

Adjusting and (Re)Adapting from Online to Face-To-Face Systems – A Case Study

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Abstract

The current study investigates several aspects connected to students’ academic behavioural adjustment and their capacity to (re)adapt during the transition stage from emergency remote teaching, due to the temporary shift caused by the Covid-19 pandemic to face-to-face teaching. We researched students’ intentions in terms of their long-term plans regarding their academic education and designed a questionnaire concerning the advantages of the two teaching systems they experienced: online vs. face-to-face. As indicated by students’ answers, the impact of the pandemic period is less powerful than anticipated by different scenarios, while the possibility of testing alternative forms of teaching proved beneficial.

Key words: behavioural adjustment, ERT -emergency remote learning, adaptation, face-to-face learning,

J.E.L. classification: Z 13

1. Introduction

Abruptly, in 2019, during the Covid 19 pandemic, universities around the world were forced to shift from face-to-face to emergency remote education (ERT). Approximately two years later, in spring 2022, in Romania, after two years of online learning, the authorities decided that the academic systems had to reverse the initial jump from face-to-face to online by a sudden return to the initial system. This change came quite abruptly, and it aroused numerous justified protests from universities and students alike. Re-adapting and re-adjusting to the systems on the run became the new norm. The present study investigates how students managed to re-adapt during this hasty return from emergency remote learning to face-to-face learning. 53 students completed the questionnaire on their (un)successful (re)adaptation to face-to-face learning and their personal worries about this process.

In order to prevent a permanent abandonment of study, as a result of this shock and to decrease the fear of inadaptation, especially among first- and second-year students who, due to the social and medical circumstances, only experienced emergency remote learning, a study offering an insight into students’ adaptation, specifically focused on aspects concerning personal motivations and worries which influence their self-regulated learning, could help provide individualized support.

2. Literature review

Possessing the capacity to adjust one’s behaviour or a behavioural adjustment refers to an individual’s possibility to modify his/her behaviour in accordance with environmental challenges (Heckhausen and Schultz, 1995). It represents an important psychological coping resource which enables subtle mental mechanisms to become flexible and to find a state of equilibrium with external demands. An adequate adjustment of students to academic requirements directly influences their academic performance. Students’ adjustment can be indirectly influenced by the academic environment, social factors, educational and psychological factors.

Translated in everyday terms, the issue of adjustment is in tight correlation with one’s efforts to effectively and efficiently live, by developing the necessary skills and gaining control over one’s daily routine, successfully coping with life’s challenges, developing self-understanding and making accurate judgements about what happens and people around.

We can all agree that adaptation means behaviour as much as it means biology. In psychology adaptation is defined as a natural ability to constantly modify our behaviour in order to cope with changes around us. In Piaget’s view adaptation is an important process which influences our cognitive development, and it can be done in two ways: through assimilation and accommodation (Piaget, 1985). In our constant cognitive development adaptation is vital, as we are able to continuously adjust to changes affecting us and the world around us.

Students are perpetually faced with the challenge to adapt and adjust to academic life, as indicated by Baker and Siryk, this academic adjustment involves having clear academic goals, being able to concentrate on one’s academic achievement, making efforts to deal with the demands of the system and finding contentment in one’s academic life (Baker and Siryk, 1984). Under normal circumstances, students consider their academic life as stressful and intimidating and those who are overwhelmed by the changes they need to face are confronted with a considerable amount of distress and increase the churn rates, from here derives the pressure on universities to manage to increase their retention and graduation rates (Krause and Jennings, 2010).

The advantages of face-to-face learning include encouraging students to develop social interactions, which go hand in hand with developing a sense of security and a sense of inclusion and a sense of belonging to a group. A real-time help and explanations offered, most of the time, spontaneous and immediate correction of the errors can be done during face-to-face lessons. Other competing forms of entertainment, such as video games or social media or just the comfort of one’s home, taking a nap, which can be considered forms of massive distraction are totally excluded. Collaborative learning activities, which simulate a working environment in which students learn from each other or teach each other, can be better organized in a physical classroom environment. The physical environment also simulates better a professional working environment in the case of role-playing activities. The physical class environment is a more reliable tool in terms of putting a certain amount of pressure on students to become more responsible and to manage their time correctly, to develop useful professional skills, for example by forcing them not to postpone their duties.

