



CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC IMPACT ON AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT: A PERSPECTIVE

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Amidst spring break, on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared the coronavirus outbreak a global pandemic. Ever since, almost every aspect of our normal life has been affected. Adapting to these unprecedented conditions drastically changed our daily routine and imposed adverse effects on us at multiple levels.

Schools and universities suspended in-person classes and moved to online instruction. Faculty and staff transitioned all learning to online in a very short period of time, when everything was planned to be carried out differently. While their efforts to make our Zoom and WebEx classes as engaging as possible are greatly appreciated, nothing can replicate the classroom experience. As an international student, studying abroad is not just about the academics; it's about the broader learning experience. I came to the United States of America to broaden my perspectives, experience and appreciate on-campus diversity, establish connections and building friendships, as well as to grow professionally and become a more competent practitioner in my area of interest.

The university I am attending, East Carolina University (ECU), is working tirelessly to keep us informed, updated, and involved. ECU has put great effort to make the transition to online instructions smoother for students. Academically, instructors were able to deliver the intended content remotely. However, research in the area of speech-language pathology, when often data collection through direct experimentation is needed, has been affected. For example, studies that require the use of instrumentation or direct follow-up were temporarily and indefinitely discontinued.

As the pandemic spread throughout the world, most countries took radical measures to limit the virus spread. Lockdown procedures were implement-

ed through enforcing social distancing and the use protective masks whenever we go out, which was not done unless deemed absolutely necessary. Also, the shortage on disinfectants and personal protective equipment created panic. As closed borders and travel bans became the norm, and as the situation became more uncertain with each passing day, I became worried about my own wellbeing as well as that of my loved ones in my home country thousands of miles away.

Feeling like I'm missing out on the real student experience, along with the uncertainty of the situation, both in my home country and in the U.S., I decided to stay connected with my family and friends to get and offer the support we all needed in these unprecedented times. Using videocalls, social media, and group chats, we have managed to stay connected and involved. My friends meet every other week to talk about virtually anything, and perhaps to offer a safe space for anyone to share what they are going through. We realized our emotional and mental wellbeing is essential for us to move forward and deal with the current situation.

As an international student in a lockdown in a foreign country, the situation is overwhelming, to say the least. However, I am thankful I am able to stay safe, healthy, and connected. I am grateful to my university, professors, family, and friends for offering me support during these times. Hopeful for it to end soon, my thoughts go to everyone affected by this pandemic.

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