



OAQHE

NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER

2020

1ST. ISSUE

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HM SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIQ SULTAN OF OMAN 11th January 2020

HM Haitham Bin Tariq succeeded his cousin late Sultan Qaboos Bin Said on 11th January 2020. He holds this esteemed bearing post of Sultan along with other bearings: The Prime Minister, Supreme Commander of the armed forces, Minister of Defence, finance and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Prior to attaining the throne, he was the Minister of Heritage and Culture of Oman. Being a great lover of sports, he was the head of the Oman Football Association in the 1980s.

HM Haitham Bin Tariq is a Pembroke College alumni, University of Oxford, from where he graduated in Foreign Service Programme in 1979. He was also chairman of the committee for the future vision of "Oman 2040" along with being the honorary president of the Oman Association for the Disabled.

OAQHE Vision

To be recognised as the leading independent network for quality enhancement in higher education in the MENA region.

OAQHE Mission

To act as a facilitator in enhancing quality within higher education in the Sultanate of Oman, through the sharing of; ideas, research, and good practice.



OAQHE at a Glance



OAQHE is a non-profit organisation for the promotion and enhancement of quality in higher education in Oman. It is a legal entity with financial and administrative independence operating under the laws for private associations in the Sultanate of Oman.

In April 2018, the association got the approval from the legislative body (Ministry of Social Development) and in the same month, the association members selected the first Board of Directors.

The official launch of the association was on 8th May 2018 under the patronage of H.E. Dr Abdullah Mohammed Al Sarmi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Higher Education with parallel sessions:

- Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET and QAA (UK) accreditation
- European Quality Improvement System EQUIS (EFMD) and association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) Accreditation
- Accreditation in the GCC Region: Developments, Challenges and Future Opportunities by Founder and CEO of Centre for Learning Innovations and Customised Knowledge Solutions (CLICKS)

The association organized many activities to serve the sector such as:

- A Workshop on Institutional Performance Management: From Planning to Measurement – Focus on Key Performance Indicators Led on 10th December 2018 and presented by Dr Rima Al Zadjali (Dean, Gulf College) at the Scientific College of Design
- A Workshop on Student Assessment for Better Quality in Higher Education on 28th March 2019 presented by Prof. Martin Henson (UK Independent Consultant) at the University of Nizwa
- A Workshop on Benchmarking Masterclass led on 25th April 2019, presented by Dr Lee Waller and Mr Ramy Iskander (QASPIR) at Gulf College
- One day online workshop “Sharing good practices: Lessons learned from online teaching during the pandemic period and the plan for the next academic year” on 29 July 2020

In March 2020, the Association conducted the Annual General Meeting to select the Board of Directors and to appoint the financial auditor and their remuneration.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Prof Taqi Al-Abdwani
Chair of BoD



Ms Nabeela Macki
Vice-Chair



Dr Mona Ismail
Rapporteur



Dr Bushra Al-Hasani
Treasurer



Dr Mohammad Al-Azawi
Member



Ms Juhaina Al-Kindi
Member



Dr Djamel Azzi
Member



Ms Alaa Al-Attili
Member



Mr Emad Al-Rajhi
Member



Editorial



Dear Readers,

It is our pleasure to welcome you to the first issue of the Oman Association for Quality in Higher Education (OAQHE)'s Newsletter for the year 2020. This publication comes after the selection of the new Board of Directors for the Association on March 9th, 2020, which includes among its members specialists in the field of quality assurance in higher education in addition to their respective specialisms in various academic fields. The OAQHE's vision consists of being recognized as the leading independent network for quality enhancement in higher education in the MENA region. In this regard, the mission of the Association is to act as a facilitator in enhancing quality within higher education in the Sultanate of Oman, through the sharing of ideas, research, and good practice, all the while adopting the values of quality, transparency, diversity, professional ethics, collaboration, and social responsibility.

