ORCID - 0000-0001-5928-451X
ORCID - 0000-0002-5224-5240

Irena Kudlińska
Wyższa Szkoła Gospodarki w Bydgoszczy

Natalia Mospan
Wyższa Szkoła Gospodarki w Bydgoszczy

ONLINE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION UNDER PANDEMIC AND WAR: THE INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is seriously affecting life in all countries, causing changes in many different aspects of life. This has particularly affected the sphere of higher education. According to a 2020 UNESCO report, about a billion students worldwide do not actually attend educational institutions (1). This situation has greatly increased the need for universities to provide effective online learning.

This study attempts to analyze the problem of online learning in connection with the forced transition to this form in order to identify the degree of student satisfaction with the online training format, as well as to develop potential approaches to learning in the new realities. Besides, the research aims to provide an understanding of how the online educational resources and digital platforms of Wyższa Szkoła Gospodarki w Bydgoszczy, Poland, and Kyiv National Linguistic University, Kyiv, Ukraine, adapt to the on-line learning process and explore the advantages and disadvantages of current implementations.

The authors conducted similar research in 2021, where the students of the two above-mentioned universities took part in a survey. In 2022, the authors enlarged the sampling, surveying the students of a third university: the Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, in Georgia.

Based on the analysis of the obtained data for 2021-2022, below the authors propose strategies for improvement in the field of higher education for the period of the pandemic and beyond.

2. Literature review

Recently, new factors have necessitated completely new approaches in the higher education sphere, and the first one is a pandemic. Education is one of the largest sectors most affected by the adverse effects of the COVID-19 crisis, including changes that are likely to be found in the long term. This generation of students now risks losing $17 trillion in lifetime earnings in present value, or about 14% of today's global GDP, as a result of COVID-19 pandemic-related school closures, according to a new report published today by the World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF (2).

Another factor, threatening the life loss and continuity of higher education, is the current war in Europe. According to the latest available data, it is estimated that 83% of Ukrainian youth between the ages of 18 and 24 were enrolled in higher education (UIS, 2014). Since the start of the war, academic institutions in Ukraine have been shut down (3).

Both of these strong long-lasting factors cannot but create the grounds for digital transformation of higher education. The International Association of Universities reports, that technology has an important impact on all aspects of higher education worldwide. It brings new opportunities (4).

Some scholars predict, that a steep negative learning curve will haunt students in the coming years. Against the backdrop of these realities, the United Nations called on countries to take a different look at the current situation and to change the perception of the new negative conditions, seeing the latter as an opportunity to update educational systems (5).

As a result of the current crises, online technologies for teaching students have been actively developed all over the world, which allow them to study remotely in almost any discipline on various educational platforms of open education, including the world's leading universities. Under the ongoing crises, information technology contributes to flexibility in the choice of place and time of study, the availability of various resources for teaching and learning, and preparation for future digital needs. The COVID-19 crisis has spurred higher educational institutions to make a massive technological transformation. Universities that have embraced some form of digital transformation, especially those with cloud platform capabilities, were able to respond more quickly by providing end-to-end services, personalized communications, and online tools. Essentially, this response plan during the current pandemic provides insight into how agencies can respond to emergencies such as public health crises and severe weather events (6).

Online learning is not a fundamentally new way to get an education. However, the forced switching to a predominantly online regime due to the unfolding pandemic is certainly unprecedented. In addition to the pandemic crisis, the war in Ukraine has had a devastating impact on the infrastructure of the Ukrainian education and higher education systems. As a result, the problem of implementing online learning

is today in line with changes in the system of higher professional education, which is characterized by a change in paradigms and educational technologies, and in the content, forms, and methods of the pedagogical process (7).

The online learning system has become an extremely popular form of learning because of its convenience and flexibility. It eliminates the main obstacle, i.e., the need to attend classes according to an established schedule, preventing people from contacting people in complex epidemiological situations (8), and helping the students to continue with the educational process regardless of their life situations.

