The Development of Crisis Distance Education at Kuwait University During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Introduction:

The educational system has been evolving since it was formalized in the 19th century. However, this evolution has reached its peak during the 20th century, when several educational institutions started to launch instructional initiatives that revolve around the student, paving the way for more student-cantered learning that allows students to learn and gain academic knowledge, in a manner through which their independence to use different resources is heightened. This modern approach also emphasizes the concept of interactive communication between students and teachers, and it does not leave students to their own devices (Popova, 2020, p. 196).

This is because student-cantered education makes students have more responsibility for the choices they make regarding learning objectives, academic subjects, and developmental strategies needed to enhance their mental capabilities (Das, 2019, p. 157).

Accordingly, this student-cantered approach can be represented by several forms and models of education such as distance learning. Therefore, it can be indicated that distance learning is a rather modern form of education that enables students to learn from and communicate with their tutors without having to attend school. This form of education offers an array of strategies such as e-learning that gives students the freedom to learn, communicate, and adjust their schedule by using the internet (Tavukcu, Arap, & Ozcan, 2011, p. 4002).

Moreover, it can be indicated that the modern educational system is highly dependent on distance education as a tool that signifies the significance of using the latest scientific and technological

innovations to help renovate the overall structure of both learning and teaching (Cimpanu, Lupu, & Ungureanu, 2019, p. 242).

The importance of distance education does not end here. Aside from giving students a significant degree of freedom to learn and communicate with their teachers independently, distance education is also regarded by many as an effective alternative for students who are not fully capable of traveling abroad to complete their higher education. It also assists students in obtaining their doctoral or/and master's degrees, especially for those who reside in Arab countries such as Kuwait (Almuttawa, & Alsomeet, 2015, p. 456-457).

To be more specific, distance education could be the perfect form of education that caters to the need of a multitude of learners across the globe amid a given crisis. Thanks to the many advantages provided by distance education, students can gain more experience, share their knowledge, study and communicate with teachers and perform various academic activities whenever and wherever they see fit (Mulyadi, Kadir, Omolu, Prasetyaningsih, & Normawati, 2020, p. 51).

Speaking of which, the current COVID-19 pandemic is considered one of the most destructive threats that humanity has ever witnessed in the last twenty years. This pandemic has affected every aspect of life, especially the educational system that was globally brought to a halt. However, a more flexible and adaptable form of education has stemmed from distance education known as crisis distance education. This novel form of education was created as a practical response to the current COVID-19 pandemic, and many countries started to officially adopt it as the most effective educational strategy for the time being (Delo, 2021, p. iv).

Thus, the necessity to identify the manner through which distance education differs from crisis distance education shall be highlighted as follows:

1. **Conventional Distance Education:** This form of education is always available as an alternative for students who cannot attend school. Moreover, it is not, by any means, mandatory.

2. **Crisis Distance Education:** Also known as "Pandemic Distance Education", is only available for students in case a major global crisis takes place. It is then implemented as a mandatory educational tool that students have to use temporarily (Zhumbei, 2021, p. 53).

Research Steps:

The current research provided an analytical demonstration of the concept of using crisis distance education as an effective educational alternative in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These specific steps helped the researcher achieve the research objectives, and find rational answers to the research questions that will be identified later. Thus, the following steps shall be underlined:

Firstly, the researcher presented the first section within which a brief yet comprehensive introduction to the study shall be provided, highlighting the significance of crisis distance education, the objectives of the current research, and the main problem that prevents Kuwait University's deans from implementing crisis distance educations strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic. This section also highlighted the study's methodology, population, and instrument.

In the second section, the researcher inspected and theoretically analysed the study's main variables, starting with distance education in general and crisis distance education in particular, and eventually finishing with the COVID-19 pandemic, and how Kuwait university responded to it using various e-learning and other related crisis distance education strategies.

The third section was designed to understand the dimensions and statistical differences among the participants' statements. The researcher used statistical tests and parameters to gather, measure, validate and analyse data extracted from a series of interviews that had been conducted between the researcher and the study's participants, to identify the required information about their

perceptions and experience toward using crisis distance education as an educational alternative during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Terminologies:

The current research investigated the issue of implementing distance education strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the main research terminologies can be defined as follows:

Firstly: Crisis Distance Education:

Al-Lily, Ismail, Abunasser, and Alqahtani (2020, p. 1) defined crisis distance as "A unique form of education in its philosophies and procedures, being fundamentally different from typical distance education in several ways".

The researcher defined crisis distance education as a distinct form of education that can be used mandatorily to assist both teachers and students in teaching and learning from a distance, during any given crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Secondly: Crisis:

Abrashi (2018, p. 21) defined crisis as "A circumstance in which the organization cannot function normally, hindering the achievement of its objectives and threatening survival, and it causes uncertainty, stress, panic, and confusion among management, employees and the public".

Oluwasola, Tiwalola, and Ibitoye (2017, p. 47) defined crisis as "A phenomenon that has affected many products, individuals and even corporate establishments".

Moreover, Mir, Hassan, Ali, and Kosar (2016, p. 2831) defined crisis as "A change resulting in an urgent problem which must be addressed immediately".

The researcher defined crisis as an event that suddenly takes place as it negatively affects all aspects of life, and destructively threatens people's livelihoods on a global scale.

Thirdly: The COVID-19 pandemic:

Sabbah (2020, p. 50) defined the COVID-19 pandemic as "The cluster of viral pneumonia cases which first started occurring in Wuhan city. The coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as severe acute respiratory syndrome".

Koshi et al (2021, p. 126) defined the COVID-19 pandemic as "An infection with the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 pathogen and has spread to pandemic levels since its inception in December 2019".

Nas, Eryilmaz, Geylk, and Atlas (2021, p. 811) defined the COVID-19 pandemic as "The clinical picture of an important and severe infectious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2".

The researcher defined the COVID-19 pandemic as a pandemic that took the whole world by storm since 2019, and it carries an infectious virus that attacks individuals' respiratory systems.

