INFLUENCE OF DISTANCE LEARNING ON THE ACADEMIC MOTIVATION OF STUDENTS FROM SPECIALTIES IN THE FIELD OF ARTS

Liliya Babakova[1], Tsvetana Kolovska[2], Konstantina Konstantinidu[3]

Abstract: This article discusses the problem of the impact of distance learning on the motivation to learn in students studying arts. Learning arts such as music, dance, and fine arts via distance learning is proving to be a real challenge for students and teachers. The aim of the present study is to determine how distance learning affects the learning motivation of students studying art at the university.

Method: a questionnaire for measuring academic motivation and a modified scale for measuring students' engagement in online learning, and a survey.

Sample: 109 students from first to fourth-year in university, studying specialties related to music, fine arts and dance

Results: The results showed that distance learning did not prove to be a major obstacle in establishing the learning material, but students who are internally motivated to learn prefer traditional learning. The main difficulties in distance learning turned out to be technical - the use of too many and different learning platforms, lack of a good internet connection, organizational - time management difficulties, easy distraction and psychological factors such – overwhelming written information, the high demands of the teachers, and a lack of social exchange. Correlation analysis found that students who prefer traditional education have a high intrinsic motivation to study art-related disciplines. ANOVA did not establish statistically significant differences in the factors, course and specialty.

Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic has forced many higher education institutions in Bulgaria to switch to distance learning in the summer semester of 2019/2020. The transition to distance learning happened very unexpectedly, and many Bulgarian universities were unprepared for this change. However, many educational institutions were able to adapt to this challenge, and most students were able to successfully complete the school year. But distance learning has greatly changed the process of education in higher education in Bulgaria, and this has affected the academic motivation of students studying specialties related to art. Many students have decided to give up studying the specialty they study at university because it is difficult for them to absorb the material from distance learning. Many teachers found it difficult to teach the specifics and details of art. That is why it is important to consider the factors influencing the academic motivation of art students. Knowing what motivates and demotivates students to study art online will help teachers build good teaching strategies.

Literature review

Situations that threaten human health or the lack of physical infrastructure and opportunities for face-to-face interactions predispose to the search for alternative forms of communication and learning such as distance learning. Some authors even find that distance learning is a predictor of excellence and motivation, and it also provokes the ability to think and reason, as it is accessible, flexible and allows learners to take part in it, regardless of the geographical scale or professional engagement of students (Robinson & Hullinger, 2008; McPhee & Söderström, 2012). However, other authors are quite skeptical about distance learning and find that students who study in this form of learning are more likely to drop out due to their low involvement in their studies compared to traditional learning. The distance between teachers and students hinders full communication and interaction, and this prevents participation in classes (Lee & Choi, 2011). In addition, this type of training requires additional training and competence from the teacher himself, which includes communication skills, technical competence, providing feedback, administrative skills, monitoring the training and its results and providing support to students. Controlling students' progress, identifying their problems or barriers to learning is more difficult to implement than in traditional learning (Roddy et al., 2017).

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[1] Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof.Asen Diamandiev", Faculty of Music Education, Plovdiv, Bulgaria, liliya.babakova@artacademyplovdiv.com

[2] Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof.Asen Diamandiev", Faculty of Music Education, Plovdiv, Bulgaria, tsvetana.kolovska@artacademyplovdiv.com

[3] Plovdiv University „Paisii Hilendarski", Faculty of Pedagogy, Plovdiv, Bulgaria, kon.konstantinidou@gmail.com

Students' involvement in education is a key topic in psychology and pedagogy, as it affects other phenomena and processes such as motivation and academic effectiveness in the educational process. Entering the university is a challenge and stress for the students themselves, as they face unexpected demands: academic work grows suddenly, new and unknown disciplines are studied, there is less support from teachers, new colleagues, it is difficult to combine work with study sessions amongst other factors. When students are strongly involved in the learning process, they can improve their academic performance, critical thinking, assessments, after which the acquired knowledge can be applied in real life (Carini et al., 2006). Student engagement is an indicator of the quality of education as well as the success of higher education (Maina-Okori, 2019).

The indicators of students' involvement in the learning process are making efforts in learning, active participation in seminars, the interaction between teacher and students, solving cognitive cases or tasks, learning satisfaction and a sense of belonging. The indicators showing the effort of the students in their learning are regular preparation before the lesson, delivery of the assignments assigned by the teacher on time, regular learning, etc. The indicators showing the participation of students in the classes are taking an active part in the classes, presenting, asking questions and expressing their thoughts. The success of all these activities makes students feel satisfied and enjoy learning (J. Lee, H. Song, A. Hong, 2019).

