How to make the switch to online teaching more effective

CHINA

Huili Han 21 March 2020

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As a result of the new coronavirus epidemic most universities in China have encouraged their professors to apply online teaching instead of in-class teaching and this is likely to continue for the indefinite future. Some professors and students have complained about problems with online teaching and lack confidence in its effectiveness, but many are still new to the whole online experience. Here are some of the problems and some potential solutions.

Network overload

The network is too busy and network quality is not good enough. Some universities require professors to follow their normal schedule. Yet the reality is that thousands, and sometimes even tens of thousands of students, will be on the same platform at the same time, which massively challenges the network.

One way of dealing with this is to encourage professors to upload their teaching resource beforehand and guide students to learn at their own pace and time. The professors only organise discussions and Q&As according to their normal schedule.

Training of faculty

Many professors do not have the same experience of online instruction as they have of in-class teaching. To address this requires student-centred education. A top-down approach is the worst way to teach.

Teaching should not be based on what knowledge the professors can impart, but instead on what students need. Professors should instead let students express their opinions, reflect, act and cultivate their professional skills. Setting a good example for students, addressing

their common problems and promoting creative ideas and unique solutions are good strategies.

Student engagement

The students' commitment to learning is not as high and the professors do not know whether they are taking studying seriously.

However, professors could use a test to evaluate students' learning and their online participation process could be counted as part of their final exam results in order to motivate students to participate. The final exam should be used as a way to test the effectiveness of daily online teaching.

Learning collaboration

Sometimes communication between students is not effective. However, if universities can design collaborative learning content or homework assignments this can be addressed.

The professors could instruct students to form study groups according to their hobbies and cooperate to complete group assignments. This will increase communication between students, stimulate students' enthusiasm for learning, promote an autonomous learning atmosphere and enhance the breadth and depth of students' thinking.

Too much choice

Some students find it difficult to choose between too many resources, but professors could screen teaching resources and recommend some to students for autonomous study. The resources should be a combination of entertainment and academic material. A moderate amount of learning material is required. Providing too many materials will put too much pressure on students.

Isolation of professors

Professors themselves encounter many new problems and some of them feel isolated and helpless. One solution is to provide a platform for tutoring professors.

Universities should extend physical teaching and research activities to the online network, conduct teaching seminars online, jointly solve new problems that may arise in the teaching process, allow professors to have a chance to learn effective solutions from each other and ensure professors do not feel alone. Doing that would be a tangible demonstration of the collective wisdom of the professors' team.

A learning exercise

Professors are taking double, even triple workloads to try to adapt to online teaching as a new platform for delivery of teaching content and to prevent their students from wasting their time during this period of being stuck at home. It is a huge challenge for schools and professors. They may have made some mistakes at the beginning of this crisis, but they are now trying to battle against the coronavirus in their own way, at home.

This unexpected disease is a challenge for China right now, but also a massive opportunity. Some old industries may decline or even disappear because of coronavirus. That may include, for example, in-class teaching, at least for a while. By the same token, some new industries may grow or even be set up as a result of this disease. The way online teaching is quickly responding is a case in point.

According to the current feedback from professors and students, it is impossible for online teaching to completely replace in-class teaching. However, the proportion of online teaching in future education is bound to increase and its importance will also increase.

The experience of Chinese people working to defeat this unpredictable disease, including through online teaching, will become an important experience not only for China itself but potentially for many others around the world.

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