Before we introduce the newsletter's contents, we must acknowledge the special circumstances which currently affect humanity. Yes, the COVID-19 pandemic has an impact on all walks of life, not least the academic sphere and education at large. In spite of the difficulties that institutions and individuals are experiencing, the Board of Directors has endeavoured to work towards advancing its mission to achieve its vision, by organising events, improving its visibility and generally improving its interaction with members and member institutions for the benefit of the sector at large.

As would be expected in this issue, the pandemic and the way the sector has reacted to it, take centre stage with the majority of the articles being related to this topic from participants in administrative and science, accountancy, engineering education, and computing.

The OAQHE wishes that you enjoy reading this issue of the newsletter and that will be encouraged to contribute in future editions.

Best wishes,
Editorial Team

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ENGLISH ARTICLES

All are invited to submit their articles for the upcoming issue which will be issued in December 2020.

The Article should be of around 500 words in addition to the author details and a photo.

You can submit your articles using the following link:

www.oaqhe.org.om/newsletter/

ARABIC ARTICLES

Arabic Articles are welcomed. Please use the following link to send your Arabic articles

www.oaqhe.org.om/ar/newsletter



Chair's Message

PROF. DR TAQI AL-ABDWANI

Professorship, International University of Vienna

PhD University of Reading, UK

Master, University of Lincoln, UK

CMA, The Institute of Certified Management Accountants, Australia

ISO 9001:2008 Internal Auditor

External programme reviewer of Association of Arab Universities

External programme reviewer of Ministry of Higher Education, Oman

External reviewer of Oman Academic Accreditation Authority



On 8th May 2018, the higher education sector in Oman celebrated the launch of OAQHE under the patronage of HE Dr Abdullah Mohammed Al Sarmi, Undersecretary, Ministry of Higher Education.

On behalf of Oman Association for Quality in Higher Education (OAQHE) board members, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Education Council, Ministry of Higher Education, Research Council and Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) for their continuous support to enhance the higher education sector in Oman. I would like to also thank all of those who served higher education when the association was still a network which had started in 2008.

The focus area of the association is to share good practices through conferences, workshops, forums and. Symposia The members are entitled to attend all the activities of the association free of charge. Four (4) members from the universities and two (2) members from colleges. The membership is also open for the individuals who would like to contribute to the higher education sector in Oman.

The objectives of the association can be summarised as follows:-

1. Establishing a culture of quality in Higher Education by supporting the initiatives and the activities and enhancing quality;
2. Contributing to providing technical support and training programmes for the workforce of the higher education institutions;
3. Working towards enhancing the association activities for sustainability;
4. Enhancing relationships with other similar associations nationally, regionally and internationally;
5. Providing a platform of Coordination between higher education institutions in Oman and other higher education authorities locally, regionally and internationally through sharing of good practices and activities which might enhance the performance of Quality assurance.
- 6.

In 2018, the association conducted five (5) activities including two workshops. In 2019, it conducted four activities including two workshops as well. In 2020, the plan is to organise five activities of which four workshops and one conference will be conducted at the end of the year 2020 or first quarter of 2021.

The association has formed two permanent committees;

1. Corporate Identity, Media and Communication Committee
2. Events planning and management Committee

Each committee has an operational plan and an objective to meet.

The board of directors has already reviewed and approved the association's vision, mission, strategic plan and the operational plan specifying the focus area.

I would like to encourage all higher education institutions both government and private to become members in this association and support its association.

The higher education sector in Oman has a long journey to travel and sharing good practices will make the journey easier for everyone.

Taqi Al Abdwani
Chairperson



OAQHE News



BOD of OAQHE Conducts its First Meeting virtually

Sunday, 28th June 2020.

The meeting was chaired by Prof. Taqi Al Abdwani and attended by:- Ms. Nabila AlMacki, Dr. Mona Ismail, Dr. Bushra Al Hasni, Dr. Djamel Azzi, Dr. Mohammed Al Azawi, Ms. Alaa Ismat, Ms. Juhaina Al Kindi, and Ms. Salha Al Farsi (Association Administrator)

The board discussed and approved the workshop activities for July- December 2020 presented by Ms. Juhaina Al Kindi, chair of Events planning committee. Dr. Mohammed Al-Azawi, chair of Corporate Identity and Media Committee also presented the plan for automation and improvement of digital services of the association. The board also discussed the date for the upcoming conference and matter arising from decision taken from the last meeting along with the financial report presented by Dr. Bushra Al Hasni

The chair of the association thanked the members, VCs of the universities, deans of the colleges, Ministry of Higher Education, OAAA and the Education Council for their continuous support to the higher education sector and the association.