Due to the above factors, the interest of researchers is focused on studying various aspects of online learning. A review of recent scholarly literature in Poland and abroad shows, that there is an increasing number of studies on, for example, the awareness of teachers about the COVID-19 pandemic and their opinions about the readiness of secondary schools (9), the readiness of teachers to transition to blended learning in the post-Covid period (10), on the expectations of first-year students regarding distance learning (11), on the consideration of the influence of quality factors in online learning of Chinese students (12), on the assessment of the difficulties of students of a concrete university, in particular, the problems of students of the University of Warsaw with special learning difficulties during distance learning related to the COVID-19 epidemic (13), on the assessment of the level of digitalization of Polish universities (14), on the investigation of the student online learning experience (SOLE) during the 2020 spring Covid-19 pandemic by collecting quantitative data through an online survey from 362 international and 488 domestic students at a large Polish University (15), on the research regarding how teachers managed the transition to remote instruction by surveying nearly 1,500 instructors from 118 countries (16), etc.

These studies have contributed to the analysis of various aspects of online learning, but despite the importance of these works, they do not cover many problems whose significance has increased recently due to the global epidemic and the war in Europe, and the problem of the effectiveness of online learning is still highly up-to-date. In this context, the authors of the current research have found it relevant to conduct a study aimed at identifying the student satisfaction with the online learning format in higher education in the international perspective.

2.1. Objectives of this study

The purpose of this study is to assess student satisfaction with the online learning format, clarify students' point of view regarding its future, identify the main difficulties and problems of students in the process of the transition to online learning, as well as to propose ways to solve them. The importance of this work is confirmed by the following assumptions:

- the results obtained from the survey can be used in the review of academic courses and curricula of philological and non-philological specialties;

- interpretation of the research data can serve as a basis for subsequent more narrowly focused studies.

2.2. Methodology

To achieve the objective of the study and solve the tasks set, our analysis used a mixed approach to data analysis: quantitative (that is, statistical analysis of data from questionnaires filled out by the students) and qualitative (that is, analysis and evaluation of the students' answers in order to achieve the stated research goals).

Our interpretive materials and research methods include a comprehensive and systematic study of the object of study; comparison of various objects of research with each other; generalization of theoretical and practical experience, etc., including empirical, that is, conducting a survey of students from three universities in order to determine the level of their satisfaction with the organization and conduct of online classes and develop recommendations for improving work in terms of increasing the effectiveness of online learning in higher education.

2.3. Structure and plan

The research consisted of two steps. The first was conducted in 2021 and was structured according to the following plan.

The first stage: drawing up a questionnaire.

The second stage: the organization of the process of filling out the questionnaire by the students.

The third stage: data collection and analysis.

The second step was conducted one year later, in 2022, aiming at getting the students' perception of online learning over time in order to identify changes, if any. This step implied using the same questionnaire and carrying out stages 1-3 of the first step described above.

The two steps were amplified by one more stage: drawing conclusions and specifying areas for further research.

As a data collection tool, a questionnaire (Appendix 1) in English, Russian and Polish was used to reach a wider audience. This questionnaire includes questions aimed at obtaining relevant information regarding the opinions and views of students in assessing their satisfaction with the online learning format.

After the questionnaire was sent out through the Google Forms tool (step 1) and handed out on paper (step 2) to the students, responses were received from the partic-

ipants, and an analysis of the collected data for each aspect was carried out. After that, we benchmarked the data, obtained under steps 1 and 2, and relevant conclusions were made.

The questionnaire, was conducted at the University of Economics in Bydgoszcz, Bydgoszcz, Poland (Wyższa Szkoła Gospodarki w Bydgoszczy) (hereinafter – WSG) Kyiv National Linguistic University, Kyiv, Ukraine (hereinafter – KNLU) and Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Georgia (hereinafter – BSRSU). In total, 138 students from eight countries were interviewed. The results of the questionnaire are presented in the form of diagrams and tables; the presented data are quantified and derive from both steps as a whole.

As part of the last stage, conclusions were formulated regarding the students' satisfaction with the online learning format, and the challenges of this form of learning. Also, proposals were presented for further improvement in higher education.

3. Survey results

3.1. Analysis of the answers
to the questions included in the questionnaire

The contingent of respondents was analyzed based on the results of the survey, and its characteristics are presented below.

According to the information arising from the survey, more than half of the respondents are 1st-year students at the 1st year of universities (62 people, which is 47%), 27 – 2nd-year, which is 21%, and these categories together make up the majority of the respondents (see Figure 1); the majority of the sample is female (81% are girls, 19% are boys) (as shown in Figure 2); almost half of the respondents (42%) named Ukraine as their country of origin. It is worth noting the presence of representatives from other countries of Europe, Asia and Africa, including Uzbekistan, Poland, Ukraine, Cameroon, Sri Lanka, etc.

