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The challenges of distance learning on a higher education level in Kosovo – case study

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Abstract. Virtual learning, also known as distance learning has changed many parts of teaching and learning in recent years as a form of high-level "academic communication". This model of teaching as a form of academic communication has marked encouraging results in countries in transition that apply for many years. The education system continues to be a challenge these countries such as in Kosovo, and the education system is forced to apply this form of teaching after the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic in March 2020. Kosovo's borders were closed as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic on March 13, 2020, while the UBT Higher Education Institution started teaching online on March 16, 2020, in Kosovo and even more in the regions. The purpose of the study is to more realistically reflect the organization of distance learning, the challenges, the effects on the activity of lessons and students, as well as the communication and follow-up of teachers-students and the realization of more effective curriculum now in isolation and social distance academic objectives of UBT College. The main objective of the paper was that there were instruments that we applied to learn how to influence distance learning but also the performance of students' academic staff during this period of social distance and the teaching process in this way and application for the first time in Kosovo university education.

Keywords: Distance learning, social distance, pandemic, interactivity, communication.

Introduction

Online learning in developing countries until 2020 was in the conceptual, initial phase and with few exceptions was almost never applied. The global pandemic COVID 19 changed many circumstances in socio-economic terms, communication, and especially in the field of education. The World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020 declared COVID 19 as a global pandemic. "This is not just a public health crisis, it is a crisis that will touch every sector," said Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO director-general, (WHO, 2020). In accordance with this decision of the WHO will act the Government of the Republic of Kosovo, which on the same date took a decision to discontinue teaching at all levels (Government of the Republic of Kosovo, 2020). The first tests related to this unknown disease started on February 8, 2008 (Sali Ahmeti, 2021). The first cases of COVID 19 in Kosovo were reported on March 13, 2020, (Gazeta Express, 2020), which were then followed by other measures by the competent institutions that

obliged the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation to organize teaching in distance for all levels of the education system in Kosovo.

However, the challenges were many, from the organizational aspect, technical - technological, tradition and new experience of this form of teaching, psycho-emotional aspect of students and teachers, lack of experience of academic staff in this teaching model but also resistance of a number of them to be accommodated in this new form of "academic communication". Although the shift to online learning had already become part of many education systems in the world, the level of use and the way technology was used to achieve the quality of distance or online learning. This level depended on many factors, related to the various parties involved in the implementation of this learning format and the integration of technology in education systems before the period of taking measures for school closures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Hyseni –Duraku & Hoxha, 2020). In reality, the challenges were also present for UBT College, where we started distance learning, although as one of the most well-known institutions of university education in terms of information technology in Southeast Europe.

The effects of the use of information technology in educational institutions were researched many years ago by researchers in the field of education, through which it has been proven and promoted that technology can help in various educational processes (Hung & Yyen, 2010), have a positive impact on supporting learning in students (Dyson et al., 2015), assist teachers, and assist them in professional advancement and development (Donelan, 2016; Manca & Raineri, 2017),.All these studies and others during this period of our first experience in the form of distance learning continue to remain challenges for countries in transition but also good experiences in this new model of "academic communication".

Methodology

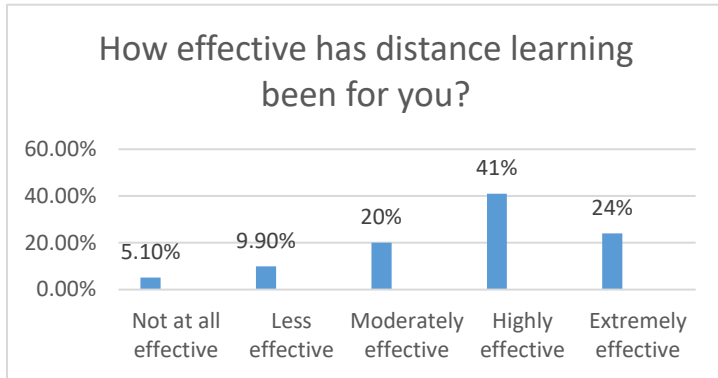
During the realization of this paper we applied the qualitative and quantitative method, because the nature of the problem we have addressed has forced us to use mixed methods to realize the purpose of this scientific paper.