OAQHE launches its new website,

The association launched its newly developed website. You can visit the website using the URL:

www.oaqhe.org.om





OAQHE
Oman Association of Quality Higher Education



OAQHE WEBINAR
You are Invited to Join

"Sharing good practices: Lessons learned from online teaching during the pandemic period and the plan for the next academic year"

📅 29th July 2020 ⌚ 11AM -1PM 🖥️ via GoToWebinar



SPEAKER
Dr. JOKHA AL SHUKAILI - MBM
General Director of Private Universities & Colleges



SPEAKER
Dr. IBRAHIM AL HARITHY - SQU
Director of Quality Assurance



SPEAKER
Dr. SAMYA AL SHANFARI - MU
Executive Director of Quality & Institutional Performance



WEBINAR MODERATOR
Dr. MONA ISMAIL - OAQHE
Scientific College of Design Dean

For registration:
<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/2164513291989202445>

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OAQHE webinars

Sharing Good Practice: Lesson Learned from online teaching during the pandemic Period

Wednesday, 29th July 2020

The association organised a webinar on Sharing Good Practice: Lesson Learned from online teaching during the pandemic Period. The webinar was attended by specialised people from the sector and presented by:

- 1- Dr Jokha Al Shukaili, General Director of Private Universities and Colleges,
- 2- Dr Ibrahim Al-Harithy, Director of QA, SQU,
- 3- Dr Samya Al Shanfari, Executive Director of Quality and Institutional Performance, MU

The Webinar was moderated by Dr Mona Ismail, OAQHE BOD.

Utilising Data for informed decision making

Thursday, 27th August 2020

The association organized its second webinar entitled "utilising data for informed decision making" on 27th August 2020. The webinar was presented by:

- 1- Dr Rima AlZadjali, Dean, Gulf College,
- 2- Dr Bushra Al-Hsani, College of Education, Rustaq

The Webinar was moderated by Ms Alaa Al-Attili, OAQHE BOD

More information and the recordings are available on:

www.oaqhe.org.om/events



Sector's Participations



Requirements of Emergency Remote Teaching

Mohammad Al-Azawi

Asst. Dean for Academic Affairs,

*Oman College of Management and Technology
(OCMT)*



The circumstances and conditions that require switching to ERT have so far been temporary and the period for which this will last is not uncertain. Every educational institution must be prepared for such a transition at any given time. To do so, one must start by identifying the risks of study interruption, assess the risks which could have a high impact factor and accordingly set up a comprehensive mitigation plan. The emergency remote teaching (ERT) can be understood as the process of switching from traditional education to electronic education in a short time and with limited capabilities. Educational institutions that were not ready for such risks may face difficulties in switching to e-learning or distance learning as a result of the fact that this change is not just a change in the teaching methods but also one that materialises in the teaching system itself.

There may be many factors that may help and facilitate this transition, such as the availability of the necessary technologies or electronic culture. However, there are many difficulties that accompany the transition process. Two major concerns towards electronic education system are lack of necessary expertise and the inappropriateness of the course content which need to be analysed.

The process of switching from traditional education to e-learning is not just a transition from giving lectures in a physical classroom to giving them remotely via the internet. This misconception in understanding may cause some educational institutions to struggle and even fail to manage the process successfully. In fact, it is a process of moving from one academic system to another and satisfying the new system's characteristics given below. E-learning does not solely depend on the availability of technology. A successful ERT system needs to fulfil the following E-learning requirements:

1- Technology: The availability of appropriate technology is essential for any e-learning process.