As part of step 2, 30 students from Georgia as well as 5 more from other countries gave their opinions, which makes up 25% of the overall number of the research participants and, thus constitutes a representative sampling. The geography of the study demonstrates the international nature of the latter and emphasizes the importance of its results in terms of their potential extrapolation. More details regarding the respondents' countries of birth are indicated in Figure 3.
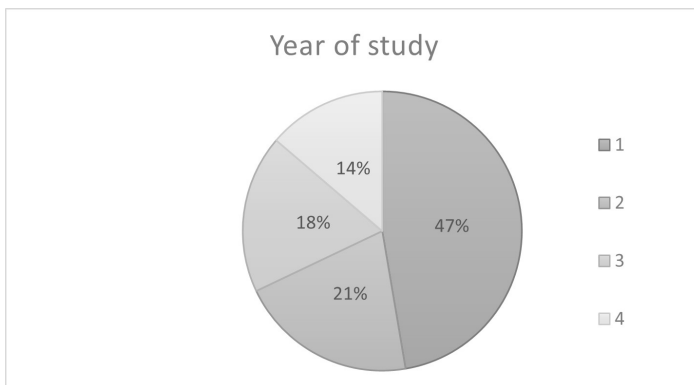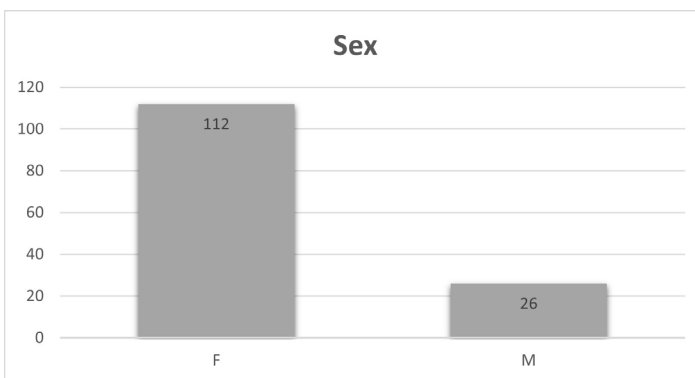
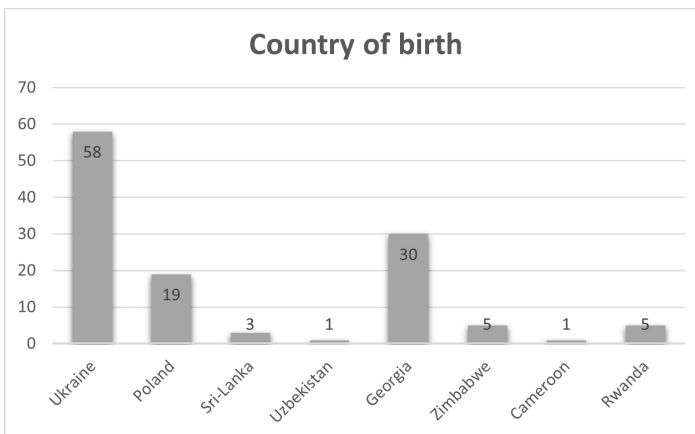**Figure 1. Year of study**

Figure 2. Sex

Figure 3. Country of birth

All respondents were grouped into three main age groups: 16-20 years – 86 people, which was 68%, 21-29 years – 36 students (27%), and the 30-50 year group has 6 people (5%) – more details are in Figure 4 below.
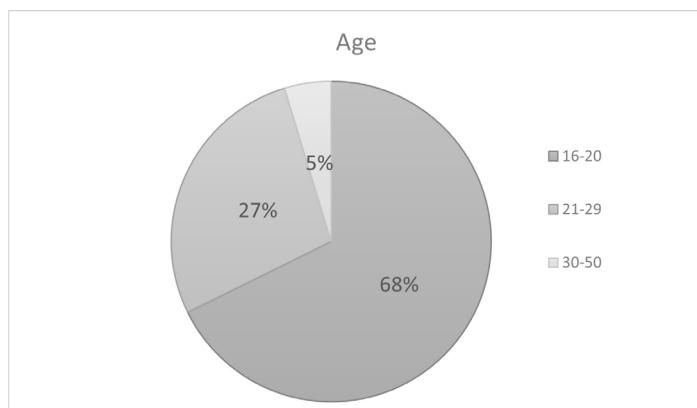
Figure 4. Age

