

Received: 01.02.2021

Accepted: 07.04.2021

DOI: 10.34858/sstp.1.2021.005

Oksana CHAIKA

National University of Life and
Environmental Sciences of Ukraine
e-mail: oxana.chaika@yahoo.es
ORCID: 0000-0002-4317-9456

Impact of COVID-19 on Educational Process in University: Case Study

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly changed the global life dramatically. Educational systems across the world have been subject to operation under the unexpected whirl of changes, which consequently affected not only the economic component of educational establishments both public and private, but also the lifestyle and study/instruction-style of students and the pedagogical staff. The findings of the current project are based on a case study carried out in Kyiv, Ukraine. The data have been received from students' feedback and the surveys conducted at the *National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine*.

Admitting the evidence that the pandemic unveiled an immense number of social and economic problems, unemployment rates rocketed up, health issues and depression started being a regular issue, there are factors of positive nature. Among these are improved skills and refreshed abilities of students and university staff to quickly adapt to changes, move faster in life and acquire the new according to the findings. Emotionally, the major part of senior students (Year 4, Philology and International Relations Departments) and master students got adjusted fast enough and looked at the digital opportunities, including extra digital learning, obtaining new certificates in the areas of communication, soft skills and online team-building. The advantages named by 98% of respondents both pedagogical staff (faculty) and students included time- and cost-saving as the key benefits in relation to instruction / study from home rather than campus.

Keywords: COVID-19, pandemic, remote study, online education, advantages and disadvantages of online education

Introduction

At present, it is no longer a shocking solution to temporarily keep educational institutions closed for an indefinite/definite time span. In order to mitigate the health risks and reduce the spread of COVID-19, most governments globally adopted domestic regulations that resulted in school/university closures for the peaks of the pandemic and under emergency. Citing Cambridge International, the management took “the difficult decision not to run our international examinations in the May/June 2020 series in any country”, at the same time enabling students to “receive a grade and a certificate from Cambridge International, given the knowledge and skills” they had acquired in their programmes of study. The similar situation was with International Baccalaureate exams etc. (Update from Cambridge International, 2020).

Partly, for literature review purposes, it appears worth mentioning what www.thehill.com shares in *The advantages and disadvantages of online learning during the coronavirus pandemic: Education psychologists and experts talk about the emergency remote learning situation teachers and students have been thrown into*. One of major concerns with the pandemic time is seen with lack of access to equipment and the internet (Hou, 2020). Thus, it becomes hardly possible to adapt to the new educational environment without reliable and fast internet. Another challenge is resource intensive as some participants of the educational process may just not have appropriate gadgets and devices for online work, in particular. Reading further, the post mentions that with colleges and universities are even more challenges. For instance, “Many college students experience [...] challenges upon returning home under quarantine: competing for digital resources and experiencing the challenges of their own motivational and regulatory dispositions and capacities” (Hou, 2020). It is very true of the challenges specified in Results and Discussion as highlighted by university students, which are survey respondents. Next, “the stress of leaving campus in the midst of a pandemic also adds to their mental health burden” in the US colleges and universities (ibid.) absolutely coincides with comments of the student respondents under our case study. Importantly, that “learning outcomes from remote classes may not be the same as in-person classes” (ibid.) features contradictory responses with the university respondents in Ukraine (please see Results and Discussion below).

Methods

This qualitative case study was conducted at the *National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine* (NUBiP Ukraine) among students of *Philology* (seeking master's degree) and students of *International Relations, Social Communication and Regional Studies* (senior students of Year 4, Bachelor's). The case study focused on the period of four months, from the beginning of the academic year (September 2020) to the end of Semester 1 (31 December 2020), in order to collect the feedback at the time when everybody experienced one quarantine follow another, as well as a mix of lockdowns and unlocks.

Ethical approval for this case study included two stages. Stage 1 associates with the personal consent of each respondent to collect, process and publicly distribute the case study findings in aggregate keeping to confidentiality covenants. Stage 2 connects to the ethical review session at the Department meeting of the staff at the Chair for Romance and Germanic languages and Translation, Faculty for pedagogy and the Humanities, NUBiP Ukraine.

