FNU FIJI NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS
2010-2020 ANNIVERSARY

FNUNIKUA

SHIFT TO REMOTE
Learning and Teaching

ISSUE NO. 5

MAY 2020

ONLINE LEARNING DURING AND
POST-COVID-19 ERA

ACADEMIC SHARES REMOTE
TEACHING EXPERIENCE

ONLINE LEARNING
during and post-COVID-19 era

Prof Paul A. Iji

Distance education may be as old as the origins of teaching and learning, which date back to several centuries. Some of the great philosophers of old must have used one form of distance education or the other, in which learners would have remained at their own homes and visited the teacher from time to time, to deal with tasks that were assigned by the teacher. This form of learning preceded the physical development of facilities to provide a formal education setting. With the development of modern training institutions, it became possible for learners to congregate at one location and be taught by different teachers. However, distance education continued to develop alongside or became embedded in conventional education, with students being provided with reading materials and their learning tasks. With the improvement in technology, distance education began to be delivered by radio and by television, supported by audio on cassettes and later, compact discs.

The birth of the Internet opened up a new order, in which material could be placed on the world wide web and be accessible to millions of people located across the globe. Online education caught on this wave and began to grow rapidly to where we are today. Starting with written material, it grew into audio and then video. The rapid development of personal computers and later, tablets and other gadgets alongside the development of the Internet and wireless technology increased the rate of uptake of online learning. Teaching can be delivered on stationary devices right down to the handheld appliance.

The world has witnessed a number of epidemics in the past one hundred years but most of them were localized, tending to affect only a few countries or regions. Nothing comes close to COVID-19, in terms of global coverage, driven largely by a very efficient air transport system. From a few index cases, community transmission raised national levels to several thousands in many countries, with a global count of currently over three million. The death toll is still lower than those of some previous epidemics but it is still early days to draw a conclusion. Much still needs to be learned about the virus; for example, whether it has the ability to re-infect or if there could be a second and more waves of infection. For the first time, the entire world shut down; grounding international and even intranational travel; business, and education delivery. The presence of technology has been helpful for some business activities and one area that is benefiting the most from technological advancement and some preparation is education. Although it is possible to deliver teaching online, it easier to do so at the tertiary level where learners are more mature to schedule themselves around the activities. With social distancing a key requirement in controlling the viral scourge, online teaching has become the natural alternative. Online teaching came in handy because many institutions have been developing it for application, to meet the requirements of students who are cut off by geography or by social factors such as work.

So, is Fiji National University (FNU) prepared for online learning? I think we are prepared. Firstly, we have been engaged in some online teaching for some time now. The connection of the FNU to the Australia Academic and Research Network (AARNet), about two years ago has been a major boost to the institution. Through AANet FNU is now connected with the universities of Australasia and those of North America giving us superfast broadband speeds on campus and access to a range of new educational software tools and that this advancement has given FNU an opportunity to expand and improve its services in various ways. It has also expanded the storage capacity of FNU. Two new centres, one in charge of learning and teaching enhancement and the other in charge of flexible and e-learning, have been preparing, not for a disease virus attack but the future in general. These centres and the much-improved Division of ICT ensured that the University was ready to go online at the same time the pandemic reached Fiji. Academic staff have also been trained over the past few years, with instructions on how to prepare online teaching material. By the time of the COVD-19 lockdown, almost all courses at FNU were online. The two learning centres refreshed or offered quick training to staff and students on how to use the hard and software.

Like in many universities around the world, a few students at Fiji National University were caught off-guard mainly by the lack of devices to connect to the Internet. The number represents a small proportion of the current student population but the University will develop mechanisms to cover them. Internet connectivity in some parts of Fiji is also not too good, with a few spots that still do not have any coverage. COVID-19 has served as a wakeup call for some of these shortcomings to be addressed at individual and community levels. The University is negotiating with a government agency to re-direct some funding towards electronic gadgets for students. Fiji's mobile and Internet phone providers have been generous in offering staff and students zero data rating for material on the University intranet, including online learning platforms.