Some researchers, such as Roddy and colleagues (2017), note that in online learning, teachers play an important role in student success. They note that in the absence of the wealth of interactions that students receive in the university, teachers have an even more important role in supporting and engaging in the acquisition of learning material and its successful and fruitful completion by students. Thus, educators have a key role to play in motivating students in online learning (Bolliger & Martindale, 2004), as educators can usually be the only starting point for student contact. Moreover, a lack of feedback from teachers on how students are coping with learning material or delayed responses reduces students' satisfaction with online learning (Bolliger & Martindale, 2004).

Other factors that can lead to demotivation in students from online learning are higher levels of fatigue compared to traditional learning, technical difficulties, prolonged isolation and lack of contacts, confusion regarding the learning content.

On the other hand, distance learning has sufficient prerequisites to motivate students to learn more effectively: accessibility, opportunities to adopt new technologies and promote independent learning, optimizing learning time.

That is why it is important to monitor and establish whether distance learning has a positive or negative effect on the motivation of students to study specialties in the field of "Arts" because, in this field, students study very specific material and acquire skills that are visually taught, which could be a big challenge for distance learning.

Data and methodology

The study of the internal readiness of students for an active attitude to the learning process in a distance format is essential for its effective management and the introduction of new forms of learning. Academic motivation, as part of a broader motivational orientation towards their own professional development, stimulates students' self-preparation and is an essential factor in building good specialists with higher education.

The aim of the present study is to examine how distance learning affects the motivation for learning achievement.

Respondents: 109 students took part in the study, of which 45 students studied pedagogical specialties in the field of music and fine arts, 23 students studied dance art, and the remaining 41 students studied musical art (classical and folk). The study was conducted in 2020. Students were sent an email with a link to the surveys asking to participate in the study. The distribution by "year of study" is: first-year students - 36%, second-year students - 21%, third-year students - 28%, fourth-year students - 15%.

Methods:

- Questionnaire for assessing the level of academic motivation (Velichkov A. & Radoslavova M., 2005), containing eleven statements: 7 for high academic motivation and 4 - for low. The

method used is designed to measure academic motivation, understood as a construct that describes the general motivational state caused by and related to higher education.

- ▪ A modified scale for student engagement in online learning (J. Lee, H. Song, A. Hong, 2019). The scale contains 27 items that measure students' motivation, cooperation between students in online learning, solving cognitive problems, interaction with the teacher, support from the course in online learning.
- ▪ A demographic survey to determine information such as gender, course, major.

Students were also offered a 7-point scale to assess their satisfaction with distance and traditional learning.

Students had the opportunity to write the difficulties they encountered during distance learning.

Results and discussion

To the question "What difficulties did you face during the distance learning?" The results of the content analysis were structured into three categories:

- ▪ Technical issues. These are the most common problems in students' answers (46%). They pointed out problems and difficulties with inclusion in the lesson. A very high percentage of students noted video interruptions due to poor internet connection, platform congestion, platform time constraints (e.g. the free version of Zoom interrupts the conference after 40 minutes), background noise from students' microphones, which also leads to poor video connection quality.
- ▪ Organizational issues (28%) - the students felt discomfort from various platforms that teachers have chosen to conduct their classes - Zoom, Google Meet, Google Hangouts, Viber, Google Classroom, Messenger, Skype, WhatsApp. A small number of students reported that teachers organize their learning process, sending scanned reading materials to students
- ▪ The high demands of the teachers (9%) - a small part of the students' answers showed dissatisfaction with the fact that the teachers do not give detailed and broad explanations of the homework they are assigned. Also, during the online training, some students noted that they did not receive clear criteria for testing and assessment, as well as the short time that teachers give students to complete the tasks assigned to them.

