

The popularity of distance learning among International students in Hungary

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Abstract: With the rapid development of economic globalization and information technology, distance learning makes students study without distance limitation. Nowadays, high-level education organizations are not only top students' privileges anymore, instead, everyone can get this opportunity due to distance learning. At the same time, studying at far-away organizations gradually comes true. Obviously, distance learning is influencing our life especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, which plays a pivotal role in education. However, it also has some disadvantages, such as the weak study motivation and study effect, and high requirement for devices. In this study, we examined some existing literature and our primary research will study the International students' attitudes and their expectations about distance learning in Hungary. The research purpose is to reveal the popularity of distance learning among International students and provide suggestions for future distance learning.

Keywords: distance learning; international students' attitude; future

1 Introduction

Distance learning is the kind of education in which students may not always be physically present at a school (Pardanjac, 2020). In the post-pandemic period, the number of universities offering distance education programs has significantly increased, that the courses have become more varied and that the number of students applying these programs is rising as well. In fact, this is not the first time that conventional education activities were suspended. The outbreak of SARS coronavirus and H1N1 Flu also negatively impacted conventional education activities around the globe (Muhammad Adnan et al., 2020). But there is no doubt that COVID-19 has brought more serious implications and opportunities for distance education.

Distance learning is increasingly influencing both classroom and campus-based teaching, particularly for the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but more important is leading to new models or designs for teaching and learning. After more than a half year of online learning for the student, it is a great edge for improving distance education. However, to our best knowledge, not many studies directly investigate the satisfaction and effectiveness of international students with distance learning in Hungary. Besides, most of the literature is focusing on the

implications brought by COVID-19 to the traditional (face-to-face) teaching method. Moreover, Hungary as a safe and open country has a lot of study programs for international students with diverse excellent universities[1]. Therefore, we seek to answer the question: what are the attitudes and expectations of international students towards distance learning in Hungary? To answer this question, we employed qualitative and quantitative analysis. A questionnaire was generated to examine international students' experience and attitudes regarding distance learning in Hungary. We conducted questionnaire surveys at the Obuda University, the University of Pécs, the University of Szeged, and the Budapest University of Technology and Economics, and received a total of 233 valid questionnaires.

The structure of the study is as follows. Chapter 2 gives overviews of distance learning. We went through the literature on distance learning and summarized its advantages and disadvantages. Chapter 3 introduces the methodology used in this study. The design ideas and analysis methods of the questionnaire were also introduced in this chapter. Chapter 4 introduces sample data and analysis results. The last chapter is the conclusion and limitation of the study. This study will contribute to the literature on the effectiveness of distance learning and provide suggestions for related organizations and enterprises to improve distance education.

2 Literature Review

With the rapid development of economic globalization and information technology, distance learning is getting more popular, eliminating the distance limitation and access requirement. Distance learning is offering diverse opportunities to everyone who wants to study more conveniently and efficiently. However, distance learning as a creative study method cannot be perfect. Compared to the traditional study style, distance learning has some disadvantages. Distance learning is like a double-sword, which can be used perfectly only by an objective and comprehensive view.

2.1 The definition and short history of distance learning

Distance learning is also called distance education, which is similar to e-learning and online learning, but different. Distance learning offers the study convenience and flexibility for teachers and learners who are separated physically by digital learning technologies (Zilka,2021; Traxler, 2018; Al-Arimi, 2014; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2016). The distance learning format can be video and audio, and the learners can pause the proceedings anytime to review the study materials as they want (Al-Arimi, 2014).

The first mode of distance learning was founded by Isaac Pitman in England in the 1840s, who taught his students by his shorthand via a new postal system and gave feedback (Alan, 2003). In 1873, Anna Eliot Ticknor found the first

correspondence school especially for women in the United States. The purpose of this school was to teach women in case of less financial ability, less educational background, race, geographical location, or physical ability (Robinson, 2012). Wolsey Hall Oxford is the first distance learning college (non-profit) in the UK, founded by Joseph William Knipe in 1894. During the 1930s - 1980s, Wolsey Hall supplied degree-level courses via the University of London external degree program. In 1985, Wolsey Hall Oxford launched the world's first distance learning MBA with Warwick Business School. Till 2020, Wolsey Hall supplied the courses for aged 5-13 children[1].

2.2 The effectiveness of distance learning

Distance learning or online education is not novel. It has been applied earlier in the medical and military training fields. A large number of studies have been done on learning outcomes in distance education versus face-to-face instructional settings. These studies show that there are no significant differences in learning outcomes achieved by students engaged in face-to-face instruction (Barbara Means et al, 2010). This holds true regardless of the technology medium used (i.e speed of internet, camera etc.), the discipline, or the type of student. What is more, using the studies found on Nosignificantdifference.org as an indicator of the effectiveness of distance and online learning, it would be observed that about 92% of all distance and online education studies find that distance and online education is at least as effective. About 3% of the studies compiled by the site show the reverse, that traditional face-to-face format is more effective, and about 4% show mixed findings. However, given the issues of selection bias that later studies pointed out and the lack of rigorous methodology of the earlier studies, it is difficult to say how meaningful these numbers really are.

