



Shaping Teaching & Learning and Internationalization beyond the Pandemic

A qualitative research project following the IAU Report: Higher Education One Year into the COVID-19 Pandemic.



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A qualitative research project following the IAU Report: Higher Education One Year into the COVID-19 Pandemic.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2022, the International Association of Universities (IAU) launched the report **Higher Education One Year into the COVID-19 Pandemic** (Jensen *et al.*, 2022). It contains the results of the second global quantitative survey conducted by the IAU since the beginning of the pandemic. The aim of the global surveys was to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on higher education during different phases of the pandemic. The first global survey was conducted in 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, and it was a short survey to monitor the immediate effects, while the second one was conducted in 2021 and was longer in order to monitor not only the impact of the pandemic after one year, but also to capture responses provided by higher education institutions (HEIs) around the world.

The findings of the second global survey revealed to what extent teaching and learning (T&L) and internationalization activities had been disrupted by lock-downs and other physical distancing measures put in place to prevent the spread of the disease.

These significant interruptions to both T&L and internationalization activities and the innovative responses by HEIs around the world, generated further interest in investigating the reasons for such changes in more depth.

This is the rationale behind the development of this qualitative research project focusing on specific aspects of transformations in T&L and internationalization. It was carried out in the aftermath of a particularly turbulent period, but at the same time a period that saw a high level of innovation and resilience as institutions sought to continue their mission despite the challenging context.

The results of this qualitative research project allow us to understand how and to what extent the experiences of HEIs during the pandemic have generated changes and transformation that go beyond the pandemic, as the project was conducted at a time where HEIs were no longer forced to rely on digital technologies to continue operating.

The findings of this project are divided into two sections focusing on the impact of T&L and Internationalization respectively.

Teaching and Learning following the COVID-19 pandemic

Teaching and Learning (T&L) was particularly impacted by lock-downs that took place in many countries in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and HEIs around the world became more than ever reliant on digital technologies for communication and exchange, for T&L, for research collaboration as well as for many other services provided as part of the day-to-day life of an institution. This experience has - for better and for worse - contributed to creating a new understanding of, both opportunities and challenges.

The results of the second IAU Global Survey on Higher Education One Year into the COVID-19 Pandemic (Jensen *et al.* 2022) showed that T&L is one of the areas most impacted by the pandemic, as a great majority of institutions had to ensure an unplanned shift from face-to-face to remote operations to avoid disruption. Compared to the first IAU Global Survey (Marinoni *et al.*, 2020), the number of institutions able to shift to remote T&L increased, as 89% of HEIs offered remote T&L (67% in the first survey). The Second Report (Jensen *et al.*, 2022) also shows that the majority of institutions reported an increase in the use of different digital tools and a reinforcement of infrastructure. Finally, the Report also uncovered a significant increase in the workload of staff (particularly academic, but also administrative staff).

Internationalization following the COVID-19 pandemic

In the same manner, the COVID-19 pandemic was a turning point for internationalization of higher education all around the world. Lock-downs and travel restrictions introduced at the beginning of the pandemic put a stop to all types of academic mobility. HEIs worldwide started reflecting on their internationalization strategies and activities and paid closer attention to other dimensions of internationalization instead of mobility. Digital transformation of higher education offered new possibilities for implementing internationalization and activities such as Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) and virtual exchanges grew in importance, proving to be very useful tools for internationalization of the curriculum at home.

The results of the second IAU Global Survey (Jensen *et al.*, 2022) confirm these trends. While at the time of the survey, only 31% of HEIs had revised their internationalization strategy due to the pandemic, 43% were in the process of discussing a revision. When asked about changing priorities in the revised internationalization strategy, 81% of HEIs indicated that virtual exchanges and collaborative online learning had increased in importance, and 58% stated that internationalization of the curriculum/at home also grew

in significance. At the same time, the importance of mobility and especially attracting international students remained high, with a higher percentage of HEIs reporting an increase in importance rather than a decrease due to the pandemic (37% vs. 25%).

The pandemic also affected international partnership and international research collaboration. According to the survey outcomes, almost half of institutions reported stability in international research collaboration, while one out of four HEIs experienced either an increase or a decrease.

OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Against this background, the aim of this research project was to explore in more detail the findings of the Second IAU Global Survey. As for T&L, the purpose was to understand how the shift to remote operations and the reinforcement of digital infrastructures has been impacting T&L strategies. It also sought to uncover whether increased workload is an enduring trend or simply a temporary phenomenon linked to crisis management at the beginning of the pandemic. The project was conducted when most HEIs had resumed face-to-face learning. Therefore, it was possible to examine the impact within HEIs beyond a crisis characterized by lock-downs and restrictions on social gatherings. This project thereby wished to explore if T&L has been changing since the pandemic and if so what type of transformations are currently taking place in the aftermath of the pandemic.

In terms of internationalization, the aim was to discover how and why the importance of international student enrollment/recruitment changed due to the pandemic; what were the most important changes in terms of international partnerships and research collaborations; if, how and why internationalization strategies changed (or not). Furthermore, the qualitative research investigated how HEIs envisage the future of internationalization, focusing on new opportunities brought about by the pandemic and remaining challenges still to be addressed in the future.

METHODS

Instrument: an online qualitative survey

The tool used for data collection was an online qualitative survey enabling researchers to reach geo-dislocated target groups (Braun *et al.*, 2021), and this was crucial for this instrument as we wanted to hear university voices from different regions of the world.

The project included a pilot phase to explore whether the questions could provide for meaningful qualitative data for the analysis, and only one additional question was added for the standard survey. The latter was available in English and contained three general questions (i.e., name of institution, country, and position of the respondent) and eleven open-ended questions, divided in two sections: one referring to teaching and learning (5 questions) and one relating to internationalization (6 questions). The online qualitative survey also described the project aims and allowed us to record participants' consent. The questions of the standard survey are available in Annex 1.

Respondents and procedure

Including the three pilot survey responses, the respondents were made up of 37 individuals representing 37 different HEIs from 27 countries worldwide. The highest percentage of the participants came from Europe (35%), followed by Asia & Pacific (30%), the Americas (27%), and Africa (8%). As for the respondents' positions, about 19% were heads of the institution, 27% were deputy heads of the institution, 8% were registrars, and almost half of the sample (46%) described themselves as representing one of the above profiles.

We used convenience sampling to enroll universities. Initially, participants were recruited from the IAU Second Global Survey's respondents. More specifically, those who agreed to be contacted again for follow-up information and stated they had changed or considered changing their internationalization strategy due to COVID-19 and implemented remote T&L. The universities received an invitation to participate by email describing the purpose of the research and the link to the qualitative survey. Subsequently, to reach HEIs from all four regions, the research team extended the invitation to contribute to IAU members and project partners of the project "Higher Education and Research for Tuscan Universities 2020" (acronym AFRUT 2020) (i.e., seven Tuscan universities in Italy). Data were collected from April 2022 to July 2022 (a total of twelve weeks: i.e., three weeks for the pilot phase and nine weeks for the standard survey). All participants gave their consent to the project.

Data analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed following the thematic analysis six-step procedure (i.e., familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing report) described by Braun and Clarke (2006), using Qcamap (Mayring, 2014). One researcher developed the initial codes and subsequently clustered them into sub-themes, themes, and macro-themes. During the data analysis process, the research team had several meetings and consulted with a senior

researcher to discuss and review findings to reach a consensus. As for quotations reported in this report, some have been edited to preserve anonymity and for brevity reasons (marked with [...] in the extract). Each quote indicates the country where the responding university is located (e.g., HEI Italy). If two universities were from the same country, a reference number was added (e.g., HEI Japan 1; HEI Japan 2).

