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THE ADVANTAGES OF ONLINE LEARNING FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF STUDENTS: THE TRANSITION FROM ONLINE TO OFFLINE LEARNING AFTER COVID-19

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Introduction

In recent years, the COVID-19 epidemic has altered education all across the world. When life gradually returns to normality after the pandemic, which appears to have stopped for the time being, consideration must be given to the resumption of in-person instruction and its repercussions. In other words, as the United Nations suggested [1], it might be necessary to "reimagine education." It would be wise to conduct research to determine what elements of the pandemic's online learning environment would be applicable to the way that education is delivered now. Aspects to consider include integrating technology into the classroom, using cutting-edge and intelligent technologies [2–6], implementing new teaching strategies, and considering the experiences and perspectives of the students.

This study focuses on a sample of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University students. The COVID-19 has an impact on Kazakhstan, as it does on all other nations. Universities in Kazakhstan changed their teaching-learning operations online as a result of the pandemic. Because to the autonomy that Kazakhstani universities enjoy in terms of their mission, institutional strategy, structure, activities, organization, and functioning, despite the fact that the education system is centralized, each university developed a unique approach to address this [7].

Literature Review

Students' Views of Online Education During the Epidemic. Distance learning, also known as online learning or e-learning and frequently used synonymously [8], is an alternative to the traditional mode of learning (face-to-face) that uses ICT (information and communications technology) as a means of connecting and enabling communication between students and teachers for educational purposes, primarily focusing on "nontraditional students" (i.e., people who work full-time or who are unable to physically attend classes) [9]. Online learning is viewed by some scholars [10] as a more recent or enhanced iteration of remote learning.

Online education in the midst of the pandemic. The body of literature argues that, despite drawbacks like technological difficulties (such as power outages and connectivity issues), a lack of a sense of community and of social interactions and relationships with peers, and the home study environment (such as a lack of space and distractions), there are a number of key benefits to online learning. They include adaptability, availability of knowledge, the ability to learn at one's own pace, and cost-effectiveness.

Moreover, students have voiced concerns about the drawbacks of online education, with concerns about physical and mental health standing out as maybe the most significant. The most frequent physical concerns students reported were eye strain and neck stiffness, whereas the most prevalent mental issues were worry, frustration, wrath, hopelessness, and shame. Also recognized as a result of the pandemic and its impact on online learning were post-traumatic stress disorder and mental stress.

In light of this, the present study aims to ascertain the attitudes and aspirations of Kazakhstani students regarding their educational experience (learning and assessment) during the pandemic as well as their expectations for the post-pandemic education. Remember that L.N.Gumilyov Eurasian National University of Astana adopted a blended learning strategy beginning with the second semester of 2022 (faculty-student interaction for practical activities and online coursework), transitioning gradually to a 100 percent face-to-face approach by the end of the semester.

The two research questions that the team had in mind were as follows:

1.What are the characteristics of online learning that students would like to experience but do not in offline settings?

2.Which type of education is thought to be more advantageous for students' professional development in terms of effort and level of difficulty when transferring from online to offline learning?

Resources and Procedures

The study team employed a survey that was built around a questionnaire to gather the data. Surveys are a quantitative way to look into societal problems. The stages of the research process went as follows: developing the questionnaire's questions, determining the population to be studied, developing the data collection method, and designing the working tool, then gathering the data, examining the responses, and creating the research report. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was determined in order to evaluate the reliability of the questionnaire items. The used questionnaire is internally coherent, and as this has a value larger than 0.9, the survey items have very strong dependability.

Sample

Subjects were chosen from all academic years and specialties at L.N.Gumilyov Eurasian National University of Astana for the data collection, which took place between May and June 2022. Using the student population of this university (over 15 000 students), the margin of error was computed to be ±5% and applied to the replies of 387 individuals. The respondents' average age was 22.5 and their gender distribution (60 percent male and 40 percent female) was similar to that of all university students.

Instruments and Data Gathering for Research

Data were collected using a non-standard questionnaire, and the content was evaluated by sociologists before being pretested qualitatively and quantitatively. About two months prior to the primary study, a group of fifty students completed a pretest of the questionnaire's pilot version. As a result of this activity, the open questions' texts were rewritten to make them more comprehensible for the subjects of the study by adding more details to them.

It was constructed in accordance with the dimensions that were the subject of the study, including how learning takes place, how lectures and hands-on activities are taught, how knowledge is evaluated, and how peer and teacher interaction is carried out. It also took into account how easy or difficult it would be for students to switch from online to face-to-face learning as well as which type of education was thought to be more beneficial for students' professional development.

