Khalique, A and Bury, A

 Moving on from Covid-19: Lessons from the maritime teaching experience

http://researchonline.ljmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/25232/

Article

For more information please contact researchonline@ljmu.ac.uk

Moving on from Covid-19

Lessons from the maritime teaching experience

Abdul Khalique
Alan Bury MNI

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, online teaching was perceived by many as simply a useful method for providing access to learning resources. However, with the arrival of the pandemic, approaches to teaching that were previously used only in support of face-to-face sessions came to the fore. Terms such as online, blended, digital, synchronous, and asynchronous learning came to be widely used amongst both teaching staff and students.

Synchronous and asynchronous learning

Whereas online, blended, and digital learning are terms that will be familiar to many readers, perhaps a little more in the way of an explanation is required on what synchronous and asynchronous learning are. Synchronous learning involves using online video conferencing tools to provide a real time interaction opportunity between lectures and students. This approach is typically pursued through a series of scheduled lessons in which both students and lecturers are present for the entire lesson. Asynchronous learning on the other hand does not provide an opportunity for real-time interaction. The material to be learned is simply made available to students through an online virtual learning environment. Learners access the content via the internet at their own convenience. Both synchronous and asynchronous learning require a suitable computing device with access to the internet.

In the recent past, synchronous learning has tended to be supported by asynchronous learning, where the course content remains available to students after the scheduled lesson. However, the pandemic glaringly exposed the limitations of this approach. All topics, including those that require a practical hands-on approach to being taught, had to go entirely online rather than being taught face-to-face. Maritime students had to learn to embrace this model – failing to do so would have resulted in a prolonged gap of uncertain duration in their studies.

Challenges and solutions

The relevant Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB) had to make a concerted effort to temporarily approve maritime courses for this type of delivery. However, not all topics lend themselves to being taught online within the given time frame. For example, teaching practical chart work to Nautical Science students does not lend itself to remote learning, either synchronous or asynchronous, in the way that subjects such as maritime law do. With chartwork, students needed access to navigational charts (provided by the training provider) as well as suitable drawing tools which then needed to be used effectively to draw on the provided charts. All of this process had to be observed by teaching staff to check for accuracy and ensure that the desired learning was taking place. In the early days of the pandemic, when attempts were initially made to teach chartwork remotely, significant hurdles were encountered, mainly due to the limited 'view' permitted by the available IT facilities. This was particularly found to be an issue with the cameras used by students as the lecturer was unable to see each student's work on the chart. It could be argued that the same outcomes as classroom-based teaching were ultimately achieved – but only at the cost of spending considerably more time on the topic in comparison to face-to-face teaching.

Another issue that was highlighted was the lack of peer-to-peer interaction between students. It proved challenging to artificially generate something that came so easily when teaching face-to-face. Despite the availability of online forums for discussions, many learners were unwilling to engage with them and this resulted in some feeling 'left behind' because their queries were not being immediately addressed. This resulted in some of them halting their studying until those issues – often minor and in some cases trivial – were resolved.

Actions going forward

Despite the pandemic coming to an end, online learning is here to stay. In order to make this a success story, both the educators and the PSRBs need to focus on the following Maritime Education and Training (MET) sector wide issues:

- Establish standards and formats for online teaching that all educators can follow, especially for subjects that do not lend themselves to being taught online. We must ensure that the standard of online learning is the same as for face-to-face learning.
- Strategies for delivering online learning must be established. These should be wide ranging in scope but also answer such specific questions as whether lessons should always be followed up by tutorials, feedback sessions and asynchronous learning support.
- Additional tools for assisting the provision of online learning need to be identified and standardised.
- Teaching staff need to be upskilled in the use of digital learning tools and relevant pedagogies.
- The extra time that is required for a lecturer to set up a quality online experience for students needs to be recognised by education establishments and factored into their employment contracts.

Over the last two years, online learning has evolved at a much faster pace than it would have done without the pandemic. However, numerous opportunities remain for further progress to be made. When these issues are resolved, a formalised and standardised approach will provide a more learner friendly environment where students will have more freedom to learn in a way that is most suitable to them.

Alan Bury spent a decade at sea as a Deck Officer before making the transition to work ashore. While completing his PhD, he qualified to teach and began delivering elements of the Deck Officer syllabus along with the ECDIS and NAEST-O simulator courses. He has now been a lecturer for 12 years.

Abdul Khalique is the Head of Liverpool John Moores University Maritime Centre. Formerly a Master Mariner, he has over 30 years combined experience as a seafarer and a nautical science lecturer. In his teaching role he has taught simulator courses using Kongsberg and Watsila (Transas) simulators.