The dark side of online transition of exams in higher education: a perspective of an emerging nation

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Abstract

Purpose – Higher educational institutes (HEIs) are experiencing a significant shift towards online education, which has been fast-forwarded with the global pandemic of COVID-19. The forced shift has also exposed many vulnerabilities in online education, especially assessments. The purpose of this study is to investigate the potential dark side of the digital transformation of examinations through the lens of university students.

Design/methodology/approach – This study involves a sample of 127 university students from the fields of business and science, technology, education and management (STEM) and the key factors affecting student perception were assessed quantitatively to explore the interrelationships.

Findings – Results revealed that both business and STEM students have a similar impression of the use of online examinations, and the majority still have mixed feelings about them as a replacement for physical examinations. The regrouping of the factors revealed two key dimensions, trustworthiness and apprehensible education, as key areas of student perception in the context of online examinations.

Research limitations/implications – This study aims to strengthen the understanding of Kolb's experiential learning mechanism through a discussion on the importance of abstract conceptualization as opposed to concrete experience in the establishment of the online assessment and learning space. Practically speaking, increasing investment in internet infrastructure and forming strategic alliances with important parties, like internet providers, to create uninterrupted network coverage, are an effective place to start if one wants to make sure that the process of moving to online learning is becoming more and more accepted by educators, students, and the general public.

Originality/value – The online transition to higher education has seen expedited growth since the pandemic and has not given much room for many HEIs globally to adjust. The procedures and techniques implemented take a Western lens, and less attention is given to the emerging context and its context-specific characteristics in such implementation. This study takes the theoretical lens of Kolb and proposes the key learnings for a successful online transition to assessment in emerging contexts.

Keywords Online education, Examinations, Student perception, COVID-19, Higher educational institutes, Emerging nation

Paper type Research paper