Fourthly: Distance Education:

Benli and Ismaliova (2018, p. 1) defined distance education as "A model of the education system that students and teachers carry out through their learning and teaching activities by communicating via technologies and post services".

Venkateshwarlu, Raju, and Kumar (2016, p. 70) defined distance education as a form of education that "Has become a permeating and growing phenomenon that provides the flexibility intended for the people who can't be able to continue their education during geographical distance, economical status, and cultural reasons".

Ambeth and Saravanakumar also (2020, p. 90-91) defined distance education as "the learning process in which there is usually a spatial and temporal distance between the teacher and the learner".

The researcher defined distance education as a unique type of education that enables students who are not allowed to continue their studies, due to cultural temporal, and spatial reasons, to communicate with and learn from teachers via different methods such as electronic learning and correspondence courses.

Fifthly: Pandemic:

Kalyani and Somani (2020, p. 357) defined a pandemic as "An epidemic occurring worldwide or over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries and usually affecting a large number of people".

Mansoor (2021, p. 420) defined a pandemic as "An epidemic of an infectious aetiology that crosses the international boundaries and infects a large number of people".

On the other hand, Acikgoz and Gunay (2020, p. 520) defined a pandemic as "The highest level of global health emergency affecting multiple regions of the world".

The researcher defined the pandemic as a menacingly and adversely impactful event that prevents individuals from carrying out their daily activities, and forces societies to take drastic and emergency-related measures.

Research Problem:

The current study was fundamentally designed to address a specific problem that revolves around the fact that although Kuwait university acknowledges the significance of distance education in general and crisis distance education in particular, there still seems to be a major issue preventing crisis distance education from being fully implemented effectively. The issue at hand encompasses three main elements including:

1. Being challenged by obstacles that obstruct the implementation of crisis distance education in Kuwait university.
2. The lack of pre-active planning skills, and reliance on reactive measures in Kuwait University.
3. The lack of training and professional development programs concerning crisis distance education in Kuwait University.

Accordingly, Alsairafi, Naser, Alsaleh, Awad, and Jalal (2021, p. 2) indicated that Kuwait university reacted to the COVID-19 outbreak by simply shutting down its department and suspending all educational and academic activities until further notice. However,

Kuwait University was not very successful at presenting an effective alternative that allows students and teachers to cope with the crisis and resume their normal instructional and learning practices, for a period of almost six months in 2020. The researcher concluded that this highlights the lack of proper planning that should have been conducted beforehand, to prevent this crisis from exacerbating.

Another challenge faced by Kuwait University during the COVID-19 pandemic was represented in the lack of training regarding using the university's electronic repository, resources, and library. This reflected the huge number of students and academics who were not fully aware of the existence of such electronic resources, given the fact that these resources happen to be essential for the utilization of distance education during the crisis. Therefore, it can be indicated that the university had a problem with the lack of trained individuals who can use these resources during the pandemic (Hendal, 2020, p. 429).

Also, it was indicated that the educational staff in Kuwait University faced a few major difficulties that serve as obstacles to the implementation process of distance education during the COVID-19 crisis. These obstacles included administrative, academic, and logistic difficulties, concerning the manner through which distance education is used to assist the teaching staff in providing their instructional services to all students (Safar, 2020, p. 2059).

Based on the aforementioned, the researcher can verify the existence of a triple-faceted problem in Kuwait University regarding the implementation of various crisis distance education strategies. The facets of this problem entail the lack of proper pre-active planning, the lack of training needed to use online tools, and other administrative, academic, and logistic obstacles that prevent the university from implementing crisis distance education strategies.

Research Objectives:

The current research aimed at identifying the degree to which Kuwait University implements crisis distance education strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the following objectives can be listed:

1. Identifying the study's participants' perceptions and individual experiences toward the implementation of crisis distance education in response to the COVID-19 pandemic at Kuwait university.
2. Identifying all requirements for the implementation of crisis distance education in response to the COVID-19 pandemic at Kuwait University.
3. Identifying all threatening obstacles that obstruct the implementation of crisis distance education in response to the COVID-19 pandemic at Kuwait University.
4. Detecting statistically significant differences among the study's participants mean scores in accordance with their perceptions toward the implementation of crisis distance education in response to the COVID-19 pandemic at Kuwait University.
5. Detecting statistically significant differences among the study's participants mean scores in accordance with all requirements for the implementation of crisis distance education in response to the COVID-19 pandemic at Kuwait University.
6. Detecting statistically significant differences among the study's participants mean scores in accordance with all threatening obstacles that obstruct the implementation of crisis distance education in response to the COVID-19 pandemic at Kuwait University.

Research Questions:
The current research, therefore, attempts to gather specific and rational answers for the following research questions:

1. What are the participants' perceptions and individual experiences toward the implementation of crisis distance education in response to the COVID-19 pandemic at Kuwait University?
2. What are the requirements for the implementation of crisis distance education in response to the COVID-19 pandemic at Kuwait University?

3. What are the threatening obstacles that obstruct the implementation of crisis distance education in response to the COVID-19 pandemic at Kuwait University?
4. Are there any statistically significant differences among the study's participants' mean scores in accordance with their perceptions and individual experiences and individual experiences toward the implementation of crisis distance education in response to the COVID-19 pandemic at Kuwait University?
5. Are there any statistically significant differences among the study's participants' mean scores in accordance with all requirements for the implementation of crisis distance education in response to the COVID-19 pandemic at Kuwait University?
6. Are there any statistically significant differences among the study's participants' mean scores in accordance with all threatening obstacles that obstruct the implementation of crisis distance education in response to the COVID-19 pandemic at Kuwait University?

Research Methodology:
The current research adopted the qualitative approach. In this vein, Zermiani, Freitas, Ditterich, and Giordani (2021, p. 1) posited that the qualitative approach appertains to the concept of subjectivity through which the researcher can get involved in an interactive and open-ended conversation with the study's participants whose ideas and perceptions are then analysed and characterized by the researcher. This occurs to establish a full understanding of the perceptions and attitudes adopted by the participants.