FINDINGS CONCERNING TEACHING AND LEARNING

In this report, we present two macro-themes. The first theme identifies reflections on the impact of the shift to remote operations during the pandemic on T&L. The second theme provides insights into how the universities are building on this experience and using it to shape the future of T&L.

Macro-theme 1: The impact of shifting to remote teaching and learning during the pandemic

This macro-theme describes HEIs' efforts to continue T&L through digital transformation and the very diverse contexts of the universities when responding to the sudden shift to remote T&L during the pandemic. This theme also captures HEIs' explanations regarding the increased workload linked to remote operations and their actions to deal with such challenges. These findings demonstrate a high level of commitment from staff (academic and administrative) to their responsibilities in their functions and to students and fall under the following four themes (Figure 1).

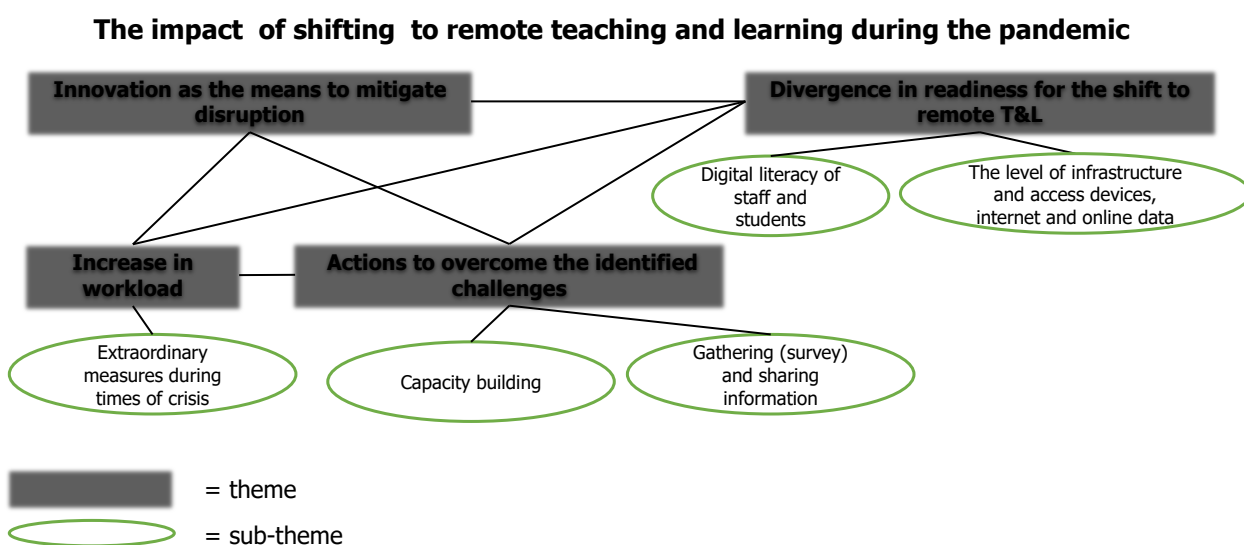


Figure 1: Thematic map of Macro-Theme 1

Theme 1: Innovation as the means to mitigate disruption

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, distance education became the only alternative for continuing T&L for many HEIs. This shift to remote T&L was described by several institutions as “abrupt” in an emergency context and it was challenging to adapt to this sudden and disruptive shift, both in terms of operations, organization, available infrastructure, and processes required, as well as to inadequate financial resources to overcome any challenges.

«The pandemic indeed affected our students and teachers in both teaching and learning strategies. At the beginning we did not know how to react and manage at a distance; we learned on the path about how to integrate LMS, online classes, or the use of messaging apps to keep communicating» (HEI Mexico 1).

Gradually, universities improved T&L practices, using digital platforms and tools in better ways, thereby increasing the opportunities for teachers and students. So institutional narratives showed us the resilience of institutions as they promptly responded to the COVID-19 crisis.

«The introduction of new tools can be seen as a positive aspect and a way to support teaching and learning, however, learning about all of these new features in a short period of time and in a very specific context such as a pandemic can become a significant challenge. Transitions and implementations in a short period of time can create uncertainty and some frustrations» (HEI Canada 1).

Theme 2: Divergence in readiness for the shift to remote T&L

Narratives from the universities revealed divergence in the capacity of HEIs to transition to distance T&L. This divergence inevitably impacts the level of success of HEIs in operating the shift to remote T&L. At the same time, these results also reveal how HEIs - regardless of their situation when the pandemic started - have placed increased priority on enhancing digital infrastructures and building competencies and skills of staff as well as students.

This theme has been split into two sub-themes: level of infrastructure and access devices, internet and online data; and digital literacy of staff and students.

Level of infrastructure and access devices, internet and online data. Among the elements within HEIs that promoted preparedness to move to distance education was the availability of the infrastructure and internet access required to implement remote T&L. Some of the responding HEIs had offered courses or distance education pre-pandemic, and digital transformation had already been integrated as part of the institutional strategic plan.

«Our university has a very well-built IT infrastructure and effective IT system. In addition, as a part of the University strategies 2013-2020 and 2020-2030, the development of digital technology in teaching and learning was considered a strategic objective. Accordingly, our university worked on it as an initiative starting from the year 2016. Some contents of the offered courses were uploaded via the university portal and delivered online since that date» (HEI Lebanon 1).

Yet, other HEIs report that even though this had been part of the institutional strategy for a while, the pandemic simply exposed weaknesses in terms of its implementation.

«[...] the University had already adopted a teaching strategy that aimed at integrating remote learning in its Strategic Plan in 2015 [...] What the pandemic exposed in these lofty goals and objectives was that the University could not come up with an adequate investment strategy or a clear implementation plan towards expanding its technology infrastructure and capacity» (HEI Lesotho).

Digital literacy of staff and students. The same divergence in readiness can be seen between universities whose teachers and students already had the necessary digital competencies and those who didn't. Some teachers from universities surveyed had already participated in training for distance learning before the pandemic, while others who hadn't were less prepared.

«We have been training our staff to become acquainted with digital environments for many years. This is why, when the pandemic started, we could adapt easily without the need to stop our daily operations» (HEI Argentina).

«The pandemic required the transition from face-to-face activities to remote activities, and the majority of teachers/staff were not fully prepared for this» (HEI Brazil).

Theme 3: Increase in workload

Against a backdrop of this sudden change, one major consequence emphasized by respondents was the increase in perceived workload among staff, which was primarily due to the shift in operations towards working remotely. There are no indications in university narratives that this is a long-standing trend, but rather that the increase in workload was a consequence of dealing with a crisis where many new processes and operations had to be set up and implemented very rapidly.

In this context, it is interesting to note that explanations provided by universities for increased workloads all refer to the sudden shift of operations, dealing with new and rapidly-changing instructions, and developing and designing remote operations within a very short timeframe. More specifically, organizing and setting-up such a drastic change required not only additional time and new skill acquisition, but also new procedures and processes to be able to continue operations. It thus impacted both administrative and academic staff, who had to adapt to an ever-changing social, economic, political and health situation, also implying an increase in stress levels.

