Impact of COVID-19 on higher education institutions of Myanmar

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Abstract

As connectivity throughout the world is increasing, we are to face a lot of risks. The spread of COVID-19 has caused an unprecedented test on education and most students are faced with a lot of challenges. This study aims to investigate the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic in higher institutions in Myanmar. For this purpose, the data were accumulated through a questionnaire responded by 249 participants consisting of 127 university teachers and 122 students. The participants were chosen using the non-probability sampling method. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. This method has also improved the reliability and reduced the biasness. Overall, it was found that there was a very large undesirable impact upon the humankind development especially on education system to continue the routine personal and professional lives. Myanmar universities need to reinvent learning environments so that digitalization expands and complements, but does not replace, student-teacher and student-student relationships.

Keywords: COVID-19, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Myanmar

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has pictured the many privations in our education systems from access to the broadband and computers needed for online education, and the helpful surroundings required to emphasis on learning, up to the misalignment between means and requirements. Putri, Purwanto, Pramono, Asbari, Wijayanti & Hyun (2020) assert in their study that higher education is a critical determinant of the economic future of the nation & higher education sector has significantly distressed by the virus as well. This crisis has touched the whole world and influences the various sector for longer period of time. The medical experts in different nations have not discovered the appropriate way to overwhelm the shock of this drawback.

The cases of COVID-19 are breaking the record every day and rising the problems for the world and raising many questions for businesses, education, agriculture, import-export and supply chain at the local and global level (Casero-Ripolles, 2020). The deficiency of treatment options and the shortage of medical and protective kits are harming the procedure of maintaining stability in economy and other sectors. It is a very difficult time for the educational institutes to commence sessions and parents to drive their kids to universities, college to continue the education and complete the courses (Vladescu, 2016). Social distancing is a serious issue for both educational institutes and parents. Ahmed, Taqi, Farabi, Sarker & Sankaranarayanan (2021) recommend that the pandemic has provided an impetus for change in the education sector; technology-based sustainable education platforms not experienced previously have become essential due to the necessities for community separation.

Technology can help in various educational processes (Hung & Yyen, 2010), it can have a positive impact on supporting learning in students (Dyson et al., 2015), it can support teachers, and aid them in professional advancement and development (Donelan, 2016; Manca & Raineri, 2017). Commencing the educational institutes at that time is a risky affair, especially when the sum of cases is increasing, and the medical department has not confirmed any vaccine or impactful treatment for COVID-19. Duraku & Hoxha (2020) claim that several factors are assumed to affect the value of remote or online learning, teachers' performance, and students' knowledge and skills during the course of shifting learning to a virtual format in educational institutions worldwide.

McKibbin & Fernando (2021) mentioned that managing the education system and implementing changes in the higher education institutions are needed. Education and learning are one of the major needs of societies, and due to this pandemic issue, the teachers and students are facing a tough situation to continue their courses. Meanwhile, researchers such as Lee et al. (2003) have pointed out that protective dealings can recover environmental hygiene to alleviate the transmission of the virulent infection. Toquero (2020) also states that health managing apparatuses can be given to the students so that they can exercise protocols until good hygiene becomes a culture.

Given the unexpectedness of the condition, schoolteachers and governments were spontaneous for this changeover and were enforced to shape substitute distant learning systems almost instantly. Myanmar also implemented inaccessible schooling and cramming with broadcasting video lessons via

government television programs & exploiting virtual expanse education programs. Ministry of Education organized online learning opportunities for teachers to meet remotely and share experiences with online studying throughout the COVID-19 crisis. Myanmar also managed communication operations not only to give the advices for secure and continuous learning, but also to inform educators, governors, learners, and parents under the COVID-19 in the 2020–21 academic year.

1.1. Problem Statement and Sub-problems

The lockdowns in response to COVID-19 have disturbed the traditional universities with nationwide university closures in most countries. While the educational society have made strengths to maintain learning continuity throughout this period, students have had to rely more on their own properties to continue learning remotely through the Internet, television or radio. New pedagogical concepts and modes of supply of teaching were applied for which they may not have been trained. In particular, most students who don't have access to digital knowledge supplies or lack the spirit and commitment to learn on their own, are at hazard of falling behind. Internet or the inadequacy of the technological formats used for students with special educational needs; economic hardship (UNESCO, 2020b).

