

## Message from the Editor-in-Chief

Dr Ingrid Harrington

To cite this article: Dr Ingrid Harrington. (2022). Message from the Editor-in-Chief. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 11(5), p0-1. <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v11n5p0>

doi:10.5430/ijhe.v11n5p0

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v11n5p0>

We continue to be confronted by ongoing global challenges that require educators and students to conform to learning that requires greater patience, application, flexibility, and a willingness to learn differently. It would appear that no corner of the globe is exempt from the implications to their daily life of the actions and relationships between countries. Years on, the full ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic are still evident in the practices and policies of tertiary educators, as evidenced by the many articles that continue to discuss their experiences. What has remained a constant for higher education educators is their duty to ensure that they provide opportunities for their students to develop and experience a sense of belonging, community, and 'place' in the virtual classroom. Another challenge is ensuring that the design of educational offerings taps into and nurtures the development of student learning styles and approaches to learning, that can lead to a successful, meaningful, productive and enjoyable student learning experience.

The IJHE is proud to provide an avenue for researchers to share their findings to enhance the overall student experience. We are proud to present this issue with 16 contributions from Thailand, South Africa, Israel, Australia, Malaysia, Canada, the USA, Switzerland, Oman, Korea and China. This issue has a strong focus on improving the academic delivery and access of information to students in higher education. Research on information and communication technology deficits and innovations, assessment techniques, balancing home, study and employment, and leadership, will provide interesting and informative reading for all.

The first article by Wongchantra and colleagues launches into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the stress levels of undergraduate students with different genders and year levels. They found that female students' stress levels were higher than male students, and that there were no marked difference in stress due to year levels. The second article by Ramaila and Molwele explores the role of technology integration in the development of 21st century skills and competencies in Life Sciences teaching and learning, from five South African suburban schools. Their findings revealed that the integration of technology was perceived to promote the acquisition of 21st century skills and competencies in Life Sciences teaching and learning, specifically, facilitating the development of skills such as communication, critical thinking, collaboration, problem solving and computational thinking. In addition, technology integration was largely perceived to create an exciting teaching and learning environment, which fosters the enhancement of academic achievement and motivation of learners. The third article by Rotnitsky et al., used a case study approach to examine school-based educator habits of using tools for distance learning. They investigated if the choice of tools differed between teachers at different age groups; examined teachers' attitudes to distance learning assessment tools; and considered teachers' recommendations for the use of specific tools for different subjects and age groups. Their findings were extensive finding that middle and high school teachers required immediate help and more support during online learning, and was their preference to continue teaching via distance learning even when face-to-face teaching was possible. Whilst teachers that teach humanities subjects reported that students were actively participating in online learning processes, those that taught science and mathematics subjects found that most students did not take an active part during the lesson. All teachers reported that it was more difficult to follow students' progress during distance learning. Ways forward to promote student engagement required a review of current assessment methods. Research by Carscadden and Martin explored an essential skill for STEM undergraduates which is the ability to understand the world by manipulating, visualizing, and analyzing data to make or evaluate claims. They investigate two common R syntax environments: base R or tidyverse, and consider which is best for teaching novice R users. Their findings report that prior experience had the largest estimated effect, followed by syntax environment, whilst sex had the smallest effect. Pedagogical approaches that ensure students have repeated opportunities for practice and that implement techniques to overcome student frustration and anxiety, were also more important than the syntax environment when learning coding in biology classes. The next article by Donald Ipperciel investigated the possible and desirable future of technology-enhanced teaching and learning in higher education. He suggests we embrace technology as it brings us closer to realizing the pedagogical ideals of educability, personalization, and active, experiential learning. His research examines how these principles prove helpful in prioritizing the technologies worthy of being adopted, and how technology can contribute in a meaningful way on all three fronts. The sixth article by Singh and colleagues considered which elements of a course could be modified to reduce or eliminate bimodality in grade distributions. Bimodality is indicated by a gap in student learning, where the highest quartile of students is skilful in the subject matter, but the lowest quartile fails to retain course material that demonstrates a good level of understanding. They explore an approach to detect bimodality, explore the causes, and provide potential solutions that could be applied to any course.

