PEDAGOGICAL CHALLENGES FOR ACTIVE DIGITAL LEARNING IN SELECTED HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

The goal of the current study is to identify the pedagogical challenges that certain higher education institutions in Sri Lanka may face when implementing active digital learning. Ten individuals were randomly selected from Sri Lankan higher education institutions. Data for this study were gathered using in-depth interviews. The content analysis method was used to assess the qualitative data, which was then presented descriptively. The study's findings showed that the pedagogical barriers to active digital learning in the Sri Lankan higher education institutions include well-established teaching cultures, the unequal status of education and research, lack of digital incentives for teachers, and an inflexible physical learning environment. It has been recommended that institutional administration should hold more authority over academic leadership in terms of leadership duties. To improve the state of digital learning in Sri Lanka, policymakers will be able to use the knowledge gained from this study to conduct empirical research for future studies.

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Introduction

Higher education acts as a nation's knowledge hub, which is essential for the development of a knowledge-based society. The ability to access and exchange information from anywhere and by anybody, as well as the flexibility to operate across time, location, and function, have drawn a lot of interest from the education industry. Additionally, education digitalization is essential for modifying the classroom environment to meet the needs of the target audience of the "digital native" generation (Zhadko, Popova, & Gagarina, 2019) Including education, the economy has been significantly impacted by the present COVID-19 pandemic. The present investigation will close a research gap identified by Wilms and colleagues in 2017. Online learning, which may be categorized as a subset of distance learning that deals with internet learning, computer-based learning, and virtual classrooms, has gained appeal as a competitive alternative to traditional classroom instruction (Andersson,2008). Academic personnel may need to modify their "traditional classroom" teaching strategies while acquiring digital abilities to effectively communicate with distant pupils (Toquero,2020). Most instructors lack expertise teaching online, according to Bao. The same author emphasized that lacking sufficient learning tools, reliable internet connectivity, and a comfortable studying environment are common challenges for students (Bao ,2020). Only a few higher education institutions in Sri Lanka, excluding public and commercial universities, have embraced digital learning. Because of this, the current study was carried out as a pilot study to determine the challenges higher education institutions in Sri Lanka encounter while introducing active digital learning. As a result, the goal of this study is to pinpoint the pedagogical challenges higher education institutions in Sri Lanka have while introducing active digital learning. With regard to a particular government higher education institution in Sri Lanka, this study has been carried out as a case study.

Material and Methods

The sample consisted of 10 voluntarily participating students. sample picked from an open invitation. The sample was so picked at random. We asked 10 students to suggest a workable time for the interview. The sample was determined by the saturation level. A pre-established interview checklist was followed during the interview. Early in 2020, both researchers participated physically in the study's interviewing process. The data collecting tool was interview checklist. Some scripts were recorded with the respondents'

permission, and the researchers also conducted some interviews using scripts. Each interview took around an hour to an hour and a half. Following a content analysis, the collected raw data were sorted and presented descriptively.

Results and Discussion

Almost all the samples represented in this study showed the same demographic characteristics. Therefore, Pedagogical Challenges for Active Digital Learning they described have been presented here.

Lack of digital incentives for teachers

The institutional incentives and limitations can affect instructors' willingness to change their teaching approaches, according to one-fourth of respondents. According to studies, the biggest obstacle to instructors adopting digital education is a lack of institutional support. According to respondents, "To our knowledge, few universities have created incentive structures that capture distinctive aspects of digital education, such as the substantial additional workload in the design phase and this lack of legislation reduces teachers' motivation to participate in digital reform."

Conventional Teaching Cultures

According to the survey, instructors were generally quite optimistic about digital education, although they continued to reject its advantages for their particular specialties. "Resistant" educators aggressively oppose incorporating novel ideas into their profession and have unfavorable beliefs. The rate of pedagogical changes in higher education will undoubtedly stay slow without a sizable proportion of "active innovators." Five out of ten respondents said that college lecturers were likely to stick to the traditional methods of instruction but not the latest technology developments. However, the majority of teachers prefer distant learning over physical education, according to a different reply.

The unequal status of education and research

According to the respondent, equal weight should be given to research and instructional activities that are of the highest caliber. The value of research in education is debatable, and teachers' instructional practices frequently reflect their personal preferences without question. Teaching and research are frequently compared in higher education and seen as having complementary purposes. The respondents noted that this disparity in the standing of research and education had a detrimental impact on active digital learning.

The physical learning environment settings

According to the sample, innovative, adaptable technology classroom designs influence teachers' decisions on their pedagogical strategies favorably. They proposed that a rigid and regulated learning environment prevented effective digital learning. To offer students a sense that they are engaged in global learning, the learning environment needs to be more inventive and appealing. However, there were no such amenities present at the higher education facility that was chosen.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study's conclusions demonstrated that well-established teaching cultures, the unequal status of education and research, a lack of digital incentives and legislation for teachers, and a rigid physical learning environment are among the pedagogical barriers to active digital learning in Sri Lankan higher education institutions. In terms of leadership responsibilities, it has been suggested that institutional management should have more power over academic leadership. Policymakers will be able to use the knowledge gathered from this study to undertake empirical research for future studies, which will help them to enhance the situation of digital learning in Sri Lanka. Institutions must act quickly to protect instructors' ownership of video lectures and other digital content developed without the direct involvement of institutional support functions and to provide incentives for their recompense for digital development efforts. It is necessary to fairly pay for reuse. Although this can initially appear to be expensive, expanding the options for digital content reuse might have the opposite effect.

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