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# Guest editorial: Hybrid, blended and mixed-mode learning quality: more lessons learned in the COVID pandemic and beyond

Guest editorial

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Education journal editors have the privilege to support the scholarly endeavors of people involved in one of the most important components of society. This responsibility becomes more imperative during times of crisis. Educators and institutions were confronted with emergency duties to plan, modify, organize and continue the delivery of learning programs during the COVID-19 pandemic that effected every country around the world. The strategies, methods, changes and outcomes are still being researched and analyzed. The mission and scope of *Quality Assurance in Education* is ideally suited to provide a forum for scholars to examine and document findings that happened in the field of education throughout this historic era.

In the classic book *The Uses of the University*, Clark Kerr writes that universities are viewed as stable or unchanging institutions yet have always responded (and more quickly in recent times) to the demands of external forces in society (Kerr, 1963). We would add that precollegiate levels of education respond as well and in a similarly direct and timely manner. Whereas teachers educate pupils that learning is an ongoing and never-ending process, teachers may be perceived by others that they know how to teach everything in any given situation without any further training. This attitude could restrict teachers and educators from admitting when they need any type of help in their teaching methods. Therefore, educational institutions should create organizational environments that enable faculty members, who are the people most directly involved, with structure and support to dynamism. There should also be a sense of stability so that there is no fear of internal distraction from work at hand, a sense of security from external disruption, a sense of community so as not to be concerned that their work will be disrupted and a sense of equity that others are not be treated better. Innovation in educational endeavors, such as the types examined in this special issue, should largely be left to individual education professionals with the protection and support from the surrounding structure of the institution. Further, leaders should exert themselves in encouraging, supporting and rewarding successful new policies and instructional methods, as well as defending changes that are made during times of crisis to allow sufficient time to conduct scholarly research that examines the impact and results of efforts that were made.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we announced a call for scholarship about this important topic in a special issue entitled *Quality Assurance in an Era of Sudden Online Education*. The issue was published in late 2021 and contained 14 papers that examined how different educational institutions, leaders and educators were handling the crucial task of shifting to online education. The special issue provided an opportunity to consider the varied approaches and perspectives from around the world to help inform practitioners, policymakers and researchers as the pandemic was underway.

Based on the interest and success of that special issue, we decided to call for more research in this follow-up special issue, *Hybrid, Blended, and Mixed-Mode Learning Quality: More Lessons Learned in the COVID Pandemic and Beyond*. In addition to research about



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the shift to online learning during the pandemic, this special issue asked for further examination of hybrid or blended mixed-mode in education. This area has received additional emphasis in this era of remote learning, and there are relatively few scholarly research outlets devoted exclusively to this timely topic for researchers aside from special issues of journals, occasional book chapters, or possible placement in general online or education journals (Allen and Seaman, 2007; Arbaugh, 2014; Arbaugh *et al.*, 2010; Arbaugh and Hwang, 2013; Savara and Parahoo, 2018). Therefore, this Special Issue is an important collection of scholarship that examines how educators are using a range of flexible learning formats due to the environmental circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. We received many submitted manuscripts that resulted in 13 papers successfully completed the peer-review process.

Several topical themes emerged from the collection of articles in this special issue. The subjects include challenges faced in the rapid change to online learning are presented in *Tryst with the Unknown: Navigating an Unplanned Transition to Online Examinations* and *How Do Students Deal with Forced Digitalisation in Teaching and Learning? Implications for Quality Assurance*. Key findings about resultant student learning during the COVID crisis are examined in *A Look at Student Performance During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, *Identifying Factors That Impact Online Teaching Effectiveness During COVID-19*, *Learning During (or Despite) COVID-19: Business Students' Perceptions of Online Learning* and *Investigating the Teaching Practicum During COVID-19 Through the Lens of Preservice Teachers*.

Blended or hybrid learning is a relatively recent teaching method that has worked its way into the education vocabulary and now into educational scholarship. The effectiveness of this teaching approach is examined in *Implementation of a Blended Learning Course for Adult Learners During the COVID-19 Pandemic* and *Efficacy of Blended Interactive Educational Resources in Improving Writing Skills in a Hybrid Learning Environment*. A comparison to other methods is studied in *Exploring Factors Impacting Students' Motivation to Learn Using Face-to-Face, Online, and Hybrid Learning*.

Importantly, specific aspects of online teaching and mixed-mode learning assessment is investigated in *Assuring Online Assessment Quality: The Case of Unproctored Online Assessment* and *Assessment of Student Readiness for Clinical Education in a Mixed-Mode Curriculum Delivery: A Case Study*. Finally, social behavioral aspects of online academic performance are researched in *The Relationship Between Student Motivation and Academic Performance: The Mediating Role of Online Learning Behavior* and *The Relationship Between Social Media Based Teaching and Academic Performance During Covid-19*.

The lessons learned during and after the pandemic are ongoing and causing educational researchers to deeply examine nearly all aspects of ensuring quality learning assurance. A few of the main takeaways from this second Special Issue about education during COVID and hybrid/blended learning are that proper institutional support, technology and communication are important for success as well as addressing different cultural, social and economic needs of student learners. Furthermore, student incentivization, remote assessment methods, social media options and extrinsic motivation should be considered in serving educational design and delivery. Setting and delivering hybrid/blended, mixed-mode and fully online courses offer tremendous opportunities of institutions and faculty to succeed in delivering educational quality, and the ongoing research studies already completed by peer faculty/teacher-scholars should be examined by everyone involved.

This Journal has provided scholarship about assuring quality in education for over 30 years, and this special issue delivers an assortment of timely research studies that will provide educators at all levels in different roles an opportunity to read more about successes,

challenges and lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. The lessons will undoubtedly continue being discussed for many years, and this special issue captures perspectives during an important moment in time when experiences are fresh in the minds of those who experienced crises, and the data is recent. It is often stated that learning should never stop, and research articles about the topics will certainly continue. Nevertheless, the editors of this Journal believe the authors included here have deepened the understanding of what happened in education during and soon after COVID-19, and we are grateful for their thoughtful, thorough, and expert work.

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