ERD 2021
9th International Conference Education, Reflection, Development

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF ONLINE TEACHING PERCEIVED BY STUDENTS FROM PRE-SERVICE TEACHING

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Abstract

The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic brought with it a crisis that also affects education, which is facing a new challenge: the digital one. The school, at all its levels, with all the factors involved: students, teachers, authorities, and parents, has tried to adapt to the new reality, that of social distancing, in which the educational process must continue in the online environment. The process has not been tested before, teachers have adapted to the situation in a very short time, and students have used their own devices, or those of parents, to take online academic courses. The European COVID-19 pandemic and the Romanian national measures needed to combat the spread of the virus have caused significant disruption to education, training and mobility activities for students and teachers in the European Union (EU). In this context, we considered it relevant to find out how, already having an experience of 3 semesters of presence in the online environment, the students from the initial pedagogical training programs perceive the advantages and disadvantages of technology-based teaching. We also wanted to investigate how they analyse pedagogical training programs in terms of the impact that the transition to the online environment has had on their expectations regarding their own training for a future profession.

Keywords: Advantages, disadvantages, On-line teaching, pandemia, students

1. Introduction

In theese days, there are various online and offline tools (School Education Gateway, eTwinning, SALTO-YOUTH, EPALE, etc.) that can be used to connect teachers and students when they are in different places and, also, to access information and platforms that are not normally available at home or in the educational institution, and to support the continuous professional development of teachers in a flexible way.

There are studies that talk about both the advantages and disadvantages of this option. One of them state the fact that students in online learning conditions behaved in a better way than those who receive face-to-face instructions (Shea, 2014).

Other more recent studies (Almahasees et al., 2021; Jucan, 2020; Oltean, 2020; Zboun & Farrah, 2021) talk about the fact that instructions that combine the elements of online learning with traditional ones, face to face, have a greater advantage over instructions either face-to-face or purely online.

It is known that interspersing multimedia content and online learning materials with short tests at regular intervals could improve student involvement. Research has shown that the use of these tests has reduced by almost half (42%) the distraction of students and the considerable increase in grades obtained by them. (Szpunar et al., 2013)

Teachers have gradually begun to approach online education differently (Crișan et al., 2017; Oltean, 2016;). From the amphitheatres, from the blackboard, from the chair, from the bench, teachers and students were forced at the beginning of 2020 to find themselves exclusively in front of the screens. Without a consistent prior training, we face a huge challenge and, at the same time, a fantastic opportunity to continue learning. The situation has lasted for a year and a half already and this form of organizing the teaching is still maintained.

In 2020 we tried to find out the opinion of the students from Babes-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the new way of teaching (exclusively online). We found that they could adapt and that they find among the difficulties and certain advantages that they capitalize on (Muste, 2020).

Both distance and digital learning have been addressed, on a much smaller scale, of course, even before the pandemic (Raboca & Cotoranu, 2020). Despite the challenges we have faced and which we still have to face with the start of a new school year, this time in the midst of a pandemic, we must recognize that this whole period opens up new opportunities for the implementation of new paradigms, finding new methodologies for a more flexible, maybe more modern education, systematically approaching the digitalization of learning.

Digital learning can also be done in the classroom, at any level, but it certainly brings much better results in online teaching. Therefore, the biggest benefit of this global crisis may be the digitalisation of education. More than ever, we realized the need to develop digital skills in academia, but also the ability to adapt, find solutions and learn constantly (Ferri et al., 2020).

2. Problem Statement

In these conditions of prolonging the period of courses conducted exclusively online, there have been a series of technical and content adjustments in the field of many academic courses taught, including those related to the disciplines of pedagogical training. All these changes can be seen as challenges that teachers and especially students who are preparing to become teachers are subjected to and we consider that it would be useful to analyze the extent to which they try to adapt to the rapid pace at which they occur. We considered that it is important to establish what the students think about the main advantages and disadvantages specific to online teaching, after 3 complete semesters of activity carried out in this way.

3. Research Questions

We want to investigate what are the advantages and disadvantages that students who are in the situation of participating in online courses perceive and what is their opinion about how these distance learning activities are carried out. For this purpose, we invited the students of the Faculty of Letters from Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca, year 2, enrolled in the didactic training program and having 3 semesters of participation in online courses, to complete a questionnaire composed of two open-ended questions?

1. What benefits do you think the 3 semesters of online teaching brought you?
2. What shortcomings do you think the 3 semesters of online teaching brought you?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research is to analyse in detail the advantages and disadvantages of online teaching after 3 semesters of this type of activity, to highlight the positive and negative elements of online academic activity and to analyse the existing situation. These aspects could lead in the future to the improvement of the academic approach carried out online and would allow us to keep those actions that have proven to be beneficial.

5. Research Methods

Responses were collected anonymously, via Google Forms, to ensure data confidentiality. Thus, 102 students from the second year of teacher training program, distributed as shown in Table 1 answered the two questions, mentioning their opinion on how they perceive the benefits and shortcomings of online teaching in the university environment.

