# Distance Learning and Business Continuity Plan in Post-Covid-19 Era at Umm Al-Qura University

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*Summary*
The Corona pandemic has changed the work of all educational institutions all over the world and pushed these institutions to take the distance learning approach as a solution to face this pandemic Umm Al-Qura University was one of the first educational institutions that responded to the risks and prepared a business continuity plan to face the threats of the Corona pandemic.
In this context, this paper aimed to prepare a proposed business continuity plan for the post-Corona era at Umm Al-Qura University considering the capabilities and services analysis for the deanship of e learning and distance education at Umm Al-Qura University. In addition, the special decisions that taken by stakeholders about students return to campus. As well as all possibilities that may occur to both the student and the faculty member whether feeling the symptoms of Covid19 inside the university or outside it, and what are the procedures taken to suit each of these cases in order to keep the learning community and the outside society safe.
*Keywords:*
*Distance learning, Business continuity plan, Covid-19, Higher Education.*

## 1. Introduction

The Corona pandemic that swept the world has many negative effects on various sectors of society, and the education sector is one of the most sectors that affected during this pandemic.

The outbreak of the Corona pandemic had pushed more than 180 countries all around the world to close their schools and universities in late March 2020[1].

There have been many changes and transformations towards the education system. The most important change is keeping students in their homes, and dealing only with e-learning which became a necessity, and a means to enable hundreds of millions of students to learn after they lost the opportunity to go to their educational institutions [2].

According to this trend towards relying on e-learning during this pandemic, there are more challenges have emerged, including the inability of all students to use this system effectively in light of the pressure of use, and the overload on network capacity [1,3].

In the midst of these accelerating events, educational institutions, especially higher education institutes and universities had to provide business continuity plans.

Business continuity plan means the creation of precautionary system to expect threats, and how to deal with these threats. This is based on several steps, the first step is impact analysis, which is intended to determine the size of the results from business interruption. The second step is identify critical systems such as assessing the impact of risks, i.e., identifying potential points of failure during a disaster. Third step is a risk management or crisis management which tend to reduce the size of the disaster impact [4].

Author in [5] indicated that all institutions and companies should prepare a business continuity plan to address the risk of the outbreak of the Corona virus and its impact on the continuity of work. The business continuity plan in this epidemic contains a preventive program, and a developed documented strategy with the identification of a comprehensive framework to ensure the continuity of critical operations, with a constant review for the plan and its challenges. The plan must be flexible enough to deal with a wide range of potential impacts that can result from the epidemic.

The importance of the business continuity plan generally appears in higher education institutions in main five advantages [6]:

1. Protecting the finances: The cost of conducting operations in any institution often depends on the length of the operating period of these operations. The plan provides alternatives when operations are disrupted.

2. Having peace of mind: When all essential members are aware that a plan aims to protect them, and the institution, they will have a confidence in leadership and in the institution.

3. Ensuring compliance: Comprehensive continuity plans will help the institution to remain compliant with several different laws and regulations

4. Minimizing disruption: Prolonged disruption can adversely affect many efforts in the implementation of projects and research to achieve the mission of the organization.

5. Protecting the institution's image: The safety and security always come first, and when the institution has continuity plan, the institution is much better positioned to live up to all expectations for all members.

Regarding Umm Al-Qura University, the university has developed a distance learning continuity plan during the Corona pandemic, which was represented in using digital learning tools and systems, including the blackboard learning environment, to manage the learning process and provide means of displaying content, performing homework and means of communication. Virtual Classroom (Blackboard Collaborate) for simultaneous communication between faculty members and students. Webex and MS Teams system for simultaneous communication between learning community members. A specific step-by-step training plan for students and faculty on the use of digital learning systems. Providing technical support services through many communications channels Twitter, WhatsApp, e-mail, phone. A media awareness plan about the precautionary plan and urgent challenges through social media, the deanship's website, and SMS [7].

