

LESSONS FROM DELIVERING EMERGENCY ONLINE WORKSHOPS THAT CAN ENHANCE ACADEMIC INTEGRITY VALUES AND SKILLS AMONG K-12 STUDENTS

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Abstract

COVID19 has been plaguing us since the beginning of 2020. Schools around the globe either closed or moved to the virtual platform, depending on where they were located, how much support their government provided and how much resource they had at hand (UNESCO, 2020). Emergency distance learning became a term used more and more frequently as schools in the UAE were asked to move teaching and learning online in April 2020 (Hodges et al., 2020). One thing most academics grappled with was maintaining integrity of assessments and exams conducted online. Any kind of student cheating has serious implications on the quality of education, the degree, reputation, and the greater community. Although this has been a source of concern, very little research has been conducted to truly understand the situation in the months and terms that followed, especially for K-12. Moreover, prior studies identified a gap in academic integrity and writing skills that K-12 students are trained in when they move to higher education, making it difficult for them to adjust to tertiary studies (Sivasubramaniam and Khan, 2021; Khan et al, 2021).

This study presents findings from short, emergency online workshops that were delivered as 90-minute intensive sessions to address this problem for K-12 students in the United Arab Emirates as schools reached out for

assistance for Grades 6 and above. Titled as academic integrity values and skills (AIVAS), eight online workshops were carried out for a total of 1147 students (and their parents who were invited to sit with their children) between April 2020 to May 2021 virtually. One workshop was a mixed cohort of students from grades 6 – 12, three were conducted for grades 10 – 12, two for grades 8 and 9, and two for grades 6 and 7.

At the beginning of one workshop (grades 10 – 12), with explicit approval from school and parents/guardians, students (n=88) were asked through an anonymous survey link about academic misconduct behaviour among peers, with a response rate of 62%. Findings highlight how 18% of students knew a classmate who helped someone in an exam, 18% received help in an exam, 8% plagiarised, 17% self-plagiarised, 10% had outside help and 17% had engaged in all of these behaviours. Furthermore, students felt “insecure”, “uneasy”, “relieved”, “self-disgusted”, or “overwhelmed” when asked how they felt in telling a difficult truth. The mixed-grades workshop revealed how students from the higher grades (n=53) were more aware of referencing as an important skill because “it is important to give credit”, “ensures trusted sources”, “allows more collaboration”, “because

it shows honesty”, “it is upholding integrity” and more.

The workshops that followed were based on a transitional module developed for K-12 students as “next-level preparedness” by Khan et al (2021). Although the Khan et al (2021) module is a three-day course, developed using pedagogical considerations based on Butcher, Davies and Highton (2006; 2020), these online workshops were intended to be more intensive due to constraints from schools in terms of number of sessions, hours and availability of students for one workshop. So, the content was mapped to the Khan et al (2021) module by capturing the three categories of content they delivered: (1) explicit lessons on academic integrity policies, (2) academic writing and literacy topics, and (3) reflection, but condensed to fit a 90-minute workshop. These emergency online workshops included (1) story-telling of an integrity ambassador that led to discussions on academic integrity values, (2) types of academic misconducts and how to avoid them briefly by introducing academic writing and citation practices, and (3) exercises that used practice immersion, and some formative and summative assessments to ensure students learned to recognise misconduct types, were aware of integrity values and their importance, and the

role of students in their own learning journeys. Feedback from students showed 94.60% felt confident about their own knowledge on academic integrity after the workshops. What is more, students followed up the sessions with contacts with facilitators to clarify doubts such as ‘how to avoid plagiarism’, ‘how to plan assessments’, and others. In addition, every school that asked for the workshops followed up with written feedback from the management of the schools, parents and/or students to confirm the value added by the workshops in helping to raise awareness on academic integrity values, dangers that arise due to absence of integrity values and how to avoid such situations.

It is believed these findings are vital for academics, teachers, policymakers, and researchers to recognise the behaviours that are common among students in schools. It is further believed the findings are vital for the audience of the conference so they are better able to support students during emergency distance learning or online learning situations and bring about changes in policies and frameworks to train teachers, who in turn can then support their students to develop skills for tertiary education and help create a pathway to a sustainable, inclusive, and accessible education for all.

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