Editorial

Editorial Introduction to the Special Issue "Online and Distance Learning during Lockdown Times: COVID-19 Stories–Series 1"

Palitha Edirisingha

School of Education, University of Leicester, Leicester LE1 7RH, UK; pe27@le.ac.uk

The rapid spread of COVID-19 in early 2020 has changed many aspects of life including that of education all over the world. On 11 March 2020, The World Health Organisation declared that COVID-19 has become a pandemic. Infection rates were beginning to rise, and many countries began to introduce various public health measures. When these were not adequate to control the spread of COVID-19, governments began to introduce ever more severe measures including locking down all areas of social and economic activities. Physical buildings and spaces in schools, colleges, and universities were closed (with some exceptions). Teachers and school leaders had several days or even hours of notice of preparation to move their teaching online. These unprecedented events provided a useful context for researchers, practitioners, and policy makers to examine how teachers, students and parents have responded to a world-wide public health emergency and overcame barriers to education. This volume brings together the empirical evidence from a diverse range of countries across the world on the use of online, remote, and blended teaching and learning methods in all levels of educational contexts during these unprecedented times.

The empirical evidence of learning during lockdown times reported in this volume spans from March 2020 (the start of the first lockdowns in many countries) to about March 2021. These 12 months represent different waves of lockdowns in our authors' national contexts and how teaching and learning have had to adopt to the challenging conditions imposed on them and their students during these difficult times. Papers in the volume report the perspectives of teachers, students, school leaders, parents, and other stake holders and their involvement in lockdown teaching, learning and caring experience during the different waves of lockdowns in their own national contexts.

The research projects reported in the papers in this volume represent the full range of educational settings: early childhood, primary, secondary, and vocational schools; higher education and teacher training institutions; and learners in special educational needs programmes. Some of the papers in the volume report aspects of teaching and learning experience in low-resource settings, too. Authors have drawn from a range of research methodologies and methods in their research including case studies, experiments, systematic literature reviews, interviews, questionnaires, observations of online classes, analysis of artefacts developed by teachers in planning and delivering classes, content and activities in virtual learning environments, and messages in social media.

Contributions to this collection of papers have explored how remote teaching and learning methods have helped teachers, educational leaders, and policy makers to develop innovative ways of delivering lessons, managing educational institutions; how students engaged with learning and study activities; and how parents have supported their children's learning during the pandemic. The authors have reflected on how educational institutions might need to rethink their teaching and learning provision as we learn to live with health and other emergencies, such as COVID-19. The knowledge that we can gain from exploring the developments of teaching and learning approaches in many countries and educational contexts in response to the pandemic would be useful for all stake holders in education to reconsider the future of education, to meet the challenges in the months, and possibly, years to come.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.