Research Population and Sample:
The current research population consisted of all academic staff members in Kuwait university including the Deputy Director, the Deans of the Colleges of Administrative Sciences, Allied Medical Science, Arts, Education, Engineering and Petroleum, and Sharia; the Faculties of Architecture, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Public Health,

Law, Life Sciences, and Social Sciences, as well as the Deans of Administration, Registration, and Student's Affairs. The research sample was inclusive of fifteen (15) deans who happen to be members of the academic staff at Kuwait University.

Research Instrument:

Upon reviewing the literature, the researcher used several open-ended interviews, as the main instrument of the study, with all fifteen deans who happen to be members of the academic staff in Kuwait University.

Literature Review
Crisis Distance Education
Origins of Distance Education:

The first attempt to create a formalized model of distance education that takes place between students and teachers dates back to the 18th century, specifically in the United States of America. The distance education studies that were presented at the time allowed students to carry out correspondence courses, and they were announced in a gazette published in Boston, the announcement stated that those who wish to study shorthand will be able to receive the same level of instruction as perfectly as anyone who lives in Boston, by having lessons sent to them weekly (Akinyi, 2016, p. 2).

Moving forward, the concept of distance education and the idea of studying and communicating with teachers from a distance without having to attend school started to grow and spread all over Europe. In the 19th century, England started to follow in the footsteps of the United States of America, by establishing a distance education degree in 1858 offered by the University of London. It is important to note that the University of London still offers the same program. However, it is known as "The University of London International Program" (Venkateshwarlu, Raju, & Kumar, 2016, p. 70).

It is worth noting that distance education was codified within the Open University model in England when students used to receive

lessons by post. This clarifies how influential distance education was back in the 19th century (Vlachopoulos, & Makri, 2019, p. 606).

Moreover, distance education has evolved over the last 300 years since its inception in the 18th century, especially during the last decade in the 20th century. Thanks to the latest astonishing technological innovations, students were allowed to receive their lessons through different mediums, including the radio, parcel posts, the television, and the internet that created a novel concept of education known as online learning or electronic learning (Kentnor, 2015, p. 22).

Vasile and Teodorescu (2015, p. 80) confirmed this by stating that distance education in the 20th century capitalizes on the magnificent innovations that facilitated learning and teaching, allowed students to gain access to an assortment of resources, and offered a plethora of applications through different platforms on the internet. When it comes to modern education, the 20th century is known to be the era of electronic and online learning, where students are given enough independence to study choose their academic discipline, without being completely neglected by teachers who still over their supervision and instructional services to them.

This shows how evolved distance education has become since it had been formalized in the 18th century. Distance education always seems to be using the latest technology that arises in a given era, to become more multi-faceted and complex (Aoki, 2012, p. 185).

Consequently, distance education still evolves at a progressing rate, going from correspondence courses and reaching its peak with online learning. Not only has modern distance education contributed to the development of both learning and teaching, but it also allowed for a better understanding of the theories that reflect the main approach of the latest form of distance education. Therefore, these theories also seem to evolve from traditional to digital (Bozna, & Firat, 2019, p. 247).

Types of Distance Education:

Distance education is famous for being easy to use by students and reflective of modern technologies. However, it still includes a

traditional facet that allows students to study from a distance without attending school or having to stay online. Therefore, distance education offers an array of types including the following:

1. Educational radio and television programs that present different lessons in different disciplines.
2. Online and internet-based learning using different multimedia instructional materials, including video, audio, or text materials.
3. Correspondence courses allow students to receive their lessons by traditional mail (Mohammed, & Teshome, 2012, p. 58).

Al-Arimi (2014, p. 85) also confirmed this by listing the following types of both traditional and online distance education:

1. Correspondence courses send to students by traditional mail.
2. Internet-based and online learning using courses via different synchronous and asynchronous learning modalities.
3. Television and radio programs that broadcast educational content and coursework.
4. Computer-based learning where students can study their lessons using content that had been already stored and installed on hard discs.
5. Mobil learning where students can gain access to a multitude of content and coursework online via different mobile applications and educational platforms.

Speaking of traditional types of distance education, correspondence courses are supposed to be the most utilized form of traditional distance education. Therefore, there are four types of students who happen to use correspondence courses as their method of choice. These types can be listed as follows:

1. Students who had earlier postponed their education for personal reasons, and later decided to continue their education.

2. Students who are prevented from going to school due to geographical limitations.
3. Students who are qualified to pursue higher education, but lack the motivation to join a specific university.
4. Students who wish to update their knowledge and apply for lifelong learning programs (Panchabakesan, 2011, p. 114).

When it comes to online learning, Shahidian, Sadighi, and Bozorgmanesh (2011, p. 29) stated that distance education encompasses two main categories, each category entails several different types that can be applied using all kinds of programs and models. These two categories can be listed as follows:

1. **Synchronous Learning Programs:** Within this category, students are prompted to be online by logging on to the school/institution's website or platform at a set time that is assigned by the teaching staff. Synchronous learning programs allow students to interact with their teachers, professors, peers, and tutors via call-ins, web seminars, group chat, instant messaging, and video conferencing. Therefore, a synchronous learning program can be identified as an online/live-feed based educational modality.

2. **Asynchronous Learning Programs:** Within this category, students do not have to be online at a set time, instead, they can study and review their courses according to their time schedules, and this might differ from one student to another. Asynchronous learning programs include different sub-types of asynchronous distance education such as email, assignment sheets, pre-recorded video and audio lectures, online courses sent by email, and message boards Therefore, synchronous learning program can be identified as an offline educational modality.

Moreover, there exist several different types of online and computer-based distance education modalities. These types might differ from one another regarding each one's modality and overall

instructional structure. However, they all seem to aim at achieving the same objective, which is offering students an independent and flexible way of learning. These types are inclusive of, but not exclusive to, audio-taped lectures, online learning, and interactive videoconferencing, given the fact that interactive videoconferencing happens to be the most utilized method of online learning (Basho ski, Koceska, & Koceski, 2014, p. 25).