In the light of changes and decisions regarding the return of the study face to face for both students and faculty members at Umm Al-Qura University, this paper aims to present a vision for a business continuity plan for the post-Corona era.

## 2. Literature review and theoretical framework

Business continuity during the Corona crisis has owned the concern of many business owners at the present time, in conjunction with the deteriorating conditions and the continuing spread of the virus, especially with inability of everyone to set expectations for the end of this crisis, and if they want to survive, a solid plan must be developed to ensure business continuity in case of the crisis continue for a long time, while taking advantage of available opportunities.

In the light of above, the theoretical framework reviews the following items that will contribute to building a vision for preparing a business continuity plan for the post-Corona era at Umm Al-Qura University and its relation with distance learning.

### 2.1. Distance learning

Distance learning is a system that allows the possibility of transferring and delivering the scientific material through multiple means without the need for the student to come to the classroom on a regular basis, as the student is responsible for educating himself [8].

Distance education is an educational style that relies on the use of information and communication technology to deliver lessons and lectures within a directed e system with the aim of providing a high-level of educational service, and freedom from stereotypes and traditionalism in learning [9].

Distance learning can be defined in this paper as a system that depends on the use of computer and internet capabilities to deliver instructional content to students without the need

to come to their instructional institution, in addition of learning management process.

The distance learning has many advantages such as: Distance learning provides a digital culture that focuses on knowledge processing. Provides an opportunity for all groups of students with a rich and multi-source that serves the learning process. Reduces various costs and saves large amounts of costs of training. Knowledge and opinions exchanging among students through a specific site that brings them all together in a virtual room. Contributes to the development of thinking and enriches the learning process at any time and any place according to the learner's ability. Develops the effectiveness of teachers and increases their experience in preparing instructional materials. Helps the student to be independent and motivates him to rely on himself [10, 11, 12].

On the other side, there are some of disadvantage or obstacles of distance learning including: The learner may feel bored from the long period of sitting in front of the electronic devices. Some health damages that may be related to the long period of time dealing with electronic devices. The absence of the human aspect in the educational process, and the weakness of social relations. The high cost of this type of education, especially at the beginning of the establishment. student and teacher should has a sufficient knowledge of using technology and employing it in achieving instructional goals [12; 13, 14].

The Conditions for the success of the distance education system at any instructional institution can be illustrated as follow [15, 16]:
1. The presence of a teacher who is fluent in the use and in the employment of modern technologies and is professional in designing the strategies of distance teaching
2. Clarity of the distinctive characteristics of distance education and the differences between it and traditional education
3. Availability of the necessary time and training for both the teacher and the student to use the tools of the distance education system
4. Availability of the necessary funds for distance education
5. Availability of a clear strategy within educational institutions about the effective employment of the distance education system.

These factors were considered, and their availability was emphasized when preparing the proposed business continuity plan

### 2.2. Business continuity plan

Business continuity plan is the process of creating system for the prevention and recovery from potential threats that may face a company. Business Continuity Planning is used for creation a detailed plan about how an

institute will be able to face disasters without hampering their operations or without incurring too much loss [17].

Business continuity planning is the process of identifying the parts of your company that are most vulnerable to create a plan to recover them if a business interruption occurs [18].

The business continuity plan in this paper can be defined as a process of creating a system for the prevention and recovery from potential threats from the return of attendance at Umm Al-Qura University after the era of the Corona pandemic, and it means a creating of detailed plan on how Umm Al-Qura University will be able to face the disasters without hampering its operations or incurring significant losses.

There are several benefits of business continuity plan. Some of these benefits are keeping the operation of the businesses during the disaster. Reducing the cost of disruptions. Business continuity plan can save lives and can prevent a big chunk of revenue loss. [17].

