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Editorial

The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Digital Competence of Educators

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is having an undeniable impact on all aspects of society. Regarding teaching and learning activities, most educational institutions suspended in-person instruction and moved to remote emergency teaching during the lockdown of March and April 2020. Although many countries progressively re-opened their educational systems, online and hybrid education became a common practice aimed at reducing the spread of the COVID-19 disease. This disruption has caused an unprecedented acceleration in the digitalization of teaching and learning. Teaching professionals have been forced to develop their digital competence quickly, achieving mastery in the management of information, creation of audiovisual content, and use of technology to keep their students engaged. This Special Issue (SI) presents contributions regarding adopting distance learning strategies, experiences, or lessons learned in this domain.

2. The Present Issue

A total of 15 papers are presented in this SI. Birsa et al. [1] conducted a qualitative case study by interviewing teachers from Slovene primary schools focusing on implementing cross-curricular connections in music and visual arts content during emergency remote teaching. Pilotti et al. [2] proposed machine learning algorithms to predict students' final grades based on early performance. Wijaya and Weinhandl [3] presented a study to explain and predict the factors influencing students' continuous intention to use micro-lectures to learn mathematics after the pandemic based on the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT-2). Woltran et al. [4] studied Christensen and Knezek's theoretical Will–Skill–Tool model to examine various factors that influenced teachers' use of digital technologies during remote emergency education due to the materialization of COVID-19 in the spring of 2020. Alghizzi and Elyas [5] conducted a study to analyze the effect of learning environments (blended and online) on the reading comprehension in English of Saudi undergraduates during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sucuoğlu and Andrew [6] presented a paper investigating the impact of adopting e-learning to fix the dilapidated Nigerian educational structure. Almaiah et al. [7] proposed an article examining the most critical drivers influencing the adoption of smart mobile learning (M-learning) using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Sederevičiūtė-Pačiauskienė et al. [8] studied how students perceived the quality studies related to the use of video cameras during synchronous remote learning. Pérez-Sanagustín et al. [9] evaluated the PROF-XXI framework, which proposes a holistic set of competencies that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can take as a reference to develop the actions and strategies of their Teaching and Learning Centers (TLCs). Oraif and Elyas [10] investigated the learners' acceptance of breakout

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groups on the Learning Management System (LMS) Blackboard in a second language (L2) English learners. Antón-Sancho et al. [11] analyzed the degree of acquisition of soft skills in Latin American university teachers using hybrid educational models. Limone et al. [12] illustrated the experimentation conducted in the initial training of teachers to observe the processes of negotiating content, making decisions, and group building through the use of Digital storytelling (DST) in an educational context. Wu et al. [13] proposed a method combined with the parsing trees of program codes and the fuzzy membership function to detect plagiarism in an online, blended programming course during the COVID-19 pandemic. Al Mulhem and Almaiah [14] presented an experimental design to examine the role of scaffolding learning strategy in students' use of mobile educational games. Estriegana et al. [15] presented an empirical study of an online learning environment using a set of web-based resources (such as virtual laboratories, interactive activities, or educational videos) that examined the influence of the combination of such resources with active and collaborative learning.

3. Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic initiated a sudden and profound digital transformation. By April 2020, around half of the world's population was under lockdown. This situation forced society to take an extraordinary digital leap. In the high education space, about 186 countries worldwide closed their institutions due to this lockdown, switching from on-site teaching to remote emergency teaching using online resources. But as happened before, a crisis also means an opportunity. This way, educators and students were forced to develop their digital competence quickly. Nowadays, online and hybrid education is still essential in the post-COVID world, and this digital transformation has changed the education landscape forever.

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