COVID-19 may be gone in a matter of months, like other infections before it but it is very unlikely that the world would be the same again. The virus has a positive side, as sinister as this may sound. It opened the world to other ways of working, be it in retail or education. The world will need to balance this carefully. As education providers, we see the benefit of being able to serve many learners practically across the world. We implore the business sector not to replace people with technology but work hand-in-hand with education providers to develop the workforce of the future. Technology is here to be used but let us not allow it to destroy the community. More than ever before, everyone can learn and as we head into the future, FNU will make learning an easier process. As we settle into the new normal, the two learning centres located in the Office of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) are intensifying training of both staff and students on various aspects of online learning and use of technology.

The Author, Professor Paul Iji, is the Acting Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) at Fiji National University.

Tuicikobia *enjoys* learning from home

Vans *APPLAUDS* online learning

Eighteen year–old Navitalai Vola Tuicikobia has taken a break from waking up to the early morning alarm, getting ready and rushing to catch the bus to travel to Fiji National University (FNU) Ba Campus.

For the past two months, Tuicikobia attends his classes from the comfort of his home as online classes via Moodle, and the occasional Zoom have replaced the traditional face to face lectures and workshops.

Currently enrolled in the Certificate IV in Carpentry offered through the College of Engineering, Science and Technology (CEST), Tuicikobia said with more time now on his hands he has additional time for research and work on projects.

"Online classes are a bit challenging, however, learning on my own has unlocked the potential that I was unaware of – that in the comfort of my own home, I have more room to be creative," shared Tuicikobia.

Though his classes mostly require a hands-on approach, Tuicikobia is coping well with the online studies.

"It's very challenging; however, our lecturers have provided videos from YouTube to watch practicals being done step by step," he said.

The former Natabua High School student said he has learnt to pace himself as learning online can also be overwhelming. You have to view materials online and then there is the issue of digital interruptions and distractions such as social media.

"Since we are learning from home, I usually get distracted while being on the internet, sometimes I go off track while doing research," he confessed.

However, to make online studies enjoyable, the Lau native has inculcated in himself a culture of self-learning, curiosity and the desire to work on his own.

"Doing online learning is very helpful because I get to work at my own pace, and I get to learn more things on my own. This doesn't make me independent," he said.

He is enjoying the online delivery of his class as there is constant dialogue with his lecturers and classmates.

"At times the assignments are difficult or complicated, but the frequent interaction with my course instructors keeps me engaged and provide guidance on what needs to be done," Tuicikobia said.

"I enjoy this mode of study as we regularly log in to Moodle, and this assists me in tracking and my assignments due dates. I feel part of the collaborative atmosphere with my instructors and colleagues."

Tuicikobia is thankful that the University has an agreement with Vodafone and Digicel, which allows him to access the FNU website and Moodle platform free of charge.

Similar to face-face classroom and workshop atmosphere, Tuicikobia is happy that his instructors are always checking and providing feedback promptly resulting in a positive and productive experience.

Despite the intermittent network issues, Tuicikobia is thoroughly enjoying the online learning process and endeavours to complete his two-year-programme next year.

The move by FNU to offer teaching via the online platform has been commended by Edwin Vans, a Lecturer at the Fiji National University's (FNU) Department of Electronics, Instrumentations and Control at the College of Engineering, Science and Technology (CEST).

Vans said, given the global trend on online programme delivery, the University was on the right path, and despite the global COVID-19 pandemic, students through the online learning platform can continue with their studies.

He also acknowledged that although students are quick learners, remote learning sometimes presents difficult situations such as access to laptops and internet connectivity issues.

"Our College is relying on online teaching and learning. We are making use of technologies such as Moodle and Zoom to deliver our courses. Moodle is used to disseminate course materials, allow students to submit their assignments and to give student grade and feedback," he said.

"We use Zoom to record lecture videos and make it accessible to students through Moodle and YouTube."

Vans acknowledges that Engineering courses which involve a lot of mathematics often makes it difficult for Lecturers to explain online.