Also mentioned was the increase in support provided to students who were finding it difficult to cope during the lockdowns. Specifically, teachers initially saw their workload increase due to preparation of materials and procedures for online teaching and assessment. Furthermore, universities pointed out that academic and administrative staff had to be fully available in order not to jeopardize students' learning pathways, and this often without any additional staff. Sometimes this led to new challenges such as balancing private and work life.

For some, the increased workload resulted in a negative psychological impact on academic community members that affected the quality of work and, sometimes, led staff to leave their jobs.

«The reason is that staff had not only to continue doing their job, but also to learn how to do it under new circumstances and with no disruptions, and it was not an easy process. Besides, new opportunities require more time and more skills to be fully implemented and it is also a challenge for an employee to quickly adapt to that reality» (HEI Russian Federation 1).

«The consequences of this scenario that we have documented are the following: Feeling of being overwhelmed in the face of daily work problems. Tiredness or exasperation with daily work tasks.

Anxiety disorders or strong stress episodes amongst staff members, which affects their overall health and leads up to negatively impacting their productivity. Neglect of crucial aspects of the work that require greater dedication. Isolation and/or disconnection between team members» (HEI Peru).

This next theme encompasses one sub-theme: extraordinary measures during times of crisis.

Extraordinary measures during times of crisis. Some universities cited different actions undertaken to counteract the increased workload due to the shift. For example, universities hired new staff, implemented different support activities at technological, educational, instrumental and psychological levels, and tried to redistribute the workload by establishing guidelines.

«Our university tries to address these issues [consequences of increased workload] by increasing its support to its community at all levels: Pedagogical support (LTEC), Technical support (Information Technology office), Psychological support (Counseling Center) » (HEI Lebanon 2).

Theme 4: Actions to overcome the identified challenges

Universities developed actions to tackle obstacles related to the shift to remote operations, highlighting their commitment to ensuring T&L during the COVID-19 outbreak. Respondents indicated some urgent measures taken in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as changes in regulations and T&L strategies, the establishment of a plan for educational continuity, and the creation of online portals as information support tools.

This theme has been organized into two sub-themes: capacity building and gathering (survey) and sharing information.

Capacity building. The universities surveyed invested intensively during the pandemic in capacity building for teachers in digital literacy through training courses, self-instructional courses, peer training, one-on-one consultations, seminars and workshops. Capacity building and training in the use of technology involved both students and administrative staff. In this context, some universities also encouraged the use of massive open online course providers among their teachers and learners.

«All of these infrastructure additions have been accompanied by training or one-on-one consultation to help teachers learn about these new tools. In two years, more than 350 training sessions (in webinar format) and more than 6,000 hours of consultation have been offered to our teachers to

help them navigate this increased use of technology in a teaching context. This has been an unprecedented capacity-building opportunity in our institution» (HEI Canada 1).

Gathering (survey) and sharing information. To monitor and support the transformation of T&L during this unprecedented period, respondents implemented actions aimed at understanding academic community member needs. For instance, it was crucial to engage in dialogue with different stakeholders, establish institutional reflection groups on lessons learned and conduct surveys within the university.

«The Division of Educational Reform Support conducted a "Survey on the Status of Academic Training for Online Classes" in 2020, and received 6,401 responses (response rate: 38.6%) from students. Based on the survey results, we are working on improvements» (HEI Japan 1).

Macro-theme 2: Transformation in teaching and learning

The macro-theme depicts how the use of digital technologies in T&L and a learner-centered approach have become more mainstream in the wake of the pandemic. Another aspect of this macro-theme is the positive consequences of the shift to remote T&L and current challenges faced by HEIs in integrating digital transformation into higher education. This macro-theme has been organized into three themes described below (Figure 2).

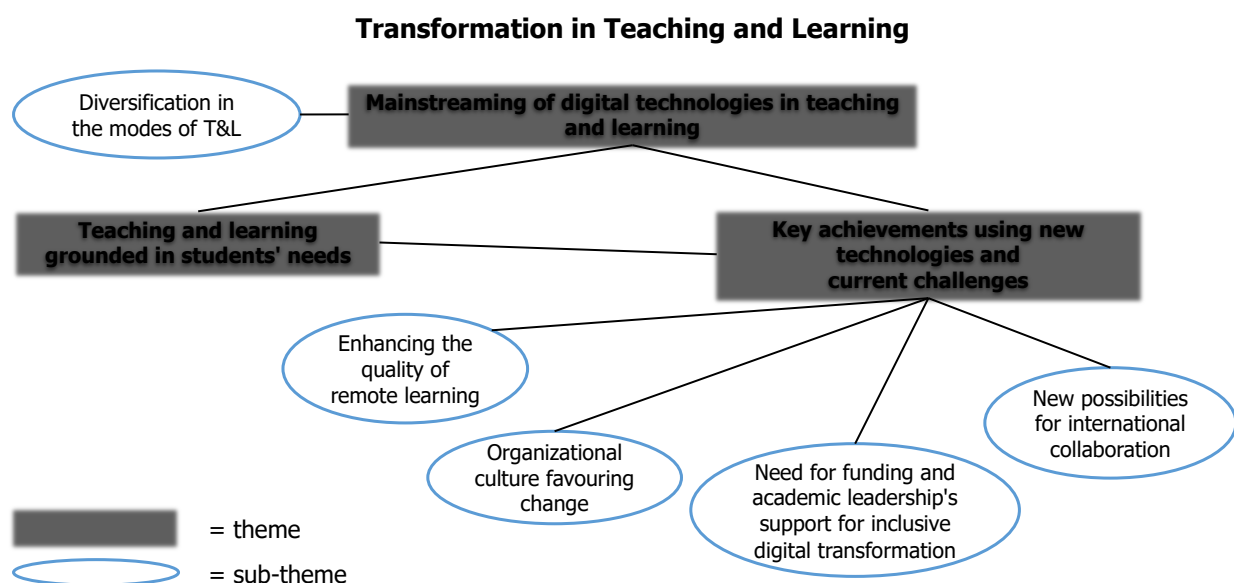


Figure 2: Thematic map related macro-theme 2

Theme 1: Mainstreaming of digital technologies in teaching and learning

When compared to the situation before the pandemic, universities indicated that the pandemic experience has made it much more mainstream to use digital technologies in T&L. Investment in digital infrastructure, increased use of digital tools and improved digital skills of teachers and learners entailed an increased integration of technology as part of T&L, particularly in campus-based HEIs. HEIs recognized new opportunities using technology in T&L. While the results showed that the experience of remote T&L has not replaced the need for in-person T&L, many universities have been increasing the number of blended or hybrid learning opportunities as part of their educational offer.

«This experience has improved the digital skills of teachers and students, which is why many of the academic activities are making greater use of digital technologies once the pandemic is over» (HEI Mexico 3).

«Our institution for the most part has returned to in-person teaching as the main format. We incorporate remote forms of teaching in hybrid course formats but our standard format will be on campus and in-person teaching, with hybrid elements incorporated into the in-person teaching» (HEI Canada 2).

«Since the classes which provide knowledge can be conducted online, we have decided to continue to use this method. However, we have decided to conduct face-to-face classes for skills, including communication skills, classes requiring students to think through discussions, and classes requiring students to conduct experiments to learn while performing the procedures» (HEI Japan 2).

This theme includes a sub-theme: diversification in the modes of T&L.