2- Well-designed course contents: Developing content suitable for e-learning is a vital factor as not all the content developed for regular or physical classes is suitable for e-learning. Learning theories should be considered when designing the subject matter.

3- Well-trained instructors: As the role of the instructor in e-learning is not limited to presenting the course material, instructors who undertake online teaching require

skills in a variety of fields and should have a deep understanding of the differences between traditional teaching and online teaching

4- Well-prepared students: Preparing the student for this type of teaching is also a major challenge that must be taken into consideration during the educational process.

5- Suitable assessment methods: Most of the assessment methods that are used in traditional teaching in physical classes are not suitable for online teaching. Therefore, assessment methods should be chosen and designed carefully to be fair to students and should fulfil the objectives of the course.

6- Academic support services for students and instructors: The availability of academic support, services and tools is another important aspect of the educational process. Services such as e-library, training and webinars, software and academic advising should be available to all students to achieve the goals of their study.

7- Academic Quality and Legislation: All educational institutions must develop appropriate standards, bylaws, policies, and procedures to ensure the academic quality of the educational process.



Pandemic effect on student's mental health and educational institutions new challenges: A driving force for revising policies

Mazhar Hussain Malik

Head of Computing

*Global College of Engineering and Technology
(GCET)*



The COVID-19 pandemic forced educational institutions to stop conducting regular classes as per the directions of relevant authorities in the Sultanate of Oman, since 15 March 2020. All the educational institutions were instructed to stop campus-based teaching to keep the social gathering which is causing CoVID-19 to spread. These swift measures had the potential to affect a student's mental and physical health.

As mobility is limited and due to additional measure, such as lockdown, curfew and social isolation causing mental and physical issues of student's health. Students are under great stress as they are new to online teaching which can cause anxiety and depression due to all the necessary changes and actions taken to stop the COVID-19 spread. E-learning is a big challenge for young learners as the majority of the schools and even colleges are only focusing on campus-based teaching. The pandemic has also caused issues at the institutional end that how the institutions will deliver classes online due to lack of availability of online teaching platforms such as Blackboard, Moodle etc, secondly the sudden changes cause the problem of data storage as many schools, colleges and universities were only delivery campus-based lectures without lecture recording, considering this sudden fact, there is need to prepare the IT (Information Technology) infrastructure which can help to meet the massive storage challenges along with remote access to IT and lab resources.

Considering that the life of students has changed drastically and that this may increase the social isolation of students and can affect their psychological and mental health as students are under a lot of pressure to perform academic activities under these news conditions.

The students distress contributed by the uncertain disruption of the study along with the anxiety caused by schools, colleges, or universities closures. Students are facing disruption of their research projects and internships, which are the core part of their study in the case of some specialisations and COVID-19 caused delay their graduation and at the end their competitiveness in the job market.

Students, especially young learners are not used to online learning, there is a high need to provide them with counselling so they can perform better by coping up the uncertain condition efficiently.

To sum up, there is a need to revisit institution policies to define these strategies which can help and support online learning while considering all the possible challenges such as:

- (1) providing interactive teaching with the help of ICT (Information Communication Technology),
- (2) promoting personalized learning to be more student-centric,
- (3) defining the policies for assessment design and conduction to,
- (4) defining the rules and policies about the conduction of demonstration and students group work,
- (5) defining the strategies to conduct engineering and technology programs lab sessions by considering online lab simulators and emulators whenever possible,

(6) defining the rules and policies do support the computer programming related modules lab sessions online and

(7) Finally providing an effective communication channel to avoid the communication gaps between the students and institute to provide the truthful information and to avoid any lack of communication which affect student performance.

COVID-19 effects on learning system and assurance of the quality of higher education

Abdul Rahman Albulushi

*Lecturer Administrative and Financial Science
Department*

*Oman College of Management and Technology
(OCMT)*



As we all know that the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has influenced the standard livelihood of the people throughout the globe. There are huge paradigm shifts due to this virus in various sectors including educational institutions. Many institutions in affected countries have shifted from on campus to remote learning including Oman. To deal with the virus, Oman had established a supreme committee to oversee the circumstances resulted from this virus. In order to control the spread of the virus, the supreme committee decided to close all schools, college and universities throughout the sultanate.

