Addressing Research Challenges During Calamity: How Do We Move Forward?

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Abstract

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is the worst public health disaster in our modern history. The disease has almost put a pause on our daily lives and activities, slowed down the civilization, made millions of people lose their jobs, children’s education and future are at stake and the global economy spiraling down. To date, COVID-19 has caused 6.31 million deaths and 537 million cases worldwide. Unfortunately, the numbers are still counting albeit rather slowly. In Malaysia alone, as this abstract was written, the total number of deaths was 35,725 while the cumulative number of cases was 4,532,632. However, the good news is that the vaccination program that started more than a year ago has successfully and significantly reduced the number of active cases globally and slowly restored the world to order. In our higher education programs, postgraduate students were among the most affected during the pandemic. Students were only allowed into laboratories with restricted access. In many cases, they opted not to enter the laboratory and other research facilities due to the Movement Control Order (MCO), limited supply of chemicals and reagents, unavailability of laboratory staff for service and assistance, and for the fear of getting infected that may cause fatality with the virus that many of us are not familiar with. As a result, research activities in higher education stayed still; affected the students’ academic progression in terms of research and publications. Hence, what can we learn from this? What went wrong with our approaches? How do we prevent this from happening again? Have we learned the lesson? How do we move forward? This plenary lecture will dissect the root cause of the issue and offer various strategies from different angles and perspectives to ensure the same mistakes that we have made will never happen again. The whole idea is to bring back the glory of research on the right track.

Keywords
COVID-19, Pandemic, Research challenges