Different colleges under universities required to evaluate available models of online education and standardize their education platforms for long-term sustainability.

iii Universities need to recruit specialized teachers for online teaching, and supporting staff for providing required support for teachers, students, and online systems.

The quality levels of teachers are highly depending on effective condition of productive distance education. Teachers need to have full awareness on ethics of education apart from their subject knowledge and skills for the efficient execution of online education(Clark, 1930). Proper training sessions to adopt new type of teaching models for online education.

6. Summary

Followings are the summary points drawn from the present study:

- Information about COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on delivery of education in universities in entire globe are discussed.
- Higher education in Ethiopia is also addressed.
- Teaching and learning activities conducted in Bule Hora University during lock down are mentioned.
- Some suggestions are recommended to the universities for following and handling pandemic in future and conducting education in a smooth manner.
- From the study, it is mentioned that COVID-19 pandemic has changed the mind set of people in the world and it is the time to transform education into the next level.

Declaration of competing interest

I, on behalf of all the authors of this manuscript, disclose that this paper has NO financial or personal relationship with people or organizations that could inappropriately influence or bias the contents of the paper and research.

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