In order to reach the objective of the study, the students were asked how convenient it is for them to study online. As shown in Figure 5 (below), half of the respondents surveyed (69 out of 138, which is 50%) answered, that it is suitable for them. At the same time, 33% (46 students) experience difficulties learning online. Obtaining education in an electronic mode is very difficult for 12% (16 people) of the total number of respondents.

It is interesting to see the data in comparison. In 2021 53 % of the respondents found the online learning convenient while in 2022 the percentage of the student population satisfied with this mode of studies decreased to 42%. There has been a slight change in seeing online learning as difficult in the selected years, i.e., 33% in 2021 and 36% in 2022 as well as 10% perceived it as very difficult in 2021, and in 2022 this figure is almost twice higher (18%). These findings indicate, that the overall level of comfort and satisfaction with the online studies has been decreasing over the last two years.
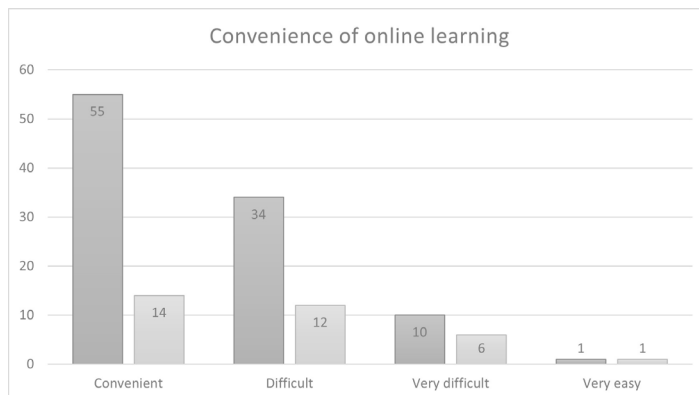

Figure 5. Convenience of online learning

The 2021 survey showed, that 47% (46 students) perfectly adapted to the new learning environment and another 35% (33 students) considered that they adapted well enough, and only 8% (7 students) believed, that they could not adapt to the new format of training. The picture looks different in 2022 with only 17% of students (6 persons), stating that the level of adaptation is excellent, while 44% (16 students) found the new learning environment satisfactory, whereas 6% (2 persons) claimed that it does not work for them. The received statistics shows the tendency towards a moderate tailoring to the online learning with not so many students indicating, that it is very easy or too difficult to adapt to learning online.
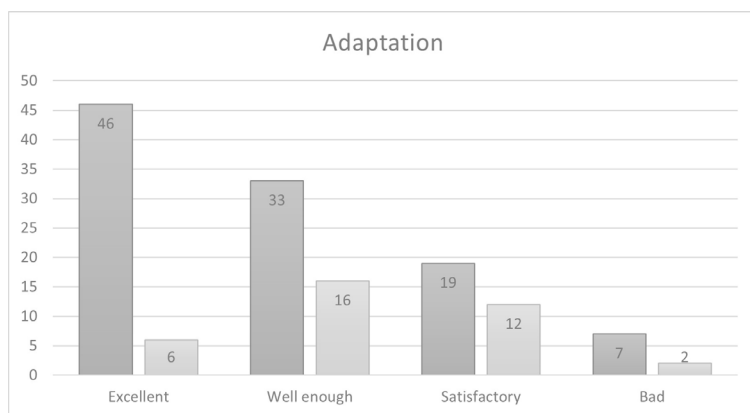

Figure 6. The level of adaptation to the new learning environment

It is important to note that in 2021 many respondents (38%, or 39 students) declared a decrease in motivation when studying online, while for 27% (28 students) the level of motivation did not change. The picture looks slightly different in 2022 with 40% (14 students), witnessing decrease and 51% (i.e., 18 students) reporting no change in their motivation. From this we can conclude, that the factor of motivation of students, as well as their learning activities and initiative tend to be better in a face-to-face learning in the classroom, when there is a direct contact with the lecturer and classmates. Otherwise, the activity and cognitive interest of students are reduced, which cannot but effect, in the end, the level of knowledge gained at the university. In our view, these findings should be taken into account by the university lecturers when preparing for classes, as well as in general, when choosing methods of teaching.

