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COVID-19 AND OBLIGATORY REMOTE WORKING IN HEIs: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF FACULTIES' WORK-LIFE BALANCE, WELL-BEING AND PRODUCTIVITY DURING THE PANDEMIC

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Abstract

At present, COVID-19 has caused a possible paradigm shift in education, especially in education delivery for higher educational and learning institutions. To align with the national government and relevant national/international authorities' policies and to avoid the spread of the virus, educational institutions in many nations have decided to temporarily suspend the traditional classroom-based education and replace it with online-based education. This study aims at exploring the impact of COVID-19 pandemic and obligatory remote working on work-life balance, mental health and productivity of faculty members working in higher education institutions (HEI). The study is exploratory and uses a qualitative approach using an online survey strategy to include voices of faculty members from different countries. While the results of this study indicate both positive and negative effects of obligatory remote working on faculty members' work-life balance, well-being and productivity at the same time our findings indicate that university administration must pay heed to address concerns presented in the results.

Keywords: Covid-19, Obligatory Remote Working, Higher Education Institutions, Work-Life Balance, Productivity



The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the nature of work and employees from different industries are forced to work from home. Higher education institutes are not an exception and a rapid transition towards online education has considerably affected almost all key stakeholders including faculty members. While this fast and huge change in education delivery has happened in most universities, teachers and faculty members are still struggling with new ways of teaching, engaging students, assessment, research and managing related tasks.

Before the obligatory shift in education delivery, there have been many forms of online courses including but not limited to Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs), fully online bachelor's and master's programs and even individual modules. Teaching and learning pedagogies like blended learning and flipped classrooms have applied these methods of online education delivery on a regular basis. However, now virtual classes are the only method that teachers are using for the time being. It is expected that the current situation will affect higher education and faculty members significantly, but the outcomes will not be clear so soon. The fact is that remote working is now not a choice but the only option for faculty members. This can have possible negative impacts on their work-life balance, mental health and productivity.

Although during the past decade the ability to work remotely has been available through smart technologies and has led to more flexible working hours specifically for faculty members, it has now become an issue for many employees, with or without families, wishing to manage their work and lives effectively (Grant, et al., 2013). In other words, it seems that the unexpected and obligatory change to remote working has brought more challenges to faculty members in higher education, while their professional and private lives are affected differently.

Previous studies have also shown that there are some negative effects associated with remote working. According to Hartig, Kylin and Johansson (2007), working remotely can cause overlap between home and work lives which results in reducing the restorative effects of home. In other words, it makes it hard to distinguish between work and non-working hours, working days and free days. Although telecommuting can have some advantages, such as decreased absenteeism and improved employee retention, it may not improve work-family conflicts (Noonan & Glass, 2012).

Although there is an increasing awareness of possible negative impact(s) of remote working, it is crucial to understand both positive and negative sides of obligatory remote working as the result of COVID-19 and explore the possibilities of converting this issue to an opportunity for improving the faculty's work-life balance, mental health and productivity. The current study aims to explore and describe the faculty's experience in this challenging, forced working-from-home situation, and provide recommendations for higher education institutions in

order to make necessary developments in new ways of education delivery, as well as improving working conditions for faculty members.

LITERATURE REVIEW

With the current pandemic not showing an immediate resolution, university staff may have to continue to get to grips with technology and remote learning. For most university staff in many countries, working remotely from home will continue through to at least the end of the calendar year. Many faculty members are still navigating this abrupt new normal with blurred lines between work and home (Harvard University, 2020). For many, the transition from physical classroom to virtual classrooms has been dotted with new stressors and challenges. While some still feel this new paradigm shift that has been hurled at them difficult to handle and balance, most have learnt to accept, adapt and even improvise their online teaching strategies and pedagogies. A study done by Lustig et al. (2020) aimed to measure organizational resilience at a large research university during the unfolding crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study was conducted at the University of Washington using semi-structured interviews with 29 employees working in different positions. The participants were recruited through snowball sampling, department website and personal contacts. The study revealed that participants are navigating different ways of enacting resilience in their attempts to weather this new way of working. The study also showed that the teaching faculty supported the university mission by adapting existing communication infrastructures and using them to expand human networks within a remote 'workplace'. These extended networks offer instructors shared teaching techniques and solutions to problems related to remote instruction (Lustig, et al., 2020). Working remotely also encourages academics to initiate activities to briefly socialize and check on their colleagues' well-being. As a result, participants felt a stronger sense of community, team cohesion and wellbeing (Lustig, et al., 2020; Kotera, et al., 2020).

