APPLIED MANAGEMENT POST-COVID19: IMPLICATIONS FOR ACADEMIC MANAGERS IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION, BEYOND CRISES

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Abstract:

The outbreak of COVID-19 caused severe disruption to most sectors of the global economy, creating a spectre of fear, anxiety and uncertainty. The education sector has been one of the worst affected by the pandemic. The education sector is one of the heavily affected sectors. The pandemic forced educational institutions worldwide to close, cancel classes and shift towards remote working and online teaching. The purpose of this study is to investigate the implication of the COVID-19 pandemic on private higher education. Moreover, the study's main objective is to assess the pandemic's academic management, especially in private higher education. For this, different landscapes were examined, including pre, during and Post COVID-19, focusing on the post-COVID-19 implications. In addition, various publications and surveys have been analysed to find out about the COVID-19 followed-up changes happening in higher education and its management. For this particular study, qualitative research was employed by conducting nine semi-structured interviews with academic managers working in the private higher education sector in the UK to capture their experience insights about the implications, advantages, disadvantages, and challenges faced during the pandemic. The findings showed that workplace accessibility was the most affected factor; during the lockdown, the private higher education institutions (PrHEIs) could recruit highly qualified and experienced

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part-time academic staff, as they need to teach online. However, most of these part-time academic staff wanted to quit when face-to-face teaching starts, as they live far from their institutions. Only online teaching motivated them to join during the lockdown because it provided ease and convenience, no travelling time & cost, freedom and autonomy. In addition, the online teaching amazingly increased the student attendance; higher pass rates but difficulties in engaging students in group activities. Another one of the challenges was the immediate adoption of online teaching and training of academic staff. Moreover, the reinvention of a new workplace approach and the high level of technology implementation to abide by the safety regulations will permanently transform the work routine. Therefore, most of the employees want to continue remote working in future.

Keywords: applied management, COVID-19 (pre, during and post), implications, private higher education

1. Introduction

In the attempt to contain the spread of COVID-19, the governments of the world's countries announced a major lockdown to safeguard the population. COVID-19 has produced significant challenges for all industries, including the higher education industry globally. For example, a critical challenge faced by higher education was the urgent request for suspension of face-to-face teaching and replacement with online teaching (Qureshi et al., 2020). Although the workplace concept differs through different professions, industries, and countries, the challenges issued from COVID-19 were common. Due to the lockdown implications, different sectors suffered significant losses in human resources and the economy. In the educational sector, most institutions had to close for a short period or switch to online teaching to follow up on the orders issued by the governments. According to UNESCO (2020), the nationwide closure impacted over half of the world's student population. In addition, severe changes were applied to managerial responsibilities, such as the cutoff of face-to-face activities. Following these changes, higher education institutions' guidance on managing operations was implemented as a preventive solution (Zhu and Liu, 2020). As a result, online education and remote working became the new everyday phenomena. Despite the considerable time that has passed since the pandemic, the situation has not improved to the point where the education sector would implement back to work policy.

2. Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic seems to be leaving long-term ramifications that would alter the future of education, comprising the teaching, learning and what is implicated on the managerial level. At this point, it is still unclear to what extent these changes will extend. However, it seems that the most vulnerable tuition-dependent higher education institutions with international students, who often pay higher tuition fees than domestic

ones (Qureshi et al., 2021), will face a severe outcome. Higher education institutions (HEIs) worldwide shut down in 2020 to control the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, possibly affecting more than 3.9 million overseas students (UNESCO, 2020). In addition, hundreds of international students at three major London universities have refused to pay their tuition fees, arguing that mainly learning from their bedrooms did not justify tuition fees of up to £29,000 a year (Qureshi et al., 2021).

The situation seems notably worse to institutions already facing demographically driven declines in demand (Kim, 2020). Paterson disclosed that many public universities with feeble resources and a large proportion of private higher education located in Africa, Asia and the US encountered struggle in adapting to the economic damage result from the pandemic (Paterson, 2021).

Remote working and online teaching or blended learning became the answer to the academic workflow for managers, tutors, mentors, and students. However, the issue resides in understanding the implications of this new regime since it has not been thoroughly analysed, and the predictions remain uncertain (Diver et al., 2021).