Furthermore, beginning around 2000, several studies, including meta-studies (review and analysis of hundreds of studies selected for their rigor), began to find significant differences in favor of online learning. The meta-analysis found that, on average, students in online learning conditions performed modestly better than those receiving face-to-face instruction.

2.3 The advantages and disadvantages of distance learning and the comparison of distance learning and traditional learning

The main advantages of distance learning can be described as follows. Firstly, it is knowledge accessibility. By learning remotely, we can gain knowledge from anywhere in the world. In general, a working laptop and the internet can produce huge learning achievements. Furthermore, we are not limited to a country or continent. You are free to get an education at any university in the world (Ahern and Repman, 1994). This availability is one of the advantages of distance learning.

Online lessons are usually held in two formats: pre-recorded video lessons, or live webinars. Live broadcasts which are the same as the usual offline classes - where you can see the teacher and presentation, ask questions, and communicate with classmates. The advantage of pre-recorded video lessons is to make the learning schedule and progress more flexible. It is convenient for learners to arrange courses according to their own time. But the disadvantage is that it is not suitable for lower grades or learners with procrastination.

The second advantage is flexibility. Distance learning provides us with a relatively flexible learning schedule. Students don't consider commuting time. In today's multitasking working environment, this is a mainstream learning method. For people who prefer to live on a non-standard schedule, distance learning is the best option (Djalilova, 2020). Besides, the time of online study can be easily adjusted to almost any work schedule (Means et al., 2009).

However, there are some negative impacts of distance learning as well such as limited choice of faculties or programs and feeling less motivated when studying individually. Not everything can be studied remotely. In some cases, we cannot do without practical exercises under the guidance of an experienced mentor. We can study history or programming remotely but it is difficult to become a pilot or surgeon under distance learning. Secondly, distance learning slowly forms friendships between lecturers and students. The face-to-face teaching method is how we build relationships and trust. Education isn't about content delivery, but about processes and skills that can only partially happen at a distance. For some respondents, these relationships are a crucial component of the learning experience. To some extent, student engagement highly depends on relationships with faculty. We should notice that online and real teaching are different and what works in the classroom often does not work online, and vice versa.

Thirdly, distance learning is difficult to avoid being disturbed by "other affairs". One of the biggest differences between distance learning and traditional offline learning is the lack of supervision. Lecturers and classmates supervise our classroom situation when studying offline. Therefore, we are totally concentrated in class and don't allow ourselves to interact with others by social media. In the case of distance learning, there is usually only an individual environment, which is easily influenced by many things such as social media, emails, etc.

3 Methodology

In this paper, both the secondary and primary research methods are used. Scientific research is used to study the basic information of distance learning, such as the introduction, history, advantages, and disadvantages. Besides, we also researched traditional learning, which is compared to distance learning. Our primary research is to investigate the students' attitude and their expectations about distance learning, especially among the International students in Hungary. A questionnaire is used in primary research as a quantitative method, including closed and open questions. In the questionnaire, the respondents answered the

questions related to their experience in distance learning before COVID-19 pandemic time, their opinion about the obligatory course study by distance learning, and their perspective about distance learning in a full-time and extra study in the future. Hungary is welcoming more and more international students, so it is useful to research the international students' opinions about distance learning. As all authors of this paper are studying master's and bachelor's degrees in Hungary, Budapest, Szeged and Pecs, we have enough respondents among International students to investigate their perspective about distance learning. The questionnaire data was collected by a professional questionnaire website Wen Juan Xing (2021). The data collection started from the 6th of June 2021 until the 13th of June 2021.

There was a pre-test of the questionnaire instrument to check if there is a potential mistake or unreliable information. After the well-structured survey design, There were 16 questions, including 14 close questions relating to the students' experience of distance learning and the student's attitude about distance learning, and one open question about the suggestions on distance learning, another open question about the barrier in distance learning. Due to the method of sampling, the sample cannot be considered as a representative one but gives a good base to discover the research questions.

4 Result And Discussions

Below we present the quantitative and the qualitative results, with supporting 233 questionnaires from the international students in Hungary.

4.1 Sample analysis

We have received 233 valid questionnaires, which contain 92 bachelor students, 99 master students, and 42 Ph.D. students. (Table 1 shows the number and percentage of international students' education.) Ph.D. students account for a small portion, this is because the number of international Ph.D. students in Hungary is relatively small compared with bachelor and master's students.

