Evaluation of students’ attitude toward distance learning during the pandemic (Covid-19): a case study of ELTE university

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Abstract

Purpose – Covid-19 has prompted higher institutions around the globe to relocate traditional classes to online classes. Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) was no exception. It had already drawn up limited strategies regarding distance education, but those Web-based platforms were provided only to students with special needs. Due to the pandemic, all ELTE students were compelled to use online platforms that the university provided, such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom, to resume their studies. This study aims to evaluate the initial experience of students in using these new platforms. It also explores the effects distance learning has on students’ satisfaction and attitudes toward their education.

Design/methodology/approach – By using a quantitative approach, students’ attitudes toward e-learning and their access to tech-platforms, use of those platforms and satisfaction with online courses are processed and analyzed via a statistical package for the social sciences.

Findings – The results of this study show that distance learning is still in the development stage, and although traditional classrooms appeared to be indispensable, the positive attitudes and willingness of the majority of students to engage in distance learning classes in the post-COVID19 pandemic indicate that there is an immense potential future for e-learning platforms in higher education institutions.

Originality/value – The distance learning approach has been the only way for institutions worldwide to resume studies during the pandemic of Covid-19. Students faced mixed feelings of perplexity, loneliness, uncertainty over what is going to happen with classes, exams, graduation and other significant activities impacting their study path; irrespective of their daily struggles with the hard accessibility to means of e-learning and personal potential health problems. This evaluation is considered as a roadmap for institutions to follow-up and to improve the organizational and educational shortcomings they met.

Keywords Evaluation, E-learning, Distance learning, Student attitudes, Education

Paper type Case study

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused massive disruption of the academic field. The struggle to transition rapidly to electronic learning (e-learning) settings has impacted colleges, teachers and students at all levels. The number of colleges and universities worldwide, providing distance education programs has risen dramatically and many countries have seen a surge in distance education. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reported that more than 1.37 billion students (80% of the global student population) have been affected by the crisis (UNESCO, 2020). The disruptions have forced students to relocate from physical college campuses and adapt to new online educational settings.

They have encountered mixed feelings of fear, loneliness, uncertainty over what will happen with classes, exams, graduation and other significant activities impacting their study path, such as platform accessibility issues notwithstanding potential coronavirus health risks.
Customarily, distance learning was a choice for educators to integrate different learning strategies in their planning. The novel pandemic has made distance learning mandatory, forcing schools and universities to create an immediate learning climate in a setting that is distinct from traditional classrooms and to rapidly adopt unprecedented strategies in their efforts to make distance education possible.

At the present time, universities have started to evaluate the distance learning process focusing on issues that pertain to students’ e-learning and performance and comparing it with previous experiences in a physical classroom-based setting. This study focuses on the initiatives of Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) by evaluating students’ attitudes toward their initial experience with distance learning during the quarantine. Special emphasis regarding the challenges they encountered are examined. The findings can contribute to the potential prospects distance learning can hold for the future.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 E-learning

E-learning is a late 20th-century technological development in education. Several schools and higher institutions globally have turned to e-learning to enhance learning opportunities (Govindasamy, 2001). The term “e-learning” has been used to indicate accessible materials using computers that use telecommunications or web-based networks instead of traditional in-class materials or other non-networked mediums (Radford, 1997). Siragusa et al. (2007) defined e-learning as a process where students interact with each other, instructors and materials via the internet. Rosenberg (2001) notes that e-learning is based on the following three essential criteria:

1. E-learning is networked.
2. It is transmitted to the user through internet technologies via a computer.
3. E-learning focuses on the promising aspects of distance learning, which goes beyond traditional learning paradigms.

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Chandra and Fisher (1999) found that an internet-based learning system is composed of digitally accessible information tools and digital devices that can enable interaction. As a result, learning practices in e-learning are centered on interactive learning behavior along with learner autonomy.