Significance of Distance Education:

Distance education is considered an important and integral element of education in the 21st century, thanks to its multi-faceted nature that pertains to the latest technology. Due to its importance, distance education is highly recommended for all learners and tutors and should be used by all educational institutions regardless of the discipline chosen by the student, as it can be applied in different academic contexts (Kanbul, Zaitseva, Ikonnikov, Kalugina, Savina, & Evgrafova, 2020, p. 59).

The importance of distance learning lies in the fact that it can be used when a threatening crisis occurs, and that is because crises do not allow people to practice their activities normally, and that also affects the educational system in a major way. Therefore, distance education offers an effective alternative to traditional education, to allow students to continue their education, and learn from their teachers without having to leave their houses (Aydin, & Erol, 2021, p. 60).

Distance education also happens to be important as it offers students a convenient alternative to traditional education, where they can gain access to different academic content and materials. It also assists students in possessing high levels of self-efficiency, autonomy, and confidence. This can happen by using different methods of distance education such as learning management systems "LMS" and online learning (Prior, Mazanov, Meacheam, Heaslip, & Hanson, 2016, p. 91).

Consequently, distance education is the most convenient form of modern education because it adheres to the latest technologies such as mobile devices and the internet, offering a more cost-effective,

easy to use and highly accessible alternative to traditional education, that can be used by anyone wherever they might be. Accordingly, distance education can be used as a great option for students who wish to continue their higher education (Nurgaliyeva, 2018, p. 117).

Objectives of Distance Education:

Distance education attempts to achieve several specific objectives. For example, the main objective that distance education aims at achieving is the development of an effective and fruitful form of education that can respond to student's different demands and aspirations. It also aims at creating a flexible educational modality that allows students to utilize the internet and the latest technologies to customize their learning and gain autonomy and self-confidence (Dwivedi, & Gupta, 2019, p. 1-2).

Hongliang, Shaoying, and Wei (2013, p. 1163) also confirmed this by stating that distance education aims at establishing a higher degree of autonomous learning that pertains to and responds to each student's unique personality and needs respectively, given the fact that it places each student within an environment where he/she is fully capable to dictating the pace of their learning, and that should heighten their sense of confidence and self-efficacy.

Furthermore, distance education is not supposed to be aiming at creating a permanent replacement for traditional education by any means. Instead, it aims at complementing traditional education, by offering students a different option through which they can continue their education, communicate with their tutors and teachers, and also enhance their professional knowledge by developing their career skills and professional competencies (Bercasio, Llenaresas, & Nunez, 2014, p. 65).

In that regard, distance education is an important complementary tool that reinforces traditional education by aiming at delivering a unique and distinct form of qualitative education to those who wish to continue their higher education but face several physical limitations. Thus, it offers them the latest technology known to mankind, and that allows students to cope with the most advanced methods of learning, and stay ahead of other students who might be

using traditional education as their only option (Bagapova, Kobilova, & Yuldasheva, 2020, p. 209).

Crisis Distance Education:

Distance education can be used in times of crisis as an alternative to traditional education, to cope with the difficulties and challenges imposed by this crisis. Therefore, the term "crisis distance education" can be adopted to refer to this form of education.

Accordingly, stated that crisis distance education is also known as emergency remote teaching, and it does not aim at replacing traditional education. Although the nature of crisis distance education is not dedicated to establishing a new educational environment, it is still considered a temporary and urgent alternative that allows students to gain access to educational resources in times of crisis (Calik, & Altay, 2021, p. 74).

Moreover, it could be noted that crisis distance education differs from traditional distance education by being inclusive of the following characteristics:

1. **Suddenness:** Crisis distance education is implemented as a response to a sudden event that affects the educational system on a global scale. Therefore, it can be concluded that crisis distance education is never preceded by precautionary measures, which means that it is used as an emergency alternative, that is used right after the crisis occurs.

2. **Internationalization:** Crisis distance education is known to be a variation of distance education that every single institution around the globe happens to be familiar with. It is characterized by its internationally acknowledged qualities and advantages that allow students, regardless of their ethnic or cultural background, to makes use of the latest technological innovations to continue their education in times of crisis. Therefore, it can be indicated that crisis distance education is not a mere local framework that only applies to one or two nations.

3. **Popularity:** Crisis distance education is, without a shadow of a doubt, one of the most renowned forms of education, that assists both educational institutions and students in continuing their learning and teaching respectively, without being hindered by the crisis at hand. Therefore, crisis distance education has become a trend within the educational environment as a tool that helps individuals overcome any crisis and coexist with its unexpected tribulations.

4. **Expansion:** Crisis distance education is famous for being easy to use and available for implementation in different school stages. It can even be used by higher education institutions and other professional development organizations. Therefore, it can be concluded that crisis distance education has expanded to surpass the limitations of K12 schooling, to reach other frontiers such as higher education and post-secondary studies.

5. **Medical Use:** Crisis distance education is always used when the crisis at hand starts to affect people's health and the overall medical aspect of society. That makes crisis distance education the perfect solution for an educational lockdown that forces schools to close and postpone their services until further notice. That is because crisis distance education can be implemented to offer students the ability to continue their education while being isolated at their homes (Al Llily, Ismail, Abunasser, & Alqahtani, 2020, p. 1-2).

Consequently, for teaching staff members to implement crisis distance education, one has to abide by an organized framework that is normally inclusive of the following steps:

1. **Step 1- Engage:**
- Start by communicating with your students about the best method they can use to continue their studies in times of crisis.
- Establish a well-organized plan that allows the student to comprehend the aspects of the crisis fully, and the manner

through which they can use the crisis distance education method that had already been indicated above.

- Follow that by presenting similar scenarios where similar crises took place so that everyone can learn from them.

2. **Step 2- Explore:**

- Start preparing a crisis plan for all students who attend school. The plan has to be direct and clear so that students can continue their studies with ease.

- Create a team that has three different factions; the first faction shall be responsible for providing assistance and supervision to all students, the second faction shall study the crisis at hand to find a way out of it sooner than later and the third faction shall be in charge of determining how teaching should be resumed after the crisis fades away.

- Prepare a good amount of crisis management courses that the school can benefit from in case any similar crisis takes place in the future.