The variation sampling under the case study numbered 16 master students of Philology and 26 bachelor students of International Relations, Social Communication and Regional Studies, 42 students altogether. The age groups covered 20–25 year old students of the faculty for pedagogy and the Humanities.

In the end, an interview guide was developed to explore the opinions of the students as to their perception of advantages and disadvantages of online learning with the pandemic quarantine and, to their minds, as to possible solutions to overcome the mentioned in the survey challenges. The interviews with the students were conducted via a questionnaire in the survey form, the fields were filled in as typed by students electronically and later transferred to the automated and processed worksheets.

Results and discussion

The students under the case study were aged 20–25 and represented by a double larger group of females ($n = 28$) as compared to male representatives ($n = 14$). Please see the breakdown in Figure 1 below. 'Students IR' stands for the students from *International Relations, Social Communication and Regional Studies* Department and 'students Ph' refer to the *Philology* students.

Figure 1. *Criteria with respondents, quantity and percentage weight*

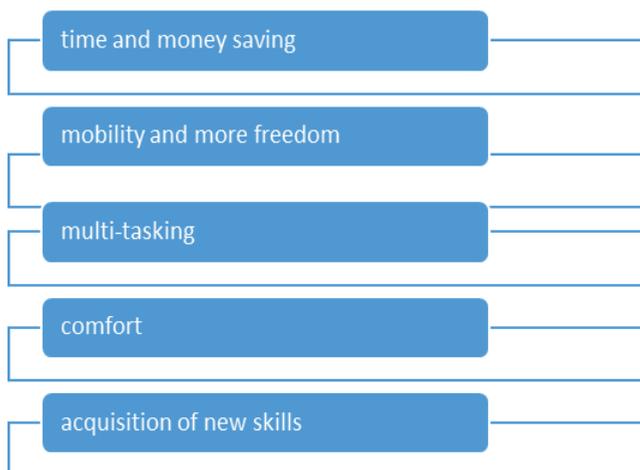
Criteria	Students IR [n = 26, 100%]	Students Ph [n = 16, 100%]
<i>Age range</i>		
18–25	26 (100%)	16 (100%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	10 (38.5 %)	4 (25%)
Female	16 (61.5 %)	12 (75%)

Source: Author own research

To follow the entire picture possible under the study it is proposed to see the findings according to three groups:

1. advantages of online education as explained by the students, both males and females;
2. disadvantages of online education as explained by the students, both males and females;
3. recommendations by the students as a possible solution to combat the hurdles.

Advantages of online education as explained by the students can be grouped under five key labels: 1) time and money saving; 2) mobility and more freedom; 3) multi-tasking; 4) comfort; 5) acquisition of new skills.

Figure 2. *Breakdown of advantages with online education according to priority list*

Source: Author own research

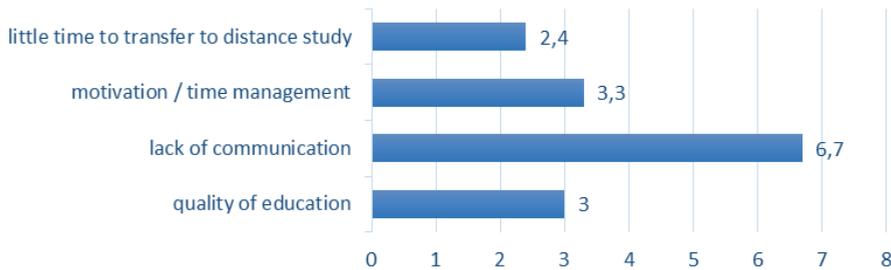
Both the departments Philology and International Relations see the priority positive point about the time, 100% of respondents mentioned it from the very start. Money saving appeared more critical to female students, making 75% of the total. Speaking of mobility and freedom, the main mention was by the majority of students who commuted to university. The big advantage was about doing any course from any place, either place of residence, or friend's place, or staying in the countryside and helping the grandparents and at the same time keeping on with study. The female respondents (10 out of 28, which is 35,7% of the female group and 24% of the total) underlined the importance of doing assignments any time of the day. The girl students commented, if they could work harder in class and cover more exercises, they would have more free time in the afternoon and evening for the family.