2.2 The significance of distance learning

While online learning is not a recent phenomenon, with roots tracing back to the late 1990s, it has recently flourished with the emergence of the novel coronavirus disease in addition to modern technological advances (Liebef et al., 1997; Keegan, 2004; Reynolds et al., 2002). In this respect, distance learning is not only a potential prospect for planning by higher education, but moreover, a current reality and priority. Distance learning presents both possibilities and obstacles for educational institutions (Mehrotra et al., 2001). Several studies have concentrated on distance learning’s impact and its importance. Numerous of these studies found no differences in learning outcomes between physical classroom-based learning and distance education students. A study by Holt et al. (2015) corroborated these findings when they compared students who were provided the same course material via one of the following three settings:

1. A standard classroom.
2. An electronic course management program.
3. A compact disc read-only memory disk.

They did not assess any substantial difference between the three environments in overall student satisfaction.
2.3 Exposure and access to tech-platforms

Students’ degree of exposure and the quality of the accessibility of information and communications technology (ICT) is a significant consideration that can influence their attitudes and readiness to use e-learning. ICT can be described as the integration of technological devices in education and other sectors of society. Access to the required ICT resources is one of the most critical concerns to be addressed in evaluating the success of e-learning in both developing and developed countries. The planning and development of suitable ICT in education is necessary and valuable to have beneficial significance (Gharmallah Alzahrani, 2017). ICT implementation in both teaching and learning in worldwide educational systems has seen considerable improvements in education (Klimov, 2012). Blended learning, which is the combination of traditional and online education, has been adopted as an alternate approach for teaching over the past decade and has proven to be an adequate option for educational systems (Hubackova and Semradova, 2016). The success in blended learning environments depends on a number of factors, including student self-preparation and motivation, active engagement and the quality of the course (Bowyer and Chambers, 2017; Hubackova and Semradova, 2016; Jowsey et al., 2020).

2.4 University Eötvös Loránd experience with e-learning before COVID-19

Prior to the emergence of the novel coronavirus, Eötvös Loránd University provided only limited distance learning platforms at the school. It had earlier begun adopting distance learning as an alternate to traditional classes primarily geared to students with disabilities in efforts to ensure equal access to academic resources and programs. The university established the Service Directorate’s Disability Center (SHÜTI) in 2015 as a response to the growing needs of this student demographic. This center consists of instructors, Information Technology professionals and social care specialists who provide services to meet the specific needs of disabled students. The university supplied SHÜTI with the equipment needed. Distance learning implementation was not without its challenges, however. Students and the SHÜTI support teams faced several unique difficulties. The university’s main concern was the variety of platforms that were being operated. Many of these platforms were used by only a few students. The university found that “they did not have any information of the accessibility features of Teams and Zoom” (Eőtvös Loránd University, 2015). Microsoft teams for education is a comparatively new platform that allows for efficient corroboration between students and teachers. Zoom provides similar services. According to the author’s opinion, the inability of students to use these platforms (among other platforms the university uses) indicated a need to help familiarize students more adequately with ICT options.

2.5 University experience with e-learning during COVID-19

As mentioned above, distance learning was primarily structured toward students with disabilities. With the emergence of the novel coronavirus, it became necessary to provide non-disabled students with distance learning as an essential option to keep education moving forward. Consequently, the university charged the Epidemiological Operational Coordinating Body (járványtan operatív koordináló testület) in planning and setting the following guidelines surrounding distance learning (this is not an all-encompassing list) (ELTE, 2020):

- Lectures cannot be presented via live streaming, but instructors can share them online.
- Practical seminars can be held live.
- Courses must be completed, notwithstanding any technical difficulties.
- The university mandates that the only applications to be used are Canvas, Microsoft and WebEx Teams.
Although the university has taken this preemptive initiative to meet students’ needs and expectations, the lack of prior training and knowledge of students on those e-learning platforms posed many challenges. The scope of this study is to investigate ELTE students’ exposure and attitudes in general toward their entire distance learning process during the pandemic.

3. Educational models of learning

3.1 Prosser and Trigwell model

Prosser and Trigwell explored the process of how students bring prior experience and methods into their learning process. These experiences are vitally important when learning in new environments. Prosser and Trigwell (1999) also contend that students’ perceptions of the learning situation are integral to successful outcomes. This could be the physical environment in which the student learns in. In the constitutionalist perspective theorized by Prosser and Trigwell, the social context in which students learn is highly significant in academic development. This model asserts that “individuals and the world are internally related through the individual's awareness of the world” (Prosser and Trigwell, 1997). All important is the students’ perception of their unique learning conditions.

