

STUDENT ASSESSMENT FROM THE FACULTY OF “PUBLIC HEALTH, HEALTHCARE AND SPORTS” SOUTH-WEST UNIVERSITY “NEOPHIT RILSKY” ON THE ONLINE TRAINING

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic is having an unprecedented impact on human behavior and everyday life. One of the most characteristic post-COVID effects that has occurred is the increasingly imposed digital communication in all public and personal spheres. Higher education institutions stopped the face-to-face form of education and switched to online education. Digital literacy was required for university teachers and students to use online platforms. For large part of the students this process was easier due to their almost daily presence in the Internet space, use of various communicative social networks and applications. For the teachers, it became necessary to adapt the teaching material for application in an environment, to prepare in a short period of time to move to a different learning environment and to overcome the existing deficits for teaching in an online environment, to develop different forms of testing, to use webinars as a means of synchronous learning. The purpose of the present study is to examine the opinion of the students from the Faculty of Public Health, Health Care and Sport, South-West University „Neofit Rilski“-Blagoevgrad for the quality of online education. An anonymous survey was conducted among students of medical and non-medical specialties – nursing, midwifery, kinesiotherapy, speech therapy and social work. The results show that part of the students accept the online training as effective in terms of the theoretical material, but all of the them express a definite opinion about conducting hands-on training. Students expect from teachers more attractive methods, more time for direct dialogue and discussions. The technical problems in implementing online learning and the difficulties experienced by both students and teachers are reported. The technical problems in implementing online learning and the difficulties experienced by both students and teachers are reported. The obtained results show that both countries are facing a number of problems in the digital reality rethinking the traditional way of teaching.

Keywords: *online learning, students, teachers, advantages, disadvantages, problems*

Field:3) *Medical sciences and Health*

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on human behavior and daily life. The global crisis caused is unparalleled, not only with the high mortality from the disease, the forced social isolation, the economic, geopolitical changes that have occurred, but also with the long-term consequences that we have to deal with as a society. One of the most characteristic post-COVID effects that has occurred is the increasingly imposed digital communication in all public and personal spheres. Higher education institutions stopped the face-to-face form of education and switched to online education. The learning process was reorganized and conducted remotely in an electronic environment through Internet-based learning platforms with a wide variety of interactive learning resources, so that students can continue their education, not severing their connection and communication with their teachers. For a large part of the students, this process was easier due to their almost daily presence in the Internet space, use of various communicative social networks and applications.

There are different definitions of e-learning - a new generation of distance learning, easier access to resources, distance exchange and collaboration (Alonso et al., 2005); training that provides a type of information, in real-time training, via the Internet to the trainees as the ultimate recipients and users of the information (Lee & Lee, 2006); learning and education using electronic means (Li & Lau Dharmendran, 2009).

In order to achieve positive results in online learning, the motivation and competence of teachers, structured teaching, the application of systems for adapting and supporting learning, and providing feedback are important (Hristova, A., S. Petrova, & E. Papazova, 2020). According to Kasnakova, P., & B. Hadzhieva (2021), one of the main tasks in front of the teacher is to create a supportive, stimulating environment for the learner, which will lead to increased cognitive ability. In evaluating online learning,

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Kosev, V., (2020) analyzes how far the physically absent (online) learning process can be defined as a synchronous process - teaching through traditional approaches, but transferred to an electronic, online, environment.

The online learning environment provides opportunities for various, attractive modern means of presenting and evaluating the learning material, which stimulate the digital generation of students to promote their active role in the learning process (Terzieva, V., K. Todorova, & P. Kademova- Katsarova, 2016). The modern educational environment offers a variety of forms of communication based on technology, e-learning platforms, personalized social networks, etc. Teachers and learners have the opportunity at any time to connect through the use of various information and communication technologies (Gaidarova, M., T. Terzieva, & A. Rahnev, 2020).

The learning strategies used for online learning have one common feature - they are not considered by the teachers and the academic society to be applied in a single learning option - online or distance learning. The sudden shift to this type of education, due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, caught both teachers and students unprepared (Dragusheva, S., 2021, Dragusheva S., Petleshkova P., & Uchikov P., 2021). There is a need to invest in new educational technologies and continuous education for teachers (Dimitrova, D., 2020). Particularly for medical specialties, institutional support is critical to overcoming barriers to online learning, to build future professional and communication skills and develop institutional strategy (D. O'Doherty, M., Dromey, J. Loughheed, A. Hannigan, J. , Last & D., McGrath, 2018).

