

SUMMARY

Trends, Critical Issues, and Observations— Instructional Technology in a Time of Crisis

Vanaja Nethi and Michael Simonson
Nova Southeastern University

PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR CONTEXTS

Survey

An online survey was developed to collect demographic, as well as other data relevant to the focus of this study. The link to the survey was sent to the 45 Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) members who had responded to the invitation sent to all AECT members, indicating their interest to participate in the study. Of this group, only 26 people (57.8%) completed the online survey. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the demographic characteristics of this sample.

The majority who completed the survey were women (73.8%). The respondents were also mainly from the higher education sector (84.6%). Age wise, most of them (73.1%) were in the 30's to 50's age range. Eight of the 26 respondents (30.8%) were from institutions outside the United States with representation from almost every continent; Eurasia (Azerbaijan and Georgia), Africa (Nigeria), Asia (Indonesia), Europe (United Kingdom) and

North America (Canada). In addition, the respondents also represent a myriad of perspectives, experiencing the impact of the global pandemic in a variety of roles. In higher education, among the respondents were doctoral students; instructional designers including those with administrative and academic duties related to instructional design; full-time faculty, some of whom also served in academic administrative roles; adjuncts, as well as a librarian who also serves as a liaison to one of the colleges on campus. In the K–12 arena, there were a few teachers bringing their perspectives from the elementary, middle and high school contexts. Finally, there was also representation from one of the departments in government bringing the perspective of an instructional designer and training management advisor on the impact of the pandemic on the execution of training programs.

Case Study Essays

From those who completed the online survey, 13 participants (50%) submitted a narra-

TABLE 1
AECT Members Who Completed the Online Survey ($n = 26$)

Gender	Male	10 (38.5%)
	Female	16 (73.8%)
Age	20s	1 (3.8%)
	30s	5 (19.2%)
	40s	9 (34.6%)
	50s	5 (19.2%)
	60s	3 (11.6%)
	70s	3 (11.6%)
Type of institution	K–12	3 (11.5%)
	Higher education	22 (84.6%)
	Government	1 (3.9%)
Location of institution	USA	18 (69.2%)
	International	8 (30.8%)
Role in institution	Doctoral student	
	Teacher (K–12)	
	Faculty (full-time/adjunct)	
	Instructional design related	
	Library related	

TABLE 2
Survey Respondents Who Submitted Case Study Essays ($n = 13$)

Gender	Male	6 (46.2%)
	Female	7 (53.8%)
Age	20s	1 (7.7%)
	30s	3 (23.1%)
	40s	3 (23.1%)
	50s	2 (15.4%)
	60s	2 (15.4%)
	70s	2 (15.4%)
Type of institution	K–12	1 (7.7%)
	Higher education (total)	12 (92.3%)
	Public	7 (53.8%)
	Private	5 (38.5%)
Location of institution	USA	8 (61.5%)
	International	5 (38.5%)
Role in institution	Doctoral student	
	Teacher (high school)	
	Faculty (full-time/adjunct)	
	Instructional design related	
	Library related	

tive of their experience of the pandemic in the form of a research report, a journal log or a personal essay. A description of this smaller sample is presented in Table 2.

Gender and Age

The case study essays were a balance of perspectives from both males (46.2%) and females (53.8%) who submitted as the first author. They also were a good representation across the age groups, from 20's to 70's (see Table 2).

Type and Location of the Institution

It is important to highlight that 12 out of 13 (92.3%) are from individuals who are in various roles at higher education institutions, both public and private institutions. Also, 5 of the 13 are essays submitted by individuals in various roles at institutions abroad.

Role in Institution

In some essays, the focus is on a particular institution or even a particular college. Whereas, in other essays, although the author is from a higher education context, the perspectives shared is a bird's eye view of the educational system in the country or the region and this may encompass both K-12 and higher education.

A FEW COMMON THEMES

The essays poignantly illustrate how different educational institutions, both in K-12 and in higher education located in the United States, as well as around the world had taken steps to continue to function as the unprecedented global pandemic caused by COVID-19 unfolded. Most of the essays cover the period between March to September 2020. Although the impact of this global phenomenon is described as viewed through the lenses of individuals in a variety of roles in various types of

educational institutions, a few common themes and unique challenges that were identified are briefly discussed here.

Slow Response to the Crisis

A number of the essays, from higher education faculty perspective make the observation that their institution seems to be caught off-guard. The "order to move online came slowly with little or no cross-campus consultation". Another essay from a doctoral student perspective makes the observation that the initial response was a sense of general disbelief that COVID-19 which started half way across the world in China could impact a university in the middle of the United States of America!

Top-Down Communication

Many of the essays identify regular communication regarding the impact of the pandemic on the functioning of the institution, the students and faculty, and steps being taken to ensure their safety was very much appreciated. However, the observation was also made that much of this communication was top-down with very little faculty and staff involvement in the decisionmaking process. Similarly in the K-12 setting, teacher and parents appreciated the communication and the transparency regarding the situation that was in flux but were very minimally involved in the decisions being made.

Flexibility and Adaptability

Many of the essays highlight the adjustments that were made to the educational process, the academic calendar, assessments, and how both faculty and students were asked to be flexible and adaptable. For example, there was a 2-week break in the face-to-face teaching process, both in higher education and K-12 institutions to allow faculty and teachers who were teaching face-to-face to transition their teaching materials to an online format and pre-

pare to pivot their teaching to an online format too. Similarly, the attendance policy was relaxed when it was found that students could not get access to the internet or that it was spotty or too slow. Many of the essays describe the process of trial and error as different strategies are put in place, then modified or abandoned when they are found to be ineffective and replaced with others.

Investing in Hardware, Software, and Infrastructure but Lacking Faculty Training and Support

The response in many institutions seemed to be to purchase hardware and software licenses and make infrastructure adjustments to classrooms, lecture halls, and teaching laboratory spaces. Some wrote that inadequate investments were made in training and supporting faculty to teach fully online or in a hybrid or blendflex model. Although, some do highlight the pivotal role of the instructional designers and how in some higher education institutions, this resources was expanded and fully utilized.

A Silver Lining

Some think that a silver lining to this pandemic is that educational institutions, whether in K–12, higher education or in the corporate or government sectors, have all been forced to adopt and engage in online teaching and learning. As a result, it has required instructional technologists to rethink the delivery of education and led to improving perceptions of online education.

Ubiquitous Online Education?

Does it then mean that online education is here to stay?

Looking Ahead

The next question to ask would be, how will institutions use this experience to identify lessons learned? Will this painful experience result in contingency planning to better prepare for the next crisis become an integral part of educational institutions' strategic plans?