3.2 Walberg and Moos’s learning model

Walberg and Moos are considered key figures of the learning environment approach. They helped set the groundwork for research studies on classroom settings in the 1960s and 1970s. Moos (1980) investigated human-environmental interactions and the significance of the physical and social environment, such as instructors, learners, schools, institutions and other public spaces. Moos developed the university residence environment scale and the classroom environment scale in an effort to assess the unique challenges faced by individual students and how to design strategies to make the environment more comfortable and conducive to success. Moos views technological advancements and the large-scale transition in education as complicated, requiring a need for new models to conceptualize and analyze new educational settings (Zandvliet, 2004). Walberg (1980) finds that the classroom environment and the methods used in teaching have potent effects on student performance. His study indicates that new environments pose unique challenges to the student and teacher as well. Integrating e-learning into the students’ learning environment involves awareness of the relationship between students, teachers and technologies within a design context (Ellis et al., 2009). Walberg indicated that the study of behavioral complexes and cognitive experiences would ultimately begin to outline the essential features of the social learning climate. Therefore, learning environment theory was structured to define educational contexts and to recognize the experimental relationships and interactions between instructors and learners in a particular environment. Walberg has contributed much to the area of educational environments and has aided further research.

3.3 Lave and Wenger's model

Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that learning is inherently a process of acculturation and that outsiders enter such groups by a method of “legitimate peripheral engagement.” In other words, assimilation in the new culture requires the acquisition of its modes of behavior and a sense of being a group member. They claim that technology has not made significant changes in learning outcomes. They considered traditional classrooms, with their chairs and tables, teaching staff, teaching materials, student workbooks and classroom discussions as “technologies for the communication of knowledge” (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Their model of situated learning (learning based on current environments) suggests that learning generally involves a process of engagement in a “community of practice” through which learning can be carried out anywhere, regardless of the given context (Smith, 2003).
They argued that communities of practice (a group of people with a common goal) seem to be everywhere, and we as learners are usually involved in a variety of them – whether they be at work, college, home or in other public spaces.

Models such as these have significantly enhanced our understanding of students’ interaction within the context whereby the learning process is carried out. This study focuses on ELTE university students’ first exposure to e-learning platforms with limited prior training or experience in using them. This research paper relates many of the challenges they faced during distance learning and how self-paced learning and ICT skills can impact students’ attitudes toward e-learning. This research contributes to a proper assessment of distance learning effects in general by comparing the relationships between student learning in the traditional classroom before the pandemic and their first e-learning experience. The focus is on three aspects:

1. The availability and accessibility of e-learning platforms.
2. The educational and environmental conditions.
3. The psychological and emotional impact.

4. Related works

Studies relating to distance education have increased in recent times because of technological advances and with the emergence of new e-learning platforms in various educational systems. In advanced countries, university students hold diverse attitudes toward e-learning, with most of them reporting positive perspectives (Gamal et al., 2011). Campbell et al. (2011) evaluate the disparities in performance and attitudes among students trained online and on-site. They used a course assessment instrument to examine student satisfaction in specific areas. Student performance was evaluated by a comprehensive questionnaire that covered all the materials in the course. Their findings reinforce the claim that online students achieve, as well as if not better than conventional on-site students and are equally satisfied with the course and instruction as are their peers on-site.

Another study conducted by Liaw and Huang (2011) investigated learners’ attitudes toward e-learning. Their findings indicate that male students have more positive e-learning attitudes than their female counterparts. They also find that computer-related experience is an essential indicator of learner self-efficiency and enthusiasm for e-learning. Self-efficacy and initiative, along with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, are significant predictors of the student’s behavioral intention in e-learning.

Bertea (2009) also conducted a case study measuring students’ attitudes toward e-learning. The purpose was to determine some key factors that influence the e-learning process. Findings showed that there is a link between technical skills and students’ attitudes toward e-learning. According to her study, attitude is also impacted by the time devoted to computer use. Struyven et al. (2005), throughout their study, found that how the students perceived the teacher’s method of evaluating performance in the class played a vital role. For example, students prefer multiple choice exams over other forms of testing. This finding significantly impacts their attitudes toward learning and studying. Students also show reluctance toward other creative assessment methods.

