

# Education in Emergencies in Samoa

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## Abstract

*Crisis-sensitive educational planning has become the norm when COVID-19 pandemic afflicted the educational platform creating chaos in Teaching and learning requiring different levels of reforms. This scholarship provides an overview of the “Emergency Teaching” response based on Reflective practice in the pandemic and further provides a Case Study of the Stimulus package offered by the Faculty of Business and Entrepreneurship at the National University of Samoa as a response to the crisis and identifies the key challenges and benefits of the programme. It further explores the policy and supportive components that are requisite for promoting successful delivery and draws implications for crisis educational planning.*

**Keywords:** Crisis Educational Planning, COVID-19, Faculty of Business and Entrepreneurship, Emergency Teaching

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a massive disruption to the entire education system including universities and the student populace at large. With the restrictive movement policies and advent of the implementation of social distancing, normal Teaching and Learning (T&L) has been incredibly tested. This has further necessitated institutions to transform and implement eccentric strategies. Universities have witnessed a paradigm shift. The online learning/distance education have become a panacea for this unprecedented global pandemic, despite the challenges posed to both educators and the learners and has been used for Emergency Teaching. Transitioning from traditional face to face (F2F) learning to online learning can be an entirely different experience for the learners and the academia, which they must adapt to with little or no other alternatives available. The Higher Education (HE) system and the academics have adopted “Education in Emergency” or “Remote Teaching”. There is no one size-fits-all pedagogy for “Education in Emergencies”. There are a variety of subjects with varying needs. Different subjects and age groups require different approaches as a response (Doucet et al., 2020). Switching to online learning permits physically challenged students with more freedom to participate in learning in the virtual environment, requiring limited movement (Basilaia and Kvavadze, 2020).

## Literature Review: Progresses and Challenges for Educators and Learners

Some of the platforms used so far in Emergency teaching include unified communication and collaboration platforms including: Microsoft Teams; Google Classroom; Canvas; Blackboard; Moodle; Zoom; Skype; Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter); Apps (WhatsApp, Viber, etc) which have all permitted educators to create educational courses, training and skill development programmes. Chats, video meetings and file storages have kept classes organized and easy to work. Online mechanisms have

also facilitated the tracking of student learning and assessment via quizzes and the rubric-based assessment of submitted assignments (Petrie, 2020). The flipped classroom has availed the learning resources such as articles, pre-recorded videos and YouTube links prior to the classes. The online classroom time has then been utilized to deepen understanding through discussion with faculty and peers (Doucet et al., 2020). This is a very effective way of encouraging skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking and self-directed learning. The virtual classroom platforms like videoconferencing (Google Hangouts Meet, Zoom, Slack, Cisco, WebEx) and customizable cloud-based learning management platforms such as Elias, Moodle, BigBlueButton and Skype have been increasingly used. (ibid).

In assessing the challenges The ‘sudden’ implementation of “emergency teaching” during the COVID-19 pandemic, increased anxiety level (Ajmal and Ahmad, 2019), stress, and led to depression (Li et al., 2020). It was observed that the new norms in completing the “emergency teaching” sessions were not easily adapted by students and teachers due to readiness issues. According to (Alomyan, 2021) the worst-case scenario expected would be caused by lack of readiness on perceived usefulness of the implementation. Students’ psychological readiness towards implementation based on gender, age, field of study, or level of education (Beharu, 2018) were noted in scholarships. The COVID-19 outbreak increased student anxiety, made them less confident to self-manage their courses with less F2F interaction with the lecturer (Elmer and Stadtfeld, 2020; Mantasiah et al., 2021). In addition, the sudden implementation that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak: seemed to undergo new norms not only for the lecturers but also to the students which sparked negative emotions such as anxiety, stress and depression (Li et al., 2020). Sociological readiness significantly influenced perceived usefulness of implementation by measuring students’ learning environment at home, ability to ignore online distraction such as chatting with friends, sending email, doing online shopping etc and adapting to the new norms of online academic learning environment such as preparing online presentation, attending virtual class and performing online assessment (Beharu, 2018).

### **Methodology**

The study utilized exploratory research and depended on scholastic reviews of the literature to explain “crisis educational planning and response in lieu of COVID-19 and its impact on T&L” as well as to comprehend the challenges and progresses. Appreciative enquiry and reflective practice shed light on the assessment of the challenges from which key implications for HE were drawn. As part of crisis educational planning, the Government’s Stimulus Package as a Case study was presented. The case study high pointed the benefits, challenges and way forward to comprehend the roadmap which was a response to the pandemic to build resilience in education. Key implications on crisis educational planning are elucidated in the study.