2.1 Applied Management Theories in Higher Education

Education is one of the prominent organisations of society that requires applied educational management and leadership. Although education management has been developed over several years, although determining the goals is fundamental, linking the goals and aims of the education and its actions should be considered vital (Ghasemy and Hussin, 2014).

Management is a series of actions and tasks relevant to the highly well-organised and effectual utilisation of resources to attain organisational objectives (Sapre, 2002). Educational management is a discipline concerning the management of educational organisations (Bush, 2010).

Applied management is a type of study that analyses how management skills are used in various areas of businesses. Usually, this field is pursued by those in the technical field who already possess few essential hands-on skills (Lawrence and Pasternack, 2002). Applied management refers to examining existing business management practices and the implementing strategies to alter, improve or streamline them. Applied management theory can involve implementing new hierarchical order, emerging technologies or new decision-making styles. The straightforward conceptualisation of applied management could be applying knowledge and skills in the context of managing activities (management).

While several studies have raised the issue faced in keeping up the classroom activities and the students' learning during the current pandemic crisis, it is essential to understand the applied management and its strategic issues confronting higher education.

The managerial level faces tremendous pressure in maintaining the education flow and effectiveness. The success of higher education in preserving the well-being of the staff and students may require fundamental changes to the academic model for long-term

survival. In their study on strategic management theory, Siegel and Leih (2018) demonstrated that few theoretical framework management concepts are being applied to higher education to help managers identify problems and respond to the challenges to achieve strategic goals. Such management concepts are competitive advantages, organisational capabilities, and sustainable performance. The studies investigating the academic, managerial issues have demonstrated how improved management theory can be applied to help maintain the functionality of higher education (Ghasemy and Hussin, 2014; Musingafi et al., 2014; Siegel and Leih, 2018). Academic managers (Department Heads) play pivotal roles in the management and governance of higher education institutions, making decisions that affect faculty careers, curriculum, student enrolments, and department budgets (Berdrow, 2010; Gmelch et al., 2017). Thus, academic managers make decisions, particularly concerning procedures within their departments. They lead and manage the totality of the day-to-day work of the faculty and staff who form the department as a unit.

A. Pre-COVID-19

Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, several researchers have been studying the applied management theories in higher education and covered the insights of the strategic management of higher education institutions. Strategy concepts included organisational models and designs and sustainable performance. In addition, other approaches were used, such as inherent phenomena including the role of technology in education, resource allocation decisions, governance and innovation ecosystems, or theoretical streams including evolutionary approaches to strategy, leadership, dynamic capabilities, strategic behaviour and historical, sociological and economic analyses (Siegel and Leih, 2018). The studies concluded that in more stable times, higher education could survive with "ordinary capabilities". However, with the increasing uncertainty such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it becomes necessary to strengthen the "dynamic capabilities", which are future-oriented, focused on identifying threats and opportunities before they take on crisis proportions. Sensing, seizing, and transforming are the elements of the dynamic capabilities framework, which can be applied in the context of digitised instructions.

Seigel and Leih (2018) described higher education to follow two types of competitive strategies, being the "traditional" university and the "enterprise" university, which focuses on the future and the importance of the university. The enterprise university rules the university policies while the traditional university is observed within the university academic activities. The mixed performance within the universities is a result of this competition. The study outcome emerged in two key findings; a successful strategy implementation requires the university to accommodate this competition and a vivid description of how strategic directions are developed over time to respond to the unexpected (Siegel and Leih, 2018).

B. During COVID-19

The pandemic impact was predicted to have adverse effects on higher education. The potential negative consequences include drop-in learning outcomes, a drop in graduation rates, interfering with the economic health of higher education institutions, and disadvantaging educators and managers due to a sudden change in work style by slowing non-academic related work for scholars, researchers, and scientists (Salmi, 2020). With the daily exponential increase in the number of COVID-19 infected cases in 2020, all public and private higher education institutions were required to postpone all classes and lectures for an initial period. Seeing that the situation was not showing any quick improvement, education had to rely on different measures to conduct courses and classes. The priority became understanding the emerging trends, issues and prioritising higher education (Salmi, 2020). Switching to suitable online platforms was found to be the most convenient solution. In addition, both public and private institutions had to adjust to the new situation where face-to-face interactions and mass gatherings became prohibited.