Another comparative study conducted by Rhema and Miliszewska (2014) found that Lybian students who participated in the study were favorably inclined toward e-learning and appreciated its benefits. The research also found a statistically significant correlation between student perceptions toward technology and their level of exposure to advanced technologies. Students’ positive expectations and the willingness to participate in e-learning courses indicate that prospective e-learning programs have tremendous promise in Libya.
Niwaz et al. (2019) examined many of the challenges faced by Pakistani higher education students that can hamper success with distance education. In the section, he labeled “personal circumstances” family and work obligations along with improper time management, were the significant factors that inhibited successful outcomes. In his “teacher-related issues” section, he found that the lack of adequate teacher involvement, offering timely advise to students and incompetent course content and instruction was of particular concern to the students. In the last category, which he titles “assessment and evaluation issues” course assessment methods such as exams and assignments were examined. Here too, he found that a total lack of competent measuring instruments used by teachers and the school systems had substantial adverse consequences on student perceptions and attitudes toward online courses.

Distance education for developing countries during the pandemic has had its many challenges. Alternates to traditional classrooms require significant planning by educational systems worldwide. These challenges are even more formidable in developing countries. Ramij and Sultana (2020) studies Bangladesh’s response and preparedness efforts to meet the difficulties. He reports that issues in Bangladesh such as basic infrastructure problems, adequate online framework for distance education, student access to ICT and internet access and devices in which to study on present significant challenges to the majority of students in the country. He further states that “uncertainty prevails in our educational sector” calling the situation in Bangladesh a “bitter reality.” In a study of challenges faced in Ghana (Adarkwah, 2020), the government has instituted an “education anytime anywhere for everyone” policy moving forward during the COVID-19 crisis. As with Bangladesh, Ghana has had its share of obstacles that have impeded distance learning initiatives. Ghana is ranked 112th among 175 countries in overall ICT development, according to the study. The study states that one of the most frequent barriers faced by students is the access to electricity. Studies such as these can inform educational systems to the ongoing nature of difficulties faced in implementing distance learning systems.

5. Methodology

5.1 Participants and instruments

The study surveyed 108 students from Eotvos Lorand University (ELTE) in Budapest, Hungary. Those students are from different nationalities, including Hungarians, Tunisians, Moroccans, Indians and Jordanians. A questionnaire was made by Google Forms and sent to those students to evaluate their distance learning experience during the quarantine. All participants were asked to fill out the survey. The survey was posted for four days beginning May 18 and ending May 22, 2020. The questionnaire consists of 11 Likert-type items. Those questions were grouped into three major categories:

1. Technological availability and accessibility.
2. Educational and environmental conditions.
3. Psychological and emotional attitude toward e-learning experience during the quarantine period.

Students’ attitudes toward distance learning experience were measured using a five-point rating scale from “1” “strongly disagree” to “5” “strongly agree.” The author used a categorization model from Hickcox (1995) in which learning instruments were classified into three categories:

1. Educational and environmental learning preferences.
2. Information processing learning preferences.
3. Personal learning preferences.
5.2 Data analysis

Data for the study was collected through a Google Form survey instrument and analyzed using a statistical package for the social sciences. Quantitative analysis and descriptive statistics were used to summarize and describe the data collected from students.

6. Results

6.1 Technological availability and accessibility

In the first two statements, students were asked about their distance learning experience regarding the availability of and accessibility of the university’s platforms for e-learning purposes (Figure 1). Concerning the availability of e-learning platforms, 100 out of the total number of 108 students favorably agreed that the faculty provided them with platforms through which they could interact with their instructors, which points out that the university could guarantee the continuity of the e-learning process moving forward. In contrast, only two students responded negatively. The platforms’ accessibility also indicated that the overwhelming majority of 89 students found those platforms easily accessible (Table 1).

![Figure 1 Technological availability and accessibility](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Positive correlation for platforms availability and accessibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Correlations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The university offers e-learning platforms for students and instructors</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (two-tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The e-learning platforms offered are easily accessible</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (two-tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)**
There is a positive correlation in the first rubric between “the university offers e-learning platforms for students and instructors” and “the e-learning platforms offered are easily accessible,” \( r = 0.69^{**}, n = 108, p = 0.00 \).

### 6.2 Educational and environmental conditions

This graph investigates the educational and environmental conditions that students experienced with distance learning (Figure 2). The author asked the students five different questions referencing student satisfaction levels with class times flexibility, differences between traditional classrooms and virtual classes in terms of interaction, student’s self-learning capability and online exams’ difficulty. In total, 71 students enjoyed their class time flexibility while 20 of their peers thought class time was inflexible. In total, 82 students reported that online classes reduced their interaction level with their instructors. In total, 43 students expressed their willingness and capability to learn more about the subject via online courses than in a traditional class while 32 students showed their disagreement with the statement. In total, 66 students say that the lack of interaction with their peers in traditional classes could somehow hamper their learning progress. The last statement concerns the difficulty of online exams. Results show that there is almost a 50/50 split between students who felt that online exams were more difficult and those who felt they were not (Table 2).