"We cannot explain mathematical concepts through PowerPoint slides or handouts. The best way to teach mathematical concepts is to do worked examples by hand or derive equations by hand while explaining. To overcome this, I bought a graphics tablet with pen, which made it easier for me to write and explain mathematical concepts on a digital whiteboard, such as in Zoom," he explained.

The academic stated that while there was no change to the course content due to online teaching, measures were taken to ensure students are well assessed.

"We cannot hold oral presentations, classroom tests and final semester exams. We had to modify our course assessment to cater to those types of assessments by replacing it with alternate forms of assessments. We moved exams in the form of quizzes on Moodle so that students can attempt the tests online and get their marks and feedback."

Vans, while being positive about continuing remote teaching with his students, highlighted that the only difference is in interaction.

"Students can interact with their instructors in a live online session but it's not the same as being available physically to ask and to answer questions. There could be challenges in online interaction, such as internet downtime and audio problems. Personal consultation with the instructor is much easier when compared to the use of emails and forums to ask questions," he said.

" DOING **ONLINE LEARNING** IS VERY **HELPFUL** BECAUSE I GET TO WORK AT MY **OWN PACE** "

Academic *shares remote teaching* experience

1. What strategies have been implemented by CMNHS to conduct remote teaching effectively?

We conduct regular digital equity surveys to determine student access to digital infrastructure and sufficient speeds of digital services. While we cannot provide equal access and opportunity to digital tools to individual students, we have been able to strategise our content delivery with equity in mind to ensure that no student is disadvantaged. The College also has a regular and consistent student online progress monitoring and reporting strategy enabling identification of students at risk and early intervention to help them succeed. The intervention loop is closed by a report being sent to student sponsors. We also have a buddy system for rookie teachers, although that is not what we call it. Rookie in the context refers to those teachers that are relatively new to the use of technology and the Learning Management System (LMS) for remote learning and teaching. This system provides immediate assistance to one from a more technologically experienced teacher and improves our course delivery. Buddies also serve as LMS auditors ensuring that teachers are fulfilling their end of the deal in student learning. The different methods of co-convenorship are being explored as well. There are other strategies at the school, department and programme levels for remote teaching, tailor-made for individual courses.

2. How did you prepare yourself for online teaching?

I had to put myself in the students' shoes. There is a significant difference in preparing for well-planned remote teaching to that done in response to a crisis such as the one we are in right now. I have had the experience of being both a remote student and a teacher. This turned out to be an advantage for me as we were faced with a very short window to prepare ourselves. The overwhelming amount of resources and information being circulated, that was meant for good, in reality, created a sense of panic. I had to clear my mind of all the distractions and focus on what was important, and to me, that was student engagement. If I could keep them engaged, I could keep them learning. This meant shifting attention from the outcome to the process of student learning. Assessment indeed drives learning but students need to strive for excellence, not just success. I developed a mental list of my weaknesses in facilitating remote learning and teaching, prioritised my needs and started equipping myself in those areas. I have learnt to forgive myself in the process of learning when I make mistakes and do the same with my students.

3. Are you coping well with online teaching delivery?

I think I am adapting well to this new method of teaching maybe because I have been able to resist the great temptation of comparing remote/online learning to face-to-face instruction. My acceptance of the new method and previous knowledge and experience have made adapting easier and transition smoother.

4. What are the main challenges linked to remote teaching and how have you dealt with them?

The major challenge is the time it takes for students to adapt to this method of teaching and learning. Our education system, from primary to tertiary, places very little importance and emphasis on independent and asynchronous learning. Motivating the unmotivated and disciplining those that lack self-discipline is challenging. At the same time, real-time virtual classrooms and immediate feedback are not ideal considering the digital equity issue of students in our country. There is no simple solution to this but at the course level we can keep students engaged and learning if we are keeping them informed and updated and this does not necessarily have to be through formal platforms but what they are most comfortable with and find easier to use. Learning needs to become a part of their daily life. I have also started to pay more attention to assessment for learning rather than of it. Formative quizzes, interactive forum discussions and assigning tasks with deadlines and bite-sized summative assessments rather than one high stakes assessment seem to be working well in my courses.