HEIs started to teach online quickly, comparing private higher education institutions to public higher education institutions in the UK; the former is minor and limited resources. Therefore, PrHEIs started to offer online teaching to students by using readily available online teaching software such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, Face Time etc. However, academic staff and students were not ready for this sudden change; within a short time, the academic managers had to plan and make sure delivery of lectures from home with all the practical and technological challenges this involves, and often without proper technical support (Hodges et al. 2020). On the other side students also need to be trained with online software (Zoom, Microsoft Teams etc.). Therefore, academic managers are required to arrange online training sessions for academic staff and students to ensure the smooth running of online courses (Qureshi et al., 2020).

Moreover, non-academic staff such as administrators and support units were compelled to adjust to working from home as the new operating arrangement (Chung et al., 2020). However, this methodology led to several unprecedented challenges (Yusuf, 2020). Many weaknesses have been observed in the sudden transition of the working style, such as carrying out all activities from physical to virtual interactions, determining which activities still required face-to-face meetings and to what extent (Brown and Box, 2020).

The significant challenges imposed on private higher education mainly were in the form of economic issues. The private colleges were struggling with endurance problems, as they were receiving no or very little direct support from the government and could not count on emergency grants to keep them afloat. In addition, some private HEIs started facing severe cash flow issues due to the decreased admission numbers. As a result of the new limitations, the private higher education leaders in developing countries had to abandon their regular institutional plans and attend to the day-to-day challenges (Tamrat, 2021).

The big challenge for PrHEIs in the UK was to make sure the online software could meet the needs of academic staff and students and, ultimately, effective online teaching without difficulties (Qureshi et al., 2020).

C. Post-COVID-19

Despite the COVID-19 predicaments, higher education ought to continue by procuring the necessary means for endurance. Toquero (2020) discloses in her study that the educational system needs to strengthen the practices in the curriculum and make a more adaptive environment for the students to continue their learning even beyond conventional classroom learning (Toquero, 2020).

In attempting to develop a conceptual framework for post-COVID-19 managerial work, Henry et al. (2021) carried out a systematic collection of aspects defining the work distribution concepts, including remote work, distributed work, telecommunicating, and virtual work teams, and distributed organisations. They then systematically analysed the reviewed definitions to extract each concept's fundamental principles (Henry et al., 2021). Their findings suggest that virtual work and new work distribution fit under distinct continuation modes described as particular work settings when combined. In addition, they identified four factors impacting this new virtual and distribution work: magnitude of the task independence, nature of work, technological environment, and temporal distance. Thus, the framework gave managers the foundation to establish new work distribution and determine the implications while integrating the virtual mode of work to adapt to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the same time, institutions suffering from more profound pandemic implications, such as economic endurance, which is the case in private higher education, had to adapt new accommodations due to precariousness to lessen the aggravated influences predicted on the future.

3. Materials and Methods

Several studies have been conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic peak season to evaluate the challenges faced by the educational system in higher education (Bao, 2020; Boyer-Davis, 2020; Toquero, 2020), other studied the post-COVID-19 managerial implication (IESALC, 2020; Kim, 2020; Zhu and Liu, 2020). However, while most studies focused on higher education in general, a few studies addressed the challenges faced by the traditional working to switching online in private higher education managerial sector (Bao, 2020; Qureshi et al., 2020, Yusuf, 2020; Zhu and Liu, 2020; Tamrat, 2021).

Although several studies carried out surveys, other research adopted different methods. For example, Yusuf followed an applied qualitative research methodology with open-ended questions, where twenty participants were asked to write down answers in the space provided in the form of long paragraphs (Yusuf, 2020). This method was selected for its excellent understanding of the value and perception of the participant, being educators at a faculty of Management Sciences at a private institution. Boyer-Davis

conducted a survey of 307 college and university professors predominantly teaching in various business-related disciplines. The survey purpose was to determine the different levels of techno-stress creators perceived by educators before and during the COVID-19 pandemic (Boyer-Davis, 2020).

This study includes an interview with nine academic managers (head of departments) from five private HEIs. These participants were identified as "1", "2", "3","4","5","6","7","8", and "9". Each participant was assigned an abbreviation for Academic Manager (AM) with a number; therefore, we have AM1, AM2.AM3.......AM9. We also did not disclose the identity of five PrHEIs.