The advantages of online learning are not negligible and include the possibility of enjoying the comfort of one’s home, or becoming a digital nomad, more autonomy, and more control of one’s schedule. It proves to be better in terms of time management and even timesaving, in the case of commuters, learning new technical skills and enhancing communication skills, developing a type of self-regulated autonomous form of learning through the development of self-regulatory mechanisms. As noticed by Chirobocea-Tudor, online education as tested during the pandemic period is a form of education which needs to be refined and improved and further used at a much larger extent than it was initially estimated (Chirobocea-Tudor, 2021).

3. Research methodology

The survey was carried out using a specially designed Microsoft Forms Questionnaire, a number of 53 students (aged between 19 and 23 years old) participated to the survey, out of which 40 women and 13 men. They were enrolled in the academic year 2020-2021 on the Faculty of Economic Sciences, “Ovidius” University of Constanta, in the first year of study. The survey contained both open and closed answer questions and students were allowed to skip the questions they didn’t feel comfortable with. The questions were grouped under two main categories: questions concerning their long-term plans regarding their academic education and questions concerning the advantages of the two teaching systems they experienced: online vs. face-to-face. The answers are anonymous.

4. Findings

The first question offered students the possibility to freely express the difficulties they expect to overcome during the readaptation process to traditional face-to-face teaching; 51 students out of 53 were willing to answer this question - 9 students didn't foresee any difficulties, while 42 indicated lack of time, less time for studying, more stress, more money spent on commuting, or on rent, losing their present job or even losing a personal relationship. When asked to hierarchize their worries, in the second question of our survey, being offered a limited number of options in a closed- question, top positions are occupied by the fear of failing the exams (64%) and a lack of time (34%). We would like to point out a positive aspect revealed by the answers to this question, even though the Covid-19 pandemic was a period dominated by depression, isolation lack or disruption of social relationships, affecting the entire population, only 1 student in our survey feared the possibility of inadaptation to the system and no student opted for the inability to establish connections with other fellow students.

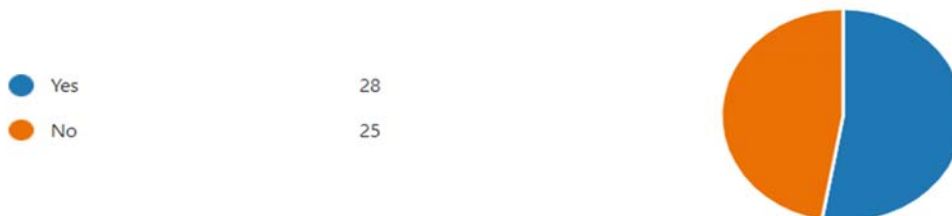
When asked about a motivation to work harder, 10 students out of 49 who offered free answers to this question, said : " Nothing", "-", " I don't know", while other respondents indicated either internal or administrative factors, such as the amount of taxes, the inclusion of more practical activities in the curricula, better communication with the teaching staff, access to more free didactic materials, more interactive teaching methods, less learning and more relaxation, better urban environment, access to better jobs or better salaries.

In questions number 4 and 5 we aimed to investigate whether students consider that this transition from online to traditional systems affects their plans on a long-term basis, and if this affects their plans concerning completing their academic education. The answers are, as you can see from the figures below (Figure no. 1 and 2), quite biased, in the case of question 4, while in the case of question 5, in alignment with the difficulties and worries expressed in the previous questions, dropping school is an option 14% of the total number of respondents would take into consideration, in a slight increase compared to the official statistics.