We also posed a question regarding difficulties the students face in the online learning (see Appendix 1). As indicated in Figure 8, in 2021, 52 people, that is, 56%, reported a large number of materials to be processed. As an explanation for the finding, we suggest that some lecturers not yet consider this form effective and by sending an excessive of additional materials they try to compensate for its shortcomings. This fact leads to conclusions about the need to evaluate the volume of tasks given to increase the efficiency and avoid the motivation decrease among the students.
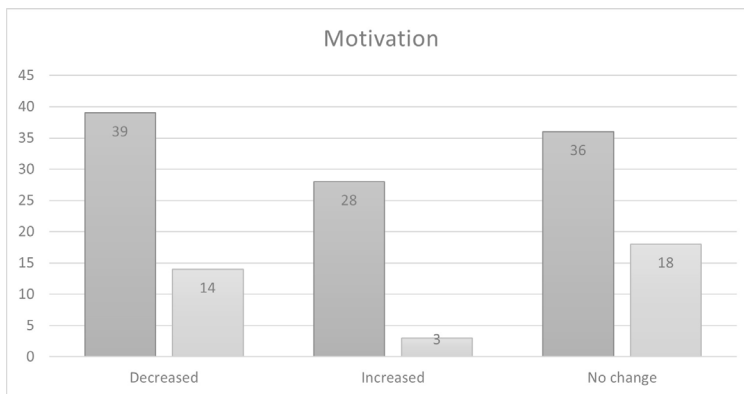
Figure 7. Level of motivation of students

In 2022 the percentage of students complaining about too many materials to process plummeted to 26%. This fact suggests that the academic lecturers have tailored to the new mode of work taking into account the realistic possibilities of the system. At the same time the statistics of increasing lack of IT competence revealed by the surveyed students (18% in 2021 and 23% in 2022) gives cause for concern since the online format continues to be an integral part of the modern learning process.
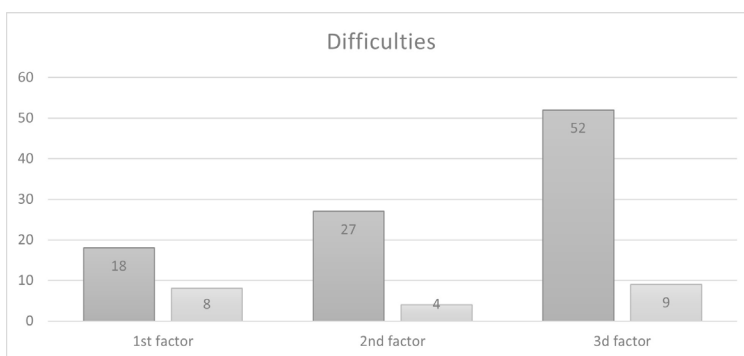

Figure 8. Difficulties of online learning

Despite a number of shortcomings, online learning has a number of positive aspects, which has also been confirmed experimentally (see Figure 9). Among such factors, the vast majority of students note a low risk of infection – 64% in 2021 (66 students) and 63% (22 students) in 2022. The individual pace of study, as well as the possibility to download lecture materials, presentations, and other educational information were significant factors for the students of our sample – 52% (50 students) and 50% (48 students), respectively in 2021. But the statistics for the same factors changed in 2022 with 23% (8 students) and 54% (19 students). This may mean that over time

students see online learning in a less favorable way, i.e., when an individual pace of studies becomes not such an appealing factor any longer, or, alternatively, they do not see it as an advantage.