5. How different is online teaching compared to the traditional form of lecture room based teaching?

There are quite a lot of differences between the two forms of teaching but in our context, I think the major difference is the shift from synchronous learning in the traditional form to quite an asynchronous one in the online approach. The traditional teaching and learning style is what both the teachers and the students are used to. It is convenient for the teacher and motivating for the student as it promotes a greater degree of social interaction, fostering a sense of community. Online teaching, on the other hand, increases flexibility for both the teacher and the learner. It also provides a more objective means of measuring class participation and teacher activity and to some extent is less intimidating to students, although a bit isolating at times. I think online teaching and learning could be one of the ways of instilling self-discipline and responsibility in both the students and the teachers.

6. How has been the response from your students?

Student response has been quite mixed. I have seen students from being very shy and reserved in face-to-face teachings to being active and engaging in the online platform and vice versa but the forces that encourage or resist change for the better are quite frankly in the hands of the teacher.

7. What are your thoughts on the future of remote teaching?

We need to be prepared and planning for remote teaching and not wait for a crisis or disruptor such as the COVID-19 pandemic to push us to change or embrace this method. In the healthcare field, remote learning is not a replacement for the traditional method, but a balanced blend between the two will be an education equaliser. We are only restricted by our imaginations on how we can create opportunities for new ways of learning and teaching and delivering health care.

The Fiji National University (FNU) has joined other tertiary education institutions around the world in delivering study programmes ONLINE as the world battles the COVID-19 crisis. FNUNIKUA approached Raymond Keshwan from FNU's College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (CMNHS) to share his experience in engaging with students and providing guidance during this period. Keshwan is the Acting Head of School of Health Sciences at CMNHS.

FLEXIBILITY
is key to Online teaching

Transitioning to online teaching means embracing change and being visible, flexible and available to students online and outside regular classroom hours, according to Dr Vasemaca Alifereti.

Dr Alifereti, the Head of School, School of Communication, Language & Literature at College of Humanities and Education (CHE) said the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated online delivery at FNU.

"It is happening at other institutions around the world, and in terms of our status as a part of the Global Community, we need to shape up and be on par with what is happening at the global platform," highlighted Dr Alifereti.

To ensure students do not miss out on anything, Dr Alifereti said she is transforming her teaching delivery, which is also a learning experience for her.

"I believe this is a big part of online teaching effectiveness due to its asynchronous nature. This means that students can participate from anywhere at any time- depending on whatever is convenient to them," she said.

Teaching an online course is an opportunity to create a more engaging, interactive experience for students, according to Dr Alifereti.

"While we cannot replicate the face to face class, we can encourage students to utilise social media channels or the virtual discussion groups to work together to simulate a collaborative environment,".

"This will motivate students to succeed while enabling them to turn to each other as they work on assignments and tutorials," she emphasised.

The senior academic said she is sensitive to students' learning space constraints and intermittent internet connectivity issues.

"I try to be as flexible as I possibly can by always giving them a window of one to two weeks for assignment submissions. I have found this to be effective with my latest assignment with a 95% submission rate," she adds.

Apart from the live online classes, Dr Alifereti does voice-overs for her PowerPoint presentations to assist students' to make meaning of the slides.

To make her classes, interactive Dr Alifereti provides students' with the Uniform Resource Locator (URL) cites with YouTube videos they can access to assist in whatever assignments or topics they are discussing each week.

"I give forum discussion topics each week to determine student accessibility and active participation. I ensure to provide instant feedback on their assignments and also their online discussion forums are prompt to assure them of my availability and concerns for their progress," she said.

"I have modified some assignments, ensuring that course learning outcomes are not compromised. This is in consideration of how the COVID-19 pandemic might be affecting our students physically, mentally, psychologically and emotionally not to mention economic impacts," said the soft-spoken academic.

While teaching in an online environment for the past two months, Dr Alifereti has learnt that it is vital to engage students early and encourages her students to ask questions.