The interview was carried out by collecting answers with a semi-structured set of questions related to the academic managerial implications. The aim is to explore the variable phases at the managerial level during the COVID-19. Therefore, the interview includes questions on Post COVID-19 implications, including the different phases across the pandemic, pre-, during, and post-COVID-19. However, the interview questions were related to the comparative aspects to work before, during and post COVID-19. Therefore, the several questions focused on the part related to the impact of the changes implemented during COVID-19. During the last part of the interview, participants described their experiences, how they perceived the changes triggered by the pandemic, as well as their thoughts on the long-term impact of the pandemic. The interviews were conducted online, but we sent all the possible questions by e-mail and informed participants that some questions would be generated based on their replies as well.

4. Data Analysis

As a vital paradigm of inquiry, qualitative research aims to collect qualitative data that is non-numeric and captures opinions and concepts from participants to generate meaningful information (knowledge) grounded in human experience (Sandelowski, 2004). For data analysis, we used the thematic analysis approach, which is the first qualitative data analysis method that provides core skills that are useful for conducting many other kinds of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

At this stage, we started to organise data in a systematic and meaningful fashion by using coding. Thus, for example, all of the interviews were assigned alpha-numeric titles as AM1 to AM9.

The study was based on theoretical thematic aspects of academic managers originally three COVID-19 themes, pre, during and post. Therefore it was not necessary to code every piece of text or sentence. Instead, we used open and straightforward coding; this meant that no predetermined codes were used except for the three COVID-19 predetermined themes.

Table 1: Coding Samples

Sample Participant Quotes	Codes
"*We quickly recruited highly qualified and experienced academic staff during the lockdown as the teaching was online; therefore, the PhDs candidates applied who were living far away from the college….some PhDs applied for the online teaching positions from outside the UK (Europe)…..Pre COVID-19, we had under 10 PhDs, and this number was doubled in two months and exceeded forty within a year…..we have been fortunate during the COVID-19 and found recruitment for PhDs has been easy for us during the lockdown…..".* (AM1)	Highly qualified and experienced academic staff, Recruitment, Easy, PhDs, Online Teaching, Lockdown, COVID-19, UK, Europe,
"*Student attendances increased dramatically; during the first online teaching phase, the attendance has been 100% for a few courses during the lockdown.........student punctuality and attendance has been a serious issue before the COVID-19"* (AM4)	Student Attendance, Punctuality, Serious Issue, Online teaching, lockdown, COVID-19
"*Both students and academic staff found online teaching with many advantages as it saves time, money….no travelling cost provides convenience and autonomy. Our surveys (for staff and students) results showed that most students and staff want to continue online learning after the COVID-19 crises...... we are also considering the option of blended learning but not for all courses...only for a few courses.***"** (AM7)	Students, Academic Staff, Online Teaching, Advantages,Time, Money, Travelling, COVID-19, Crises, Online Learning, Blended Learning

After coding all nine interviews, we grouped them and produced a list, eliminating overlapping codes. For example, in the above table of coding samples, we noted recurring and salient codes, such as "COVID-19", and "lockdown". The final list of codes provided relevant information in terms of carrying out data analysis. We categorised coded data under three themes of COVID-19 (Pre, During and Post) and created the following.

Table 2: The gist of the interviews

Participant	Pre-COVID-19	During COVID-19	Post-COVID-19
PrHEI (1)			
AM1	Problem in recruiting highly qualified and experienced academic staff	Recruited highly qualified and experienced academic staff	Loss of some highly qualified and experienced academic staff
AM2	Satisfactory Pass Rate Normal Business Expansion	Excellent Pass Rate Staff and students' productivity was higher than expectations. Fast Business Expansion	Concerns maintaining the same pass rate and productivity Continue Business Growth
AM3	No assessment of student and staff IT skills and competencies	Assessment of students and staff IT skills IT Training of staff and students to make online teaching effective	More IT skilled staff required
PrHEI (2)			
AM4	Punctuality and Attendance issues of students	Excellent Punctuality and attendance	Punctuality and attendance Issue of students