After the decision made by the supreme committee, most of the higher education institutions initiated remote teaching in order to prevent the loss of costs and time which are vital factors for the students. However, this step had raised several serious queries including how we can assure the quality education, assessments, and other academic integrity? Assurance of quality and academic integrity is a preliminary aspect of every single institution. They are required to come up with sound strategies and practices in order to assure that their quality is being maintained whether learning is on-campus or distance. Since COVID-19 has affected face to face learning, the institutions switched to remote learning, in this scenario some important points are to be noted:

Initially, higher institutions need to ensure that their policies and practices enrich and support the implementation of distance learning. This may assist professionally implement the instructions and policies. Secondly, the higher education institution must be accountable to adopt a reliable and advanced online interaction source so that timely communication is made with the students. Instructors and students who are involved in distance teaching and learning should be equipped with all the technical skills by conducting various training sessions. Thirdly, a key point to maintain quality is student support services. This may include admission guidance, induction of newly admitted students, timely supervising graduating students, training to utilize e-resources of the institutions. Moreover, one of the most important service to be provided to students is academic advising. Since some students are unable to decide about the selection of courses, thus, academic advising is required. Therefore, in these unexceptional situations, online academic advising must be carried out effectively so that the students continue their education smoothly. Finally, coming to the assessment and evaluation stage, higher education institutions must adopt effective online assessment technique that can result in maintaining the quality of assessments. Institutions must monitor students that the exams are done by him/herself rather than any other senior student, the student is not involved in any other unfair mean activities during the exam. This can be protected by different methods. Moreover, Students must be asked to evaluate, faculty performance, course content and its online delivery process.



Bridging the gap between academic and professional qualifications in accountancy

Ikram Ul Haq

Majan University College



Quite often jobs advertised by companies in the field of accountancy are contested by two diverse groups of candidates. On the one hand, you have those holding academic qualifications like MBA and MSc in accountancy/finance, on the other hand, you have those holding professional accountancy qualifications like ACCA and CPA. Although broadly speaking both types of qualifications cover the same area in terms of the content, there are some fundamental differences in these two types of qualifications which tend to provide an advantage to one group rather than the other.

Academic qualifications are designed to develop multiple skill sets in graduates, such as communication skills, problem-solving skills, and independent learning skills, to name just a few. Furthermore, although these degrees do cover wider areas of the field of accountancy, their rigour and depth are no match for those of the professional accountancy qualifications. The professional qualifications focus entirely on enriching the students with in-depth technical knowledge of the various areas of accountancy profession like auditing, reporting and taxation. As a result, graduates of professional accountancy qualifications have a better grounding when it comes to technical knowledge and they become preferred candidates by employers.

Many professional accountancy qualifications also require students to undertake mandatory training in accounting in order to complete the requirements of the degree. This provides students with an opportunity to gain hands-on experience in various accountancy roles and prepares them for work-related tasks. However, academic qualifications generally do not have any such requirements.

On the minus side, professional qualifications highly focus on content with less attention to skills development. For example, the globally recognized qualification ACCA does not have any module on business communication or IT skills. These two skills are extremely important in today's corporate environment and students often get the chance to polish these skills only when they start working.

There is clearly a need to bridge the gap between these two types of qualifications. Academic qualifications need to increase technical areas by considering mandatory on the job training.

Meanwhile, the syllabuses of professional accountancy qualifications should include modules covering business communication and development of IT-related skills.

Such Modifications would level up the playing field for all accountancy students when competing for jobs, while employers would find greater numbers of highly skilled employment-ready candidates and would need to spend far less on training. Perhaps a working group consisting of experts from both academic and professional side can be formed to identify and propose detailed recommendations along these lines.

Teaching and learning during COVID-19

T. Sheeba Justin

Assistant Professor

Muscat College,



Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all education institutions in the Sultanate of Oman have been shut down since the middle of March and hence most institutions have shift-ed their paradigm to online education.