Research by Villalobos and Walsh's research investigated the rise of Veteran student populations across the U.S.A, due to benefits from the revised Post 9/11 Government Issue (G.I.). They examine how one veteran student cohort program provided support for veterans transitioning to their new student identity, and their retention and degree completion at one large California State University. Their findings report that as veterans begin transition into a new college student identity, their pre-existing identities compete in the reprioritizing process. They also concluded that students partaking in a veteran cohort program transitioned better into the broader campus community with a variety of supports. The eighth article by Beauchamp and Monk explored the effect of

optional assessments designed to promote engagement in a fourth-year asynchronous online nutritional science course. Seven optional engagement assessments were assigned, and students' stress levels, learning approach, and perceptions of online learning were assessed via surveys at the start and end of the semester. Collectively, their data demonstrated that optional engagement assessments can improve student perceptions of online learning, however, these outcomes are related to students' use of surface versus deep learning approaches. The next article by Dugerdil et.al. explored the importance and impact of global university ranking systems in the medical and health sciences. International university ranking systems are an increasingly used tool to assess the excellence of universities, and assist students and researchers to choose an institution. The research comprised a scoping review using Web of Science and Google Scholar to search for scientific literature written in English, published between January 2019 and March 2022. Specifically, the research aimed to understand to what extent international university ranking systems are adapted to the disciplines of medical and health sciences. Their findings from the scoping review highlighted the absence of a specific international university ranking system designed for the disciplines of medical and health sciences. Future researchers could investigate how to develop discipline-specific indicators and promote a university ranking system dedicated to these disciplines. Hubais and Muftahu's study scrutinised the impact of the internationalization of curriculum (IoC) in Arab countries, including the Omani higher education context. As the key definition and conceptual frameworks of the IoC have not been adopted in Omani higher education institutions, their qualitative study examined lecturers' understanding of the IoC in the Omani higher education context. Their findings reported that there were fragmented IoC practices that were primarily based on the ad hoc practices of academic staff, and as such, initiatives should be taken to develop a shared understanding of IoC at the institutional level in all degree programs in the Omani higher education context.

The eleventh article by Tonos-Barlucea explored a co-curricular program called the Knights of Distinction, that encourages undergraduate students to plan, connect, and reflect in the pursuit of their academic and professional goals. Its purpose is to help students make connections between theory and practice, and recognise that they possess valuable skills such as problem-solving, teamwork, time-management, and communication that employers and graduate schools value. Their findings report that students positively articulate the benefits of the program as they advance in their professional careers. The twelfth article is from Kaninjing, Dickey and Ouma who applied the Communication Privacy Management theory as a framework to examine health and cancer communication among college students and their families. It is essential that college students are knowledgeable about their family health history to make informed decisions about health behaviours and cancer screening. Their findings discussed how demographic, socioeconomic, and sociocultural factors may influence college students' level of knowledge about their family health history, and communication within their family about general health and cancer risks. The next project by Shteigman and colleagues explored how "field experience" programs generated a meaningful bridge between the "theoretical" academic world, and the "real" labour market. Their findings highlighted the academic supervisor's importance in establishing the quality of the program, and consequently improving students' perceptions of its contribution to their integration in the employment market. Additionally, an innovative mediating effect of the guidance provided by the organizational mentor was found, one that generated an association between the quality of the program and its contribution to integration in the employment market. The next paper is from Li, Ouyand and Xu who discuss the merits of the Situational Simulation Teaching (SST) method, in addressing the deficiencies in pre-service chemistry teacher's teaching and management abilities, and communication skills. The results show that SST method can improve pre-service teacher's learning quality and cultivate their comprehensive abilities and professional skills. The fifteenth paper is from Hyein Kim who explored the experiences of peer tutors of a Korean language peer tutoring program at a U.S. university. The findings outlined the reasons people sought to become peer tutors, how peer tutors addressed learners' needs, the importance of empathy in peer tutoring, and benefits of peer tutoring. They concluded that peer tutoring can be a useful tool for enhancing the effectiveness of Korean language education at universities, especially as the numbers of Korean language learners increase. The final paper in this edition is from Jansen and colleagues who investigated the motives, expectations and preparedness of first-year accounting students enrolled in an accounting degree at the University Of the Western Cape (UWC). The study contributes to understanding the first-year experience of students studying at a historically disadvantaged institution in South Africa. The authors conclude that educators should acknowledge the importance of and incorporate initiatives to develop the interpersonal skills in the training of accounting graduates.

I am certain that this edition has something for everyone to enjoy and learn from. As always, I would like to thank all contributors and reviewers who continue to make the timely publication of the current issue possible. I look forward to receiving more contributions from researchers and practitioners for our future issues. Wishing all readers all the very best with their research studies.

Warm regards,

Dr Ingrid Harrington

Senior Lecturer, Classroom Behaviour Management

Coordinator, Commencing Student Success Program

School of Education, Faculty of Humanities, Arts, Social Sciences, Education (HASSE)

University of New England, Australia

& Editor-in-Chief, International Journal of Higher Education

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1898-4795>