The business continuity plan requirements contain the following items [17, 18]:

1. A clearly defined team: preparing a business continuity team in every part inside the institute. They should stay involved in planning and testing all over the year to keep the plan up-to-date.
2. A detailed Plan: Thinking through the kind of problems that could occur in each place while doing the business. Ranking the priorities in business such as revenue, regulatory implications, brand concerns, customer protection.
3. Effective testing: Reviewing and updating the plan at least once a year to reflect changes in your business priorities, operational structure, and other factors.
4. Crisis Communications: Creating a group of communications channels, including email, public address, intranet, and the company website.
5. Employee Safety: Safety should always be the priority.
6. Uninterrupted access to business resources: Remote access technologies make it possible for people to work from any place, and at any time.
7. Continuous IT Operations: Operations of the business should not be disrupted. Most organizations already have more than one data center for redundancy. If one comes offline for any reason. Users should be able to switch seamlessly to another to access the same apps and data.

The Business Continuity Planning Process can be illustrated as shown in figurer 1. [19].



Figure 1. The Business Continuity Planning Process

As shown in figure 1. The process of developing business continuity planning contains main four steps, and with agreement with what mentioned in [20]as follow:

1. Conducting a business impact analysis to identify critical business processes and functions and the resources that support it.
2. Identifying, documenting, and implementing for recovering critical business functions and processes.
3. Organizing a business continuity team and a business continuity plan to manage a business disruption.
4. Conducting a training for the business continuity team and testing and exercises to evaluate recovery strategies and the plan.

## 3. The proposed business continuity plan.

From the theoretical framework and study the reality of events at Umm al-Qura University in the light of students' return to the university campus. In addition, analysis the services of e learning and distance education deanship at Umm Al-Qura University that include the following [7].

- The electronic educational environment: The Deanship provides various services that enable Umm Al-Qura University to present the educational process by using several digital learning tools and systems, including the Learning management system (Blackboard), (WebEx), and (Microsoft team) for holding meetings and discussions on the Internet directly with voice and image.
- Training: The Deanship provides training courses and workshops to assist both faculty members and students in the employment of different learning systems, help students and faculty members to become familiar with the latest innovations in the field of technology and strategies for distance teaching and learning.
- Technical support. The Deanship provides technical support services all over the day through various channels such as e-mail, E tickets, WhatsApp and provides a hotline for technical support.
- Awareness: The Deanship provides awareness-related services to its student and faculty beneficiaries through several channels, including the Deanship's YouTube channel, Twitter, and WhatsApp. Infographics and news are published on the Deanship's website.

The proposed business continuity plan is divided into two branches. The first one concerns with faculty members as shown in table 1, and the second one concerns to students as shown in table 2.

Table 1. The proposed business continuity plan that concerns with faculty members

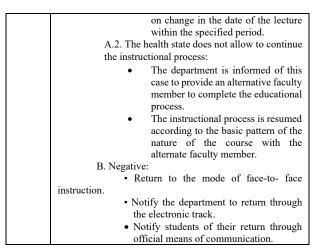| Case 1. | A faculty member felt with one or some of the symptoms of Covid-19 inside the lecture |
|---|---|
| Steps | Procedures |
| Step 1. | Leave the campus and go to do the swab. |
| Step 2. | Filling out the electronic template that be created for this purpose to notify the parties related to the educational system |
| Step 3. | After doing the swab, and the result appeared:<br>  A.  Positive result<br>    A.1. The health state allows to continue the instructional process:<br>      • Notifying the department of the swab result through the electronic track.<br>      • Informing students by official means communication to transfer from face-to-face mode to the full distance learning mode, specifying the period during which this pattern will be followed until recovery, with on change in the date of the lecture within the specified period.<br>    A.2. The health state does not allow to continue the instructional process:<br>      • The department is informed of this case to provide an alternative faculty member to complete the instructional process.<br>      • The instructional process is resumed according to the basic pattern of the nature of the course with the alternate faculty member.<br>  B. Negative:<br>      • Return to the mode of face-to- face instruction.<br>      • Notify the department to return through the electronic track.<br>      • Notify students of their return through official means of communication. |
| Case 2. | A faculty member felt with one or some of the symptoms of Covid-19 outside the lecture |
| Steps | Procedures |
| Step 1. | Filling out the electronic template for the notifications of the parties related to the instructional system. |
| Step 2. | After doing the swab, and the result appeared:<br>  B.  Positive result<br>    A.1. The health state allows to continue the instructional process:<br>      • Notifying the department of the swab result through the electronic track.<br>      • Informing students by official means communication to transfer from face-to-face mode to the full distance education mode, specifying the period during which this pattern will be followed until recovery, with on change in the date of the lecture within the specified period.<br>    A.2. The health state does not allow to continue the instructional process:<br>      • The department is informed of this case to provide an alternative faculty member to complete the educational process.<br>      • The instructional process is resumed according to the basic pattern of the nature of the course with the alternate faculty member.<br>  B. Negative:<br>      • Return to the mode of face-to- face instruction.<br>      • Notify the department to return through the electronic track.<br>      • Notify students of their return through official means of communication. |