3. **Step 3- Explain:**

- Offer students a clear explanation regarding the reason why distance education is the best method of education for the time being.

- Always keep reminding students about the efficient features of crisis distance education and how beneficial it is for them.

- Determine the number of objectives that should be achieved using crisis distance education with all students.

4. **Step 4- Execute:**

- Begin executing the plan that you have established and explained.

5. **Step 5- Evaluate:**

- Create an evaluation process to measure the benefits that had been gained from using distance education as an effective alternative to traditional education.

- Allow students to evaluate the effectiveness of the crisis distance education plan that they have carried out.
- Identify all strengths and weaknesses regarding the crisis distance education plan, and enhance your future plans based on that informative identification (Nilsson, 2021, p. 22).

Crisis Distance Education in Kuwait:

The state of Kuwait was caught up in a global crisis that affected every country's position. This crisis is resembled by the COVID-19 pandemic that forced the Kuwaiti government to take drastic measures and abide by the strict recommendations given by the World Health Organization in order to deal with the current crisis. This also encouraged the Kuwaiti government to find an effective alternative to traditional learning and it eventually decided to choose distance education as the most convenient educational method for the moment and started utilizing all of its electronic resources that had not been used before, as it should have been (Alshammari, 2021, p. 205).

Moreover, crisis education in Kuwait could be characterized as an alternative that was chosen by the Kuwaiti government to combat the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was, undoubtedly, such a menacing crisis that negatively affected the Kuwaiti educational system. This crisis urged the Kuwaiti government to decide to manage the crisis from an educational standpoint and started by shutting down all schools and universities on March 1, 2020. However, the overall plan was to choose an alternative to traditional education by transitioning into using distance education as an effective educational method (Al-Hunaiyyan, & Al-Hajri, 2021, p. 2).

This was confirmed by AlHeneidi, AlTerkait, and Smith (2021, p. 59) who clearly stated that college students in Kuwait themselves stated to look for different methods that could be used as effective alternatives to traditional education in times of the COVID-19 crisis, and they were able to switch from traditional learning to electronic and online learning. It should be noted though, that this

transition from face-to-face education to distance education was the only alternative left for Kuwaiti university students, especially when the government decided to shut down all universities and colleges. Furthermore, Al Enzi and Al Saidi (2021) stated as cited in (The 2nd International Conference of the Gulf Arab States Educational Research Centre, 2020) that the Kuwaiti government started to withstand the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic by shutting down all schools and universities and switch to distance education. This transition prompted all competent teachers who excel at using digital and electronic educational tools in order to apply for the newly created distance education plans so that students can continue their studies without having to get affected by the crisis.

In order to make the best use out of crisis distance education, stated that the Kuwaiti government announced the launch of its Kuwait E-learning Portal that allows all students to resume their education, evaluate their levels of academic achievement and gain access to all materials and educational content. This portal was also accompanied by other projects created by the Kuwaiti ministry of education, such as the launch of the "Siraj" Application, several interactive books, and an educational channel known as the MOE Channel on YouTube (MIT Technology Review, 2021).

On the other hand, Almutairi, Ali, and Ghuloum (2021, p. 121) stated that crisis distance education seems to be a little bit unclear in the case of Kuwait, and the plans adopted by the Kuwaiti government to face the complications caused by the crisis of the novel COVID-19 pandemic also seems a bit haphazard in nature and unorganized. This could be attributed to the ill-defined and poorly designed plans and frameworks conducted by the Kuwaiti government in response to this crisis.

Endeavours Exerted to Enhance Crisis Distance Education in Kuwait University:

Kuwait University exerted a huge amount of efforts dedicated to the establishment of a crisis distance education framework that should

assist its students and teaching staff in continuing their learning and teaching respectively.

In this vein, Kuwait University established the Educational Development Centre that, in conjunction with the UNESCO and The Kuwait Foundation For The Advancement Of Sciences, hosted its most important conference on May 23-27 2021. The proceedings addressed the most effective alternative to traditional education, and it concluded that higher education in the state of Kuwait needs to direct its attention to blended learning, as a lesson learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, along with organizing a series of training courses for those teachers who might lack the required competencies and skills for handling digital and online learning tools (Al Enzi, Al Eissa, Al Enzi, Al Azmi, & Al Houti, 2021, p. 4).

Kuwait University also launched a very promising initiative to respond to the threatening complications of the COVID-19 pandemic that affected all facets of higher education in Kuwait. Although this initiative was already in practice before the COVID-19 pandemic, it was revamped flexibly to cope with the need for a new effective alternative to traditional education. This resulted in the establishment of the "Virtual Recharge Hour", which allowed teaching staff members to hold different meetings and sessions where they can share their experiences and ideas in order to enhance the concept of student engagement (Al-Taweel et al., 2020, p. 1297).

Accordingly, Kuwait University was able to establish a committee for distance learning in 2020. This distance learning committee includes a number of specialists who can offer students a high-quality education by enabling them to gain access to different educational resources online. The distance learning committee launched and supervised by Kuwait University also offers a number of manuals for both users and practitioners including teaching staff members, in order to give the latter a chance to complete their training regarding using digital educational tools and online platforms (Kuwait University, 2021).

Another initiative Kuwait University had to take in order to find a better plan to re-open its schools was the famous online two-day

webinar it organized with the University of Helsinki in Finland, in which the University of Helsinki Centre for Continuing Education HY+ and the Educational Development Centre "EDC" discussed the capabilities of Kuwaiti teachers and how to enhance their skills in preparation for reopening the schools in Kuwait (University of Helsinki HY+, 2021).

COVID-19 Pandemic
A Comprehensive Understanding of Pandemics:

Pandemics are known to be completely different from epidemics. While the latter refers to an outbreak that affects a large portion of human beings within one community, country, or region, the former refers to an epidemic that affects the whole world, and sweeps across the nations, surpassing different countries, regions, and even continents. Pandemics are also known for their destructive impact on both the social and economic aspects of any society (Kaur, & Saxena, 2020, p. 2861).