Table 1. Distribution of second year students by gender

Gender	Second year students
Feminine	90
Masculine	12

6. Findings

The answers collected and analysed from the 102 second year students show that 1 year and a half after the implementation of online teaching as an alternative to the classic form of face-to-face organization, they can identify the following positive aspects:

6.1. Research findings related with research question no.1

- ✓ adapting to one's own learning style
- ✓ the possibility of creating a personal learning style.
- ✓ increasing the degree of collaboration and mutual aid between students;
- ✓ the possibility that its information can be stored and accessed by students at any time creating the necessary organizational framework for a productive management of time and learning activities.
- ✓ adapting to online teaching encourages teachers to collaborate with each other, sharing their materials and pedagogical practices much more easily, at great distances
- ✓ many professors want to share their knowledge with those who need support.
- ✓ Moving online courses encourages students to have more autonomy in learning, making the most of their creativity.
- ✓ temporary relocation of the online learning process can support the pace of learning
- ✓ the temporary relocation of the online learning process can increase students' confidence in their own abilities and resources to be self-taught (in fact, lifelong learning is governed by the ability to be self-taught).
- ✓ comfort is increased by being in a personal space
- ✓ there is no more noise, at the level of group management the dynamics change, and the home can provide you with the right environment for learning.
- ✓ increasing the performance of introverted students, who cannot express themselves freely in a large group of students and in the presence of teachers, being forced to socialize with them
- ✓ students have more time to rest, they do not have to wake up very early in the morning to take public transport,
- ✓ if we can reduce fatigue, students can maintain a healthy and balanced eating style
- ✓ mobilizing actors involved in education for the acquisition and use of modern technology, that can be used successfully in education for the intrinsic motivation of the learning activity;
- ✓ the experiments that the Romanian education system is going through during this crisis should help the current students who will be future teachers to build a hybrid teaching system: online and offline.
- ✓ online learning reduces the risk of infecting the population, especially in conditions of well-known overcrowding in Romanian schools, especially in urban areas

✓ during these times, the Romanian school tried to keep up with the new generations who use it naturally.

✓ facilitate the accelerated development of digital competence, one of the eight key competences needed for lifelong learning. It is an essential competence for the 21st century in educational and professional activity, providing access to information and autonomy in education.

✓ the online school allows the development of groups without a mask, so that we can read facial expressions;

6.2. Research findings related with research question no. 2

✓ low possibility of socialization of students, without direct interaction, face to face with teachers and colleagues. This mode of interaction has limited valences and used in full does not fulfil all the functions that face-to-face socialization has.

✓ lack of adequate technical means (laptop, tablet, internet connection and even electricity)

✓ unpredictable fluctuations of internet networks, a difficulty at national level, difficult to overcome

✓ poor training of users - teachers and students for online teaching-learning-assessment.

✓ the teacher's support on the student's learning activity is difficult to achieve during the course.

✓ the home space has become very crowded in the conditions of telework and online school. In families with more children or with a small living space, this is strongly felt

✓ facilitating nonverbal communication is so necessary for students (smile, amazement, question, bewilderment, disagreement, etc.) during school activities.

7. Conclusion

Online education is modern and fast, has a wide range of applicability but lacks feelings, empathy, socialization, the sound made of chalk on the board or the sound of the bell announcing the end of an hour. Thus, today's teacher must comply with the wishes and needs of students and society (Bernard et al., 2004). The need for such an approach in working with students was evident during this period when teaching moved online globally, and teachers had to rely entirely on technology to carry out their work. The Internet allows us access to many free educational platforms with which course classes can become more captivating.

The online school gives you the opportunity to explore new ways of learning, to be able to replace the classic methods (considered by some outdated and boring) with more attractive means. (Smart & Cappel, 2006)

Online resources allow the revolutionization of the educational system and due to the fact that they allow the whole teaching and learning process to become more captivating and adapted to the digital student. Also, at least theoretically, it is considered that rural students may have access to better teachers who would not have been willing to commute to the schools where they study. Parents can also be aware

of the school situation of children with access to teaching methods. This can also put pressure on parents, who must supervise their children and develop technology.

However, according to the Evaluative Research Report "Online School - Elements for educational innovation" (Botnariuc et al., 2020) which describes all the contextual elements of the online school in Romania, it is also mentioned that the following:

• the education system is only partially prepared; some teachers do not currently have enough information and skills specific to computer-assisted training.

• the curriculum allows in a variable / sequential / revised measure the transposition into distance activities.

• EdTech companies were not stimulated to build interoperable solutions, tailored to the system needs of education.

We consider that education in turn has a stronger impact if it is done in groups because the student has access to information here and now, can be trained and educated under the close supervision of the educator, has access to examples of good behavioural practice, is constantly stimulated to to think, to feel, to live, to make friends and to be part of a class (Jucan, 2019). We also highlight the role of group or individual counseling of students who in these pandemic periods or outside them need academic, professional and personal support. (Jucan, 2021)

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