Another criterion was about multi-tasking. Surprisingly, but everybody of 85.7% meant the same thing. It related to combining study and work. As to comfort, the advantage in most cases (80%) was about home food and drinks, no need to have snacks in a café. It is important to note that the focus was on taste and nutrition value rather than money saving. Next, the last but not the least was acquisition of new skills. Among 90% of respondents, male students underlined digital skills, platforms and other than university courses for self-education. Female students looked at self-confidence, self-value and self-development in the areas of communication and design (37.5%).

Disadvantages of online education as explained by the students varied between male and female students of International Relations and Philology. However, roughly, such can be presented as 1) concern about quality of education; 2) lack of communication and home stay all day long; 3) motivation issues and time management; 4) little time to transfer from offline to online study when there is a good number of habits, which should change, respectively.

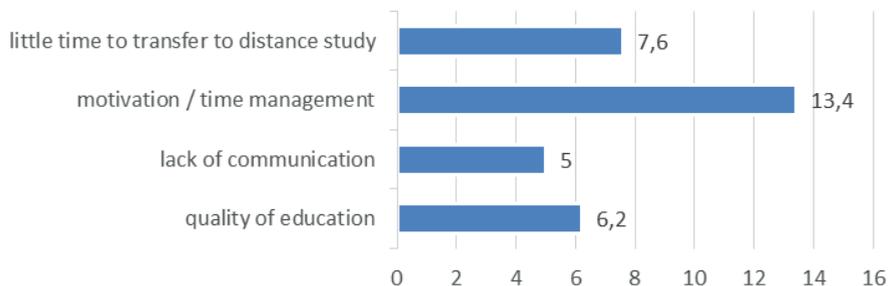
Figure 3 displays the percentage in connection to each category mentioned above according to the sex criterion (female students and male students). From all the students who agreed on the criteria and shared the opinion on weaknesses of online education it was 47.6%. The male students made 32.2% and female students came to 15.4%, respectively.

Following the comments by the girls from both the departments, the major problem had remained with lack of communication for the entire quarantine time, which accounted for 6.7%. Next, sliding down the priority list came motivation and time management – 3.3%, and quality of education – 3%. The least was a concern about unexpectedness and transfer to study from home, which caused no trouble at all as to changing habits but inconvenience with adaptation to various online platforms and digital tools for communication between professors and students.

Figure 3.1. *Disadvantages of online education (female students)*

Source: Author own research

Despite the same list of disadvantages specified by the male students from International Relations and Philology, the boys prioritized the weaknesses in fairly much different way. Number one concern was with motivation and time management. Little time to transfer from campus to home study became a challenge, inasmuch such unprecedented circumstances of COVID-19 and closures of educational institutions triggered changes in their everyday activities. Home environment relaxed, emotionally it became hard to concentrate and there always were many distractors as the male students underlined. With good lagging from 13.4% to 7.6%, next came the correlation between study, part time jobs, sports, leisure and family time was subject to dramatic modifications. Further, dropping by 1.4% was quality of education. The quality was claimed in the light of instructing staff, in particular. Some senior professors, aged 60–75, found that really next to impossible to immediately switch to digital platforms of communication. Luckily, NUBiP Ukraine implemented *e-learn*, the online educational platform, long prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. That was a helping hand for the senior pedagogical staff to gain time and train harder for their technical competencies. Lack of communication came last on the list for the male students, just 5%.