Pandemics also seem to arise frequently, and one can even measure the level of risk regarding every pandemic that occurred every 100 years or so. These repetitive waves always endanger people's health, financial position, and overall well-being. In addition to that, whenever a certain pandemic occurs, it relatively exists within many countries around the world for a number of years, which makes it more dangerous than other mere outbreaks or epidemics (Sidhu, Bhalla, & Ali, 2021, p. 7).

For that reason, it could be indicated that pandemics are characterized by their naturally destructive impact that lasts for a long period of time. This specific trait makes pandemics very difficult to find cures and treatments for, and that is because pandemics always seem to build an ever-evolving resistance over time that withstands any method of eradication (Mustapha, Ahmed, & Ahmad, 2021, p. 151).

Naturally speaking, pandemics encompass a few types and examples that had already been recorded in history within the last

centuries. Perhaps the most common types of pandemics are inclusive of smallpox, influenza, and, of course, plagues. These different pandemics had arisen in so many countries around the world, and negatively affected a significant number of people's lives, on a social and economic level (Parrey, & Rios-Escalante, 2021, p. 1).

Some might even argue that pandemics are nature's way of restoring balance into a chaotic world that is overwhelmed by a complex network of social, professional, and cultural elements. In this case, pandemics reflect the ever-changing characteristics of the ecosystem and present a perfect picture of the natural environment that summarizes the overall relationship humans have with nature (Manopo, 2021, p. 1).

Aside from the economy, education is also another facet in society that is extremely disrupted by pandemics at a staggering rate, and that is due to the highly contagious characteristics of pandemics. This could be a blessing in disguise though for students, as they are encouraged to use online learning, and organize their schedules as they see fit (Stegaroiu, 2020, p. 80).

Furthermore, perhaps the most affected sector in society by pandemics is the healthcare sector. During this trying time, healthcare professionals find themselves trapped in a situation where they are urged to work as fast as possible to find a cure for the pandemic that helps bring everything back to normal, and also to offer their medical services for all patients in different healthcare institutions around the country (Phiri, Rathod, Elliot, & Delanerolle, 2020, p. 66).

To sum up, Jankovic, Milenkovic, and Djordevic (2020, p. 42) indicated that pandemics leave behind a huge number of people who suffer from the drastic complications of the international outbreak. Those people are usually infected and fatally affected by the unforgiving and threatening nature of pandemics. This makes social distancing a preventive method that has always been regarded as an effective method in preventing the pandemic from spreading into new locations.

Causes of Pandemics:

Pandemics do not exist in a vacuum, for they usually start as a specific disease that starts spreading from one person/animal to another, it then becomes an outbreak that arises within a given nation, and later on, it becomes a pandemic once it starts spreading on an international level. Pandemics can be caused by the rapid spread of a given disease that has a rather long incubation period compared to other diseases. This might happen due to global travel that forces a huge number of individuals to leave from one geographic location to another while increasing the risk of getting other people infected (Fomicheva, 2015, p. 93).

Therefore, Nayak, Belle, and Nayak (2021, p. 77) stated that the causes that lead to the inception of a certain pandemic vary from one context to another. The most common contexts that serve as the perfectly conducive environments for a pandemic to arise can be explained from a scientific, spiritual, astrophysical, or philosophical standpoint. However, the most compelling explanation that demonstrates how a certain pandemic takes place happens to dissect the matter from a scientific standpoint. Therefore, the scientific explanation for the factors that cause pandemics to arise indicates that the viral or bacterial genome, that is responsible for carrying the virus among different hosts, happens to go through a series of mutations that reinforce the ability of that genome to survive and withstand different ecological condition.

This allows for a better understanding of the manner through which pandemics grow and evolve from just outbreaks into major pandemics that are completely out of control. Therefore, it could be concluded that viral pandemics are caused by the evolving nature of the virus that allows them to adapt to the overall structure of human cells to infect them, and survive by moving from one body to another (Bons, 2020, p. 6).

Moreover, it is a known fact that pandemics are caused by diseases that can be carried from one person to another within a specific environment. These diseases are known as communicable diseases,

and they are considered one of the main causes of pandemics in the entire world. However, animals and arboreal insects, and mosquitoes happen to be the major source for the spread of these communicable diseases in the first place (Ogunmodede, 2020, p. 17).

It is worth noting that when a certain pandemic is caused by a specific disease, one must keep in mind that these diseases that emerge within a given environment still need a lot of time to evolve and transform into a more effective disease that can adapt to the different conditions set by the biological environment of the human body (Hunter, & Kelleher, 2021, p. 1).

On the other hand, also Taques, Neumann, and Solak (2020, p. 55) stated that consuming a specific type of food such as meat products might lead to an increase in the opportunities of a pandemic to arise around the world. Moreover, climate change and other world health-related problems also serve as causes for pandemics to take place. This indicates that personal, ecological, and health-related factors might play a distinctive role in sparking the inception of a certain pandemic for a specific period of time.

The COVID-19 Pandemic:

The COVID-19 pandemic reportedly started in China in December 2019, before it became a worldwide pandemic that affected every single country on the planet. The pandemic reached its peak in 2020, especially during the period where the virus viciously attacked thousands of people all over the world from February to May. Certain countries in Europe were the most affected ones, including Italy that hosted a high death rate (De Giglio et al, 2020, p. 1).

Since then, the COVID-19 pandemic infected and caused the death of hundreds of thousands of people across the globe. As a result, there have been a huge number of healthcare institutions that were completely stunned by the pandemic, and unable to offer their service to those who were infected. This also inflicted a great deal of institutional damage upon healthcare systems in many countries around the world (Ibeh, Enitan, Akele, & Isitua, 2020, p. 68).

It is worth noting that the COVID-19 pandemic forced individuals from different geographic locations on the globe to maintain social distancing and adopt new strategies to prevent the virus from spreading and reaching another peak. These strategies were shared and broadcasted to internet users thanks to social media applications and websites that served as a platform to raise awareness with regard to the whole crisis (Shi et al., 2020, p. 1).

