The Analysis of the Lived Experiences of Farhangian University Instructors on Virtual Education Classes During the Covid Time

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Abstract

The current research was conducted with the aim of analyzing the lived experiences of Farhangian University instructors on virtual education classes during the Covid time using a qualitative approach and phenomenological method. The participants of this research were faculty members teaching in ten regions of Farhangian University across the country, and they were closely involved in virtual education. The selection of the research sample was done using a "purposive" approach and the method of selecting "key" experts and using saturation criteria and in-depth interviews with 17 people. The obtained data were analyzed using thematic coding method and the findings were organized in the form of open, central and selective codes. From the total findings of this research, 102 open coding, 23 central coding and 6 selective coding were categorized in the context of Farhangian University instructors' lived experience of virtual education classes in the Corona situation. In general, the results of the research showed that based on the lived experiences of the instructors of virtual education classes during the Covid time, there were challenges in the components of the level of competence and technical skill of the instructors, the way of presenting the content, the management of the class, the way of evaluation and the emotional interactions between instructor and students. Some of these challenges and obstacles were related to the Farhangian University, some were related to instructors and some were related to students. In general, it can be concluded that holding virtual education classes in the Corona time in Farhangian University was faced with such challenges as poor class management, seriousness and lack of real evaluation, lack of student participation, weak social interactions and weak infrastructure. In addition, the opportunities of holding virtual education classes can reduce stress, flexibility of time and place, saving time and money, more familiarity with technology and flexibility and dynamism in holding classes.

Keywords: Lived experience, instructors, Farhangian University, virtual education, Corona.

Introduction

Iranian universities faced difficult conditions in the second semester of the academic year (1399-1400) due to the coronavirus pandemic and the spread of COVID-19, which led to the declaration of a state of emergency in the country. With the corona outbreak, all universities were forced to operate remotely, but in the pre-corona era, only a limited number of higher education centers were offering a combined form of education (virtual/face-to-face) based on their mission and desired goals. However, during the corona time, all universities were forced to switch to virtual education.

   Despite the numerous scientific efforts that have been made in the field of virtual education in general (Habibi, 2020; Montazer, 2019; Yilmaz, 2017; Yu, 2018; Azizi, Mohammadi Belbanabad, and Bagheri, 2021), and particularly during the corona era (PoorSharifi, 2020; Bagheri, 2020), the gap caused by weaknesses in empowering professors, providing content to students, managing the virtual class, evaluation methods, emotional interactions, and inadequate infrastructure has not been fully addressed yet.

   The lived experiences of Farhangian University professors during virtual education classes in the corona conditions differed from their experiences in face-to-face classes. These professors had never encountered such circumstances before, and their abilities and technical skills in using programs and software, content

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creation, class management, evaluation, and even social and emotional interactions were different from what they were used to in face-to-face classes. Consequently, it became essential to document and compile the professors' lived experiences during the corona time to identify the existing and potential limitations and challenges. The objective was also to propose solutions that would assist the university authorities in rectifying the current situation and progressing towards a more feasible and desirable educational environment. With this perspective in mind, the present research was conducted to analyze the lived experiences of Farhangian University professors during virtual education classes amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Methodology
The current research employed a qualitative approach, specifically a phenomenological design. The study participants consisted of faculty members teaching in ten regions of Farhangian University across the country, namely Tehran, Gilan, Zanjan, Qom, Kurdistan, Yazd, Fars, Hormozgan, Razavi Khorasan, and Bushehr, during the academic year 2019-2020. The selection of participants was carried out using a "targeted" approach, with input from a panel of experts. Furthermore, the researchers used the saturation criteria to conduct in-depth interviews, which involved interviewing 17 individuals. To ensure the accuracy and acceptability of the data and to verify the findings, the interview transcripts and research report were reviewed by professors familiar with the field and expert specialists. Additionally, the participants were involved in constructing the interview questions since the questions required specificity. The data collection method utilized in this research was semi-structured interviews. To measure the reliability of the main concepts and categories, the researchers employed the method of coefficient of agreement, which resulted in a coefficient of agreement of 0.94.

Findings
The analysis of qualitative data regarding the level of competence and the process of empowering professors in content production revealed that during the corona time, professors encountered several problems. These included a lack of sufficient training courses, workshops, and webinars, inadequate knowledge, expertise, and technological skills, scarcity of virtual training conditions and resources, shortcomings in the information technology infrastructure for content production, and insufficient training for professors in content production. Based on the analysis results, it can be inferred that professors need to enhance their knowledge in content production. Additionally, their level of ability and technical skills in using programs and software is not satisfactory, and there is a need for them to update their technical skills.

Analyzing the qualitative data on providing content to students in virtual education classes showed that professors relied on methods such as reverse learning, changing teaching strategies, and adopting flexibility and dynamism in holding classes. However, delving into the lived experiences of professors in the way of presenting content to students revealed that a major issue and problem lied in the weakness of teaching strategies. Presenting content to students in virtual education classes during the corona situation was affected by the prevailing traditional paradigm in teaching and the utilization of conventional strategies, leading to significant challenges in achieving emotional and psycho-motor goals.

The qualitative data analysis regarding how professors manage virtual education classes revealed that based on the lived experiences of the professors, they encountered several problems in classroom management. These problems included not having a suitable lesson plan, weakness in choosing appropriate learning tools, failure to determine effective and flexible rules, lack of class engagement and poor interaction, and insufficient attention to time management. Delving into the lived experiences of professors in classroom management during virtual education in the corona time highlighted that the weakness of classroom management is a major issue that needs to be addressed.

Analyzing the qualitative data about the way professors evaluate in virtual education classes showed that, according to the lived experiences of professors, evaluation in virtual education during the corona conditions faced certain issues. These problems included the lack of seriousness and realism in evaluation, the difficulty of accurately measuring learning outcomes, the absence of task-oriented evaluation, and

inadequate focus on process evaluation. Delving into the lived experiences of professors in evaluation during virtual education in the corona time emphasized that a significant problem is the lack of seriousness and realism in the evaluation process.

Based on the lived experiences of the professors, emotional interactions during virtual education in the corona time were found to be limited to greetings, using multimedia elements such as clips and images during teaching, engaging in two-way and multi-person conversations, listening to issues and problems raised by students, and communicating through social networks like WhatsApp, ETA, Telegram, etc. Therefore, delving into the lived experience of professors in virtual education during the corona situation reveals that emotional interactions primarily take place in a non-verbal manner

According to the professors' lived experiences, they expressed positive aspects of virtual education, such as stress reduction, flexibility of time and place, and saving time and money. However, they also mentioned negative experiences, including the weakness of social interactions and the inactivity of students and professors. Therefore, delving into the lived experience of professors in virtual education during the corona situation indicates that inactivity is the main problem affecting the overall experience.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that holding virtual education classes in Farhangian University during the corona time presented various challenges. These challenges include poor class management, a lack of seriousness and realism in evaluation, students' inactivity, weak social interactions, and issues related to the infrastructure, such as internet speed and system problems. On the other hand, the opportunities of virtual education classes include stress reduction, flexibility in terms of time and location, cost and time-saving benefits, increased familiarity with technology, and the potential for flexibility and dynamism in conducting classes.

Overall, the research findings indicate that based on the lived experiences of the professors, virtual education faces challenges in several aspects, including enhancing the knowledge of professors, effectively delivering content, managing virtual classrooms, evaluating student performance, and fostering emotional interactions. These challenges and obstacles can be related to the level of educational institutions, as well as factors associated with professors and students.

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