The instrument of realization of the applied methodology was the questionnaire consisting of 22 questions, where 133 students were interviewed directly and by completing the questionnaire in electronic form. In the work plan of our study we selected three faculties of UBT College as follows: 89 students from the Faculty of Nursing, 29 students from the Faculty of Dentistry and 15 students from the Faculty of Communication Sciences. Of the surveyed students 60.7% are female and 39.3% male, while their age varies from 19 to 25 years old. Distance learning at UBT College was developed on the Moodle platform. Out of the total questions in the questionnaire, we focused on 8 questions related to the objectives and purpose of our study.

Results

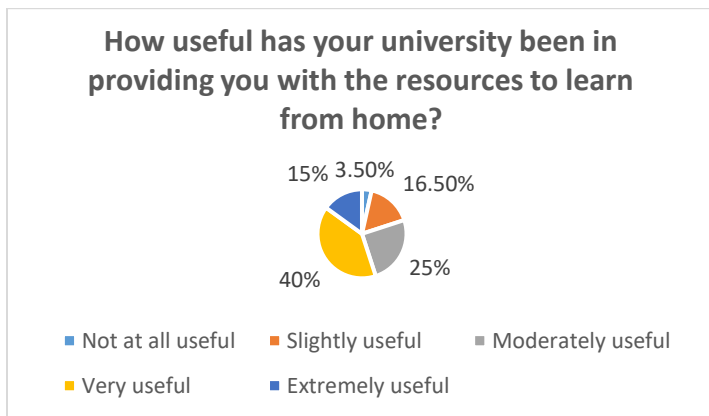
From the analysis we conducted for the answers to the questions of the questionnaire, we noticed that we have differences in evaluation depending on the direction of the studies but also

based on gender we had a variety of answers regarding the issues we have addressed in this paper.



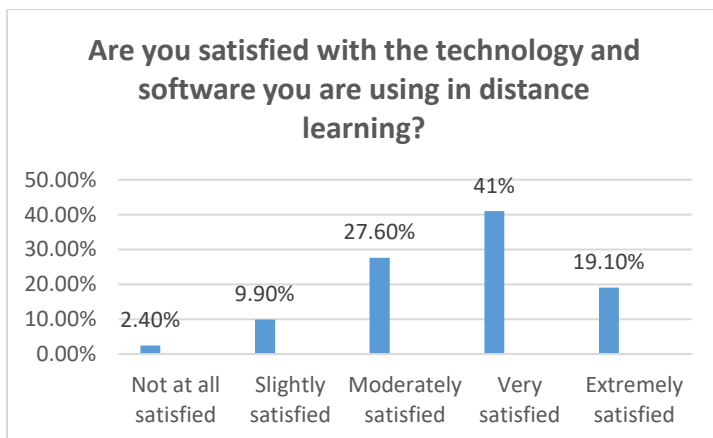
When asked how effective distance learning has been, we have the following assessments from students: Not at all effective 5.1%, less effective 9.9%, moderately effective 20%, very effective 41% and extremely effective 24%.

Graph 1. Results of question no. 3 of the questionnaire.



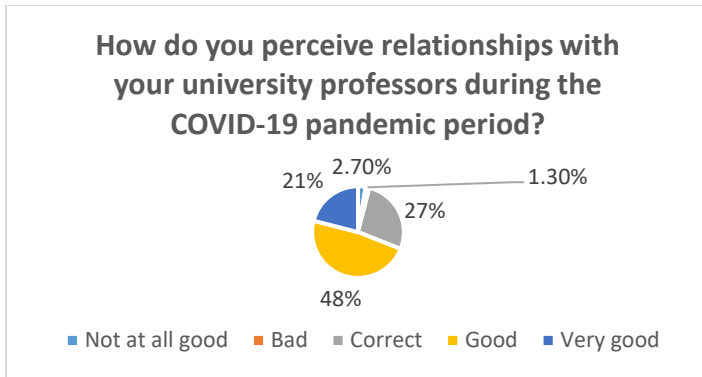
When asked how useful your university has been in providing the necessary resources for home learning we have the following results: Not at all useful 3.5%, slightly useful 16.5%, moderately useful 25%, very useful 40% and extremely useful 15%.