Since its inception in 2019, stated that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all aspects of human life, especially the educational system. The COVID-19 pandemic also hindered the progress of several research studies within different academic medical centres and institutions. However, the COVID-19 pandemic is considered a promising opportunity to change the essence of medical research once and for all (Woolliscroft, 2020, p. 1).

Consequently, the official website of the World Health Organization (2021) stated clearly that the timeline of the COVID-19 pandemic could be resembled by the following significant events:

1. **14 Jan 2020:** The World Health Organization launched a press announcement, in order to clarify the threatening nature of the virus. The announcement aimed at identifying the possibility for the virus to be transmitted from one human being to another. Upon reviewing the 41 confirmed cases that had been officially reported by China, it was then concluded that there is, in fact, a high possibility for limited human-to-human transmission.

2. **10 Mar 2020:** The World Health Organization, through its Director-General, announced that the European continent had, unfortunately, become the epicentre of the COVID-19 pandemic, due to the high number of infected patients and death rate that was officially reported by most countries in the continent. This announcement marked Europe as the second most dangerous geographic location apart from China.

3. **20 Nov 2020:** The number of daily cases jumped for the first time to 600,000 official cases around the globe. This was

accompanied by many announcements that indicated the inception of a few SARS-CoV-2 variants that mainly arose in several European countries such as Denmark, and the United Kingdom.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic carries a few blessings that will allow our human society to advance on a technological level. Needless to say, the COVID-19 pandemic encouraged the use of digital tools, such as websites, applications, and computer software programs, as alternatives to multiple educational and social methods of learning and communicating with others within different communities. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic might help facilitate the adoption of digital transformation (Kang, 2021, p. 15).

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Education:

Pandemics pose a great challenge that obstructs the ability of different education systems to present their services to students. Therefore, maintaining a high level of good quality teaching and learning in times of crisis and pandemics becomes more difficult. Traditional teaching and learning methods might not be enough to cope with a seriously threatening pandemic. Therefore, the inevitability to establish a more advanced educational design becomes more apparent (Pappas, & Giannakos, 2021, p. 1).

Moreover, studying at school allows students to interact and communicate with their peers and teachers, this allows them to enhance their social skills within an institutional context. However, the COVID-19 pandemic forced students around the world to stay at home and imposed several regulations that aim at protecting them from being infected. These regulations led to the emergence of several problems such as social isolation, and the risk of experiencing depression and loneliness (Morris, Dragone, Peabody, & Carr, 2020, p. 1).

The COVID-19 pandemic has been considered an effective parameter that measures the effectiveness of higher education institutions regarding the manner through which it carries out its regular teaching and learning activities and copes with the pandemic

flexibly. The COVID-19 pandemic is also regarded as a good opportunity for higher education institutions to start adopting electronic learning as an alternative to traditional education to respond to different crises that might arise in the future (Osman, 2020, p. 8).

The main problem with the traditional method of teaching and learning lies in the fact that a number of countries, regarding establishing an educational plan that responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, do not happen to have a well-trained teaching staff that knows how to use digital and electronic educational tools for teaching and tutoring. The same countries might not also have the infrastructure required to establish an effective and comprehensive online platform that allows students to gain access to different educational resources (Atuahene, Kong, & Bentum-Micah, 2020, p. 104).

This is because, as stated, the COVID-19 pandemic forced almost all educational institutions around the world to shut down, abide by the "lockdown" regulations announced by the country and postpone their services until further notice. This also affected both teachers and students, who were not able to cope with the new changes that took place. This was more than enough to intensify their sense of confusion and uncertainty (Jena, 2020, p. 12582).

As far as the impact the COVID-19 pandemic imposes on different education systems, it could be concluded that higher education institutions are supposedly the most affected systems, due to universities' integral and critical position in society. As a result, teaching and learning started to shift from direct to distance, with all students and teachers having to learn and teach from home (Wulandari, & Dayana, 2021, p. 111).

Furthermore, it can be indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic affected education in the sense that different educational institutions started to shift from traditional learning to electronic learning, as an alternative that helps these institutions adapt to the new changes imposed by the pandemic. the COVID-19 pandemic also urged

education systems to use different online tools such as platforms, portals, and applications (Yuniarto, Widayanti, & Khasanah, 2021, p. 346).

Thus, Nurdiansyah (2020, p. 377) stated that distance education has become the method of choice for a multitude of schools around the world, thanks to its flexible and easy-to-use features. It becomes apparent that the COVID-19 pandemic and the latest technological innovations are both dependants on one another, simply because they need to find a cure requires more advanced research using these innovations, and these innovations would not have been implemented if it had not been for the pandemic itself that prompted every education system to start using distance education and electronic learning as alternatives to traditional learning.

Distance Education Strategies during the COVID-19 Pandemic:

In order to create a practical instructional plan that allows different educational institutions to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in an effective manner, countries started considering distance education as their best all-encompassing method that entails electronic learning elements and allows students to learn from a distance without exposing their lives to the dangers of being infected (Ozer, 2020, p. 1124).

Accordingly, stated a number of strategies that can be adopted in order to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. These strategies are inclusive of the following:

1. Organizing a committee that can be held accountable for the development and implementation of instructional plans and frameworks, in order to cope with the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic might present from time to time. This committee will also be responsible for the establishment of an online school network that allows students and teachers to communicate and exchange their information and questions.

2. Creating a number of principles upon which the COVID-19 pandemic strategy shall be implemented. These principles are supposed to be offering a number of strict regulations and

standards that require individuals to apply them, in order to support the students' journey through using the latest electronic learning technology during the pandemic, organize their time schedule and define the number of academic sources available for them, on an emotional and academic level.

3. Reinforcing the level of cooperation between educational institutions and other healthcare organizations, in order to synchronize education actions and medical regulations, and to also educate the students, teaching staff members and parents about the significance of social distancing, and the necessity for taking care of one's health and abide by the healthcare regulations.

4. Creating an accustomed curriculum that responds to the students' needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, and defines the most important goals of the whole instructional process via distance education using different digital and computer-based tools that facilitate their learning. The newly created curriculum should also include clarified and well-defined mechanisms that demonstrate how to use online learning platforms to achieve the desired objectives.