		Problems managing group students' engagement	
AM5	No Staff Wellbeing concerns	Staff Wellbeing concerns, stress, self isolation	Socialising activities, Staff summer party
PrHEI (3)			
AM6	Staff holidays problems	100% availability of academic staff- Cancellations of holidays, Low academic staff turnover	Staff holidays problems
AM7	Traditional Face to face teaching	Online teaching Immediately switching to online teaching	Blended learning
PrHEI (4)			
AM8	High Academic Staff Turnover Traditional working patterns	COVID-19 Guidance for Staff and Students New staff working patterns (remote working)	High Academic Staff Turnover Back to normal, may some staff members prefer remote or flexible working and their adjustment problems
PrHEI (5)			
AM9	Working according to strategic planning	Death of College Director due to COVID-19 Catastrophic impact Difficulties in student recruitment	Restoration and sustainability of the College

AM=Academic Manager

5. Findings and Discussion

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the requirement to change the managerial and strategic approaches, embracing the virtual concept became the most suitable option to continue the academic and managerial tasks. However, it is crucial to understand that the virtual teaching-learning process has not fully emerged due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Learning online is a method applied before COVID-19 by public and private higher education institutions and by the corporate sectors offering selected online courses (Yusuf, 2020). After the pandemic, this method forced managers, educators, and students to continue their academic activities. A previous study presented teaching-learning experience in a non-classroom or blended environment before the appearance of COVID-19 as a flipped classroom methodology. Moreover, the study described the usefulness of this methodology in times where social and academic restrictions apply (Izagirre-Olaizola and Morandeira-Arca, 2020). As a result, the institutions introducing the online learning methodology during the pre-COVID-19 encountered fewer struggles in adapting to the new routine method.

Several PrHEIs found limitations in transitioning from face-to-face to a virtual modality due to structural, social, and technical reasons. At the technical level, providing a fully-fledged online system requires arranging several technology tools which, may prove challenging to administer in some private institutions (Tamrat, 2021).

As the pandemic led to a continuous shift in the work style in higher education and its management, the implications it has led to are represented in the three following landscapes, being pre-, during, and post-COVID-19.

5.1 Interview Findings

This study was limited to nine academic managers (heads of departments) from five private HEIs in the UK. We selected three academic managers from PrHEI one, two academic managers from PrHEIs two and three and each academic manager from PrHEIs four and five (Please see table 2). Answers from the interview were substantial; however, due to the limited number, they will not be representative or generalized to all private higher education institutions.

A. Pre-COVID-19

Pre-COVID-19 study on the challenges facing the private higher education institutions academic management reported the challenges to be grouped in three major categories, namely, resources (physical and financial), capacity development (staff roles and responsibilities, academic leadership and development, and research), and programme design including curriculum design (Stander and Herman, 2017).

Most participants agreed that recruiting highly qualified (PhDs) and experienced academic staff was difficult before the Pre-COVID-19.

The qualified and experienced academic staff is a critical element of HEIs, and it is not easy to recruit them, especially for PrHEIs. Once they are recruited, the PrHEIs must retain and use their skills, knowledge and abilities.

A few participants mentioned that academic staff turnover is higher as compare to non-academic staff.

The Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) revealed exciting facts about academic staff turnover in HE in the study conducted in 2017. Employee turnover has been rising steadily since 2012 but is still low compared to the broader economy, with an overall rate of 8.9% compared to 18.5% across the UK (UCEA, 2017, p. 4).

The report also says that the turnover rate is higher for junior academic staff than senior. The report also says that the turnover rate is higher for junior academic staff than senior academic staff. For example, a turnover rate of 11.2 per cent for Lecturer Grade A compared with 6.2 per cent for professors (UCEA, 2017, p. 25).

According to contemporary literature, high turnover among academic staff is most likely caused by the inability of the academic workplace to meet individual expectations and perceptions that their specific needs are not being met. (For example see, Bucklin et

al., 2014; King et al., 2018; O'Meara, Bennett, & Neihaus, 2016; Robyn & Du Preez, 2013; Watanabe & Falci, 2016; Yan, Yue, & Niu, 2015).

One participant mentioned that before the COVID-19, the students' results were satisfactory; most students obtained marks between 50 to 60 per cent.

Most of the students could not obtain higher marks (70 to 80 per cent) before the COVID-19; maybe they had been wasting a couple of hours commuting to attend face-to-face classes. Nevertheless, on the other hand, the commuting time could be used to study to perform well and obtain higher marks.