## Discussion

Based on the appreciative enquiry approach of identifying good practices via reflective practice and through discovery and design, some of the key assessments pertaining to emergency response as part of crisis educational planning narrated to the following:

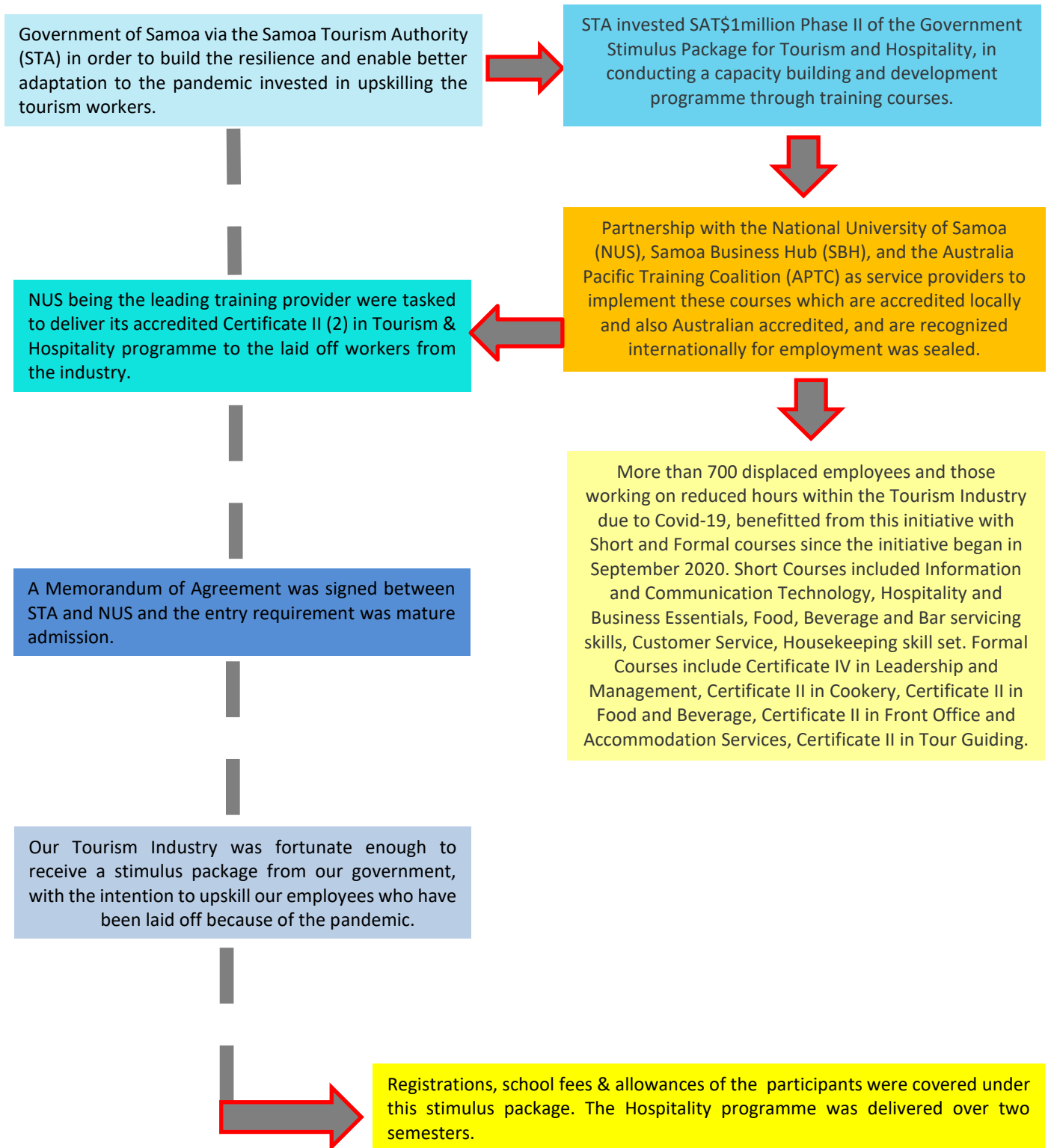
- Lack of materials like laptops, mobile phones, and tablets for students' and Lack of a private workplace, unstable home Internet connection, & slack of efficient parental support which impacted students' engagement.
- Accumulation of domestic chores impacting student engagement and performance in course.
- Increased workload for students' and educators leading to greater anxiety.
- Lack of face-to-face contact with the educator making it difficult for some students to understand.
- Absence of practical and field classes.