Education	Number	%
bachelor	92	39%
master	99	43%
PhD	42	18%

Table 1

Number and percentage of international students' education

4.2 The experience of distance learning

Participants were asked about their experience of distance learning. There are 5 grades, poor, below average, average, good and wonderful. We did a cross-analysis between the education and the experience of distance learning. Table 2 shows the results.

X/Y	Poor	Below average	Average	Good	Wonderful	Number
Bachelor	7 (7.61%)	8 (8.70%)	35 (38.04%)	40 (43.38%)	2 (2.17%)	92
Master	12 (12.12%)	12 (12.12%)	43 (43.43%)	31 (31.31%)	1 (1.01%)	99
PhD	3 (7.14%)	9 (21.43%)	23 (54.76%)	6 (14.29%)	1 (2.38%)	42

Table 2

Cross analysis between education and the experience of distance learning

From table 2, we find that the majority of master's students and Ph.D. students evaluate their experience of distance learning as average. However, for bachelor students, most evaluate their experience of distance learning as good. Compared to the master and Ph.D. curriculum, the bachelor curriculum is easier and not designed to study deep enough. Bachelor students don't need more practical skills and distance learning can meet their class needs. That's why their experience of distance learning had a good evaluation.

4.3 The attitudes and feelings about distance learning

To examine the students' feelings about distance learning, we asked the students how stressful is distance learning, 13.45% of international students think distance learning is a little stressful, 61.8% think it is moderate stressful, and 19.74% think it is more stressful, which indicates distance learning brings a certain sense of pressure to students. We also have a question about the effectiveness of distance learning. 7% of students think distance learning is not at all effective, 23.18% of students think distance learning is slightly effective. 51.93% of students hold the attitude that distance learning is moderately effective. The other students think distance learning is very effective. From this result, we know the effectiveness of distance learning does not achieve satisfactory results.

For the correlation between the effectiveness, the stress, the teachers' help, the students' preference, we conducted a Spearman rank correlation. Table 3 shows the results. As table 3 showed, teachers' help is significantly related to distance learning experience ($p < 0.01$), correlation coefficient value is 0.5, which means they have a very close positive correlation. A better teachers' help was associated with a good experience of distance learning. Besides, significant positive correlations were found between the student's preferences and the experience of distance learning. ($p < 0.05$, $r_s = 0.26$)

			How effective has distance learning been for you?	Rate your overall Distance Learning Experience.	How helpful are your teachers while distance learning?	Which teaching mode do you prefer?
How effective has distance learning been for you?	1.90	0.66	1			
Rate your overall Distance Learning Experience.	2.97	0.93	-0.00			
How helpful are your teachers while distance learning?	2.93	0.74	-0.10	0.50**		
Which teaching mode do you prefer?	1.65	0.86	0.11	0.26*	0.21	1

Table 3

Correlations between study variables

4.4 The students' opinion about distance learning

In this study, we asked students' opinions about the future teaching mode after the COVID-19. 14.16% of students think school will be different: distance learning will become integral to school practices. 42.06% of students think the school will be a little different, with more distance learning. 30.47% of students think the school will return to its original practice, with minor changes. 13.3% of students think the school will return to its original practice. From this data, we know most international students think the school will make some changes with distance learning because of the COVID-19. Students mentioned distance learning has its own advantages, like improving self-learning ability, and flexibility of place and time. For students, it is more accessible and easy to get every lesson. Record lessons really helped them because that way they could watch again, to get details they missed, and understand them without a problem. Because of these advantages, schools will make some changes like adding more distance learning in the future.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Distance learning is a learning method that is in line with today's rapid economic and social development. Although the current advantages and disadvantages coexist, with the improvement of hardware and software, the advantages of distance learning will become more and more obvious. For example, eyes tracking software can identify learners' learning efficiency and remind them to focus and rest time. This study explored the distance learning of international students in Hungary for Hungarian universities during the COVID-19 pandemic. We find that in terms of students' academic qualifications, foreign undergraduates prefer distance learning in Hungary, and the evaluations given by masters and doctors are average. More than 50 percent of respondents evaluate their learning effectiveness regarding distance learning during the pandemic as moderate. Therefore, we can say the effectiveness of distance learning during the pandemic does not obtain satisfactory results. There is much room for improving distance learning whether from students' or universities' sides.

Furthermore, from our empirical study, lecturers' assistance was highly associated with students' performance on distance learning. Face-to-face teaching is how we build relationships and trust. Education isn't about content delivery, but about processes and skills that can only partially happen at a distance. For some respondents, these relationships are a crucial component of the learning experience. To some extent, student engagement highly depends on relationships with faculty. We should notice that online and real teaching are different and what works in the classroom often does not work online, and vice versa.

Therefore, we suggest that distance learning should actively engage students through challenging academic rigor, consistent and timely student-faculty interaction, a collaborative learning environment, and activities that enrich the development of the student. The Internet and related technologies have increased

the opportunity for learning through the elimination of time and place constraints and the availability of flexible and innovative channels for interaction.

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