Diversification in the modes of T&L. Universities also sought to enrich T&L through the use of digital tools. From a general perspective, universities highlighted how embedding technologies in teaching has contributed to a diversification of modes of teaching and that more flexible learning paths are available for learners. Digital tools can make learning environments more dynamic and flexible, and their use can enhance digital literacy amongst both teachers and students, skills that are increasingly in demand in today's world. Moreover, digital resources helped make university education more inclusive, allowing access to students who, before the pandemic, could not attend or had difficulty attending in-person courses. Therefore, beyond making use of different modes of learning and flexible

learning paths, the experience has also led to a process of rethinking how to make the best use of time spent with students on campus, and of examining how to best make use of the different forms of learning.

«The shift to distance learning has afforded many opportunities to teach differently, encouraging self-learning, providing opportunities to learn from diverse resources, and allowing customized learning for different needs» (HEI Lebanon 2).

«Now most of our programs at master level are blended learning programs. Flexibility in learning paths is the future vision» (HEI Lithuania).

«Now it is possible at our university to apply to master's programs held in person, completely online, hybrid - with some students at home and others in class, or blended - with some remote activities and others in person. We believe this promotes students to join from outside Santiago or even other countries» (HEI Chile).

Theme 2: Teaching and learning grounded in students' needs

From narratives of participating universities, it was possible to identify an emphasis on students and their needs and demands, highlighting a trend towards a learner-centered approach to education at HEIs. Specifically, universities detected - including through surveys – student requests for more interactive teaching activities and more flexible programs and curricula, and maintaining multiple learning options such as in-person, online, and hybrid. Universities, acknowledging the voice of students and seeking to meet today's societal needs, wish to respond to this diversification of educational offerings and opportunities. For instance, HEIs expressed the intent to leverage existing online course content and strengthened digital infrastructure to offer new distance learning courses and programs. In addition, universities also seek to address the need for lifelong learning and transversal skills development as part of transformation.

«This crisis taught us that learning activities must be grounded in students' realities, cultivating critical, creative, and flexible thinking, resilience, and empathy in students» (HEI Lebanon 2).

«Survey results show that a majority of students, although many want to return to the campus, want to retain the flexibility offered by the possibility of choosing some of their courses online, bi-modal, hybrid,

or face-to-face. For example, 83% of students responding to a survey on dual-mode education told us that if they had the choice, they would always take dual-mode courses because of the flexibility they offer. However, 20% of these 83% asked for improvements to be made to the teaching practice of the teacher or the quality of the technology (e.g., microphones) » (HEI Canada 1).

Theme 3: Key achievements and current challenges

Among the positive developments that the COVID-19 pandemic created for HEIs, universities indicated strengthened digital infrastructure, improved collaboration through digital technology, and enhanced processes through increased use of digital procedures. The narratives of universities also shed light on current challenges for HEIs posed by integrating technology into higher education. This theme has been organized into four sub-themes: new possibilities for international collaboration, enhancing the quality of remote learning, need for funding and academic leadership support for inclusive digital transformation, and organizational culture favoring change.

New possibilities for international collaboration. Some universities identified new opportunities for international collaboration as part of the positive consequences of the shift to remote T&L. The increased use of the virtual space allows institutions to engage in new forms of international collaboration which can take place in different forms. This part is also further developed in the section on internationalization.

«Collaborations can be enhanced through the virtual space. We can be able to interact with people that we would have never interacted with if we had not gone virtual» (HEI Kenya).

«The rapid penetration of online classes due to the pandemic and the accompanying enhancement of digital infrastructure at institutions of higher education have led to the accumulation of course contents at each institution. Opportunities are expected to be found in the future for the mutual complementation of educational content through the sharing of online content among institutions and the establishment of "branch schools" as franchises through the licensing of content packages» (HEI Japan 1).

This type of collaboration can generate new forms of synergies in cooperation among higher education institutions internationally, bringing together experts in different areas or enhancing the quality by mutualizing certain resources for T&L between institutions.

Enhancing the quality of remote learning. Thinking about the post-pandemic scenario, universities highlighted the need to improve the design of online courses and programs from a pedagogical perspective and, more generally, active pedagogy strategies to engage students in their learning process and, in some contexts, to motivate them back to the classroom.

«Yes, remote teaching and learning increased. Now, the next step is to develop remote teaching pedagogically. [...]. This does not necessarily mean that remote teaching would make the majority of teaching but that it will be more systematic and the whole programs will be developed more wisely (not in terms of the pandemic)» (HEI Finland).

Other critical scenarios described by a few universities concerned the uncertainty of distance T&L being used over the long-term and the threat of possible commercialization of content produced by massive open online course providers.

«A threat could be the commercialization and oligopolization of higher education through the GAFA (the Big Tech) of online education platforms such as Coursera and edX. In addition, the monopolization of content distribution by these companies and government control and management of digital content distribution will be an obstacle to opportunities» (HEI Japan 1).

Need for funding and academic leadership support for inclusive digital transformation. Universities stressed that having funding and support from academic leadership are key aspects of guaranteeing inclusive digital transformation in higher education.

«Support from the university's top management to provide VLE environments structure and new technologies are essential» (HEI Brazil).

Organizational culture favoring change. Another element to be considered in digital transformation of HEIs is university culture, as organizational culture may slow down the process of transformation due to traditional beliefs regarding T&L. In addition, academic administration and government authorities could also threaten innovation in universities if policies and governance are not updated to the rapidly changing context. However, experiences during the pandemic showed that HEIs have a collaborative and agile mindset,

evidence of university resilience during the COVID-19 emergency. Universities should therefore maintain this innovative mindset over time.

«The main obstacle is the cultural mindset change required and understanding that an effective digital transformation is not just about technology and infrastructure but needs a change in the organization itself» (HEI Spain).

DISCUSSION

The results of this survey reaffirm that experiences during the pandemic were complex for the majority of the HEIs. It was an unplanned shift that had to be implemented in a very short timeframe to avoid disruption to T&L. Readiness to accommodate this unplanned shift was very diverse from one HEI to another and some of the most important parameters of readiness were linked to the state of digital infrastructure at the HEI, as well as the extent to which students had access to the necessary devices and online data. The level of skills and competencies to plan and deliver remote T&L was another pertinent aspect that impacted this shift. HEIs were faced with a situation where the choice was not whether they wished to explore remote T&L or not, it was a choice between remote T&L and disruption. This was a difficult shift for staff at HEIs, which led to an important increase in workload in order to adapt to the change, but on the positive side, this increased workload seems to be very much linked to the transition to remote T&L rather than an ongoing trend that is set to last.

Another positive aspect of this experience is that many HEIs have taken extraordinary measures to enhance the digital infrastructure within their institutions and to build staff competencies and skills. This means that institutions are better equipped to leverage the use of digital tools as a means to enhance the quality of T&L. It is also important to note that the experience has revealed that remote T&L has not led to the replacement of face-to-face T&L, but rather to an additional set of complementary alternatives, creating a more diversified range of opportunities.

The study also showed that while a few HEIs have returned to pre-pandemic, face-to-face T&L, the majority of institutions indicate that the pandemic had an important impact on T&L. Based on the lessons learned, institutions are exploring new possibilities, particularly in terms of blended or hybrid learning, combining face-to-face learning with online opportunities. Thus, although it was difficult to implement remote T&L in an unreasonably

short timeframe and with significant consequences for staff and students, it did lead to important innovations in T&L. Before the pandemic, campus-based universities were mostly associated with face-to-face, on-campus learning. Post-pandemic, it is no longer the case. While most institutions will certainly continue to offer face-to-face learning, thus playing an important social role for students on campus, many HEIs will have a more diversified offer in terms of learning modes, not only responding to the need of learners, but also as they seek to provide the optimum learning experience.