It was noted that the concerns of teachers engaged in the learning process were related to opportunities to conduct remote/online learning according to their knowledge and skills in using technology, access to technology and isolation at home (UNESCO, 2020a). The negative and positive impact of this pandemic issue were analyzed as it is not only affecting the students but also the teachers and families. Now, the research about issues related to effects of this pandemic on the whole education system and institution will help to improve the understanding of the short- and long-term issues and approaches that could be used for overcome and help in managing the effectiveness for professional learning.

1.2. Objectives

The objectives of the present study were: To analyze the impacts of COVID-19 on the educational system of Myanmar. To identify the challenges and opportunities of higher education institutions due to COVID-19. Research Questions included the following:
  i. How is COVID-19 affecting the educational higher education institutions of Myanmar?
 ii. What are the major challenges that can arise in the educational system and functions of higher education institutions?

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Data collection tool

This study interrelated to the investigation of the influence of COVID-19 on the education system and higher education institutions of Myanmar. The researcher has collected data by using the

questionnaire method to investigate the influence of Covid-19 on the educational system and higher education institutions of Myanmar.

2.2. Sampling method

2.3.   Sampling was done by using the non-probability method as the researcher has chosen the sample of students and teachers from the entire population according to own connivance. For the current research, the researcher has selected a sample of 249 respondents and shared the questionnaire to gain awareness of their opinion for evaluation of the effect of COVID-19 on educational system and institution of Myanmar.

2.4. Data collection procedure

The collection of data for the current research was done by using the primary method as the researcher has applied descriptive design, quantitative type and indicative approach. As indicated before, the questionnaire method via e-mail was applied to collect the data. Now, the collection of data in terms of this approach will be less time consuming as the researcher has shared the questionnaire through email. The researcher has taken prior consent from the respondents for involvement in the research.

2.5. Analysis Technique

It is very important for the researcher to examine the data by using the thematic analysis method as the thematic analysis can expand the reliability and eliminated the biasness in the study. Then, the researcher has done the frequency distribution and analyzed the response of respondents by emerging the graphs and tables.

3.   Results

3.1. Demographic information
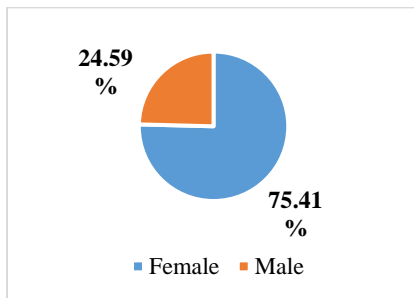
Table 1
Student participants (n=122)

Figure 1. Student participants (n=122)

SN	Respondents	Gender	
		Female	Male
1	Aged between 17-20 years	23	11
2	Aged between 21-30 years	33	10
3	Aged above 31 years	36	9
Total		92(75.41%)	30(24.59%)
		122	
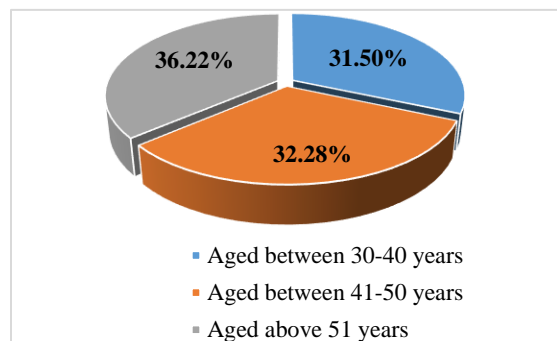
Table 2
Teacher participants (n=127)

SN	Respondents	Gender		Total
		Female	Male	
1	Aged between 30-40 years	30	10	40(31.50%)
2	Aged between 41-50 years	31	10	41(32.28%)
3	Aged above 51 years	34	12	46(36.22)
	Total	95	32	127(100%)
		127		

Figure 2. Teacher participants (n=127)

3.2. Results of the survey

Reopening universities will create crucial profits to schoolchildren and the broader saving. Moreover, reopening universities will create financial profits to persons by encouraging some nurtures to go back to work. Those advantages, conversely, have to be carefully weighed in contradiction of the health threats and the necessity to moderate the charge of the virus. To protect the people, social distancing and isolations are major things, but it is having an important collision on the educational system as physical appearance is required for offering knowledge through classroom activities. The higher education institutions are not allowed to take classes and gathering of the students. This kind of situation is creating issues for the educational system to maintain the flow of courses and activities of studying and sharing the knowledge to students. The low attention of parents for online learning makes it more difficult for the teacher to offer to learn to the students. The technology devices, design of the program, choices of instructors, responsive curriculum, and supportive stakeholders are necessary and significant for the successful delivery of the lessons in an online environment (Barr & Miller, 2013). Moreover, some of the parents are not monetarily strong to set the digital learning system for attending online classes. Lack of devices and internet facilities is also generating problems for posing knowledge and understanding about the course.