As a computing science teacher, I have to prepare myself to face an online teaching environment and to develop alternative remote teaching in my teaching and assessment to comply with the new requirements. I did involve additional hours of detailed planning, designing the course materials and assessment pattern, to address the requirements of online education. So every day has become a day of new ideas, new technologies, and new experiments. I eagerly lookout for webinars to attend and avid

ly read the views of others to explore the opportunity in online education and chose to integrate web-based technologies in my teaching to achieve evaluation, discussions, and engagements, etc to drive the student's academic acumen with a conducive environment for education.

Despite the use of technologies that are meant to provide solutions, there are many un-precedented challenges encountered in the absence of physical classrooms and proper digital infrastructure. Merely shifting classrooms online would not mean effective re-mote learning.

The first biggest challenge faced is access to internet service in the rural areas of Oman. Most of the students are not able to attend online classes regularly as they do not have broadband internet access at home and mainly depend on their cell phones for their only access. Even students with broadband connections in rural areas face slow internet connections or limited access in-home. Besides, the students from low-income families have to bear the cost of internet service which leads to a cost implication too. This challenge has caused ripple effects on students' contribution and finally leads students to fall behind academically. Hence, the government should take necessary steps to improve digital infrastructure and provide requisite free internet services in rural communities.

Another challenge faced is the disparity in access to devices such as laptops, smartphones, etc. However, most of the students use smartphones but it might not be convenient to serve various purposes such as developing software programs, carrying out lengthy assignments, mathematical calculations, etc. As a result, students are not able to do the practicals and work on a project as per the requirements. Besides, the teachers would not be able to monitor the students' work and clarify their doubts as done in classroom teaching. The government and educational institutions should take the necessary initiative to ensure that the required devices are available for all the students to use online education without interruption.

Despite these challenges, teachers should be trained on alternative modes of teaching and assessment preparation, as a large number of teachers have never used an online environment to teach, and not only are many of them digitally inept.

The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed how rooted imbalances are created in the digital world of online education. With the existing challenges, expanding online education without necessary supportive measures will widen educational inequalities among learners, thereby increasing inequity in educational outcomes.



Engineering Education in COVID-19 Environment: Challenges and Opportunities

Piyush Dua and Parmal Singh Solanki

College of Applied Sciences- Suhar,



An engineering program includes the balancing of classroom teaching, hands-on experience and interaction with technical society. But the current scenario of COVID-19 pandemic enforces the system to find out alternatives of face-to-face (F2F) mode of teaching and learning. The engineering courses are difficult to teach without hands-on-experience because each student has to devote around 6 to 8 scheduled hours per week at laboratories along with F2F interaction with instructors. To perform the practical, standard laboratory area recommended by regulatory authorities is around 2m² per student (equivalent to approximately 1.6 m between two adjacent students) while the World Health Organisation(WHO) advisory has recommended minimum 2m distance between two people to avoid the threats of virus contamination. For meeting WHO guidelines, the cost of laboratory infrastructure will increase by a manifold to provide a safe working environment.

In traditional teaching-learning process (TLP) students have multiple synchronous options to discuss and clarify the concepts with instructors and professionals from industries. Also, the peer to peer interaction significantly contributes to personal development and healthy competition among the students. The regular access to the library or learning resource centre (LRC) has a vital role to enrich the knowledge of students.

In extraordinary situations such as present pandemic where social distancing is mandatory, mounts many challenges to the F2F system and hence the e-learning (EL) tools could provide various feasible solutions and opportunities to overcome these challenges. For instance, the “virtual labs”^{*} could compensate the scheduled time flexibility and hands-on experience requirements. This will also address the problem of social distancing and the concerns of the additional cost of laboratory infrastructure. On the other hand learning by doing in real laboratory scenario is certainly necessary for getting practical experience. Most of the study material can be made available online to explore the alternative of LRC. The various Internet & Communication Technologies and Learning Management System like BlackboardTM, Google Meet and Cisco WebEx are also available to meet the TLP challenges. Eventually, learning by using virtual laboratory is one of the feasible solutions in this pandemic environment. Even this is an opportunity for working professionals to continue their further study, which they were unable to manage the synchronous mode of learning with a regular job. Practice on virtual laboratory (being a synchronous tool) could enable to compensate for the synchronous mode of learning through the availability of flexible hours. In addition to the tuning of parameters in the virtual laboratory, it provides an opportunity to explore the system behaviour broadly.

