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# UNIVERSITY NEWS

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# Enabling Adversity into Opportunity: A Chain of Cross-cultural Expert Inputs for Undergraduate Students during COVID-19 Pandemic Period

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The nationwide lockdown imposed in March 2020 due to COVID-19 pandemic had led schools and colleges to shut down, instructing students to abandon the usual classroom teaching style. This resulted into an unprecedented increase in the usage of innovation and technology by teachers to finish the curriculum. However, in a country like India remote learning was not available in every family. There were unemployed families who couldn't afford fees and were forced to stop their children's education. Considering this factor and different communication modes, the teachers had to rethink designing lesson plans to fit a diverse group of learners.

The pandemic had also a severe impact on higher education as universities closed their premises and countries shut their borders in response to lockdown measures. Although higher education institutions were quick to replace face-to-face lectures with online learning, these closures affected learning, examinations and evaluation. The crisis raised questions about the value offered by university education including content delivery, student networking and social opportunities unlike what goes in a normal classroom and campus atmosphere. The teachers had the compulsion to learn teaching online, either through training by their institutions or by self-learning, by using any of the online interfaces than available, free or paid. Even those not very much techno savvy also learned about different online learning platforms.

While teachers and academicians were

constrained to teach, attend meetings, or train employees in virtual mode; it provided an opportunity for anxious faculty in higher institutions to tap the academic inputs of experts worldwide to engage their students online through various interactive activities, workshops, dialogues, panel discussions, and collaborative student exchange programs. In most occasions, the opportunity was available free of cost. The faculty members in School of Education, Apeejay Styia University were quick to respond to this available opportunity and started to hold almost one virtual event every week. The experts were ready, the students were willing and the events gained momentum starting from September 2020. In order to engage more students in the programmes, the National Service Scheme and the Rotaract Club of the university were tied up for the activities. All the activities were planned keeping in view the requirements of virtual instructional design. The focus was not simply of hearing to experts, ask questions or interact but the willing students in turn were trained in the different roles of being the host, introducing experts, coordinating question and answer sessions, group work during breakout sessions, and proposing vote of thanks. Such involvement of students in different roles would certainly help them in shaping their future career. When the educational institutions started opening their campus around March 2021 and learning started in face to face or hybrid mode, still important events on a limited scale continued to be organized.

During the pandemic period from September, 2020 to June 2021 (part of Fall semester 2020 and full of Spring semester 2021), at least one activity on an average was organized, and the student participation and their learning were amazing. Apart from the in-country experts, the experts from other countries were invited which included Finland, Japan, United Kingdom, West Indies, UNICEF, Singapore, Greece, Canada and Germany.

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