"The more direct involvement of students in the course, the more invested and productive they will be," she said.

> "I **believe** this is a **big part** of **online teaching** effectiveness due to its asynchronous nature"

Prasad adjusts to 'NEW NORMAL'

First-year student Shelvin Prasad says he has seamlessly adapted to the 'new normal' which has been ushered in by the global pandemic COVID-19 and is using this to his advantage by spending more time on studies and projects.

According to Prasad, while he isn't able to meet up with friends as often as he would have liked, this has been replaced by Viber and Messenger calls.

"I'm keeping myself busy with studies and ensuring my assignments are submitted on time. The online learning offered by the Fiji National University (FNU) has enabled me to overcome travel, time and cost barriers while also being able to continue my studies through the comfort of my home," said Prasad.

"I do miss hanging out with my friends, but we are in regular contact through social media, and it's a lot of fun."

Prasad is amongst the thousands of FNU students who have shifted to online learning amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

The College of Engineering, Science and Technology (CEST) student said as someone who has just joined the tertiary institution as a beginner, his experience during this sudden shift has been inspiring.

"Things did not start well as I had to arrange for a laptop and data to be able to be in the loop. However, eventually, everything fell into place, and I started enjoying my 'study from home' experience," he said.

Despite no longer being physically present at the University, Prasad said he is pleased his studies were not affected in any way.

"The good thing about this new arrangement is that it allows me to manage my time well. My first two months at the University involved lecture room based teaching and learning, therefore, travelling from Nausori to attend classes at the FNU's Derrick and Nasinu Campuses can present challenges for students like me," said Prasad.

"I enjoy the extra travelling time that is now available to me. I have my own 'to-do' list and I ensure that I stick to it and not procrastinate," mentioned the student.

"It is working pretty well for me, and I am grateful to my Lecturers for doing a great job," he added.

"Our lecturers are going an extra mile to ensure that we do not lag in studies. One of the units that I am currently undertaking is a Preliminary English Unit LNG 301 where my Lecturer Kenel Singh not only communicates with us via Moodle and Zoom platforms but he has also created a Viber group where all of us have discussions in case anything is unclear in the lecture video recordings," continued Prasad.

Through remote learning, Prasad said he has been able to engage well with other students.

"I have noticed that we now communicate a bit more compared to when we used to be physically present in the lecture rooms. We all support each other because we believe we should all stand together in this challenging yet transformative time," he said.

> "Our lecturers are going an extra mile to ensure that we do not lag in studies"

FNUNIKUA

CLTE Online Learning Support Services

A s Fiji National University (FNU) monitors the COVID-19 situation, the Centre for Learning and Teaching Enhancement (CLTE) continues to provide learning support services to students through online mode.

The following CLTE learning support services have been available to students over the last few weeks:

Peer Assisted Learning (PAL)
PAL sessions is offered through onlinePAL. Each PAL Leader has specific hours. No appointments are necessary, but email communication regarding available sessions and instructions on how to enrol in available sessions will be sent via each PAL Leader.

English Language Hub (ELH)
ELH is offering one-on-one online tutoring services via zoom. Students can make an appointment by emailing clte@fnu.ac.fj. Instructions for joining an online ELH session will be emailed to the respective students, at least a day before the session begins. Appointments are available from 9 am to 5 pm, Monday to Friday (except Public holidays).

To accommodate as many students as possible, the following guidelines will apply:
• All students are eligible for 1 (one) appointment per day.
• Appointment times will be limited to 40 minutes.
• All students can book a maximum of 2 (two) appointments per week. If you fail to attend an appointment, it will count as one of your two sessions.

Learning to Learn Online (LTLO)
LTLO is a free online course designed to introduce students to the online learning environment and to the student's role as an online learner. LTLO has been equipping students with the knowledge and strategies to manage their online learning, prepare and submit assignments online, communicate with an online instructor and plan for areas of personal adjustment required for success in an online learning environment.

