
Crisis as a Catalyst for Change in Global Higher Education

Abstract

In recent times, the world has faced pressing crises, notably the global Covid-19 pandemic (Cohen and Cromwell, 2020) and the ongoing war in Ukraine (Lendel, 2023), impacting millions worldwide, including those in global higher education (GHE). Particularly vulnerable are the displaced populations, significantly affected by conflicts such as the war in Ukraine (Korosteleva and Petrova, 2022). Amidst these challenges, higher education (HE) emerges as a crucial ally, especially in providing support and education to the displaced (Kasianchuk et al., 2022). In response, many UK universities have proactively designed measures to cater to the educational needs of displaced learners during crises.

The global crises have raised doubts about the achievability of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 (Leal Filho, et al., 2023), highlighting the pivotal role of HE in addressing such challenges. Against this background, this paper aims to investigate how HE providers perceive the design of programmes aimed at empowering learners from diverse backgrounds/cultures during crises.

This research employs secondary data through systematic literature reviews and case studies focusing on HE initiatives with displaced populations. Employing social capital theory by Bourdieu (1986) as an analytical framework, the study explores innovative initiatives and measures adopted, leveraging digital tools to educate and empower displaced populations. Developing HE programmes tailored to address the specific needs of displaced learners, emphasising their agency, is essential for fostering resilience.

HE serves multifaceted purposes, contributing to societal learning and the greater good. The findings of this study hold implications for various stakeholders, including educators, HE providers, government agencies, and businesses. Innovative approaches in HE emerge as crucial catalysts during crises, not only facilitating education but also fostering skill development and societal reintegration, thereby enhancing the socio-economic conditions of displaced individuals. In essence, these initiatives not only ensure education but also aid in rehabilitation during crises.

Keywords: Crisis; Displaced Populations; Global Challenges; Higher Education; Social Capital Theory

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