On the other hand, other studies appear to show the direct opposite. Sokal et al. (2020) conducted a survey among 1,330 Canadian teachers to learn about the requisite support teachers need to cope with the current pandemic. The survey included questions among others on burnout, efficacy, attitudes toward change, resources, demands and coping. These aspects are very important and impact (in)directly the key factors this study is focusing upon. Such studies including our study's early findings can be a step towards understanding how key stakeholders should consider supporting teachers during this pandemic and potentially other waves of it.

Remote working

“Remote Working” refers to working in a location other than central offices or production facilities where the employee has no personal contact with co-workers, but she/he can communicate with them by using technology (Di Martino & Wirth, 1990; Grant, et al., 2013). The concept of remote working or teleworking was originally developed after the oil crisis of the 1970s when it became clear that in the case of 1 in 7 dropouts in urban commuters, there will be no need for the US to import oil (Nilles, 2007). According to Burch (1991), the advantages of remote working were explored during that time when some employees had to carry out their work remotely. He further explained that a “flexibility in the provision of work can benefit organizations and individuals” as it was observed during the oil crisis of the 1970s (p.18). Morgan (2004) refers to remote working as using telecommunication devices to fulfil job-related tasks and responsibilities. Remote working can affect employees in different ways and this paper mainly focuses on three main areas including work-life balance, well-being and productivity in the context of university faculty members.

The impact on work-life balance

Grant et al. (2013) believe that remote working has played an important role in overcoming work-life balance challenges for organizations to retain talented employees. This has been specifically beneficial for those employees who need to make special arrangements due to family-related matters. According to Hilbrecht et al. (2008), remote working has provided some individuals with more flexible working hours; however, several studies have shown that remote working has negative impacts on work-life balance. It was generally found that while remote working helps individuals to deal with both childcare responsibilities and online working activities, this results in having little leisure time (Grant et al., 2013).

In a study conducted by Sullivan and Lewis (2001), it was found that the perception of the impact of remote working on work-life balance differed between men and women. This study used 28 in-depth, semi-structured interviews: 14 with home-based teleworkers and 14 with their co-residents. Both groups referred to some advantages of remote working; however, looking at the content, differences in perspectives could be observed. Women were primarily satisfied with managing household tasks and childcare situations, whilst men mentioned having quality time with family as an advantage of remote working. In the same study, it became evident that men consider remote working as an important factor in being able to help their spouse in looking after the children, whilst women associate the housework with their paid work. In another study conducted by Maruyama et al. (2009) a survey was performed with over 1,500 employees working remotely to examine the effects of remote working on work-life balance. The results

showed that the ability to manage working hours can enhance work-life balance. Grant et al. (2013) emphasized that remote working is not only about family and flexible working hours arrangement. In many organizations, employees are now expected to use remote technologies and devices to stay in touch with the office in fulfilling their tasks (Vernon, 2006).

The situation is worsened by a global culture where it is necessary to complete work-related responsibilities with business contacts in different countries with different working times (Grant et al., 2013). Hislop & Axtell (2007) conducted a literature review on remote working. In their paper they attempted, through the presentation of existing survey evidence as well as reviewing studies of mobile telework and the presentation of an illustrative example, to both highlight the importance of spatial mobility in contemporary work and to outline some of the key features and themes related to such forms of work. They argue that the effects of working in different remote locations other than home lacks sufficient research. Although remote technology provides employees with easy access to work, it is crucial to realize the effects of remote working on managing the boundaries between work and personal lives (Sullivan, 2012). This is not only important for maintaining work-life balance but also crucial for employee well-being and productivity.