5. Developing new mobile-based and web-based applications, along with online learning portals via which all students can gain access to different courses, academic content, and research material. These online tools need to be organized within frameworks that assist students in learning how to use them efficiently so that they can enhance their sense of autonomous learning and ability to choose the most convenient time to study.

6. Building a strong network with other schools and educational institutions, given the fact that this network shall be responsible for foreseeing the overall situation that affects all of them and needs to be dealt with, by allowing every institution to contribute with the needed research in order to

stay up-to-date regarding the online learning platforms. The more these institutions cooperate with each other the easier they can pinpoint the most effective distance education tool that responds to the COVID-19 pandemic and offers students an alternative to learn while staying at home.

7. Developing a specifically created centre that only caters to the needs of students, and responds to their queries, complaints, and other recommendations and suggestions. This centre must be directly placed under the supervision of the educational institution. The centre must also respond to parents, and respect their input regarding the best instructional and learning tool that could be used as an alternative to traditional learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2021, p. 5-6).

The COVID-19 Pandemic in Kuwait:
Kuwait began its journey through fighting the COVID-19 pandemic on 24 February 2020, when five individuals who contracted the virus returned to Kuwait from abroad. Therefore, the Ministry of Health in Kuwait spared no effort in responding to the crisis by transparently reporting the accurate numbers of infected, deceased, quarantined, and fully recovered individuals. On 30 May 2020, Kuwait reported more than 26,192 patients, 205 deceased, 23 quarantined, and 10,156 recovered (Sedaghat, Alkhatib, Mostafaeipour, & Oloomi, 2020, p. 1).

Alsharji (2020, p. 1) confirmed this by stating that the Kuwaiti government was able to take drastic measures in order to mitigate the threatening impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Kuwaiti society. The state of Kuwait was fully aware of the multi-faceted impact of the pandemic since it first occurred in February 2020. Therefore, it exerted all efforts to minimize and contain the psychological and social impact of the pandemic.

The high level of professionalism and transparency maintained by the state of Kuwait reflected the accurate adoption of the universally

developed and acknowledged guidelines to allow institutions to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic without being adversely affected in the long run. These guidelines were created by internationally renowned organizations such as The World Health Organization, The European Centre for Disease, Prevention, Control, and The American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Gasana, & Shehab, 2020, p. 1).

Consequently, on an institutional level, Kuwait was highly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic on so many levels. The country depends on a huge number of migrant workers within the industrial and institutional sectors. On the other hand, the majority of migrant workers face a number of challenging obstacles due to their different ethnic, language, and cultural backgrounds. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic formed yet another stressor that prevents them from establishing the perfect working and living conditions they aspire to achieve (Alahmad et al., 2020, p. 1).

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all aspects of life in Kuwaiti society, the essence of community engagement that all Kuwaiti citizens showed during the crisis reflected how much they are willing to stand by their government, and face the pandemic as one communal entity. This proves the high sense of patriotism that Kuwaiti citizens have toward their country. Accordingly, all citizens in Kuwait started to adjust their lives according to the new era of digital transformation that the country had to establish as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Ashour, 2020, p. 5).

Furthermore, apart from establishing this new era of digital transformation in Kuwait using the COVID-19 pandemic as an incentive, the pandemic was also inclusive of a number of benefits that encompassed the following:

1. The lockdown resulted in a great reduction in power generation that ranged from 2.2% up to 17.6%.
2. Fuel consumption in Kuwait allowed the government to generate huge income by saving around % 71.95 million.

3. The industrial full-lockdown resulted in reducing gas emissions, such as CO2, CO, and NOx (Alhajeri, Almutairi, Alenezi, & Alshammari, 2020, p. 14).

The COVID-19 Pandemic in Kuwait University:

Kuwait University was one of the first universities to adopt a preventive strategy that can withstand the threatening impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was represented by a number of initiatives and announcements that took place since the pandemic first occurred in 2020.

Therefore, Kuwait University was encouraged to establish a solidified framework that allows for further cooperation between the university and the ministry of health. This cooperation is coordinated and organized within a practical framework within which each organization is assigned a number of tasks that aim at exerting all needed efforts to find the most effective solution for the continuation of education in Kuwait University. Moreover, and according to the official website of Kuwait University (2021), the following initiatives reflects the sheer magnitude of effort the university had to exert:

1. **30 Mar 2020:** The president of Kuwait University decided to form a committee that is responsible for dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a specific set of tasks including studying the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Kuwaiti society, and the most effective way to establish a well-organized framework that identifies the efforts that are being exerted nationally to face the pandemic while coordinating with a number of medical and academic organizations and institutions, in order to exchange information and experience regarding the most effective methods that can be used to handle the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. **15 April 2020:** Vice President for Health Sciences Centre Professor Adel Al-Hunayan at Kuwait University was pleased to announce that the level of cooperation among the academic staff members at the Health Sciences Centre at Kuwait University is

at an all-time high. This cooperation resulted in developing a warning system that helps individuals investigate the intensity of the COVID-19 virus.

3. **27-28 June 2020:** Kuwait University issued a working guide that allows academic staff members, teaching staff members, and students to continue carrying out their academic, instructional, and learning activities while coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. This was considered a huge step forward for the university since the lockdown. Therefore, Kuwait University called this initiative "The Gradual Return to Work Initiative".

4. **9 Sep 2020:** Kuwait University held a field training session that took place remotely. The training session took place on August 31 and continued till September 16 in 2020. The field training session was launched in Sabah Al-Salem University City, and it was supposed to represent a continuation of the College of Engineering and Petroleum's training program for the academic year 2020/2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the program was temporarily suspended.

5. **1 Dec 2020:** Perhaps one of the most important efforts Kuwait University had to exert in the meeting that was held and organized by the Acting President of Kuwait University, and that is because it discussed the full adoption of distance education as a formally utilized educational tool for the academic year 2020/2021, in order to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting also discussed other routine-based matters such as the proper adoption of the mechanism for disbursing the unique major award.

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