

Remote Learning during a Pandemic: A Retrospect and Prospect

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Abstract

Both educators and students in schools across the globe have faced unprecedented and sweeping changes to teaching and learning due to the 2019 coronavirus disease pandemic (COVID-19). This paper focuses on the case of remote learning in BNU-HKBU United International College (UIC) during the spring semester 2019/2020. Based on two surveys conducted respectively at the beginning and the end of the semester on students' experiences with online learning, this paper explores and summarizes students' retrospective views on several aspects of remote learning, including technical difficulties, potential challenges and drawbacks of online courses across different provinces in Mainland China. In doing so, this paper aims to depict the paradigm of how students adjusted their study habits for independent learning during the coronavirus lockdown.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, remote learning, independent learning, online learning

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A Look Back: Remote Learning through a Pandemic

Since late January 2020, both educators and students in schools across Mainland China have faced sweeping and unprecedented changes to teaching and learning due to the sudden outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19). To better combat the coronavirus pandemic, the central government immediately imposed a pandemic lockdown in Wuhan and other cities in Hubei right after all domestic transportation such as buses, trains, airplanes, and ferries were suspended. When we saw the disease that could close public facilities and institutions spreading across the nation, we realized that our daily activities and life on campus would be severely affected and it would be vital to find new ways of delivering education to our students during these times of disruption. In response to the public health crisis and widespread disruption, the emergency shift to remote teaching for the upcoming spring semester was justified as an exceptional measure among Chinese universities in Mainland China.

Like many other teaching faculties in BNU-HKBU United International College (UIC), I have been suddenly thrown into the world of remote teaching without preparation since early February. As

someone whose work centers on teaching, I knew that it was not the time to wait and see what resources or training will be recommended for both educators and students. To better engage students to obtain critical information that I needed to help continue to educate my students, initial online surveys via the iSpace/Moodle platform were conducted for all three of my undergraduate courses, i.e., History of Traditional Southeast Asia, China in Western Perspectives, and Migration in World History, after I provided preliminary training classes remotely to the students.

Questionnaires were distributed at the end of Week Zero (February 9 to 13, 2020), during which UIC teaching faculties and students were to acquire vital skills to facilitate remote teaching and learning. The following four issues were examined in this initial questionnaire:

- (a) Students were asked to specify their current location.
- (b) Students were asked to describe his/her impression or experience in general about remote teaching or online courses in China.
- (c) Students were asked if they have encountered any problems with the online environment, such as weak internet connectivity, uploading problem, the time lag in the live broadcast, access to our school's IT