The e-learning enables the student to become a self-motivated learner which boosts the confidence level. Further, a large knowledge database available online will broaden the horizon of the student. Learning online is having its threshold to compensate the F2F mode beyond which the human behaviour will get adversely affected like poor personality development, shy human gestures and hesitant communication skills due to the individual mode of working. Overall, it can be observed that e-learning is a feasible solution but not a full replacement of F2F mode. Therefore, to optimize the merits and demerits of the current situation the blended mode may be more suitable.

Truly, the global goals can only be met if we work together

Stephen Aro-Gordon

Assistant Professor, Department of Business and Accounting

Muscat College,



Leveraging global partnerships encapsulated in the 2030 sustainable development goal number 17 is a veritable way towards accomplishing quality education for sustainable environmental, economic, and social development. To this end, Muscat College, one of the older private higher educational institutions in Oman, is known for its unalloyed dedication to ensuring that its students are exposed to real-life industrial operations simultaneously with their studies. The spirit of cooperation, support, and a partnership were at full display recently when three of the College’s students on the University of Stirling BA Honours in Business Studies programme received laurels in recognition of their distinguished achievement at Pearl Initiative Student Case Study Competition on Corporate Integrity in the Gulf Region in April 2020. The student’s project was titled: Anti-Corruption Policy and Practices within the National Gas Company (NGC) Oman. The strategic relationship, town-gown partnership facilitated the capacity and experience of the students’ team in gaining valuable insights into the sustainable practices of a reputed Omani corporate giant, NGC, Oman’s largest LPG marketing company, with subsidiary operations across the Gulf region, Malaysia and India.

Using corporate data from primary and secondary sources, including a privileged interaction with the company’s CEO, on 23rd December 2019, the student team successfully reviewed the development and implementation of anti-corruption policy and practices (ACPPs) at the NGC.

ACPPs are generally designed to eradicate or prevent dishonest or fraudulent conduct, including misuse of executive power for private gain. Aware of the various forms of corruption, notably, bribery, extortion, cronyism, nepotism, parochialism, patronage, influence peddling, graft, and embezzlement, and their damaging effects on national wellbeing, students were able to demonstrate ACPP’s critical role in fostering good business practices of accountability and transparency in alignment with public expectation of ethical, moral, honest and transparent business environment.

The students found that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is about ethically doing business. Hence, at NGC, anti-corruption plays a critical role in the ethical functioning of its operations; it is the basis for getting and maintaining the company’s clientele, helping the company to align with sustainable governance practices.

The students further documented that regular reviews, dedicated compliance structure, Systematic Employee Training Programmes (SETP), Policy Engagement Practices (PEPs), Clear Communication Strategy (CCS), Sanctions for Infractions (S4I), and Inclusive Accountability System (IAS), were among the key driving factors for effective policy embedding and enforcement. The imperatives for internal and external stakeholders’ partnership in the formulation and successful implementation of proactive anti-corruption and bribery policies, were also stressed.



Synchronous or Asynchronous Classes in Online Teaching

Nedhal Ibrahim

Al-Masnaa College of Technology



The debate regarding what type of e-learning classes is better is not valid as selecting the appropriate type depends on the need and the learning theory e.g. pedagogical or andragogical. Classes in e-learning can be classified mainly into synchronous and asynchronous classes and sometimes a hybrid type is considered as well.