There were nine questions in the questionnaire (four closed-ended and five open-ended questions). The closed-ended questions compare face-to-face and online learning and examine how students adjust to returning to in-person instruction. They are scale-type questions with five-step measurement intervals. In order to analyse and interpret the data, the answers to these questions needed to be grouped and coded into broad categories. In addition to the closed- and open-ended questions, the questionnaire also contains factual information on the respondent's age, gender, background, faculty, specialization, year, and study cycle.

The questionnaire was completed online, completely free of charge, and in an anonymous manner. Students had the option of stopping it at any time. No incentives were given for providing replies, and no information about the respondents' personal lives was gathered. The questionnaire took 15 minutes

on average to complete, and 35% of respondents were recorded as having answered.

Results

The aspects of online learning that students would like to experience in offline learning. Understanding the characteristics of online learning (the way in which students learnt online) that the students did not experience during face-to-face learning but that they would like to experience again was one of the concerns that the present study tackled. The first factor to consider is the availability of educational resources in electronic format, as shown in Figure 1, with 18.5% of respondents saying they would also prefer to get them in face-to-face learning. More time for learning, at 8%, and greater assessment and accessibility, at 4.4% each, are the answers that follow this one in terms of the percentages achieved. They can be supplemented with the alternatives for more technical/practical aspects (4.1%) and improved interactivity (3.1%). The answer options that received lower percentages are included in the Others category (6.8%), such as the fact that lessons are better seen and heard when being taught online (2.1%) (since this is a problem for students sitting in the back of the room in face-to-face instruction in larger amphitheaters), flexibility (1.8%), comfort (1%), the fact that teachers are more attentive to students' problems, and the fact that the learning process is stress-free (each with 0.8%). According to the findings, 12% of respondents fell into the non-answer category, and 38.6% said there was nothing to learn from online learning. Most respondents said there were no distinctions between the two methods of instruction.

Figure 1. Aspects of online learning that students would like to experience during offline learning activities

Conclusions and Discussion

It was necessary to reconsider the teaching approach and rethink how learning activities should be conceptualized in order to transfer lectures and practical activities from higher education into the online environment. Since face-to-face interaction was the primary method for conducting such activities before to the epidemic, many teachers had prior experience with online instruction. The majority of teachers found this new kind of instructional activity to be difficult because of this. The COVID-19 pandemic may have had an unanticipated impact on educational institutions, but this research identifies a number of elements that have emerged from the online learning environment that can be exploited to enhance in-person interactions and create a more successful and long-lasting education.

The study's findings show that students, in particular, want their lecturers to include online resources for lectures and practical tasks into their offline learning experiences. They were crucial during the pandemic and when teachers needed sufficient and practical resources to assist them in their instruction. Because they could be accessible by anyone, anywhere, and at any time, there were an increasing number of online educational resources available throughout the epidemic, which were shared through a variety of channels and quickly gained popularity among students. The teaching staff received ongoing training in how to use digital platforms for activities related to learning as well as managing communication with students. The studies on the use of virtual learning environments in the classroom conducted during the pandemic provided a wide range of options and choices for educational pedagogies that could be used by teachers and students to promote successful learning. So, a crucial inference can be made, namely that universities should pay attention to this element and invest resources both in the development of educational platforms and in the training of its teaching staff in order to assure the sustainability of the educational activity.

According to the study's findings, this claim is supported by students' requests to use online lectures and practical activities as well as other electronic educational resources in face-to-face learning activities. These resources not only make learning more accessible but also give students more time for learning, a higher quality of assessment, and more practical aspects.

Therefore, the current study assists stakeholders (i.e., university management and teachers) in

planning and successfully adopting sustainable ways to implement such educational scenarios by assisting them in understanding the requirements and perceptions of students. The best practices for developing academic programs of this type that strike the ideal balance between in-person and online learning must be taken into consideration in order to give an effective blended learning (BL).

Limitations

There are some limitations to the analysis that was done, including the limited geographical area (only the city of Astana), the size of the sample, and the fact that only the viewpoint of the students from L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University was considered, despite the fact that the study provided some answers to questions regarding the aspects of online education that are also preferred in face-to-face education. The manner the online education system was set up during the COVID-19 epidemic suggests that this university has a unique circumstance. The research team wants to conduct a series of qualitative analyses beginning with the recorded results in order to have a deeper knowledge of the issue being examined. Also, doing comparison studies with other universities around the nation would be important to increase the database and broaden the quantitative study. The investigated elements — learning could be further investigated in order to yield ideas for a more effective and sustainable education that is tailored to the needs of its recipients. With improvement indicators for all forms of education, these conclusions will provide a clearer picture of pre- and post-pandemic education.

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