The impact on employees' well-being

Several studies suggest a positive correlation between remote working and poor well-being (Mann & Holdsworth, 2003; Hartig, et al., 2007) Despite the fact that nowadays many organizations emphasize the importance of using technological devices for efficient online working, there has been limited research on how these practices may affect employees' well-being (Madsen, 2003). Sang et al. (2010) hold that the increased risk of musculoskeletal disorders is one of the main causes of illness in the UK, which is related to sitting for long hours without having sufficient/necessary breaks. Previous studies were conducted mainly to explore the key factors for improving work-life balance and consequently increasing employees' productivity (Baker, et al., 2007). In a study conducted by Ojala et al. (2014), data collected in the Finnish Quality of Work Life Surveys from 2003 to 2008 was examined using logistic regression analysis. The findings showed that employees working informal overtime at home showed more likelihood to have negative emotions concerning work-family conflict. Additionally, many issues like time allocation become areas of conflict for couples working at home. Dimitrova (2003) holds that longer working hours are not generally found to be improved by remote working and removing the structured time of working can even intensify work. Moreover, a study of 336 employees by Hayman (2010) indicated that flexible working hours in the office has greater benefits for improving employee's health when compared to remote working. During

the last decade, several studies have examined both mental and physical health outcomes of remote workers (Mann, et al., 2000; Lundberg & Lindfors, 2002; Mann & Holdsworth, 2003; Golden, et al., 2006). The results of these studies indicated that if employees work only during the working hours then the physiological aspects of remote working can be beneficial. For instance, it can be referred to as reduced blood pressure when working remotely compared to working in an office. However, when employees work continuously even after regular working hours, both mental and physical health will be negatively affected. Mann and Holdsworth (2003) conducted a study in which 12 journalists who worked remotely were interviewed. The findings of the study showed that the stress level of these employees was lower compared to those who worked at the office, but they had an increased feeling of loneliness. Moreover, those who worked remotely showed increased irritability and negative emotions, such as anxiety. This was mainly due to social distancing and not being able to share problems with co-workers (Mann and Holdsworth, 2003). According to Hartig et al. (2007), remote working may cause the experiencing of overlap between work and personal life and consequently reduce the restorative effects of home. They additionally argue that “having a separate room for telework appeared to ameliorate spatial but not temporal or mental overlap of work and non-work life” (p.231). Grant et al. (2013) further explain that working from home possibly causes mental health-related issues, including overwork due to the overlap between housework and office work. For instance, employees may keep thinking about office-related tasks after their computer has been switched off and while they are busy with housework. It is generally believed that a home is a place of restoration; therefore, mixing housework and office activities at home may have a negative impact on well-being. However, in another study conducted by Kossek et al. (2006), they argue that remote working results in a lower incidence of depression in women as it may provide them with the flexibility they need to make a good work-life balance.

The impact on productivity

There have been several studies conducted to measure the relationship between remote working and productivity. In a study conducted by Elshaiekh et al. (2018), it was revealed that workers who work remotely were very self-motivated, happy and very well-disciplined. The positive correlation between remote working and productivity is shown to be attributed to increased motivation and a higher degree of autonomy/freedom. Olson (1989) analyzed the effects of remote working on employees. In her study she reports on “two studies of work at home: a quasi-experimental field study of organizational telecommuting pilot programs, and an attitude survey comparing computer professionals who work at home to employees doing similar jobs in traditional office settings”(p.317). Olson found that employees’ productivity was

slightly increased when working online. She further explained technical issues and bad technological equipment were the main reasons of lower productivity increase while working from home. Bélanger (1999) examined the relationship between remote working and the perceived productivity of employees in the high-tech sector. He conducted a survey of telecommuters and non-telecommuters in two large work groups working for a high-tech company. The results showed that remote working is associated with higher perceived productivity. However, employee's self-selection in remote working was found to be important in moderating the relationship between remote-working and productivity. Dutcher (2012) conducted a real-task laboratory experiment at a US university to explore how working from home affects individual productivity. In his study, he distinguished creative and boring tasks by considering the nature of the job. The findings showed working from home increases productivity when doing creative tasks; however, a negative correlation between remote working and jobs with routine tasks was observed. Bloom et al. (2015) argued that working from home increases overall employees' performance. They further added that higher productivity is associated with a quieter working environment.