One participant reported that punctuality and attendance were not excellent; attendance was never 100 per cent for a cohort/semester. However, class punctuality and attendance are generally viewed as the most critical indicators of students' perseverance and performance, whereas absenteeism is viewed as a predictor of dropout probability (Credé et al., 2010). Therefore, as attendance is linked to performance, maybe one of the reasons for low academic performance is low attendance.

A few participants mentioned that there was no assessment of students and staff IT/Computer skills and competencies. However, computer skills are an essential part of life; no organisation could perform better without using computers and their related skills effectively.

The mammoth increase in computer use in every field of life and business has raised the question of whether people have to be assessed computer skills before entering the education for study or labour market for jobs. Nevertheless, many organisations do not assess employees' computer skills at work, and no development plans are made.

A few participants shared their experiences of preparations for the lockdown. Concerning the proper operation adopted in response to the pandemic crisis, managers attempted to keep all stakeholders informed and fully operational at all times. Therefore, they started preparing to shift to remote work as soon as the lockdown was being predicted.

In a matter of a week or so, the transition started with an initial period, which was utilised to prepare for the coming changes that the higher education had to adapt to survive. Shifting from traditional office work to remote work required preparative steps such as purchasing zoom accounts, creating shared folders and online meeting rooms, recording online training videos, followed by a training step in which managers, tutors and students started their training in using the video conferencing software. Once the lockdown started, they were fully operational and ready to carry on their daily work online. One of the interviewees answered that the preparative period took more than two weeks, while another reported that it took less than a week.

B. During COVID-19

In response to the questions related to changes in management practices during COVID-19, the interviewees' answers contradicted. For example, one answer showed that the coping was relatively more straightforward than expected, thanks to the facility provided by technology in meetings, work assignments, and getting hold of colleagues. In contrast,

other answers showed that coping was difficult; the workload increased since the pandemic kept developing, bringing more changes and regulations. As a result, managers had to be very active, pay attention to the development, respond to the changes, keep the workflow, and ensure that all academic and non-academic are up to date.

A few participants shared interesting facts regarding hiring qualified and experienced academic staff during the COVID-19. For example, all higher education institutions in the UK went for online teaching during the COVID-19; online teaching allowed hiring qualified and experienced academic staff across the country. One college even hired online qualified and experienced teaching staff across Europe.

There was a general consensus among all participants that Private HEIs had to make hasty decisions to switch to online learning during the COVID-19 crises in 2020.

However, a few participants mentioned that the immediate challenge was training students and staff to efficiently use the online teaching system. Since both staff and students had variable levels of skills and experience in using online provisions, both the groups had to be trained with different approaches. The adopted approaches of staff and students IT training were generic and customized. A few participants mentioned that they assessed staff and students IT skills for the first time.

According to a few participants, the impact of these changes on the management, the staff members were able to adapt to the changes and efficiently more towards the virtual work-style. On the other hand, the shifting was not as smooth; joining classes from home decreased their attentiveness in the classroom due to distractions at home or difficulty carrying on the group activities virtually. This may create disadvantageous opportunities for some students, especially those in need of exceptional support. In addition, students were also affected by decreased opportunities to interact with each other and form study groups. On the other hand, student enrollment was well-managed thanks to the timely transition from face-to-face to virtual online learning.

A few participants said they discussed the online software with academic staff, either to use Zoom or Microsoft Teams but could not decide. Eventually, the senior management team made the final decision about the software.

All participants confirmed that with the initial challenges of switching from traditional face to face teaching to remote online teaching, once online teaching started, they did not face any challenges and had been running online teaching successfully. All participants also confirmed that they provided guidance on COVID-19 and fastly updated information related to COVID-19 on their websites; they strictly followed the instructions of the Government in updating the information.

Student academic success depends on regular class attendance; elsewhere mentioned the student attendance increased during the COVID-19 as the classes were online and students had not to travel to attend the classes. One participant reported that a few students attended their online classes with positive COVID-19 while in isolation. As academic performance is linked to attendance, therefore, during the COVID-19,

students' results were better. One participant mentioned that the student's attendance and results were excellent.

