

Journaling in times of COVID-19: remote emergency learning through the eyes of higher education students

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The COVID-19 pandemic has had a formidable impact on educational institutions worldwide causing the shutdown of many schools, colleges and universities. Simultaneously with online teaching, institutions and educators came together to provide peer support through social network groups, webinars and training. At the end of this tribulated academic year, it is time to look back and reflect. However, with the plethora of information still circulating, not enough feedback has been provided about the target audience's insights towards remote emergency learning, i.e., the students' perception of their learning experience within this context.

The primary focus of this qualitative study is to present students' feelings towards remote education by means of one of the Moodle platform's features: the journal. While the majority of universities have reached out to students by means of questionnaires, the objective here was to provide students with the possibility of expressing their feelings, perceptions, and attitudes towards their online learning experience in a more intimate and open format.

The private diary was used with a sample group of 20 undergraduate students enrolled in an Applied Foreign Language course at a Higher Education Institution in Portugal during the COVID-19 lockdown. This exploratory research was carried out by means of content analysis of three journal entries placed at the beginning, middle and end of the second semester, from March to June 2020.

The analysis has revealed that the Journal Moodle activity offers valuable benefits to encourage reflective engagement towards the learning process. In other words, the journal is capable not only of stimulating students' reflective approach to learning but also provides valuable data for all education stakeholders (students, teachers, institutions, governments) in times of remote emergency learning.

Keywords: remote emergency learning, reflective journal as research tool, student perception towards online learning