Figure 3.2. *Disadvantages of online education (male students)*

Source: Author own research

Most likely to be expected, recommendations as to quality of distance education would have to appear first, however, the survey findings under the case study proved different. Suddenly, the students included the question of health issues in the recommendation list. The explanation was that with remote work and online study they had to spend the bigger part of the day in front of their computers, laptops and other devices. That may not but lead to increased pain in the eyeballs, sore and reddish eyes and feeling of tiredness throughout the day. Reasonably, their advice would link to time management and motivation. At the same time, that did not sound as a claim against poor arrangement of educational work by the pedagogical staff or performance in class. The top advice was about self-education and self-development in the digital era. That was the decision heated by the pandemic and pushing fast forward, especially those, who meant themselves to be among leaders, and wished to stay ahead of the curve.

Conclusion

The global pandemic of COVID-19 that embraced the world and caused closures of world's schools, high schools, colleges and universities in March 2020 will forever be known in the education community (Winthrop, 2020). Obviously, governments had to respond and as every crisis may equal an opportunity, a solution was found. The unexpectedly fast move to distance learning allowed little time for planning. Clearly enough, there was no time to reflect much on how to safeguard against potential risks of solely online education and foresee the potential opportunities. The case study on impact of COVID-19 on educational process in university was conducted at a national university in Ukraine. The students who participated in the survey under the present case study were aged 20–25, including male and female students, 42 altogether.

The students of both the departments International Relations and Philology enumerated a good number of advantages associated with online education. Thus, there were five main groups identified. The leading strength of distance study was a time and money saving factor. The next was mobility and more freedom for make decisions as to study, work, place of living and doing something else, which remained undisclosed. The other two groups were about multi-tasking from a general perspective in terms of combining work and study and comments on value of comfort. The acquisition of new skills including soft skills was also an advantage.

It should be noted that the male respondents spoke more about concentration on education and time management as the challenge was to discipline themselves when studying from home. Distracting surroundings affected their motivation and, thus, relaxed. Some tasks were postponed, projects failed, and it took too much effort to make up minds to concentrate and study, according to the replies of the male students. The female students emphasized the importance of new skills as well. However, their focus was on improvement of soft skills in communication, intercultural communication, negotiation, creativity and design.

The disadvantages were shorter on the list but not that much. They included claimed quality of education, lack of communication between students and professors, students among themselves, students and friends, students and distant family, time management and motivation to get ready for classes and do home assignments/projects, and little time they had to transfer from a typical campus university life style to home environment and distance study. The priority list varied between the departments and given the sex of respondents. The male students were concerned more with inability to motivate themselves and manage their study and leisure time whereas the female students were most concerned with lack of communication.

The recommendation part by the students rounded mostly at health care and wellness. No workouts in the open air disappointed a lot of male students, on the one hand, and on the other, both the groups males and females claimed long hours before the computers for staying in classes and afterwards doing homework with the gadgets and downloading/uploading files from /to digital platforms.

Overall, the advantages named by 98% of respondents included time- and cost-saving as the key benefits in relation to distance education.

The list of strong and weak points for online education in these findings is not exhaustive. It is limited given the set tasks under the case study and the scope permitted for publication. The further analysis is to be made, more data is being collected and processed, which is why this research would envelope into another bigger description of pros and cons for distance study, including the comments by professors and other pedagogical staff.

References

- Hou, Chia-Yi (2020). *The advantages and disadvantages of online learning during the coronavirus pandemic. Education psychologists and experts talk about the emergency remote learning situation teachers and students have been thrown into.* Downloaded from: <https://thehill.com/changing-america/well-being/prevention-cures/505452-the-advantages-and-disadvantages-of-online> (29.01.2021).
- Update from Cambridge International on May/June 2020 exams.* Downloaded from: <https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/news/news-details/view/update-from-cambridge-international-on-may-june-2020-exams-20200323/> (29.01.2021).
- Winthrop, R. (2020). *Top 10 risks and opportunities for education in the face of COVID-19.* Downloaded from: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2020/04/10/top-10-risks-and-opportunities-for-education-in-the-face-of-covid-19/> (29.01.2021).