In the current study, we aim to measure the impact of remote working on faculty members of Higher Education Institutions in terms of work-life balance, well-being and productivity. The difference of this study with previous studies is mainly the fact that remote working as a sudden obligatory situation can create different impact on employees compared to the times that it is planned due to organizational objectives and/or it can be a choice.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The research design of this study is exploratory, using a qualitative-structured survey questionnaire to explore and understand how academics experience the effects of obligatory online working on their personal and professional lives. The current study was conducted in a multi-country setting, using an online qualitative survey questionnaire in the English language and targeted university faculty members. An online survey questionnaire was used to reach as many respondents as possible, regardless of their geographical location. Table 1 shows the countries from which academics participated in the survey.

The aim of the qualitative survey questionnaire was to collect detailed observations, opinions, and participants' perceptions of how their work-life balance, well-being and productivity are affected during the COVID-19 period as a result of obligatory remote working. The questionnaire was self-designed and included both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Questions were asked in six categories, ranging from demographics, about their role

at their university, their experience in remote working during the pandemic, work-life balance in the new situation, obligatory online working and mental health, and the impact of obligatory online working on their productivity.

Table 1. Countries from which university faculty members completed the survey

Asia	Europe	America	Africa	Australia
Iran	The Netherlands	United States	Rwanda	Australia
Iraq	Germany		South Africa	
India	Georgia			
Pakistan	Greece			
UAE	France			
Turkey	Finland			
	UK			
	Denmark			
	Slovenia			
	Sweden			
	Hungary			

Research participants and response rate

A convenience sampling procedure followed by a snowball-sampling technique were used to identify academics working at HEIs. Potential participants were targeted using email and were asked to share the survey with their networks within university faculty members, while some voluntarily participated in the survey through different social media and online research platforms.

To ensure suitability of the data collection instrument and avoid biased, leading or ambiguous questions, the authors conducted a pilot survey and carefully looked for the “trustworthiness” of the data collection instrument. Following the pilot study, minor amendments to the structured questionnaire were made to reflect the feedback of pilot participants and collaborating researchers.

135 academics from different countries completed the survey questionnaire as shown in table 1, from which 122 valid responses were identified after initial data review process and analysis. The criteria for including participant responses in the study results were providing clear and explicit answers to open ended questions. Therefore, responses from those participants who refused to answer some of open-ended questions or answered some questions with single

words without further explanations were excluded from the study results. The 13 unused responses were either incomplete or insufficient/invalid to be included for such research.

Data analysis approach

A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyze the data collected through the survey. To analyze the data, the answers to open-ended questions were coded and analyzed using “NVivo 12”. The research strategy employed aimed at linking the emerging themes to the three previously mentioned research areas including work-life balance, well-being and productivity. Findings are presented under these three categories where new emerged themes per category are identified. The data was systematically analyzed by coding and categorizing responses to create new themes.

RESULTS

The findings of this study have provided us with important insights into the influence of obligatory remote working on faculty members’ personal and professional lives in HEIs during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey results are presented under three different themes: work-life balance, well-being and productivity.

Work-life balance

The results of the survey show that university faculty members are experiencing the impact of obligatory online working on their work-life balance in different/diverse ways. The majority of the participants in the survey feel that their work-life balance is affected negatively while some think otherwise. One of the respondents stated that *“While working online the amount of work is increased so if I don't stop working there is always some work to do so I just have to stop working at some point during the day to take care of my personal stuff. This makes it difficult as in [a] normal situation when you are back from work office then you know you can relax. Calls that I receive from family - friends while working from home, they think now everyone works from home so we can talk all the time, it is sometimes difficult to stop them”*. Another faculty member referred to **scheduling issues** when working remotely for HEIs. She argued that *“it seems we are available all the time online. Taking a break is unconsciously overlooked when it is needed as sitting at home seems like a break, working on official tasks coincide with home tasks. After-work plans are disturbed. Quality time with family is changed to time spent at home. The home-office concept is not appreciated by kids and difficult to explain to them.”* Some believe that the time they used to spend on commuting now is spent for extra work created by the current situation which leads them to overwork and results in negative impact on their