The pandemic has also served as a magnifying glass, highlighting challenges, limitations, and inequalities in terms of access to opportunities. This will also have an important impact on the future of T&L as some institutions will be able to explore digital tools in order to enhance the quality of T&L while others will not, and this will lead to further stratification amongst HEIs. It is clear that there is no one-size-fits-all way of transforming T&L following the pandemic, but it is worthwhile noting that this experience will generate even more differences in the type of education that HEIs will offer. It may also have repercussions in terms of the possibilities for exploring international collaboration and internationalization of the curriculum is discussed in the second part of this report.

FINDINGS CONCERNING INTERNATIONALIZATION

In this part of the report exploring the impact of the pandemic on internationalization, we focus on two the macro-themes identified: the importance of digital transformation to ensure international opportunities, and expectations of future priorities and challenges in implementing internationalization activities.

The key finding is that the pandemic did not lead to a change in internationalization strategy for most of the respondents, even if during the time of the pandemic they were considering it. What changed were the modes of implementation (e.g., more online or hybrid collaboration, virtual exchanges) taking advantage of alternative opportunities brought by digital tools introduced during the pandemic.

Macro-theme 1: The importance of digital transformation to ensure international opportunities

This macro-theme depicts how the pandemic accelerated digital transformation of universities worldwide, and how universities have also benefited from this in their internationalization activities, thus creating new opportunities. These international opportunities are embodied in the following three themes (Figure 3).

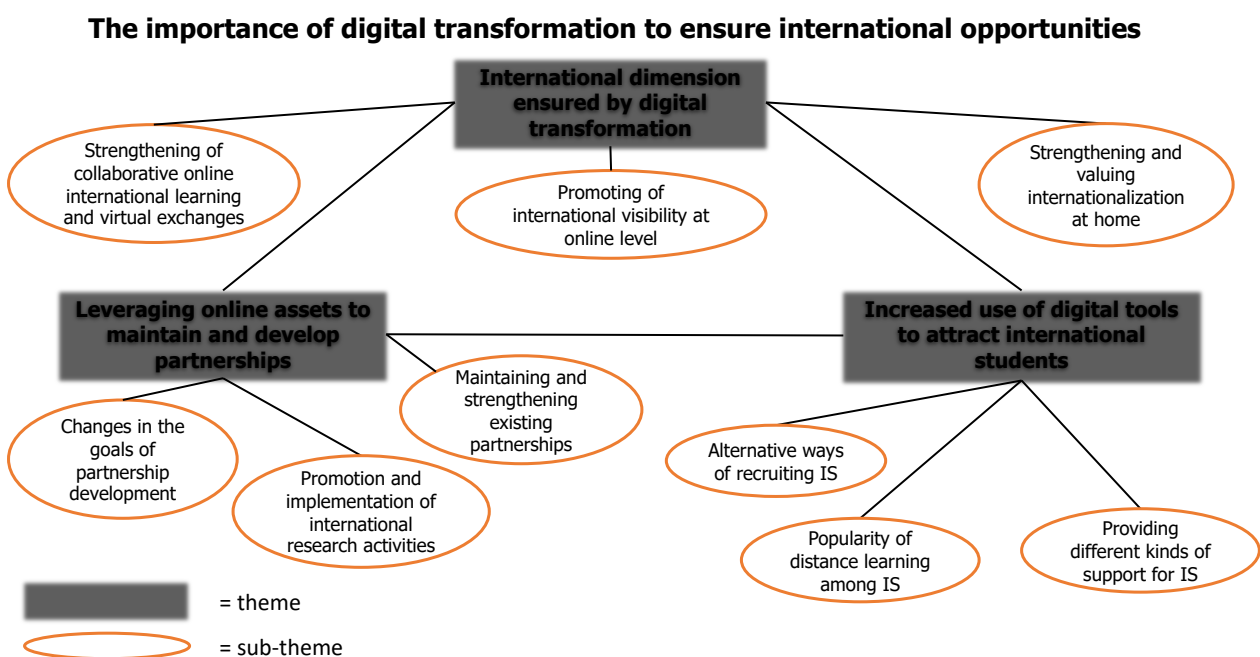


Figure 3: Thematic map of macro-theme 1

Theme 1: International dimension ensured by digital transformation

According to the respondents, HEIs have leveraged online tools to develop or enhance internationalization activities (e.g., collaborative online international learning, virtual exchanges, online meetings, etc.). These forms of internationalization, implemented during the pandemic, did not only allow universities to maintain and secure their international dimension, but also helped make internationalization more inclusive.

«We concentrated on promoting initiatives that take advantage of new technologies and virtuality, such as courses that incorporate modules with COIL (collaborative online international learning) methodology, and the holding of a virtual international week, among others. These strategies, moreover, are more viable to the extent that there are a number of expenses that no longer need to be covered (airfare, per diem, for example). [...] In this sense, those internationalization strategies that could be developed through virtual means were maintained and were very well received, as a way to preserve internationalization in the context of the pandemic and restrictions. The virtual exchange with some partner universities in Latin America was maintained, which allowed our students to take virtual courses at HEIs abroad and, in turn, but on a minor scale, foreign students could also take virtual courses at our university» (HEI Peru).

This theme encompasses three sub-themes: strengthening of collaborative online international learning and virtual exchanges; promotion of international visibility online; and strengthening and valuing internationalization at home.

Strengthening of collaborative online international learning and virtual exchanges. During the COVID-19 crisis, HEIs collaborated to offer online international learning opportunities, thus expanding educational offerings, including those in English, for students. In this context, participants emphasized that virtual exchanges enabled universities to provide some level of international and intercultural skills to their communities.

«Since the number of visiting professors drastically decreased, our university launched a Global Classroom initiative whereby a faculty member from our university would deliver a joint class with another faculty member from the partner university. This activity would provide students with the

opportunity to acquire the course components from an international perspective and to undertake group work and joint project with international students» (HEI Lebanon 2).

Promotion of international visibility online. HEIs developed marketing actions to maintain and increase their online international visibility. For example, some participants mentioned organizing webinars, participating in online fairs, and using social media.

«We had the opportunity to experiment other forms of promotion of our university which probably will be adopted also in the future. [...] We exploited extensively on-line promotional channels (e.g., webinars) and social networks for attracting international students» (HEI Italy).

Strengthening and valuing internationalization at home. Some responding universities highlighted how the pandemic led institutions to strengthen internationalization of the curriculum at home, which was valued and appreciated by the academic community.

«Our university had a more traditional approach to internationalization, focusing almost exclusively on research collaborations and mobility of students and staff. The challenges generated by the pandemic forced the university to pursue other actions, mainly strengthening 'internationalization at home' while preserving elements of its past strategy» (HEI Brazil).

Theme 2: Leveraging online assets to maintain and develop partnerships

During the pandemic, international collaborations were maintained, and new ones developed through optimizing online resources. Participants described online meetings and conferences as effective ways to collaborate and share research results. They also valued virtual international collaborations as it is cost-effective and timesaving. Such cooperation enabled universities to collaborate with more institutions, even those geographically far apart.

«The pre-pandemic idea of physical presence for any discussion or meeting was given second thoughts during the pandemic, and everyone found virtual presence a cost-effective and efficient way of interacting» (HEI Sri Lanka).