Students can access the LTLO course by logging in Moodle. For more information please on this please contact clte@fnu.ac.fj

Get one-on-one advice
All current students can make an appointment to talk to a Student Success Specialist for one-on-one advice via Zoom. A Student Success Specialist can help you:
• Develop skills such as learning to learn online, referencing, revision strategies and time management.
• Identify where you can improve.
• Discuss improvement strategies and refer you to relevant resources.

Students can book a virtual appointment by emailing clte@fnu.ac.fj. Instructions for joining a virtual one-on-one advising session will be emailed to the respective students, at least a day before the session begins. Appointments are available from 9 am to 5 pm, Monday to Friday (except Public holidays).

To accommodate as many students as possible, the following guidelines will apply:
• All students are eligible for 1 (one) appointment per day.
• Appointment times will be limited to 25 minutes.
• All students can book a maximum of 2 (two) appointments per week. If you fail to attend an appointment, it will count as one of your two sessions.

Guide to Effective Learning: CLTE has complied a set of learning guides to help students succeed in their learning journey. Log in to your Moodle and use our learning guides to fine-tune your study skills.

Workshops and Seminars: All remaining workshops in the first semester will be provided through Zoom video conferencing. Sessions for these workshops and seminars will be posted on the CLTE website.

For more information regarding the services above, please email on clte@fnu.ac.fj

Tips for Online Learners

1. Understand online learning practices and expectations.
You should also have in mind that when you take an online course, you may be expected to:
• Fully commit yourself and participate in the virtual classroom as required.
• Be, or be willing to become, tech-savvy.
• Work with others effectively.
• Complete your learning tasks and assignments on time.
• Be self-disciplined.
If you are not able or willing to do all of the above, you will probably not be a very happy online learner.

2. Have a dedicated study space.
Your study environment should be one of your main concerns when you are an online learner, so make sure that it enables your study routine.

3. Identify your learning objectives and goals.
To stay on track with your online course, make sure that you always keep in mind what you hope to accomplish by the end of it. Consider starting with the most difficult tasks, as this will improve both the effectiveness of your study and your performance.

4. Build a study plan.
A study plan is critical to online learning. Here are some tips to help you build it:
• Plan ahead
• Have an effective calendar system
• Create to-do lists
• Set time limits

• Stay on schedule

5. Ask for help when you need it.
If you don't ask for help when necessary, you may end up falling behind, which may lower your self-esteem, as you may not be able to keep up with the online course. Build a relationship with your online instructor and avoid misunderstandings by contacting them regularly and informing them who you are, and how you could use their help. By asking your online instructors to clarify problems, you will also help them not only to evaluate learners' level of understanding of the online material but also to get an idea of the overall effectiveness of the online course.

6. Take study breaks.
Your performance will decrease if you are feeling tired or frustrated while studying. Integrate some personal time into your study routine and you will be able to work more effectively on your online course goals. When taking a break, make sure that you get away from your study space; you need to have a change of scenery.

7. Participate in online discussions.
Online learning doesn't necessarily mean learning in isolation. Connecting with your virtual classmates on social media or your online course's forum will enhance tremendously your eLearning experience. Participate actively in online discussions and group activities, suggest study tricks, offer your input on the eLearning course, and engage in new ideas.

Adopted from: https://elearningindustry.com/10-study-tips-for-online-learners-getting-the-most-out-of-your-elearning-course
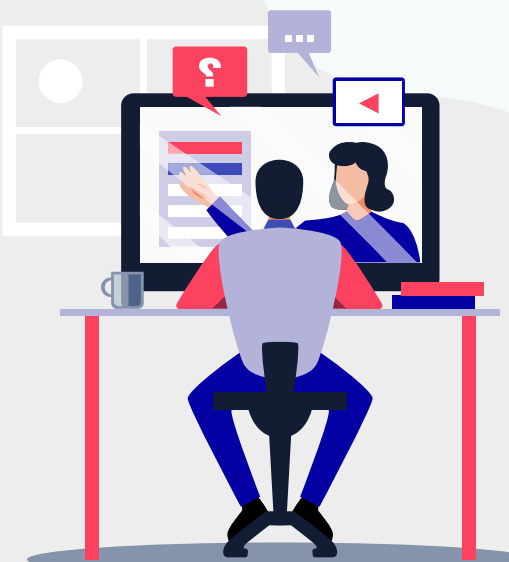
ACCESSING LIBRARY SERVICES
during COVID–19 crisis