personal lives. An HEI faculty member living and working in Georgia stated “*There is a tendency to (over)work the time you would have probably spent commuting. The extra preparation time means that I have generally been more tired, which obviously also reflects in my 'after work' life. You also miss the 'mental break/change of mindset' you can have when you physically leave the workplace and 'walk' home. Ergonomics are also not always ideal in a home office (proper equipment and furniture), and I do find that I spend a lot more time sitting and without any break (which is not good). My physical health is somewhat worse.*” Participants in the study from the UK, India and Turkey argued that “time management” is the main issue in the current situation. A university professor working and living in the United States refers to both positive and negative sides of remote working in HEIs, and she points out that “*Working from home increases the flexibility, but at the same time it might cause over work as you do not really have constraints (building opening/closing times) - too much comfort might lead to "laziness".* At the same time some other faculty members do not feel any challenge regarding obligatory remote working and its impact on their work-life balance. Conversely, some faculty members seem to be satisfied with the current situation. As an example, it can be referred to the statement made by one faculty member working in the Netherlands as she stated “*My work-life balance has improved dramatically by only teaching online. Only the good students end up showing up for the online sessions. Unprepared and apathetic students have always been a source of great annoyance to me. There is a lot less of that.*”

The results of the survey show that faculty members working in different countries are experiencing both positive and negative sides of obligatory remote working. Participants in the study refer to flexibility/freedom as the main positive side of remote working while the negative factors include but are not limited to time management and scheduling issues, separating work from private life, interruptions by children and family members, no clear difference between week days and weekends, limited working space/infrastructure at home, distractions and noises coming from the surroundings.

Employees' well-being

This section presents the view of respondents on the effects of obligatory remote working on their well-being. The study participants mainly believe that sitting behind their computers for a long time affects their physical health in a negative way. Some also refer to the lack of social interactions with colleagues and students as a cause for unhappiness in their current working condition. One of the respondents working and living in the Netherlands argues that in the current working condition “*excessive screen time leads to tiredness and low efficiency*”. Another faculty member living and working in Greece states “*I miss the impact and connection I have*

with my students and colleagues. Sometimes I feel lazy when I have to work from home in pajamas. It does not sound very motivating.” Some faculty members refer to negative impacts of online working on their physical and mental health. A respondent from Austria complains about headaches because of too much time working with the computer and being less motivated to go outside, while an Iranian participant working in Iran refers to “*increased stress and anxiety*” as a result of obligatory remote working. He further explains that technical issues, internet interruptions and time management in preparing the lectures with new materials that suit online education delivery are the main reasons for high stress levels and anxiety. One of the participants in the survey who lives and works in the Netherlands argues that maintaining a healthy balance is difficult. She further explains “*I just don't have any time for myself to do anything else than managing my work and attending my child's school lessons.*” Another faculty member working in the Netherlands refers to painful eyes and headaches as the results of long time working with the computer and lack of movement. One of the participants in the survey clearly describe the impact of the current situation on his health: “*Working behind a computer means a sedentary professional setup. In the school premises I would spend time walking, sitting, standing...altering my position and movements every now and then. I have gained some weight over the past months which I am sure is partly related to spending more time in a passive state, physically speaking, behind my desktop computer.*”

In short, the results of the survey show that faculty members working in different countries mainly have complaints about their neglected well-being, for example, increased level of stress and anxiety due to time management, painful eyes, headache and tiredness due to long time working with a computer, backache and weight gain due to lack of movement and sitting for a long time. Some faculty members believe that remote working has negatively affected their mood and motivation due to lack of social interactions with their peers and students, while some others argue that the current situation has not affected their moods and motivations much.