Table 3: *Opinions of the teacher and student participants for COVID-19 being a critical issue for humankind*

SN	Themes / Categories	Levels of agreement (%)					Calculation		Interpretation
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	M	SD	
1	COVID-19 has become negative impact on the lifestyle as well as educational social and environmental activities.	0	0	3	6	91	4.88	0.33	A very large impact upon the humankind development

2	COVID-19 has become a critical issue for society in terms of continuing the routine personal as well as professional lives.	0	0	2	5	93	4.91	0.35	A very large impact upon the humankind development
3	COVID-19 is an issue for social distancing and follow-up of protecting measures.	0	0	1	10	89	4.88	0.35	A very large impact upon the humankind development
	Average						4.89	0.37	A very large impact upon the humankind development

Note:

1.00-1.80=No impact upon the humankind development

1.81-2.60=A small impact upon the humankind development

2.61-3.40=A moderate impact upon the humankind development

3.41-4.20=A large impact upon the humankind development

4.21-5.00=A very large impact upon the humankind development

Table 3 reveals opinions of the teacher and student participants for COVID-19 being a critical issue for humankind. The statistics collected from the questionnaire demonstrates that there is a very large impact upon the humankind development (Average Mean=4.89). The pandemic continues posing major challenges for education systems as the mean value for the statement "COVID-19 has become a critical issue for society in terms of continuing the routine personal as well as professional lives" was 4.91. The data shows that important segments of the education system have been severely affected.

Many uncertainties can cause societies' longer-term grand challenges. At university, the international student mobility following travel restrictions declined & it is already reducing the funds available in countries where foreign students pay higher fees.

Table 4:*Opinions of the teacher and student participants for COVID-19 being a major challenge*

SN	Challenges	Responses (%)					Calculation		Interpretation
		I do not know if it was considered	Not considered at all	Considered with low importance	Considered with moderate importance	Considered with high importance	M	SD	
1	Physical distancing measures	0	0	0	12	88	4.88	0.00	Considered with high importance
2	Establishing hygiene protocols	0	0	0	13	87	4.87	0.34	Considered with high importance
3	Revising personnel and attendance policies	6	10	71	7	6	2.97	0.81	Considered with low importance

4	Investing in staff training on appropriate measures to cope with the virus	5	7	55	18	15	3.31	0.98	Considered with low importance
5	Declining in the international student mobility at tertiary level to follow travel restrictions	46	18	22	8	6	2.10	1.24	Not considered at all
	Average						3.63	1.37	Considered with moderate importance

Note:

1.00-1.80= I do not know if it was considered

1.81-2.60= Not considered at all

2.61-3.40= Considered with low importance

3.41-4.20= Considered with moderate importance

4.21-5.00= Considered with high importance

Table 4 demonstrates opinions of the teacher and student participants for COVID-19 being a major challenge. The data revealed that COVID-19 has become a critical issue for society in terms of physical distancing measures (Mean=4.88) followed by establishing hygiene protocols (Mean=4.87). According to analysis, almost all the respondents were agreeing that COVID-19 is having a serious impact on the lifestyle and activities of the people. It is interesting that though declining in the international student mobility at university to follow travel restrictions is not considered at all in Myanmar context, Marinoni, Van't Land & Jensen (2020) found in their study that COVID-19 has had an impact on international student mobility of HEIs.

The educational system has also got affected by the COVID-19 and will have long term impact. Thus, nearly 100% of respondents have considered for the need of changes in education system as COVID-19 has affected badly and having a direct impact on the social life and education actions.