We can observe the biggest differences in the students' opinions between 2021 and 2022 in several aspects. The number of respondents who named self-study as an advantage of online learning decreased by 4 times, falling from 32% in 2021 to 9% in 2022. At the same time, more students who were surveyed in 2022 expressed their positive attitude regarding an opportunity to obtain professional certificates without leaving home, namely, by one third, with 29% in 2021 and 37% in 2022. These facts suggest, that the students' opinions are fluctuating over time, and they tend to see new opportunities under current conditions and are quickly adapting to them.
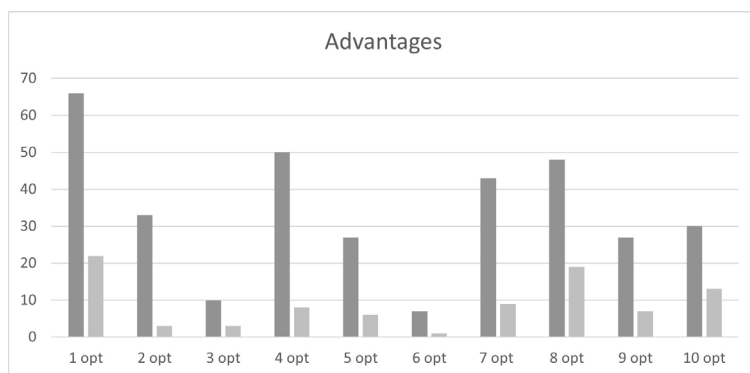

Figure 9. Advantages of online learning

3.2. Analysis of additional comments of respondents

To achieve greater objectivity in the study, the students were asked to formulate their own answers about whether there is a future for the online form of education, and whether such studies can replace the traditional (offline) one. The results were processed, randomly selected, and presented in an aggregated form in Annex 2.

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that there are clear differences in student satisfaction with classroom compared with online learning. As the answers of the surveyed students were given in a free form, we did not endeavor to translate the opinions into a statistical format. Having analyzed the responses from 2021, we observe that an approximately one-third of the respondents expressed, that they see a future for online learning, while another one-third believe that online learning can replace the traditional format. They specify some advantages of the online mode, especially in the context of the pandemic, but at the same time they note the reduced motivation and the lack of direct contact with the teacher and groupmates in the learning process, which negatively affect overall education. The conclusion that can be drawn from these facts, is that a third of students do not consider online learning to be fully effective.

On the basis of the 2022 survey results, it there appears to be decreasing motivation among students undertaking online studies and significantly increased dissatisfaction with the quality of knowledge received in the course of such learning. A large number of respondents believe that online learning can never replace the traditional method. In other words, there has been a noticeable change in the students' perception of online learning over the last year.

4. Conclusions and practical application of the survey results

It should be noted that at present, higher education is undergoing a significant transformation under the influence of global processes due to the pandemic and the war in Europe. The development of digital technologies and telecommunications systems is changing the ways in which knowledge is created, recorded and transferred, and skills are formed.

The tasks arising from the objectives of the study, were vindicated. As a result of the surveys in 2021 and 2022, the statistical data as well as subjective opinions of the students were collected, the analysis of which made it possible to conclude that 92% of students successfully adapted to the new form of education and 57% of them considered it convenient in 2021, while in 2022 the percentage of students satisfied with this mode of studies decreased to 42%. This indicates that educational institutions may consider further developing online channels and improving their quality by developing methods and technologies for online classes, as well as adjusting curricula, since a decreasing percentage of the surveyed students find online learning comfortable for them. Further, in our view a blending of traditional and online learning may become a suitable solution for the time being.

The present study attempts to evaluate the students' views on the future of online learning. The findings of the survey showed that there is a tendency among respondents to favor traditional education, while there are also students who believe that online learning has its advantages, especially given the current pandemic and military actions in Europe, but the online mode is unable to completely replace the traditional. The reasons for such opinions boil down to missing direct contact with the lecturers, favorable working atmosphere of the university classrooms, live communication with groupmates and the like. Our findings indicate that, despite the obvious advantages of online learning, it cannot completely replace the classroom format, and therefore universities should not completely depart from the standard mode; thus, as suggested above they should develop various forms of blended learning. further, attention should be paid to student motivation, which may be supported through gamification of classes, inclusion of interactive elements (such as videos, podcasts), etc.

The present time is a period of opportunities and innovations. It is too early to talk about any unambiguous trends and draw hard conclusions. However, it seems

likely that in the future, online formats will be still actively used in higher educational institutions.

At the same time, it is necessary to develop and transform existing methods in both traditional and online forms of education. Based on the data obtained, an effective form of the future education will be a blended form of learning, which can be carried out through special educational modules (online/offline). By working to transform student-centered education models in today's world, it is possible to make learning more accessible and effective for as many learners as possible.