Productivity

This section discusses the participants' understanding of the impact of obligatory remote working on their productivity during this pandemic. The findings show that the university faculty members in this study mainly perceive the impact of obligatory online working on their productivity to be negative. Some refer to students' poor learning outcomes of online educational delivery. For example, a German faculty member working in Germany argues that “*if one wants to "produce" idiots who can repeat like parrots what they are taught, one should continue with online education. This method has no potential for educating critical, intellectually*

ripe grown-ups with high emotional intelligence and the ability to develop and apply know-how in a social context. It is a good thing for e.g. getting driving licenses, that's all ... or for the American way of education which puts "efficiency" over "effect". Imagine a generation of students, primarily "educated" online - a horrible vision with dramatic long-time repercussions on society and political developments." Some respondents refer to time management as the main issue affecting their productivity. A respondent from the United States explains that "There are no positive points. Everything takes longer, the physical strain on the body is greater, I am less productive, and it is less enjoyable." A Spanish participant working in the Netherlands holds that "the main challenge is [that] we have to work more since we need to adjust to the new system, but we are not getting the time for it. So basically, we are working extra for free." In another part of the world, in Iran, faculty members complain about existing technological issues and internet interruptions as a key factor affecting their productivity in online education. This appears to be an issue in many parts of the underdeveloped and developing world that lack sophisticated technological infrastructure to support remote working smoothly. Therefore, some faculty members in Iran try to pre-record their lectures, which creates more workload for them because of reproducing their lectures multiple times in case the first recording is not good enough. One of the study participants living and working in Iran states "If I am lucky for recording every lecture I put two hours' time but normally I face a lot of problems during my first recording which forces me to re-record my lectures and put extra hours". She further explains that "when you cannot see your audience's reactions to the delivered learning materials it is demotivating, and it seems like we are becoming robots". Participants of the study generally agree that "lack of interaction with students and colleagues" is a negative factor that affects productivity to different degrees. Still some respondents refer to both positive and negative sides of the current situation and its effect on productivity. One of the respondents from South Africa points out that "The positive point is now learning new ways of working online, digital teaching and learning. The 4th Industrial Revolution caught up with us unprepared. Negative points are lack of training to work online and shortage of data and other resources." A German academic argues that "Productivity is pretty high, as we constantly need to readjust to the changing regulations. The biggest negative point is how difficult it is to plan with a very nebulous future." A Dutch academic on the other hand states that "My productivity is at this moment somewhat higher: you don't have any travel time. But I expect in the long run that it remains fatiguing and not so interesting to give classes fully online. " This is while some academics mainly experience the positive effects. An American faculty member working in the USA believes that the current situation makes her more productive. She further explains "It makes me want to write, read, and research more. Actually, for the positive side, I am quite grateful for it. I am currently finalizing an article

that I am co-writing, in which we are looking at Business Compliance in the health sector when dealing with private data.” An academic working in the Netherlands refers to saving time due to working from home as a main factor for his increased productivity. He further explains “Staying at home has saved me a lot of travel time that I can now use for research, preparation of education and family.”

In summary, the impact of obligatory remote working on productivity during pandemic has been felt in various ways by academics. The participants mainly refer to time management issues due to the necessity to learn working with the new system while they need to prepare more and new learning materials, which resulted in less productivity particularly in the first few weeks since working conditions changed. Some believe that the learning outcomes of 100% online education cannot be promising because it is demotivating, affecting their health and reduced productivity. Some other academics are satisfied with their productivity and prefer to continue working from home.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study examined issues relating to work-life balance, well-being and productivity of faculty members who had to unexpectedly work from home being forced by this pandemic. This study supports the findings by many previous studies that remote working has an impact on faculty members as reports of negative emotions such as frustration, irritation, worry and stress are more apparent now than before. It is important to note that the focus of this study was on a kind of obligatory/forced remote working and its impact. This research categorized three main themes as per the focus of this study to understand in what ways the current obligatory remote working is impacting their work-life balance, well-being and productivity. Our findings/results presented above based on our analysis on the faculty members from across the globe conclude the following:

Work-life balance - our results confirmed that faculty members working in different countries are experiencing both positive and negative effects of obligatory remote working. Flexibility appears to be one of the positive aspects of remote working while the negative factors include but not limited to time management and scheduling issues, separating work from private life, interruptions by children and family members, no clear difference between week days and weekends, limited working space at home and noises coming from the surroundings.