There is a negative correlation between “one of the benefits of studying online, for students, is that ‘class times’ are flexible” and “lack of interaction between students in an online class would impede their learning process,” \( r = -0.08, n = 108, p = 0.37 \).

There is a positive correlation between “in a standard classroom environment, interactions/lectures with the lecturer are more frequent than in an online class” and “lack of interaction between students in an online class would impede their learning process,” \( r = 0.26, n = 108, p = 0.00 \).
There is a negative correlation between “online classes allow students to educate themselves more about the subject than they do in a typical course in college” and “lack of interaction between students in an online class would impede their learning process,” $r = -0.08, n = 108, p = 0.35$.

### 6.3 Psychological and emotional attitude

This chart examined the emotional attitudes of students toward distance learning in general (Figure 3). It explores whether they were interested in the experience and are willing to repeat the experience in the future. For instance, the first statement showed slight differences between those who were appealed by online classes and those who preferred traditional classroom types. In total, 44 students were in favor of online classes, while 31 were in favor of formal classroom type. In the second and third questions, students had mixed feelings about face-to-face interaction. The preponderance of students reported that traditional classroom structures were most important to them (Table 3).

There is a positive correlation between “the fact that there is no formal classroom-type environment than an online class appeals to me” and “I would like to have online classes even when the pandemic is over,” $r = 0.38^{**}, n = 108, p = 0.00$.

There is a negative correlation between “the face-to-face meeting with classmates inside/ outside the classroom is important to me” and “I would like to have online classes even when the pandemic is over,” $r = -0.201^{*}, n = 108, p = 0.03$.

There is a negative correlation between “I have yearned for face-to-face interaction with classmates and instructors in an online course” and “I would like to have online classes even when the pandemic is over,” $r = -0.14, n = 108, p = 0.037$ (Table 4).

The mean attitude scores and standard deviations for all the students’ answers to the 11 statements on the 5-point Likert-type attitude survey after completing online courses are shown in Table 1. Responses were rated as 5 for the most positive response to 1 for the most negative response. The total mean score across the 108 student attitude survey items was 3.61, a favorable rating indicating agreement with positive statements about this

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Positive and negative correlation for educational and environmental conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Correlations</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>One of the benefits of studying online, for students, is that “class times” are flexible</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (two-tailed)</td>
<td>0.994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In a standard classroom environment, interactions/lectures with the lecturer are more frequent than in an online class</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson correlation</td>
<td>$-0.001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (two-tailed)</td>
<td>0.994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Online classes allow students to educate themselves more about the subject than they do in a typical course in college</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pearson correlation</td>
<td>$0.365^{**}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (two-tailed)</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lack of interaction between students in an online class would impede their learning process</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pearson correlation</td>
<td>$-0.086$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (two-tailed)</td>
<td>0.379</td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>108</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Note:</strong> $^{**}$Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The three highest rated statements on the survey were “the university offers e-learning platforms for students and instructors” (M = 4.36, SD = 0.67); “the e-learning platforms offered are easily accessible” (M = 4.06, SD = 0.87); and “the face-to-face meeting with classmates inside/outside the classroom is important to me” (M = 4.05, SD = 0.88). While the lowest-rated statement was “I would like to have online classes even when the pandemic is over” (M = 2.97, SD = 1.31).

Table 3  Positive and negative correlations for psychological and emotional attitude

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Pearson correlation</th>
<th>Sig. (two-tailed)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The fact that there is no formal classroom-type environment other than an online class appeals to me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The face-to-face meeting with classmates inside/outside the classroom is essential to me</td>
<td>−0.240*</td>
<td>0.405**</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have yearned for face-to-face interaction with classmates and instructors in an online course</td>
<td>0.177</td>
<td>0.405**</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to have online classes even when the pandemic is over</td>
<td>0.383**</td>
<td>0.148</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed). **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)
7. Discussion and conclusion

In this study, ELTE students were asked to evaluate their experience with e-learning during the quarantine imposed by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and indicate their online courses’ perceptions with a comparative cross-reference to a traditional classroom. The author posed several questions grouped into three major classifications:

1. Platform availability and accessibility.
2. Educational and environmental conditions.
3. Psychological and emotional attitude.