The Implications for the Higher education institutions (HEIs): Engaging in "Emergency Teaching":

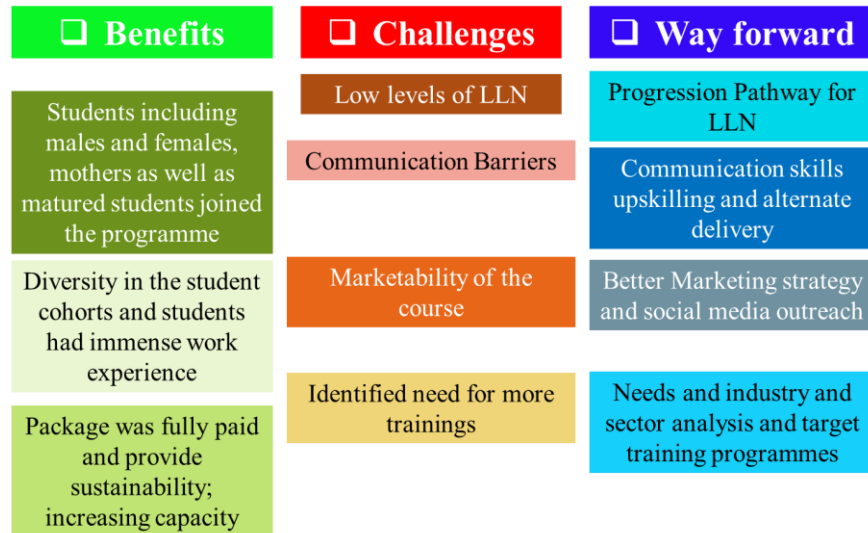
- Assessing Performance of Students in "Emergency Teaching" (lot of factors that interplayed such as student engagement, motivation, readiness as well as instructor variables etc) so Deploying Strategies to Mitigate Dropout was significant.
- Identifying the Student Support, Capacity Building Priority Areas esp for Students & Moodle Training for both educators and students was requisite.
- Using Learning Analytics in Crisis Institutional Planning was paramount.
- Contingency Planning & Ensuring inclusiveness (Gender, Equity, Disability and Social Inclusiveness) was essential.

**Figure 1: Case Illustration presented diagrammatically**

Case Study: Stimulus Package - Government of Samoa (GoS) through the Samoa Tourism Authority (STA) in collaboration with the National University of Samoa



**Figure 2: Benefits, Challenges and Way Forward**



### Conclusion and Implications

UNESCO (2020) deliberated on the significance of crisis educational planning as a response to the pandemic. It must be noted that research demonstrates that most conventional universities and students were not fully prepared for using such technologies leaving them with a range of challenges (Crawford et al., 2020; Prokopenko and Berezhna, 2020). The lesson from the case study and reflections was that crisis educational planning is dependent upon not only international response but local response and strategies to sustain outcomes in the short, medium and long term and to build resilience in education. Assessing the benefits and challenges help minimize the risks in emergency teaching and we are cognizant of our capacity and the requisites in the form of resources. This also helps address GEDSI implications. A coordinated approach such as the Stimulus Package helps accelerate learning and this coordinated partnership serves as a humanitarian, economic and educational development intervention. Crisis educational planning also had implications for contingency planning by the institution in that it requested a response strategy, resources/financing and frameworks for evaluating the impact of the crisis on the emergency teaching. Implications for practice are enlisted as follows:

- Invest in crisis educational planning and contingency planning.
- Setup an institutional framework for evaluating risks, benefits and challenges.
- Drawing data analytics to assess capabilities and learner and institution dynamics.
- Benchmarking with local practices & benchmarking with international best practices. Sharing practices is essential as well.
- Building the evidence-base through research on many of the issues confronting crisis educational planning, response and reliance outcomes in times of the pandemic (pre-pandemic, during and post-pandemic).
- Developing strong monitoring and evaluation (M&E) guidance and systems to better measure the impacts of the emergency teaching - education interventions and activities from a “resilience approach” and from a “sustainability approach” across multiple periods as well as cross-

comparative data collection and research to substantiate similarities and differences across regions, and to support learning and adaptive management within the HE sector.

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