Well-being - the results show the faculty members' complaints about their health issues - whether physical, physiological, or psychological. Examples are increased levels of stress and anxiety due to time management, headaches, eye stress and tiredness because of increased time behind a computer, backache and weight gain due to lack of movement and sitting for a

long time. Some faculty members believe that remote working has negatively affected their moods and motivations due to lack of social interactions with peers and students while some other argue that the current situation has not affected their moods and motivations much. For many staff, the social interaction with other colleagues and students is of the utmost importance. This study has highlighted the psychological stress of distancing from colleagues and the social banter that constitutes a school environment.

Productivity - the impact of obligatory remote working on productivity has been felt differently by academics. The results highlight time pressure to learn working with the new system and adapt to this unexpected change while the academics need to prepare more and to arrange customized learning materials, which resulted in less productivity, particularly in the first few weeks since the working conditions changed. Some are not positive about the learning outcomes of 100% online-based education. Some other academics are satisfied with their productivity and prefer to continue working from home. Although no precise data was collected on sickness and absence of faculty members, our discussion with two HEI leaders revealed huge decreases in absenteeism because of sickness during the first few months of this pandemic. This shows a positive side to faculty members' productivity.

In conclusion, while the results of this study indicate both positive and negative effects of obligatory remote working on faculty members' work-life balance, well-being and productivity, at the same time our findings indicate that university administrations must address concerns raised in the results. Faculty members who show more negative concerns and feel dissatisfied with the current, unexpected change are at a greater risk of suffering from possible psychological health issues and/or burnout. This is, however, difficult to confirm considering the lack of any evidence, as no data was collected on these factors because of the different focus of our study. Work and family-role issues while working from home are established phenomena now, and the current trend of forced remote working is unlikely to fade away quickly, as many HEIs think that they are going to keep to it either partially or fully even after the pandemic is over. It is important that universities take serious steps in addressing these issues to produce high-quality scholarship and a great teaching and learning experience both for faculty members and students. University faculty members are part of the core team of any HEI's workforce and their work-life balance, well-being and productivity is very important to HEIs, especially in the current, unprecedented times. The university leadership must make a concerted effort to understand the needs of quality of life among their faculty members.

To conclude, our findings suggest that a mixed/hybrid approach would be more efficient compared to 100% online or classroom-based education. On the other hand, it is too early to determine the exact/precise effects on productivity in this regard.

FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

As a second step in research on this topic, future studies should focus on how the pandemic has impacted and precisely what is the impact on personal lives of university faculty members. It is important to investigate the nature of such an impact.

There is a need to give required emphasis on a very important factor of online-based education, i.e. technical issues faced by the faculty members. It is important to build a good support mechanism to help less tech-savvy faculty members and note the huge differences in the IT and related technological infrastructures across different countries. This is one of the limitations of this study as we did not control for this variable while collecting data from countries with possibly varying types of online-based education infrastructure.

It is also important to study the impact of obligatory remote working from a student perspective, especially their work-life balance and learning experience. Chen et al. (2010) points to mixed results of the connection between technology and student learning outcomes. According to some studies, online learning and the use of information technology may disadvantage part of the student body, as highlighted by Jenkins' "participation gap" idea (Jenkins, 2006), concepts such as socioeconomic status (Gladieux & Swail, 1999) and institutional resources (Hu & Kuh, 2001) that normally play a key role in students' use of and the impact of online resources (Chen et al., 2010).

Furthermore, the difference between male and female university faculty members needs to be explored in these very important topics considering different roles/responsibilities at home among life partners for household chores and taking care of family, especially the kids. We did not consider this in our study, but it is important since studies, such as Elliott (2003), show that females felt greater work and family-role strain than their male counterparts while working from home.

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