Graph 2. Results of question no. 4 of the questionnaire.

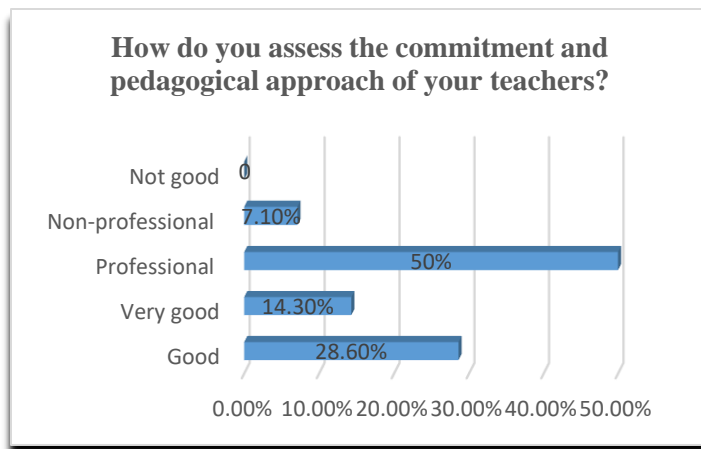


When asked if you are satisfied with the technology and software you used during the online learning, we have the following assessments: Not at all satisfied 2.4%, slightly satisfied 9.9%, moderately satisfied 27.6%, very satisfied 41% , extremely satisfied 19.1%.

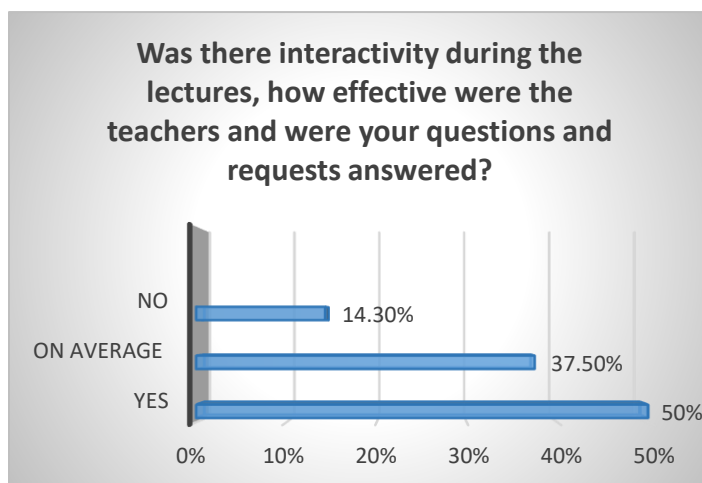
Graph 3. Results of question no. 5 of the questionnaire.



Graph 4. Results of question no. 10 of the questionnaire.



Graph 5. Results of question no. 13 of the questionnaire.

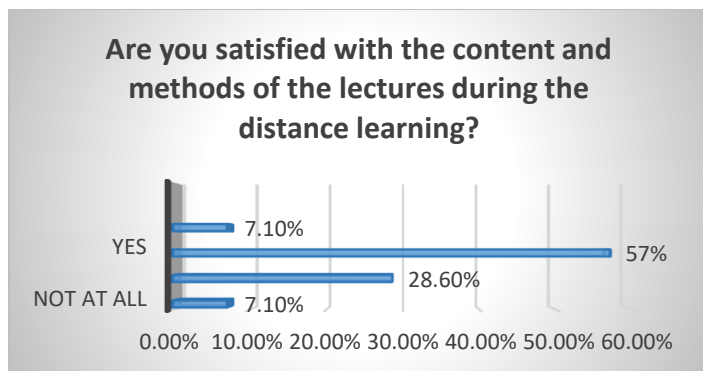


Graph 6. The results of question no. 14 of the questionnaire

When asked how you perceive the relationship with your university professors during the COVID 19 pandemic period, we have the following results: Not at all good 2.7%, bad 1.3%, correct 27%, good 48% and very good 21%.