Synchronous classes have a lot of similarity to physical classes as there should be a class schedule, compulsory attendance, and a predefined timeframe. In this category, lectures are delivered where the instructor and the students are attending a virtual meeting. The instructor explains the topics and shares slides and other course contents. The student can interact with the instructor and ask questions. The instructor, in his turn, can ask the students to participate. These kinds of classes should include chat rooms rather than discussion boards for collaboration. Synchronous classes are instructor-centred where the instructor is the source of knowledge and responsible for preparing the contents and explaining them.

Based on the above description, it is clear that synchronous e-learning class is more applicable to pedagogical learning and is more suitable for schools and early stages of undergraduate studies.

On the other hand, asynchronous online classes have little similarity to physical classrooms as there are no schedules, timeframes, direct discussions or interaction. These classes can be used with andragogical learning as it is more learner-centred than subject or instructor-centred. The instructor can share the lectures with the students using multimedia formats such as videos and voice. Additionally, the instructor can share course contents such as slides and books. It is the responsibility of the student to study the course contents and to search for further resources. Discussion boards are useful here as students can interact and collaborate with each other and with the instructor by posting their questions and discussion topics of interest.

The advancement in modern-day technology has made it possible to have a third type of online class, namely the hybrid classes which have the advantages of the two aforementioned types. In this type, the lecture is given in a meeting attended by the instructor and the students, planned at a pre-specified time and they can collaborate with each other during the lecture time. The lecture is then recorded and the students who were unable to attend can watch the recording and post their questions to the discussion board later.



Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skilful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives. (William A Foster)

COVID19, is there a silver lining?

Djamel Azzi

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The UNESCO states in the conclusion to its online article, Education in a post-COVID world: Nine ideas for public action, that "Covid-19 has revealed the anxious difficulties that come with that complexity [of the world we live in], but it has shown us that complexity also generates potent dynamism and multiple possibilities. The overwhelming challenges that accompany uncertainty have been thoroughly exposed in recent months. But, Covid-19 has reminded humanity that uncertainty also contains great potentials and puts the lie to determinism. We have seen the terrifying risks and vulnerabilities of our fragility, but Covid-19 has prompted us to recall that fragility also generates awareness, sensitivity to our interdependencies, and can be a wellspring for hope."

Hope... yes, hope, the forte of humanity and the constant fuel to its survival and potential betterment. The hope that as well as the hardship the pandemic has incurred, it will also bring about changes that improve all aspects of life, not least education.

The silver lining to this catastrophe, as perceived and lived by many, is that it has resulted in a quasi seismic change to our approach to education. The fundamental shift in paradigm being the greater reliance on the student-centred approach to learning and teaching, especially in pre-university education where come September 2020, some educational establishments will expect pupils who would traditionally have their hands held all the time, to fend for themselves for some of the time. The idea has been around for many years with various levels of implementation depending on where you are in the world and how determined the actors (teachers, students, management) have been in their endeavours in that sense. However, COVID19 has acted as a catalyst which has precipitated the adoption of the concept as a serious way forward in the delivery of education. It is a testimony to humanity's capacity to adapt, quickly.

This change also plays in the hands of the proponents of the commoditisation of education. This is not necessarily a bad thing but has to be considered carefully by professionals and institutions so as not to mechanise the imparting of knowledge. Education remains, in my view, a very human activity, even (or especially) if the onus is placed on the student to further their acquisition of knowledge and know-how.

The education sector will also need to assess its reliance on 'teaching brains', lecturers formed at great expense and may have to revise their role; lecturers? facilitators of knowledge transfer? Virtual classroom assistant? tasked with helping students in the fulfilment of their educational aspirations. How will research be affected in the post-pandemic era? All questions that will need to be addressed by all involved, not least educators themselves.

Humanity has never evolved more rapidly than in times of hardship, let us hope that COVID19 yields changes for the betterment of humanity in all walks of its life, and education in particular, as it is the cornerstone, and some may argue the only way, of a successful civilisation.





OAQHE

الجمعية العمانية للجودة في التعليم العالي
Oman Association for Quality in Higher Education

OAQHE Newsletter

Issue No. 1

September 2020

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The Article should be of around 500 words in addition to the author details and a photo.

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