«The new way of communication built more productive connections with partners in larger and broader areas than before due to the ease of accessibility. It was much quicker to connect to partners through virtual meetings while saving money and time» (HEI Lebanon 1).

This theme includes three sub-themes: maintaining and strengthening existing partnerships; changes in the goals of partnership development; and promotion and implementation of international research activities.

Maintaining and strengthening existing partnerships. Some participants pointed out that the pandemic was an opportunity to strengthen and revitalize pre-existing cooperation. Respondents also noted that international partnerships - including those focused on research - remained stable in terms of type and location, while ways of collaborating appeared to have changed and adapted to the health crisis. According to participants, this stability could come from already having well-established international networks and a willingness to pursue ongoing research.

«We focused on previously existing collaborations and consolidated the work with the partners we had from before. To a certain extent, this was a great opportunity that enabled us to have the time and space to take these pre-existing partnerships to another level» (HEI China, Macao SAR).

«Research collaborations remained fairly steady, with researchers keeping connections active through frequent online contact. Collaborations that required the use of foreign facilities and equipment naturally suffered the most» (HEI Brazil).

Changes in the goals of partnership development. Some participants underlined that universities established new partnerships, even extending them to different international stakeholders. HEIs also set new priorities for selecting new partners, and this sometimes resulted in a change in partnership strategy. Among the new selection criteria, participants mentioned partner location (privileging partners located nearby), provision of COVID-19 countermeasures, offer of online educational and research exchanges, and interest in COIL courses. In addition, the selection of new partners could also have been related to a desire to overcome the institution's own weaknesses or, conversely, to share knowledge with and support other universities.

«I think that the pandemic has allowed us to verify that we do not need to travel to collaborate. We are more used to virtual work, to the possibility of reaching an agreement through this channel. The kilometers that separate us from the other institutions seem no longer to be so important. And that allows us to think about collaborating with many more institutions, in places that are geographically distant, but with which it is easy to collaborate remotely» (HEI Mexico 2).

«With declining public funding, it has been difficult to mount specialized programs such as engineering and medicine as well as postgraduate and professional programs. Therefore, the University has explicitly set out to establish international collaborations with other institutions already offering such programs, launch research chairs in partnership with local and international foundations and make efforts to increase its international visibility» (HEI Lesotho).

Promotion and implementation of international research activities. According to some participants, the pandemic did not prevent the promotion of international collaborative research, which was carried out through health and science research, joint international project proposals, international publications, the creation of innovation hubs and the recruitment of researchers from around the world.

«Throughout the pandemic, the faculty continued to promote multidisciplinary and translational research and has continued to recruit world-class researchers, including 12 new tenure-track professors (4 Canada Research Chairs) to solidify its enviable position as a leading research-intensive institution in Canada» (HEI Canada 1).

Theme 3: Increased use of digital tools for attracting international students

For some responding universities, the COVID-19 pandemic did not impact the importance of attracting and recruiting international students, which thus remained a priority within the higher education internationalization processes.

«The importance of attracting international students has stayed the same. It represents a strategic priority of our institution as it is one of the main ways to succeed in becoming a global university with global classrooms. Thanks to online learning students from different countries and residencies can come together, fostering diversity and global competencies for global citizenship» (HEI Spain).

This theme comprises three sub-themes: alternative ways of recruiting international students; popularity of distance learning among international students; and providing different kinds of support for international students.

Alternative ways of recruiting international students. The pandemic allowed some universities to modify their international student recruitment practices, adapting their procedures to changing global conditions. Specifically, HEIs enabled online applications and conducted online recruitment by remotely attending international fairs (e.g., NAFSA, EAIE) or organizing online events. Because of strict travel restrictions, some universities changed their recruitment based on location, either from the same region or different areas. Moreover, certain universities sought to attract international students by developing joint programs on specific topics related to current challenges. Finally, reduced tuition fees and scholarship offers were other strategies to attract international students.

«Instead of promoting the University through on-site visits, we conducted online recruiting activities. As part of these efforts, in November 2021, our university held [...] the first international online recruiting event specifically focused solely on our institution. Online recruiting activities have allowed us to reach a wider geographic area than in the past» (HEI Japan 1).

«We don't have a lot of International students but our revised plan is to focus on select markets and also look at online offerings» (HEI Fiji).

Popularity of distance learning among international students. Some HEIs reported stability or an increase in international student enrolments. According to participants, this could be due to the popularity of distance learning among international students.

«Despite the complications of the Covid pandemic, international student enrollment has increased annually since 2019. [...] The University's great increases came from French-speaking countries in Africa where requests have continued to increase sharply. Student enrollment from Africa has experienced measurable growth because of Online Education as well as targeted regional scholarships» (HEI Canada 1).

Providing different kinds of support for international students. A number of universities pledged to provide support for international student well-being in order to counteract any negative effects due to COVID-19.

«We started a psychological and social program to help international students with difficulty» (HEI France).

Macro-theme 2: Future priorities and challenges

This macro-theme captures respondents' expectations of future priorities and challenges regarding internationalization of higher education. These priorities and challenges are described in the two themes presented below (Figure 4).

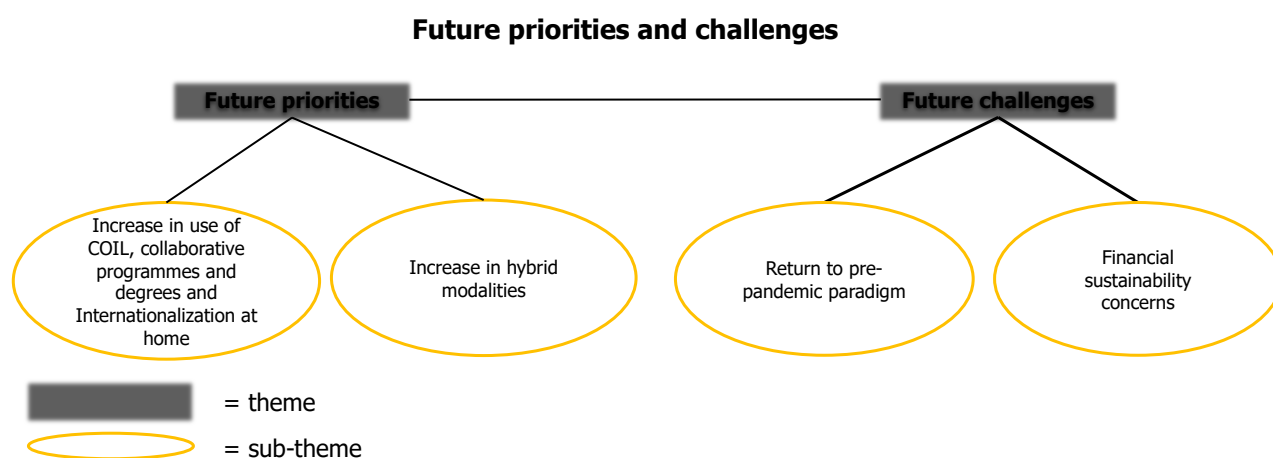


Figure 4: Thematic map of macro-theme 2

Theme 1: Future priorities

Despite the COVID-19 global crisis, HEIs worldwide have strived to pursue their internationalization activities. Experiences during the pandemic taught us some lessons about new opportunities for internationalization of higher education, leading to a shift in priorities.