The findings obtained as a result of the study, can be used in particular to adapt language courses and curricula of higher educational institutions.

However, when interpreting the results of this study, some limitations should be mentioned. Responses might have been influenced by subjective opinions arising from the tendency to report socially desirable responses. Although the sample size of this study is sufficient to summarize and draw conclusions, most respondents were from three geographic locations, indicating the need to replicate similar studies using stratified samples in different contexts. Finally, we can assume that other variables potentially influenced the opinions of respondents.

The study can serve as a basis for future research. As stated above, the survey was conducted on the basis of three universities. It could have been interesting to compare how the students were prepared for online learning, what more general lessons they have learned over the period in which the educational world has been shifting to the digitalization, etc. As the World Bank stated, "the COVID-19 crisis might retrospectively be considered as an opportunity to strategically revamp systems and prepare for the challenges to come" (17). This can be achieved via more intensive digitalization of society by joint efforts of educators and students based on support from the governmental organizations.

The authors hope that the topics not covered by the current study will draw attention to the problem and stimulate scientific research in this promising direction.

5. Acknowledgement

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ONLINE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION
UNDER PANDEMIC AND WAR:
THE INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Abstract: This article is co-authored and analyses the issues of student satisfaction with the format of online learning, their views on its future, and identifies the main difficulties with this format of learning. The authors have used the findings from 2021 questionnaires conducted in two universities in Poland and Ukraine, and from a 2022 questionnaire conducted at a university located in Georgia, which enlarged the geography of the study. Based on the survey results, the authors propose ways to solve the identified gaps in the online learning process. The article highlights possible practical use of the survey findings by transforming the current education model, adjusting the existing academic curriculum, making changes when preparing university classes, etc.

Keywords: university, online learning, survey, pandemic, digitalization

Annex 1

QUESTIONNAIRE

In connection with the transition to distance learning, the University conducts a survey among students to identify the degree of satisfaction with the format of studying. The survey results will help to identify the main difficulties and problems of students in the process of transition to distance learning, and to identify the ways to solve them. The results obtained will be processed, analyzed, and will serve as the basis for scientific research. The survey is anonymous. You are kindly asked to take part in our research. Thanks for your time and input on this matter in advance.

General information

1. Year of study:

2. Gender:

3. Age:

4. Country of birth:

Distance learning

5. How well did you adapt to the new conditions of distance learning?

    i.   excellent;

    ii.   well enough;

    iii. satisfactorily;

    iv.   bad.

6. Is it convenient for you to study remotely?

    i.   yes, convenient (I like it);

    ii.   yes, but difficult;

    iii. no, it's very difficult;

    iv.   no, very easy;

    v.   find it difficult to answer.

7. The level of motivation for learning you have in the distance form of studying

    i.   has increased;

    ii.   has decreased;

    iii. no change.

8. What difficulties do you face in the process of distance learning?

    i.   insufficient knowledge of computer technology;

    ii.   insufficient amount of material received;

    iii. too many materials to process;

    iv.   other.

9. What do you like about distance learning? Choose no more than three answer options:

    i.   low risk of contracting an infection;

    ii.   self-study;

    iii. additional amount of material on the subject available;

    iv.   individual pace of learning;

    v.   use of modern teaching technologies;

    vi.   improved quality of studies;

    vii. a possibility to re-watch the video of the lecture;

    viii. a possibility to download lecture materials, presentations and other materials;

    ix.   an opportunity to test yourself;

    x.   an opportunity to obtain professional certificates without leaving home;

    xi.   other (please specify).

10. Is there a future for distance learning? Can such learning replace the traditional one (offline)? Give your point of view.

Annex 2

Table 1. The Students' Comments[1]