One participant said that COVID-19 had a catastrophic impact on the college, as the college director's death due to COVID-19 changed the college's strategy from growth to sustainability. He was the main driver of the growth strategy. As a result, we had student recruitment problems and closed a couple of campuses, creating confusion and chaos among staff. One participant mentioned that the college could not recruit even a single international student during the COVID-19. However, the number of international students' before COVID-19 was minimal.

On the contrary to the above answer, one participant confirmed the exponential growth of the college with the opening of three campuses and one university partnership. In addition, he further confirmed a high number of students' recruitment as compared to before COVID-19. Another participant shared a different view of long waiting on their university partnership application, perhaps due to lockdown.

The majority of participants said they had 100 per cent academic staff availability for online teaching; even a few staff members cancelled their pre-booked holidays during the COVID-19. They also confirmed that they had the lowest staff turnover. All participants agreed that remote working has been successful and most of the employees prefer to continue in the future.

According to a Gartner (2020) survey of 229 Human Resources (HR) departments, indicated roughly half of the companies had 81 per cent of their employees working from home during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. The report also estimated significant long-term increases for remote work after the pandemic. As a result of COVID-19, the need for millions of workers to work from home has increased in recent years. The requirement for millions of workers to work from home in response to COVID-19 has speeded up recent remote work trends, which have been aided by the advancement of information and communication technologies.

In addition, working hours have been affected; two answers agreed that the time flexibility was a positive point for managers; however, coordination, creativity, and work flexibility had to be given at very high importance. Moreover, the informal staff meetings noticed a high increase to compensate for the decreased spontaneous interactions caused by the remote work.

One participant confirmed that they realised staff well being and mental health during the COVID-19 as they had to cancel all socialising events such as X-MASS parties and dinners in 2020. He further mentioned that the college organised a staff summer party immediately after the easing of lockdown in June 2021 to provide a socialising platform. Human beings are primarily a social species, interacting with and forming various types of relationships with others. Extensive public health research confirms the importance of social interaction and relationships for mental health throughout the lifespan. For example, Umberson and Montez (2010) conclude that social relationships influence health over the lifespan and that, as others have suggested, social isolation

contributes to anxiety and depression.(Mishra et al., 2018, Mora-Gallegos, Fornaguera 2019, Ranjan, Yadav, 2019).

Concerning the new managerial approaches during the COVID-19 and their success, the answers showed that the management became effective after the new system (flexible/remote working) was in place. Furthermore, the meeting ensured that the staff were kept updated on the changes, support was provided, the management improved rapidly, and the quality improvement was reflected in the students' performance and achievement rates.

C. Post-COVID-19

COVID-19 pandemic outcomes gave perspectives on how post-pandemic will change the higher education planning, management, and funding of online education, as it proves to become a strategic priority in every institution.

Questions related to remote working in the future and advantages and disadvantages of remote working, most participants want to continue remote working in the future.

Regarding the advantages and disadvantages of remote work, the answers were in agreement. The advantages included saving travel time, work flexibility, effective time management, convenience in organising virtual meetings, the possibility to work extra hours if needed without worrying about the late office working permission policy due to the environment safety and being around and looking after family and loved ones. In addition, there were environmental impact advantages such as reducing pollution, car parking issues and reducing the risk of accidents and paper for printing. On the other hand, the disadvantages resided mainly in the disruption of face-to-face meetings and communication struggles during technology failures, clarifying requirements when assigning job duties, creating monitoring systems, carrying periodic health assessments, and relying on IT for everything.

Gartner survey (2020) showed that many workers plan to work remotely more often in the future.

Two participants stated that the technologies that helped to continue online teaching during the COVID-19 would become a permanent part of educational methods in post-COVID-19 and play a pivotal role in refining practices consistent with an ongoing shift to more student-centred learning.

Most of the participants prefer blended teaching in the future.

As the blended teaching style began to show a dramatic increase, several studies investigated the new virtual mode in an attempt to understand its implications. Henry et al. (2021) analysis suggest that a combination of virtual and redistributed work practices define a novel particular setting. They proposed a conceptual framework integrating virtual, distributed work practice, and organisational levels (Henry, le Roux and Parry, 2021).