Despite the COVID-19 crisis, which has forced the closure of the University premises, the Department of Library Services, under the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching continues to provide key services and resources to assist with remote learning, teaching and research. To meet the needs and expectations of our students and staff, the FNU Library team is proactively providing assistance via emails, phone, social networking pages as well as continually updating the webpage with new information. All the Library staff are well connected as a team through social media platforms such as Viber, WhatsApp and emails, which ensures timely and efficient response to enquiries from students, staff and or other stakeholders.

All relevant information on the Library webpage and social networking sites were updated before the team transitioned to work remotely. Important information such as book renewals, access to e-resources, referencing and Endnote guidelines and manuals, most relevant contact personnel were all updated on the FNU Library web landing page. Online queries received are being responded to in a timely manner to avoid panic and confusion among our users.

The Department has recently undergone through organizational restructure, which has played a key role in staff carrying out their work effectively and efficiently. Posters with information on different library services are consistently being released through online mediums to reach the maximum number of users and to assist them with the information needed for their studies, research and assessments.

The Library's User-Engagement section has formed collaborative relationships within the University community to design and promote information-seeking activities to enhance learning, teaching and research. The User-engagement Librarians introduce students to the research process and train them on fundamentals of copyright, plagiarism and different styles of referencing according to the course requirements. This includes Information Literacy (IL) sessions to empower and enhance academic success through bibliographic referencing, Endnote, RefWorks and Turnitin (a similarity-matching software). Information is also provided on Library databases and Open Access, Document delivery services, Orientation for respective colleges, One to one interactions/ Lunch hour sessions, etc. During this pandemic, the User-Engagement

Librarians are working remotely to provide online services to students to address queries and provide support for continuous success. The Department has organized webinar sessions on different services stated above to ensure that any difficulties faced by users are being addressed immediately and at the same time providing a better mode of understanding and utilizing the services offered by the Library.

Furthermore, despite working remotely, the Library has continued to expand its e-resources with free access being made available to the users while working away from the University. Some of the e-resources recently added on trial access are:

• Access Engineering (ending 30th May 2020),
• Harvard Business Review (ending 4th June 2020),
• ProQuest e-database announced the launch of a coronavirus research database from 31st March 2020,
• EBSCO e-database has provided unlimited access to infectious disease database via GIDEON till 30th June 2020 and further to this, Cambridge Core has made academic textbooks accessible for free until 30th May 2020.

Added to this, Elsevier made resources freely available during COVID19, which includes more than 250 Science Direct textbooks. A webinar has also been designed on this to support remote access for FNU Library users. Webinar series for IEEE Explore is also being facilitated for 7 weeks for exploration of scientific research and technical communication, from basic IEEE Xplore search to publishing with IEEE, career development and more.

In addition, the Department of Library Services has introduced newspaper clippings whereby our team will be forwarding the newspaper articles or clippings relevant to other sections of the University. These clippings will be selected news articles related directly or indirectly to the Fiji National University. This service has been introduced to ensure that the University community is up to date with current information regarding FNU.

Through the above activities, it is evident that the Library is changing the way it used to operate to facilitate and support online learning, teaching and research. The FNU Library is meeting its goal towards maximizing the electronic access to its resources; providing digital learning support; providing virtual research to stay connected and be up to date with the right information transmitted at the right time.

Dr Uday Shukla
University Librarian

Switching from on-site to online learning and teaching

Fiji National University (FNU) alumnus Ravnil Narayan is one of many academics that are assisting the University in the transition to an online learning platform during the COVID-19 pandemic. Narayan is a Lecturer in the School of Communication, Languages and Literature at FNU's College of Humanities and Education (CHE) at the Ba Campus.