Figure no. 1 Question 4 and statistical results

4. Does this transition to traditional systems affect your plans on a long term basis?

[Mai multe detalii](#)



Source: Question and chart processed by the author

Figure no. 2- Question 5 and statistical results

5. Have you thought about dropping school?

[Mai multe detalii](#)



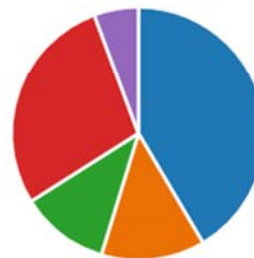
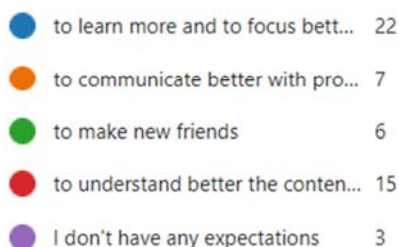
Source: Question and chart processed by the author

When asked to comment on positive aspects of online systems in the 6th question, 51 students described it in terms of: “more free time”, “more time for getting a job”, “more sleep” or “more studying”, “more comfortable”, “more time to spend with family members”, “multitasking”, “modern ways of thinking”, “more economical”, “faster and better organized”, “flexible”. A similar number of 51 students described the advantage of returning to campuses (Question no. 7) as: “A possibility to socialize”, “meeting a lot of new people”, “better connections with colleagues”, “adapting to the university environment”, “a better understanding of the courses”, they also noticed an “improving mode”, “making new friends”, “being able to get quicker the necessary information and help”. “The animated atmosphere”, “the location”, “getting to know professors personally”, “better teaching methods”, “more communication”, “more focused”, were other advantages indicated by students in their answers to the same question mentioned above.

We consider that a better understanding of students’ expectations from face-to-face systems can improve their process of readaptation and reduce school dropping figures. Therefore, in the 8th question students were invited to express their expectations from face-to-face systems, under the form of several choices they could opt for, 22 students indicated “to learn more and to focus better on my learning”, 15 opted for ‘to understand better the content of the courses, 7 to ‘communicate better with professors’, 6 ‘to make new friends’ and 3 chose ‘I don’t have any expectations’.

Figure no. 3- Question 8 and statistical results
8. Expectations from face to face systems?

[Mai multe detalii](#)



Source: Question and chart processed by the author

The last question of our survey allowed students to freely indicate those aspects which they perceive as ‘bothering’ during the transition stage. 49 participants opted to answer this question, 11 of which said “nothing”, the others indicated: “a very fast and not enough prepared transition”, ‘leaving home’, ‘lack of time’, ‘being too tired’, ‘overcrowded area’, ‘pressure and high expectations from professors”, “stress and anxiety” and too much pressure from the authorities on the educational system.

5. Conclusions

Several conclusions can be drawn from the findings of our study. Positive aspects are revealed by students’ answers to questions 1 and 5: in the first case, as you can see in the Findings section, despite the fears of isolation which prevailed during the pandemic period, the majority of students are not affected by the fear of not being able to adapt or re-adapt to the changes they are abruptly confronted with. In the case of question 5 the percentage of students taking into consideration the option of dropping school is 14%, official estimations from the pre-pandemic period range from 9,1-11,4% (see Report Concerning Academic Education in Romania 2019-2020).

Seen retrospectively, the online systems impacted traditional forms of education in various ways. Apart from negative implications, they created new visions, expectations and teaching methods, while the use of blended forms of learning is widely reconsidered and seen as a more and more suitable future form of education, as it becomes obvious that both forms of education offer various advantages and disadvantages.

If the main advantages of face-to-face teaching reside from an improved communication with the teaching staff, with colleagues, receiving clarification and help in real time, improved mood and developing social skills, in the case of online teaching- the main advantages indicated by students range from: more autonomy, better time management, better use of personal resources and no need for relocation. It is relevant to mention that in our case a considerable amount of extra pressure was put by the sudden decision of the Romanian authorities during the second semester to relocate all academic courses from the online to face-to-face locations, this last-minute decision triggered a negative impact and put a supplementary burden on the academic environment.

6. References

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