This theme consists of two sub-themes: increase in hybrid modes; and increase in use of collaborative online international learning (COIL), collaborative programs and degrees, and internationalization at home.

Increase in hybrid modes. According to universities, the future of internationalization could be very fruitful. Indeed, internationalization processes have benefited from the creative and flexible opportunities arising from online and digital tools. International exchange programs could be carried out via different modes, namely in-person, online and blended modes. Some participants pointed out that, after the pandemic, mobility cannot be

defined by physical mobility alone, but also by various other, innovative forms, that could better suit the different needs of today's academic community.

Similarly, international collaborations could benefit from remote cooperation between partners. From responses provided, we can see that the pandemic is increasing the use of hybrid modes to implement internationalization.

«While the online format is increasingly used in classes and in exchange programs with other countries, physical exchanges are also maintained, as well as an increase in hybrid exchanges (a student participates in both online and on-site programs or the same program in which some students participate either online and/or onsite). We believe that when implementing new exchange programs, there will be more options in formats or modes, which will enable us to provide students with learning opportunities in an effective and diverse manner, while taking into consideration the educational effectiveness of the programs» (HEI Japan 1).

«Mobility is no longer defined by resource-intensive physical mobility» (HEI Lesotho).

Increase in use of COIL, collaborative programs and degrees, and Internationalization at home. The pandemic was an opportunity for universities to strengthen COIL, collaborative programs and degrees and internationalization of the curriculum at home. According to respondents, universities should continue to implement them in the future. In relation to internationalization of the curriculum at home, some institutions expect an increased focus on this form of internationalization within academic settings. However, this interest could also be linked to a reduction in economic resources.

«The University is working proactively to increase the internationalization of teaching and learning, including student and staff mobility, internationalization of the curriculum at home, collaborative degrees and internationalization of research. The University is looking to start dual-degree programs with international collaborations» (HEI India 1).

«The university could envision a bright future of internationalization in all its aspects internationalization of the curriculum at home, collaborative degrees and internationalization of research» (HEI Pakistan).

«Due to the pandemic, at our university we are rethinking our internationalization strategy by focusing much more on internationalization at home. Evidently, this was due to the pandemic and

the forced virtualization that our courses went through, all this added to the impossibility of receiving international visitors or mobilizing professors and students, as well as a reduction in the university budget» (HEI Peru).

Theme 2: Future challenges

According to the participants, the end of the COVID-19 pandemic may pose challenges to internationalization of higher education. This theme includes two sub-themes: return to a pre-pandemic paradigm and financial sustainability concerns.

Return to a pre-pandemic paradigm. With the withdrawal of travel restrictions and the return of in-person lectures, some universities have experienced or envisaged a return to pre-pandemic internationalization practices (e.g., physical mobility, on-site visits, and in-person return of international students).

«Moving forward I expect that travelling will become reasonably possible again and we may go back to a similar paradigm that existed pre-pandemic» (HEI China, Macao SAR).

Other participants underlined that they will refocus on international students after the resumption of in-person activities and the lifting of travel restriction as this is their main priority.

«Our commitment to bringing in more international students after on campus activities were resumed has increased. This is a result of the need to quickly move recover incoming and outgoing mobility, as it is the main pillar of our internationalization strategy» (HEI Brazil).

However, this comes with some challenges. For instance, some responding universities from the global south stated that they expect to make progress in recruiting students in the future, but first they must improve their recruitment strategy. There could be several reasons for such a need in improvement, for instance one university stated that they were historically focused on domestic students and outbound mobility rather than on recruiting international students.

«The importance of attracting international students has stayed the same at our university, though it has been detected as an area where we need to improve and in which we expect to make progress soon» (HEI Chile).

«As an institution that is in a developing country the university has historically emphasized local students going abroad rather than bringing foreign students to the university. That said, the institution has begun to focus on slowly but surely attracting international student» (HEI Mexico 4).

Financial sustainability concerns. Another challenge reported by some universities is financial sustainability. COVID-19 had a severe impact not only at the health level but also at the economic level. A few participants expressed concerns for the future in this regard. For example, one worry is the need to raise the number of international students to increase the institution's available budget.

«The internationalization strategy has changed due more to financial pressures, namely the provincial reductions to the tuition support for Canadians. Given the regulation of Canadian student fees, the University has been obliged to increase international student recruitment, to benefit from the higher fees» (HEI Canada 1).

«One of the objectives the university identified during the last two years is the increase of the number of international students knowing that international students would contribute to the diversification of resources, a top priority given what the country is going through» (HEI Lebanon 2).

Finally, it should be emphasized that challenges such as financial sustainability concerns are not the only factor behind the prioritization of international student recruitment. Another more positive one is that the presence of international students within university settings is crucial in promoting values such as diversity and inclusion.

«We will continue to aim for a campus with diversity, inclusion, and equity. The presence of international students is indispensable for the education of Japanese students, and their importance has increased since before COVID-19. Especially for students who have given up studying abroad or become hesitant to go abroad because of COVID-19, it is essential to provide them with opportunities to meet diverse people while they are on campus» (HEI Japan 2).

DISCUSSION

The results of the survey show that the pandemic was an opportunity to explore the potential of digital technologies for transforming internationalization. Forced to halt all mobility activities because of the restrictive measures adopted by governments to prevent the spread of the disease, HEIs around the world made use of digital tools to continue to implement internationalization both in teaching and learning and in research. Activities such as COIL and virtual exchanges existed before the pandemic, but during the pandemic, they became the only possible alternative. In one way, the pandemic forced HEIs to “discover” virtual internationalization and dedicate time and resources to it. This led to exploring the potential of such tools to implement internationalization of the curriculum at home, whose importance, despite extensive debates and multiple calls from experts in the field, was often put in second place after mobility. Virtual internationalization was also a way to reinforce institutional partnerships by allowing HEIs to both strengthen existing partnerships and to create new ones. In fact, virtual internationalization removed some barriers (financial and administrative) which were preventing the setting up of partnerships between HEIs located in remote countries. At the same time, virtual internationalization also helped the continued strengthening of traditional internationalization activities such as international collaboration in research and mobility. These results confirmed those that emerged from the second IAU global survey that internationalization of research was less disrupted by the pandemic than internationalization of teaching and learning. This was mainly due to the extensive use of digital tools that made it possible for researchers to keep in touch, work collaboratively, develop projects together and co-created publications.

Virtual internationalization did not replace mobility, but somewhat surprisingly, it offered the opportunity to strengthen it, by enabling new means to recruit international students online and by improving the international exposure of institutions. Beside virtual internationalization, the pandemic was also an opportunity to reflect on internationalization, to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the way internationalization was implemented at HEIs. This reflection did not lead to a complete change of internationalization strategies, but rather to a renewed attention to specific areas of internationalization (e.g., collaborative degrees and programs, internationalization of the curriculum at home) and to the implementing of new ways to pursue internationalization activities that were already central before the pandemic (i.e., student mobility).

The pandemic did not revolutionize internationalization, but it changed the way it is implemented at HEIs around the world. The tools and processes that became predominant during the pandemic will not disappear in the future; hybrid internationalization, in which virtual and physical co-exist and reinforce each other, seems to be the way internationalization is developing and will continue to develop in the future.

However, there is a risk of a return to internationalization strongly focused on student mobility. Paradoxically, in some HEIs there is a renewed focus on recruitment of international students being driven by financial reasons. Instead of recognizing the unsustainability of a financial model based on collecting resources through international student fees, HEIs strongly affected by financial losses during the pandemic, in reaction, are enhancing their focus and efforts on attracting fee-paying international students.