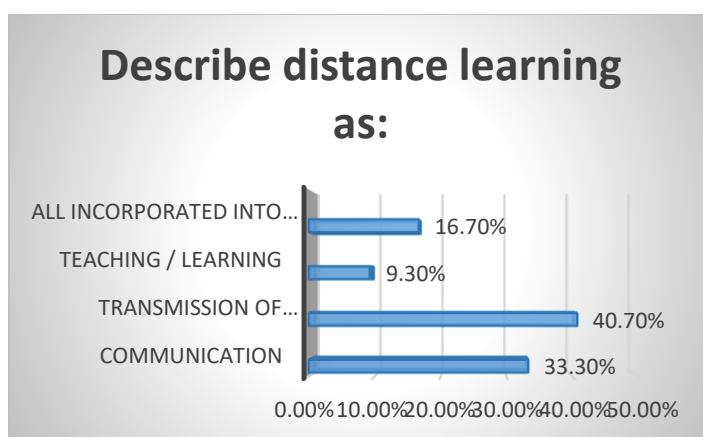
Being a teacher at this university, it was important to evaluate the students in the question of how they evaluated the commitment and pedagogical approach of their teachers. The result of the evaluation by the students was: As professional 50%, very good 14.30 %, good 28.60%, non-professional 7.10% and not good 0%.

When asked if there was interactivity during the lectures, how effective the teachers were and if the students' questions and requests were answered and fulfilled, we received the following assessments from the students: Yes 50%, on average 37.50% and No 14.50%, which we also estimate that based on the time, the general atmosphere, the uncertainty and panic that prevailed in that time period, these are responses and estimates that exceed the optimum expectations.



Graph 7. The results of question no. 15 of the questionnaire.

When asked if they are satisfied with the content and methodology of distance learning lectures, we received the following evaluations from the respondents: “Yes” (57%), “Average” 28.60%, “Very much” (7.10%), “not at all” (7.10%), which we evaluate as realistic assessments and that exceeds our expectations in the positive aspect compared to the psycho-emotional situation and the general situation created in the general aspect in the plans by COVID 19.



Graph 10. The results of question no. 21 of the questionnaire.

When asked how would you describe distance learning, we received the following assessments from students: “Information transmission” 40.70%, “communication” 33.30%, “teaching-learning” 9.30% and “all these factors together” 16.70%.

Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm that physical distancing, the circumstances created against the spread of COVID-19, including changes in education, have caused a number of concerns among students and teachers in Kosovo. These changes are in line with expectations that the spread of COVID-19 has caused fear, anxiety and other concerns to citizens in Kosovo.

Despite the stated changes and concerns, the start of distance learning has been confirmed to have been assessed with positive effects within the pandemic period, keeping them engaged and diverting attention from COVID-19 students. Despite isolation at home, lack of communication and social distance, distance learning is considered valuable and influential in increasing the level of productive time and obtaining information and new knowledge for our students. From the main focus of our work which was the evaluation by the students themselves regarding this form of teaching and learning as a new experience for Kosovo and UBT College where their satisfaction, methodology and pedagogical aspect, communication, interaction, technical-technological equipment from the College, then measuring their motivation during this period of teaching organization and up to the preferred form of teaching, we can conclude that a

satisfactory acceptance of online learning has been achieved, there has been interaction and correlation in the method and content of the teaching process , but at the same time there were doses of hesitation, confusion and other barriers that students have expressed through questionnaires designed for the purpose of our paper.

We believe that countries in transition should invest in all aspects in advancing and creating alternative opportunities for distance learning for the university level which has its functional, economic advantages, its application in different situations, facilitated access and aspects of others that impose contemporary trends and the development of information technology in the global aspect that should be imperative of university education in transition countries, especially in the Republic of Kosovo.

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