Students showed quite different expectations and experiences, ranging from satisfaction to displeasure with the e-learning process. The author believes that new online methods and instruction imposed on the student may temporarily alter some students’ ability to incorporate a “new normal” approach in their thinking and accustom themselves to new realities.

Student responses to the survey are summarized as follows. The statements relating to platform availability and accessibility were rated more satisfactory. The overwhelming majority of students expressed their satisfaction with the university’s platforms, and they found it easily accessible. A nominal number of students indicated dissatisfaction with the platforms. The author’s interpretation of this might go back to the potential difficulty that those students faced while using those platforms, particularly, as most students did not have adequate training or experience with those platforms. In the second rubric, educational and environmental conditions, students showed general satisfaction with class time flexibility; however, a vast majority felt that a traditional classroom offered more lectures. A slight majority indicated that online classes were more useful in the assimilation of course materials. When it comes to the difficulty of online exams, 50 students found the exams they took online more difficult while 30 did not. The author links the finding of the majority who found exams difficult related to the type of assessment instruments used by the instructor as discussed earlier in the research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4</th>
<th>Students’ perceptions of online courses during the quarantine measured by mean and std. deviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factors</td>
<td>Students’ perceptions by mean and std. deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Platforms availability and accessibility</td>
<td>The university offers e-learning platforms for students 108 4.36 0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The e-learning platforms offered are easily accessible 108 4.06 0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One of the benefits of studying online, for students, is that “class times” are flexible 108 3.63 1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational and environmental conditions</td>
<td>In a traditional classroom environment, interactions/lectures with the lecturer are more frequent than in an online class 108 3.97 1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Online classes allow students to educate themselves more about the subject than they do in a typical course in college 108 3.14 1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of interaction between students in an online class would impede their learning process 108 3.61 0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exams in an online course are more difficult for students 108 3.31 1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological and emotional attitude</td>
<td>The fact that there is no formal classroom-type environment other than an online class appeals to me 108 3.19 1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The face-to-face meeting with classmates inside/outside the classroom is important to me 108 4.05 0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have yearned for face-to-face interaction with classmates and instructors in an online course 108 3.46 0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I would like to have online classes even when the pandemic is over 108 2.97 1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Valid satisfaction total 108 3.61 0.374</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The third rubric addressed the psychological and emotional attitudes of students toward their distance learning experience. Students generally showed positive attitudes toward the experience, with slight differences in some answers. For instance, the fact that there is no formal classroom-type environment other than an online class appeals to me the neutral scale was highly rated as there was significant variation in satisfaction levels to each learning environment. The author’s interpretation of this is that those students who reported that online classes were less appealing were not as proficient on distance learning platforms and could not realize the value of online classes. It is noteworthy that the vast majority of students felt that real-time face-to-face interactions were essential. The author attributes the social value that is derived in a traditional classroom as an essential factor in student attitudes. Pivoting to new environments and developing a “community of practice” model of online interaction with staff and peers appears to take some time.

Finally, when students were queried about using distance learning post-pandemic, 48 of them responded in the affirmative while 47 showed little interest in pursuing educational goals online. The author notes that education is changing its transmission methods, and e-learning will undoubtedly become a vital strategy moving forward. The students who indicated reluctance would have to shift their perceptions and attitudes to navigate new educational paradigms successfully.

The article shows that on the whole, ELTE students found their e-learning experience favorable. Lack of prior ICT instruction by students did not significantly deter this finding. The study results suggest that future e-learning initiatives have great potential in Hungarian universities.

An effective operational usage and delivery of ICT by universities can expand the possibilities that distance learning can offer (Selwyn, 2007). Although prospective generations of university students worldwide will likely embrace technology as a necessary educational tool either in traditional, virtual or blended classroom settings, the research demonstrates that attitudes toward usability and accessibility to platforms will play a significant role in the future of educational strategy planning. The use of technology and learning new skills will be vital for incoming students (Edmunds et al., 2012). Distance learning is here to stay. Although the study demonstrated that distance learning has pros and cons, the study concludes that overall, the pros appear to outweigh the cons. The results of this study can be helpful and serve as a predictor of prospective students’ attitudes toward e-learning. Results can also be used as a source of information for educators, researchers, policymakers, scholars, decision-makers, stakeholders or anybody interested in the advancement of e-learning.

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Further reading


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