CONCLUSIONS

Two main outcomes are worth highlighting. Firstly, HEIs were able to cope, innovate and adapt under very difficult conditions during the pandemic and many are now exploring lessons learned and drawing on positive experiences to address the various challenges. This means that the accelerated digital transformation that was forced upon HEIs by the pandemic has led to different forms of long-term changes both in T&L and internationalization, with the exploration of digital as a means to enhance quality. These changes are likely to continue to develop in the years to come as universities are implementing reforms and changes, responding to the needs of learners and adapting methods to ensure quality after a very turbulent period.

The second outcome of note, and less positive than the first, is that there is a substantial risk of greater stratification across higher education institutions. Despite enhancement in infrastructure, there is still a considerable digital divide across regions, countries, and institutions. This does not mean that it is not possible to offer quality higher education without integrating digital tools, but it does mean that there are additional opportunities and advantages for those who are able to make use of technology and digital tools compared to those who cannot. Therefore, continuing to bridge digital divides in higher education remains of utmost importance.

Moreover, it is important to underline that the risk of returning to a pre-pandemic model of internationalization based principally, if not exclusively, on student mobility driven primarily by financial considerations remains high, especially when HEIs are under pressure to finance

their operations through tuition fees. In the process of digital transformation, it is essential not only to change the means of how internationalization is implemented, but also to reconsider the rationale behind it and to leverage this period of change to address internationalization-related problems that were identified. If not, this would be a missed opportunity, as digital transformation, catalyzed by the pandemic, provided an opportunity to reduce inequalities in higher education. Yet, if it is poorly implemented, it risks increasing these inequalities.

It is the responsibility of the global higher education community to use digital transformation of higher education in a such a way that it improves the quality of all three missions of higher education - T&L, research and societal engagement, and for all.

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ANNEX 1

General Information

Terms of data use: (please tick the box to agree, you won't be able to complete the survey if you do not agree)

- I agree that IAU may use the data entered for research, presentations and publications. The core data will not be shared with any third parties beyond IAU partners in this research nor be sold. It may appear in aggregated form or as examples as part of the data analysis, but treated anonymously. The name and email will not be part of the analysis and will only be used in order to communicate the results of the research.

Name of institution: _____

Country: _____

Position of the respondent to the Survey: (Please select only one)

- Head of Institution (President / Rector / Vice Chancellor)
- Deputy Head of Institution (Vice-President / Vice-Rector / Deputy)
- Registrar
- Representative of one of the above, please specify: _____

Internationalization

Question for universities that participated in the Second IAU Global Survey and reported that they changed their internationalization strategy

1. According to the 2nd Global Survey on the impact of COVID-19 on higher education, your institution replied that it had changed its internationalization strategy due to the pandemic. Could you please elaborate on why and how your institution changed its internationalization strategy in response to COVID and what the expected results are?

Question for universities that participated in the Second IAU Global Survey and stated that they planned to change their internationalization strategy

1. According to the 2nd Global Survey on the impact of COVID-19 on higher education, your institution replied that it had planned to change its internationalization strategy due to the pandemic. Nearly a year has passed since data collection, and the situation may have changed. Could you please inform us how and why your institution has revised its internationalization strategy and what the expected results are? If your institution has not revised its internationalization strategies, could you please describe the main reasons behind your institution's decision?

Question for universities that did not participate in the Second IAU Global Survey

1. According to the 2nd Global Survey on the impact of COVID-19 on higher education, the pandemic had an effect on internationalization strategies at the majority of HEIs. In fact, a great number of institutions had already revised their internationalization strategy or were

discussing doing so. However, outcomes also show that the pandemic did not result in a change in the international strategy at many HEIs.

If your institution has revised its internationalization strategies, could you please inform us how and why and what the expected results are? If your institution has not revised its internationalization strategies, could you please describe the main reasons behind your institution's decision?

2. We are interested in whether universities' decisions to close or not affected their internationalization activities. Could you explain whether your university closed or stayed at least partially open, and whether you think this decision had any impact on internationalization, such international student recruitment or joint program delivery?
3. The survey results highlight that despite the barriers created by the pandemic, many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) indicated an increase in the importance of attracting international students.
Could you elaborate more on whether the importance of international student enrollment/recruitment has changed, stayed the same or decreased, why, and if there are any specific actions your institution has taken to attract international students in the wake of COVID-19?
4. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, what are the most important changes your institution is experiencing in terms of international partnerships (e.g., partnerships for international collaborative learning and mobility partnerships), with reference to the type of partners (e.g., universities/research centers, governments and governmental companies, NGOs, foundations, business companies, start-ups, spin-offs) and their location? What challenges has your institution faced in partnerships, and which actions has it taken to overcome them?
5. According to the survey outcomes, almost half of institutions reported stability in international research collaborations. However, one out of four HEIs were also experiencing an increase or a decrease in international collaborations.
Since the pandemic, how have your institution's international research collaborations changed, and why?
6. How do you envisage the future of internationalization at your institution in all its aspects (internationalization of teaching and learning, including student and staff mobility, internationalization of the curriculum at home, collaborative degrees and internationalization of research)? What new opportunities in internationalization has the pandemic brought, why these opportunities opened up, and how they might be related to the future of internationalization at your institution?

Teaching and learning

Filter question for universities that did not participate in the Second IAU Global Survey

During the pandemic, did (or does) your institution offer remote teaching and learning?

- Yes
- No

If Yes, please answer the open-ended questions regarding the topic of teaching and learning.

If No, the questionnaire ends here.

7. The survey results show that 89% of HEIs offer remote teaching and learning one year into the pandemic. This shift was very much related to restrictions around physical distancing in response to the pandemic.
Is this experience impacting teaching and learning strategies at your institution and how? Please give examples of how the institution is using lessons learned from this time of pandemic to inform the future of teaching and learning.
8. Across the different regions of the world, we have seen a reinforcement of digital infrastructures in higher education institutions.
What are the main opportunities as well as obstacles within the institution in order to build on lessons learnt and implement change?
9. During the pandemic, most institutions have – for better and for worse - relied as never before on digital tools for teaching and learning.
Is the institution experiencing a change in demands from learners regarding different modes of teaching and learning and flexibility in learning paths and if so, please explain and develop how you are addressing it?
10. Digital literacy has become more important than ever, both for staff and students and in the survey results we also saw a need of capacity building in this area.
Is this something that the institution is addressing differently now compared to before the pandemic and how?
11. The survey results showed that the majority of institutions around the world are reporting an increase in the workload of both academic and administrative staff.
What are the key reasons for and the consequences of this increase in workload and how is your institution addressing this situation?

The first and second IAU Global Surveys on the Covid-19 Pandemic identified significant interruptions to both Teaching & Learning(T&L) and internationalization activities. The innovative responses from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) around the world noted in the Global Survey reports generated interest in investigating the particular reasons behind these changes. This qualitative research project focusing on specific aspects of transformations in T&L and internationalization was developed as a result. It was carried out in the aftermath of a particularly turbulent period, but at the same time a period that saw a high level of innovation and resilience as institutions sought to continue their mission despite the challenging context.

The results of this qualitative research project allow us to understand how and to what extent the experiences of HEIs during the pandemic have generated changes and transformations that go beyond the pandemic, as the project was conducted at a time where HEIs were no longer forced to rely on digital technologies to continue operating.

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