"Currently, I am teaching Academic English and Communication courses via online mode. Based on my observations, I think most FNU services are up-to-par, and students are fully abreast with the latest information broadcasted by FNU," he said.

Narayan says that the online delivery of courses has been a challenging prospect, as switching from on-site (or brick) to online (or click) mode is a significant change particularly for students, who are finding problems navigating new teaching and learning methods. However, the academic quality and rigour of the courses should not be determined by whether it is on-site or online, he adds.

"While I cannot replicate the in-person back-and-forth of a classroom, encouraging my students to utilise social media channels or setting up virtual discussion groups to work together has assisted me in creating a collaborative environment. This has motivated students to succeed and allowed them to the opportunity to interact with each other as they work through the materials."

Narayan notes that intermitted internet connectivity is sometimes a significant drawback for students as it hinders them from doing their research for assignments and accessing Moodle. The University also has an agreement with Vodafone and Digicel, which allows its users to access the FNU website and Moodle platform free of charge. This means the students do not need data to view FNU online pages.

"Due to the remote locations of most of my students, many are not able to correspond and use Moodle. However, thanks to social networking sites and other virtual apps, they can communicate and stay up to date."

He says that online teaching may lead to students not concentrating on their work 100%, which is why keeping them engaged is very crucial.

"I keep my students engaged by constantly sending them notices, emails and messages. I have noticed that they tend to respond more to messages sent via other mediums more quickly as compared to Moodle."

"While I was a student in China, all communication regarding the courses was done on WeChat, which is a multi-purpose messaging, social media and mobile payment app. It worked better," he said.

"In my experience as a Lecturer and student, other apps work better for communication and perhaps, Lecturers should start creating Viber, WhatsApp or Messenger groups with their class and communicate using that to relay important messages faster. Of course, this does not mean Moodle should be neglected as it is used for course content and assignment submissions," he added.

Education and Career

Starting his tertiary studies as a distance and flexible learning (DFL) student back in the year 2005, Narayan attained his first qualification in Diploma in Hindi Language from the Central Hindi Directorate, India. Studying simultaneously at the University of the South Pacific, he attained his second Diploma in Pacific Vernacular Language in the year 2010.

Narayan first arrived at FNU in 2010 as a Public Service Commission (PSC) scholarship student in Diploma in Secondary Education (English and Hindi) programme at the College of Education and Humanities (CHE).

After graduation in 2011, Narayan worked as an English Language Teacher with the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts (MEHA) until March 2015. Taking a break from his teaching career, he became a full-time student to complete his Bachelor of Secondary Education from FNU. In the same year, he also graduated with a Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching English as a Second Language from The University of Fiji.

Having all the necessary qualifications and experience, he was able to secure a job with FNU as a Lecturer. He later completed his Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language from The University of Fiji in 2017. All these were only possible with strict self-discipline and simplicity.

He continued working at FNU until mid-2019, when he was awarded a full scholarship to pursue his PhD in Applied Linguistics from Asia's number one, Tsinghua University in Beijing, China.

Unfortunately, his time in China was cut short when the COVID19 pandemic was declared, and he caught the earliest flight to Fiji, putting his PhD on hold. He returned to the classroom immediately upon his return, using best practices learnt in China to serve his students better during this challenging period.

Advice to Students

Advising students, Narayan says, "Understandably, the current pandemic has created havoc and a number of us are affected; however, this should not be considered as a detrimental factor to inhibit you from your studies. I would like to advice all the students to just hang in there and keep up with the pace of your studying."

He adds that patience and commitment are needed to get through these trying times.

"I believe most of us have access to the internet and can communicate with each other. If you are having problems with your assignments, then do get in touch with your respective lecturers to discuss ways in which you can solve your problems."

Narayan is looking forward to returning to China to complete his PhD once the pandemic is over.

FNUNIKUA wants to hear from you
FNUNIKUA welcomes submissions by staff and students for publication in the newsletter.
Please send your suggestions, comments or articles for consideration to mprc@fnu.ac.fj