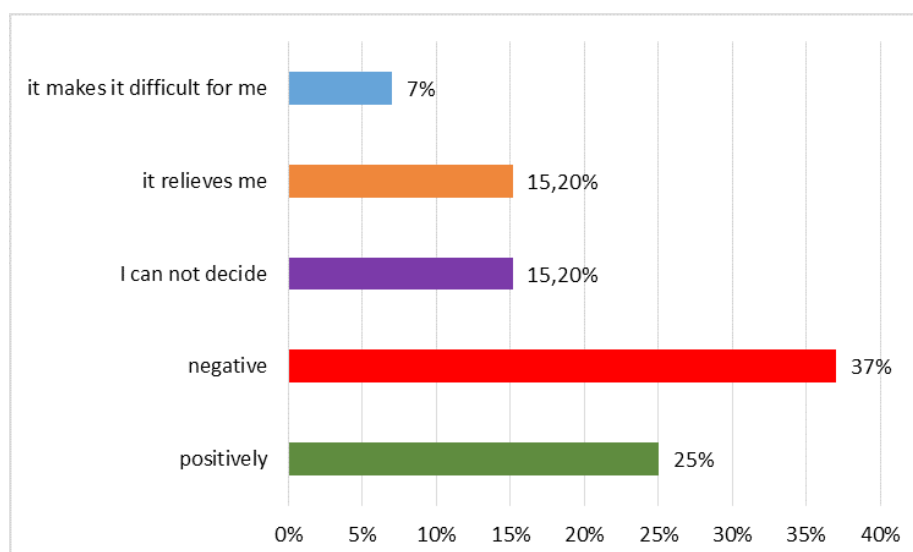
MATERIALS AND METHODS

A sociological method was used for the needs of the research - a direct anonymous survey among 92 students from the Faculty of "Public Health, Health Care and Sports", South-West University "N. Rilski" - Blagoevgrad from medical and non-medical specialties - nurse, midwife, social activities, speech therapy and kinesiotherapy for evaluation of online training. The research was conducted in March - April 2022. The results were processed statistically and illustrated with diagrams and figures using MS Excel 2013.

RESULTS

The created author's survey contains 21 questions, 13 of which are closed and 8 are open with the possibility of freely expressing one's own opinion. The principle of anonymity was respected when filling out the questionnaires. From the processing of the questionnaires, the distribution of students by major is as follows: nurse - 45.65% (n=42), midwife - 16.3% (n=15), social activities - 14.1% (n=13), kinesiotherapy - 13.04% (n=12), speech therapy - 10.86% (n=10). Students from the first to third year of study in the university were surveyed. Students in the 20-25 age group have the largest relative share of all those surveyed - 83.7% (n=77). The results for the assessment of the absent, online form of learning are presented in fig. 1.

Fig. 1. Distribution of answers for assessment of absentee form of education



Based on the survey, it was found that less than half of the respondents (37%) gave a negative assessment of this form of training. Among them, the share of students from "Nurse" and "Midwifery" specialties is the highest (21%). 7.6% answered as a form of education that makes it difficult for them. The analysis of the obtained results shows that they are most likely due to the specificity of the specialties in which the present practical training is necessary, bearing in mind that three of the specialties are medical professions (nursing, midwifery, kinesiotherapy). The obtained results are also confirmed by other studies on the possibility of clinical simulations replacing traditional training during clinical practice, in which most authors are of the opinion that it is necessary to determine whether online training helps to improve knowledge levels and whether its use as alternative teaching method should continue (Sook-Young Kim, Shin-Leong Kim & Soon-Hee-Lee, 2021).

The students, as arguments for their assessment, indicate the following reasons: great difficulties in conducting the practical (clinical) part of the training, uncertainty about practicing the profession due to insufficient practical training, missing lectures due to a bad Internet connection (32.6%), lack of the social environment and direct contact with teachers and colleagues (97.8%), difficulties in absorbing the learning material (65.1%), technical problems during training - "throwing out of the platforms", disconnection of the Internet connection (94.5 %), lack of sufficient opportunity for discussion (24%), as it is in the present form of training. Responses exceed 100% because students indicated more than one response.