The scale measuring students' involvement in online learning (J. Lee, H. Song, A. Hong, 2019) was subjected to a factor analysis, which found that for a Bulgarian sample of students studying arts, there are three subscales: satisfaction with distance learning, intrinsic motivation, and collaboration with the teacher and other students. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient showed good reliability on all three scales: satisfaction with distance learning ($\alpha = 0.913$), intrinsic motivation ($\alpha = 0.884$) and cooperation with teachers and students ($\alpha = 0.789$). The results of the factor analysis are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Factor structure and Rotated Component Matrix of the modified scale for student engagement in online learning			
	satisfaction with distance learning	intrinsic motivation	cooperation with teachers and students
1. Distance learning and online classes increase my interest and desire to learn.		0.535	
2. I try to eliminate all possible distractions from the environment when conducting online training		0.662	
3. I can analyze in depth thoughts and theories from the knowledge I have learned during online classes		0.637	
4. I communicate with the teacher outside the planned online classes for additional help		0.587	
5. I can assess the value of the information related to the knowledge learned during distance learning		0.717	
6. When I can't understand something in a class that is taught in online learning, I ask my colleagues for help.			0.643
7. Distance learning gives me the opportunity to solve with my colleagues difficult problems related to the study material when I meet them			0.675
8. After the online lesson, I plan the rest of the training time well.		0.670	
9. I am motivated to study when there is distance learning organized by the teachers.		0.617	
10. Distance learning is very useful	0.866		

11. Distance learning is accessible to all	0.778		
12. Spending hours in an online platform is very interesting and enjoyable.	0.884		
13. After distance learning this school year, I look forward to the next one.	0.714		
14. Online classes go smoothly and without problems	0.738		
15. I study the content independently and thoroughly after the online lesson.		0.677	
16. I can apply the knowledge I have learned in online classes to real problems or new situations.	0.572		
17. Distance learning gives me the opportunity to answer the questions asked by my other colleagues.	0.600		
18. I work with my colleagues on online projects or tasks			0.495
19. During distance learning I feel involved in online courses.			0.599
20. I manage my own training with the help of the online system through which I train	0.585		
21. I can draw new interpretations and ideas from the knowledge I have learned during the online training	0.672		
22. Overall, I am satisfied with the distance learning I received this school year	0.850		
23. I am trying to approach distance learning with a new perspective	0.714		
24. I often ask the teacher questions about the content of the lesson		0.446	
25. I feel a sense of belonging to the community from colleagues in online learning			0.683
26. I often communicate with other students in online classes			0.599
27. During the distance learning I have the opportunity to discuss the content of a lesson with my colleagues.			0.677

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Source: Authors

Students estimated distance learning significantly lower (M=3.68) than traditional - (M=5.82). The reason for this is that in the distance format, the attention and resources that students receive from their professors in the respective main subject they study are lost. Students mention that it is more difficult to synchronize with each other in a distance format, and the mastery of certain techniques is more effective in a face-to-face form of learning. This is evidenced by the correlation analysis, which found that students who prefer traditional learning are most motivated to learn (R = 0.396, p = 0.003), but the relationship between academic motivation and distance learning is also positive and statistically significant, although weaker (R = 0.257, p = 0.011). The ANOVA showed that there were no statistically significant differences in the factor "specialty" and "satisfaction with distance learning" F (192.671) = 1.026; p = 0.414. No statistically significant differences in the specialty were found in terms of satisfaction with traditional education F (992.208) = 0.929; p = 0.478. No statistically significant differences were found in the "course" factor and satisfaction with traditional education F (1153.279) = 0.107; p = 0.956, and also from distance learning F (267.854) = 1.137; p = 0.338. From this, it can be concluded that distance learning is not reflected in different ways in different specialties and courses and students perceive it in a similar way. No statistically significant differences were found on the "cooperation with colleagues" scale.

Conclusion

In the present study, it was found that students studying specialties in the field of "Arts" are satisfied with distance learning but give priority to the traditional. An important criterion for assessing the quality of the distance learning process is the technical support of the platforms and their accessibility for students. Distance learning provides collaboration between students, course content and faculty. However, research has shown that distance learning predisposes to a higher level of self-directed learning than traditional learning. Faced with this new situation, students need to take more responsibility for their learning and initiate higher activity instead of passively listening to their teachers' lectures. This study showed that students who successfully completed the online course had the opportunity to interact with their teachers and receive feedback from them. Unfortunately, the interaction between the students themselves during distance learning is much poorer, and this is a significant factor for them not to be satisfied with this type of learning. Therefore, a hybrid form of education, combining distance and traditional learning, could significantly increase the satisfaction of students' learning in disciplines in which practical skills are acquired.

Distance learning has imposed a more specific organization of the learning process in disciplines related to the mastery of profiled skills and competencies in the arts. Experience shows that working in smaller groups than traditionally existing provides more opportunities for more direct interaction between teacher and learners, for more effective application of the differentiated approach. All this, along with

the attention and responsiveness of the teacher to the difficulties of students, has a significant potential to positively affect the motivation of students in the process of distance learning.

Acknowledgement

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