For the vast majority of private higher education institutions surviving the pandemic was the top priority. However, those institutions that experienced an adverse

impact of COVID-19, such as the death of a most senior and influential member of staff due to COVID-19, consequently inability to recruit students and deficit in profit and higher costs. Therefore, it might be appropriate for them that relying on layoffs would be the fastest way to balance their budget. However, this is also the fastest way to kill innovation, risk-taking and morale (Kim, 2020).

Quality online learning programmes require significant development of new technology as well as notable investment. Although great chances of returning to traditional learning are foreseen, online learning is beneficial when these methods are aligned with the face-to-face methods, thanks to the increased understanding of the digital tools by the academic staff and students (Kim, 2020). It seems that online education will become a strategic methodology at each educational institution. Therefore, according to Kim, managing is prone to change post-COVID-19. The future prediction of the academic changes will include the managers understanding of the potential of online work practice as a source of revenue and a recognizable method that provides resilience and academic continuity.

In addition, in the future, remote work will open up opportunities to people with different backgrounds and life situations, those with disabilities, and those previously excluded from the traditional workplace due to their social situation or geographical location (Brown and Box, 2020).

6. Conclusion

With the spread of COVID-19, the Traditional office working witnessed a complete turnover. Almost overnight, the institutions had to adopt a virtual and remote access working style. However, remote working is not equivalent to a less advantageous working style. Brown and Box (2020) discussed that traditional office work does not necessarily correlate to productivity, wellbeing, diversity, and inclusion in the workers. They describe the significant shift from the old input model (time spent in the office) to the new driven by output (what the employee actually delivers) as growing evidence of how flexible ways of working can create a greater working environment (Brown and Box, 2020).

On this ground, the development of appropriate technology tools, as well as a commitment to training educators and managers in methodology and adaptive skills, can be of significant importance (Izagirre-Olaizola and Morandeira-Arca, 2020).

De Lucas Ancillo et al. (2020) explain how the temptation to return to pre-COVID-19 approaches should be avoided. Instead, the best approach is to adopt methods that allow preventing mistakes previously made (de Lucas Ancillo, del Val Núñez and Gavrila, 2020). Furthermore, it is necessary to construct new frameworks for a digital world, educate, and prepare the organisation so that they can adapt to different work regimes and successfully blend between the processes related to face-to-face and remote work. However, this should not imply switching to carrying out all the work from home

when the pandemic is over. As attractive as working from home sounds, the benefit from an office environment should not be disregarded (Brown and Box, 2020).

The interview revealed that, despite the uncertainties, blended work in the future is predicted and preferred as a new working model for its apparent efficiency and convenience and productivity.

Moreover, it seems that the institutions did not suffer from any hiring-freeze, in fact, support was provided, or even more hiring of highly qualified and experienced staff took place due to the provision of online teaching and increase in students' enrolment in some institutions. Furthermore, the external collaboration was not dramatically affected, as the partners showed flexibility as well as understanding. However, some adjustments were applied in the case of some university collaborators, such as increasing the quotas or reconsidering their partnership after the government statement concerning putting caps on student numbers. In the case of others, the partnership process witnessed an inevitable delay, and some university partners were taking longer time than usual in deciding on the partnership applications.

However, despite the undeniable fact that there were many challenges, the pandemic served as an excellent opportunity to learn about the business, update the information, carry out the competitor analysis, and enhance staff commitment and motivation.

The shift was easy to manage in some cases and difficult in other, yet staff and students had to cope with the changes as they did not have alternative options. However, from the received answers, managers are opting for this new style of online teaching-learning and blended work.

A significant threat altered nearly every aspect of academic life, from learning and teaching to managerial functions. As a solution, the educational management sought adjustment to adapt to the rapid changes. The applied changes aided in dealing with the fast changes and led to a permanent change in the education system. This study covers aspects of the new working method applied during and post-pandemic, including remote working, flexibility, and blended learning approaches.

The COVID-19 pandemic has offered HEIs a rare opportunity to put their dysfunctional strategies behind them. The current challenges permitted to learn that private higher education needs a fierce commitment to developing their technology infrastructure as the current solution and for a future precaution during difficult times. It is fair to assume that the implications of COVID-19 on private high education were not fully negative but gave emergence to a positive outcome as well.

The institutions adapted to change and survived and improved their organisational management and technology in educational aspects. However, the uncertainties, the future of the private sector continuity depends heavily on what can be done today and during the post-COVID-19 period.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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