#	Student Response in 2021	Student Response in 2022	Researchers' Comments
1	Of course there is, until the end of the pandemic, this is a great solution.	I think there is a chance that distance learning will replace offline learning. Because distance learning is acceptable for some to save time, however, I think distance education will affect our knowledge.	**Online learning can replace traditional**
2	Yes. Since you can study anywhere in the world, only if you have the Internet. It is also convenient to combine studies, work and hobbies.	I think that such learning can replace traditional offline learning, this is very bad because, offline learning is more fruitful and knowledgeable.	
3	Yes, it's more practical and simpler that way.	The technological revolution always surprises at first, not everyone immediately gets used to it, but gradually, I think, distance learning will become popular. It's comfortable. You live in a water country, and study in another.	
1	Distance learning definitely has a future, but the amount of work that needs to be done is very large. There are a lot of tasks that you simply cannot do on time, I mean tests that open only for 30 minutes, or tasks that open only for a day. And if you miss something, that's it, go for a retake and pay 300 zlotys. It's definitely difficult when you have more than 20 items and each item needs to be watched so you don't miss anything. First of all, we came here to gain knowledge.	If the situation does not change, there is the most reasonable way to study. In case of risk of getting infected I do prefer to stay at home and continue the offline learning. I kind of like distance learning. I can work more on my own and I do not waste time on commuting. On the other hand it is hard.	**Online learning can partially/ temporarily replace the traditional one**
2	Possibly, but only partially.		

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[1]   The grammatical constructions have been preserved, corrections have been made in terms of the spelling of words.

3	I think it's capable, it's more convenient, but it has its drawbacks.		
4	That certainly makes sense. Although this form for many is still not very clear and familiar, but this type of training should be. Of course, online learning will not be able to completely replace classroom classes and live communication, but it is still very convenient.		
5	I don't know if there is a future with distance learning, as a student who came from abroad, it is difficult for me, because all subjects are in Polish at once, and I did not receive the necessary knowledge for the Polish language course. If the form of education was normal, then learning polish would be better, and knowledge of each subject would be perceived better.		
6	It is possible, but much depends on the presentation of information by the teacher and the desire to receive it by the student.		
1	I think that distance learning cannot completely replace traditional learning. It requires a lot of self-organization and motivation. That's what a lot of people lack. Because of this, distance learning may have fewer effects than traditional learning.	Distance learning should absolutely not replace traditional ways of learning. Its true that they are many benefits to this method, but there a loss of quality and engagement from the traditional way.	**Online learning cannot replace traditional learning**
2	No.	I hope that is not. It's the worst part of my study. I have permanently problems with the connection, with being focus. Not everyone understands that some people have a problem with computers and not every	

		student is able to buy a new computer or sth, especially when I have more than one computer but my brothers use the others, so.. what can I co ? I must all the time explain why I can't focus, why I can't open sth and why the others have to wait for me when the internet doesn't cooperate with my. Besides, level of study is like a joke and it's not the lecturers fault, it's because of system which doesn't have a sense.	
3	No, distance learning for part-time students.	There is no future for distance learning. It should be offline asap.	
4	No way. The lack of live contact with the teacher, peers, the lack of full-fledged practical classes in the university of a practical direction will kill high-quality training. Online can be used as an additional form of training.	In my opinion, it wouldn't be profitable for the students who truly desire to get a high-quality education since online studying decreases motivation in studying as students know nobody will control them during exams and they won't have prepared the material as needed. I don't think anything can or must change the real life communication.	
5	It will not replace traditional training, but can be supplemented by classes with more qualified teachers, for whom access to our facility was one of the criteria for rejecting a job offer in the WSG.	Distance learning has no future in my opinion it can not replace the traditional everyday learning.	
6	It is impossible to study on your own, because it is difficult to do it at home near the bed.	For me online studying was an opportunity to test myself. I had a lot of experience and I liked it a lot. Also it was quite practical for me to attend online classes but I don't think that this will ever replace the traditional method.	

| 7 | | I do not think that distance learning can replace the offline one, because it is unnatural for me. We cannot communicate with lecturers, student and etc. Also it is unhealthy, it can cause sight problems, especially people like me, who already have this problem. For me, it is cause of laziness, you can be at home all day and cannot be physical active. Of course, it is good to have a possibility to download lecture materials, presentations and etc. but it is better when you are searching by yourself and you are motivated to learn something new. I was learning online for 3 semesters and I have been learning traditional way for 1 semester, however I learnt more in this semester than other 3 semesters. In my opinion, distance learning will never get closer to traditional one. With offline studying you feel that you are real student with real opportunity. | |
| 8 | | On the one hand, by experience of Corona virus, people understand that they can do different kind of activities without go to educational centers, but on the other hand sometimes it is so boring, because when you are only at home, you don't have communication with other people, with your classmates, you feel so uncomfortable, so as for me, offline studying in more attractive. | |