Table 5: *Opinions of the teacher and student participants for the need of changes in education system*

SN	Statement	Responses					Calculation		Interpretation
		No need at all	Low level of need	Moderate level of need	High level of need	Higher level of need	M	SD	
1	Since the educational system has got affected by the COVID-19 and will have long term impact, we need changes in education system.	0	0	3	10	87	4.84	0.32	Higher level of need
2	Higher education institutions should seek to use technology and offer online classes and learning experiences as a substitute for in-class time.	0	0	8	15	77	4.69	0.61	Higher level of need
3	As many universities struggled and lacked the experience and time, they need to consider new ways to deliver instruction and assignments.	0	0	9	16	75	4.66	0.64	Higher level of need

4	With the reopening of higher education institutions for the coming academic year, we should severely compromise the students to deal with the reality of online learning.	0	0	7	13	80	4.73	0.58	Higher level of need
5	Universities need to reinvent learning environments so that digitalization expands and complements, but does not replace, student teacher and student-student relationships.	0	0	0	10	90	4.90	0.30	Higher level of need
	Average						4.76	0.54	Higher level of need

Note:
1.00-1.80= No need at all
1.81-2.60= Low level of need
2.61-3.40= Moderate level of need
3.41-4.20= High level of need
4.21-5.00= Higher level of need

Table 5 expresses opinions of the teacher and student participants for the need of changes in education system. Most of the respondents agreed to implement changes in the education system as they agree with an average mean score 4.76. However, a few respondents were still not wishing to change the existing system of education. During the epidemic, remote learning became a lifeline for education but the chances that digital technologies offer go well beyond a stopgap solution during a crisis. Digital technology offers entirely new answers to the question of what people learn, how they learn, and where and when they learn. Technology can support teachers and students to access specialized materials well beyond textbooks, in multiple formats and in ways that can bridge time and space.

4. Discussion

The worldwide health crisis and the lockdown that shadowed have caused to the fore professions that were taken for granted, restarting our consciousness of their importance to society. The pandemic is also a call to restore the obligation to the Sustainable Development Goals. Ensuring that all young people have the probability to succeed at university and progress the knowledge, skills, mindsets and ethics that will let them to provide to society is at the heart of the global agendas and education's guarantee to our future society. The present crisis has verified our capacity to deal with large-scale disturbances. It is now up to us to build as its legacy a more resilient society.

Our findings have revealed that the lockdown and closure have affected the education system and the negative impact of COVID-19 has been witnessed on education. Application of online tools and technology will be beneficial for the requirements of the schooling arrangement. The virtual sessions and sharing of lecturer notes and data using the online platforms will be effective for maintaining the flow of the education system. The same kinds of findings are revealed in our research where the significance to educational higher education institutions is given highly. In our research findings, high numbers of respondents have shown confidence that such changes in the educational system could be good for the pupils & teachers and long-term positive impacts can be witnessed. Mackare, K., & Jansone, A. (2018) recommended that technology is all around us.

So far, since E-learning is assumed to be the preferred form of learning to improve the service quality of education, it may involve both negative and beneficial outcomes (Choudhury & Pattnaik ,2020). For developing countries and underdeveloped nations will be very difficult to establish such infrastructure in the near future as the economic condition of nations are under pressure. Despite the massive global social effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions must cope with the transition (Ratten & Jones 2020).

The results of the present study show that COVID-19 is having a serious collision on the businesses and other sectors. The research has identified the effect of this pandemic problem of the teaching method and approaches of the higher education institutions for posing the learning through other mediums. The results of the study also illustrate that people are confronting severe concerns related to learning and looking for new methodologies to learning. Many governments responded to the pressing need to provide school children with learning possibilities via online and distance learning (Römer, 2020).

5. Conclusion

The research suggests that the leading authorities should redirect the significance of the concerns and take the remedial measure for prosperous the condition that will help to stabilize the things and support in supplementing the living practice. The absence of practical understanding of students and teacher is also a big contest for the system to offer training and assistance. The proper claim of strategies for societal separation and decontaminating will also rise the effective expense of the higher education institutions. Moreover, the sudden shift to cyber studying may be problematic for the countries and educational authorities due to lack of infrastructure and arrangement for the format that suits the new approach. It becomes difficult for the educational higher education institutions to preserving the operational cost and retains the students.

It can be said that approaches of higher education institutions need changes for the advancement of the educational system. It is recommended to the higher education institutions to adopt the technology and engage the students in learning to maintain continuity in learning. By offering the training to the staff members and collecting the feedback from the parents related to the online system will be useful for the educational institution to overcome the issues related to take classes and engage the students in learning.

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