Distant learning was positively evaluated by 25% of students, mostly from the second and third year of study. 15.2% of the students answered as a form of education that eases the process for them. Due to the nature of the majors, the answers could mean that students encounter difficulties especially in practical training - building and strengthening a number of skills and habits characteristic of the professions of nurse, midwife, kinesiotherapy, especially for fresh students.

The responses of the students who gave a positive assessment of online learning are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Reasons for positive assessment of online learning

Motives	Relative share (%)
Saving money (for food, accommodation, travel)	94,5% (n=35)
More free time	54,5% (n=20)
The lecture materials from the teachers are uploaded to the platforms	45,9% (n=17)
More time for family	29,7% (n=11)
Less stress	24,3% (n=9)
I can join the lesson from anywhere	62,1% (n=23)
Possibility to lesson to the lecture even if I am at work (for working students)	16,2% (n=6)

From the obtained results, it is clear that for students, online education leads to: financial savings, especially for those who are not from the city where the university is located; possibility of communication and inclusion in the lesson from any place; no need to travel to the university, more free time and the fact that the materials are available at any time, even if you miss a lecture.

When assessing the quality of online education, half of the respondents answered that the lack of real (clinical) practice significantly affects the quality of education. The result can be explained by some of the stated reasons - impossibility of full-fledged practical training for the majority of students from regulated professions - direct observation in a clinical setting, learning and working on practical skills, impossibility of direct contact with teachers, limited time consultations and discussions. The results coincide with a study conducted among students of the regulated profession "midwife", in which the students rated it as ineffective (Georgakeva, K., & L. Lazarova, 2021).

Students indicate that during distance learning they contacted their teachers through various electronic platforms and devices: through BigBlueButton, Blackboard and Zoom – 85.8%, Viber Messenger – 17.4%. Responses exceed 100% because students indicated more than one response. The results mean that for the students, the ways of communication and the possibility of consultation with the professors are among the most important criteria for security in mastering the study material.

The students evaluated the quality of the material taught by the teachers in the following way: as excellent for most teachers - 53.26% (n=49), as very good - 32.6%, (n=30), as good - 14.13 % (n=13). The answers could mean that teachers need to implement more engaging teaching methods and seek feedback, or that student's compare distant to face-to-face learning, which allows direct dialogue and discussions with teachers.

Regarding the absent practical exercises, the responses of all students clearly show dissatisfaction,

since all students are from majors that require direct observation, professional communication and the development of professionally relevant skills and competences. The obtained results coincide with data in other studies as well (Georgakeva, K., & L. Lazarova, 2021).

DISCUSSION

In the course of online learning, a number of technical problems stood out - weak or missing Internet connection, family students using the same technical device together with their children, difficulties in using a certain online platform, the fixed time for solving the tests in the examination procedures in the different platforms. On the other hand, the time spent in front of computers and fatigue increased for all participants in the educational process. It took a short time to acquire new knowledge and skills, both for the students and the teachers. Changes occurred in the attitudes and motivation of all participants in the educational process. Digital literacy was needed for teachers and students to use the online platforms, adapting the learning material for implementation in an online environment. The teachers had to prepare in a short time the learning material for moving to a different learning environment and to overcome the existing deficits and barriers to teaching in an online environment, to develop different forms of testing, to use webinars as a means of learning. The incoming digitization in education has forced a rethinking of the existing traditional way of teaching. Information technology in education will increasingly require educators to change the way they teach and for the students the way they learn.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the obtained results shows that both sides in the educational process are facing a number of problems in the digital reality, which still have a lot to improve in the educational process. The transition from traditional to e-learning has brought to the fore a number of challenges that teachers and students must deal with in the future in order for the educational process to fulfill its purpose. In the course of online training, the positive sides also stood out with the possibility of using different simulation scenarios, with finding more modern means and forms of teaching, flexible learning. In online learning, the asynchronous organization contributes to greater student activity, greater opportunities to exchange and process information. Despite the positive aspects, the opinion of students from all majors is that practical exercises and teaching (clinical) practice should take place in a real presence environment and not in a digital one. Hands-on training is necessary to acquire professional skills and competencies so that future professionals can gain confidence in the professions for which they are being trained.

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