

A Creative Framework of Online Teaching of Public Relations Modules during the Covid-19 Pandemic: An Action Research Approach

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Abstract The education of public relations and media modules has been tied in the literature to the professionalism of these disciplines. The contribution of this paper is that it is the first paper that has used a reflective action research methodology to improve the on-line teaching of skill-oriented modules of public relations at the university-level in Bahrain during Covid-19. The instructor/researcher developed two action research cycles where she planned and implemented new teaching strategies based on the students' needs, observed, evaluated, and reflected. The paper finds that action research has been useful in creating a collaborative relationship with the students, and helped to reflect on the e-learning process of public relations modules. The paper recommends the use of action research to improve new creative strategies of teaching other media and mass communication modules at the university-level during the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, the researcher invites future scholars to take the results of this research further, and use action research to improve creative educational methods that would improve high education in Bahrain after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Key words: Public relations/media education; action research; e-learning; Covid-19 pandemic; participatory communication

Un marco creativo para la enseñanza en línea de los módulos de relaciones públicas durante la pandemia de Covid-19: un enfoque de Investigación-Acción

Resumen La educación de relaciones públicas y medios de comunicación se ha vinculado en la literatura al profesionalismo de estas disciplinas. La contribución de este artículo radica en que es el primer artículo que utilizó una metodología de investigación-acción reflexiva para mejorar la enseñanza en línea de módulos orientados a habilidades de relaciones públicas a nivel universitario en Bahrein durante el Covid-19. La instructora/ investigadora desarrolló dos ciclos de investigación-acción donde planificó e implementó nuevas estrategias de enseñanza con base en las necesidades de los estudiantes, observadas, evaluadas y reflexionadas. El resultado del artículo es que la investigación-acción ha sido útil para crear una relación de colaboración con los estudiantes y ayudó a reflexionar sobre el proceso de aprendizaje electrónico de los módulos de relaciones públicas. El artículo recomienda el uso de la investigación-acción para mejorar nuevas estrategias creativas de enseñar a partir de otros módulos y medios de comunicación masiva a nivel universitario durante la pandemia de Covid-19. Además, la investigadora invita a futuros académicos a llevar los resultados de esta investigación más lejos y utilizar la investigación-acción para mejorar los métodos educativos creativos que podrían mejorar la educación superior en Bahrein después de la pandemia de Covid-19.

Palabras clave: Relaciones públicas/educación en medios de comunicación; investigación-acción; aprendizaje electrónico; pandemia de Covid-19; comunicación participativa.

1. Introduction

The education of public relations and media modules has been tied in the literature to the professionalism of mass communication disciplines. Thus, this study addresses the challenges and opportunities accompanied with on-line teaching of public relations modules at the university-level during the Covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain. Teaching public relations includes enhancing both theoretical and practical skills. However, the rapid transfer towards distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic challenges the traditional teaching and evaluation methods. Therefore, the author recommends a strategic plan for teaching public relations modules during the pandemic that is based on using creative problem-solving approaches that focus on encouraging the active participation of the students in the e-learning process. In addition, the paper stresses the significance of ensuring a flexible learning environment, and offering sufficient learning technologies. The paper argues that e-learning offers new opportunities for creativity and thinking out of the box, and enhances the need for psychological and technical support to encounter potential challenges in the e-learning environment. The contribution of this paper is that it is the first paper that used a reflective methodology to improve the on-line teaching of skill-oriented modules of public relations at the university-level in Bahrain. The paper aims to bring new theoretical and practical insights of improving e-learning strategies of public relations modules during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Literature review

Several studies have connected public relations education to public relations professionalism (Newsom, Turk & Kuruckeberg, 1999; L'Etang & Pieczka, 1996). However, only a few studies have addressed teaching public relations in the Arab Gulf region (AlSaqer, 2016). Moreover, there is a lack of studies that have addressed on-line teaching of public relations and media modules at the university-level in the Arab Gulf region during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In other disciplines, various studies addressed teaching issues during the Covid-19 pandemic. For instance, Vlasov (2020) raised the question: "What forms of education and teaching technology can create the most effective learning environment for students?" The study focused on the legal and psychological-pedagogical aspects of distance and classroom teaching in a historical perspective. It argues that e-learning can facilitate a new level of education in the context of the computer revolution.

Alam, Changjae & Chai (2020) suggested that a systematic approach can be an alternative laboratory assessment (ALA) for Multimedia Engineering modules in the Transnational Education (TNE) program between Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) and Beijing University of Post and Telecommunications (BUPT).