Table 2. The proposed business continuity plan that concerns with students

| Case 1. | A student felt with one or some of the symptoms of Covid-19 inside the lecture |
|---|---|
| Steps | Procedures |
| Step 1. | Leave the campus and go to do the swab. |
| Step 2. | Filling out the electronic template that be created for this purpose to notify the responsible that related to the instructional system |
| Step 3. | After doing the swab, and the result appeared:<br>  A.  Positive result<br>    A.1. The health state allows to continue the instructional process:<br>      • Notifying the department of the swab result through the electronic track.<br>      • Using available e-learning systems to watch the lecture in the date of the lecture within the specified period.<br>    A.2. The health state does not allow to continue the instructional process:<br>      • The department is informed of this case.<br>      • After returning to the university, the student follows a complementary path to compensate for what was lost during the illness with the faculty member<br>  B. Negative:<br>      • Notify the department to return through the electronic track.<br>      • Return to the mode of face-to- face learning. |
| Case 2. | A student felt with one or some of the symptoms of Covid-19 outside the lecture |
| Steps | Procedures |
| Step 1. | Filling out the electronic template for the notifications of the parties related to the instructional system. |
| Step 2. | Filling out the electronic template that be created for this purpose to notify the responsible that related to the educational system |
| Step 3. | After doing the swab, and the result appeared:<br>  B.  Positive result<br>    A.1. The health state allows to continue the instructional process: |

|  |  | • Notifying the department of the swab result through the electronic track.<br>• Using available e-learning systems to watch the lecture in the date of the lecture within the specified period.<br>A.2. The health state does not allow to continue the educational process:<br>    • The department is informed of this case.<br>    • After returning to the university, the student follows a complementary path to compensate for what was lost during the illness with the faculty member<br>B. Negative:<br>    • Notify the department to return through the electronic track.<br>    • Return to the mode of face-to- face learning. |
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## 4. Conclusion

The Corona pandemic has affected the work of all educational institutions around the world and forced all these institutions to take the distance education approach to preserve the public health of societies.

These transformations have resulted in the emergence of many challenges such as infrastructure and technical skills for the learning community. Considering this crisis, the importance of the business continuity plan emerged as one of the solutions to continue the educational process. Umm Al-Qura University was one of the first educational institutions that responded to the risks and prepared a business continuity plan to face the conditions of the Corona pandemic, which contributed to the safe passage for the educational process considering this pandemic.

Based on the continuous development, this paper prepared a vision for the university's business continuity plan for the post-Corona era in light of the special decisions by the officials to return the study in presence on the basis that it puts all the possibilities that may occur to both the student and the faculty member in terms of feeling the symptoms of Covid 19, both inside the university or outside it, and what are the procedures taken to suit each of these cases.

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