CZU: 37.018.43:004.738.52 DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.7119025

ONLINE LEARNING DURING PANDEMIC: MAINTAINING STUDENT MOTIVATION IN A REMOTE TEACHING CONTEXT

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COVID-19 has forced educational institutes all around the world to suspend in-person teaching and adopt emergency remote teaching (ERT). The unprecedented academic environment brought by the pandemic led to the evolution of online teaching as an ineluctable tool for education. The process of helping students to stay motivated while learning remotely and without face-to-face support from the teacher can be challenging. This study highlights the students' perception of and motivation towards online classes in respect to internet connectivity and accessibility. Since online teaching is essentially a student-centered learning approach, the motivational level of students plays an important role in making teaching protocols effective. In this paper we will explore several factors which are determinants for online learning and play an important role in diminishing the students' motivation to learn. The present research illustrates that motivation is the influential factor in learning activity and the teacher needs to be more creative in delivering material during learning activity in a virtual environment.

Keywords: *Motivation; pandemic, distance education, traditional learning, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation.*

Online learning refers to an electronic learning environment where, unlike *traditional learning*, there are no physical peer learners, and there is freedom of time and space. However, e-learning makes learning flexible and provides an alternative for those who cannot attend traditional classrooms for any reason. With the growth of technology and the Internet, e-learning has secured a good position in an academic world. At times, e-learning is included in the category of *distance education.*

[1] According to Bernard, Borokhovski, Schmid, Tamim, and Abrami in online learning, students do much better than at traditional learning, and this can be seen through the increasing rates of course completion, student's satisfaction, and their motivation levels in order to acquire more knowledge from online learning. [2]

Motivation is an internal force that pushes a person to take an action or move toward a goal. [11] Cole, Feild, and Harris defined student motivation as the power, creativity, and readiness of students to learn and participate in classroom learning. [4] Kanuka and Jugdev suggested that remoteness and disconnectedness in the online environment may increase the student dropout rate, as well as the feeling of remoteness that may reduce the motivation to learn [18]. Bolliger, Supanakorn, and Boggs stated that motivation is an important factor to keep students satisfied in an online classroom setup. [3]

As COVID 19 pandemic affected all aspects of the society, it greatly affected all educational systems wherein the traditional classroom set-up was altered instantly. This situation has pushed every educational institute towards online learning, although nobody was ready for this transition. Teachers and students recognized the shift towards online learning as forceful, but important for continuing the learning process. It challenged schools and universities to reset their traditional education activities. Both teaching and learning went online because of the mobility restrictions. Other studies showed that although online learning is not new, exclusive online education is something different and proved to affect both the education and personal life of teachers and students [10, 9]. The transition toward online learning has been a difficult one for students all across the world, and this struggle has manifested itself in many different ways. Student motivation is an important element of a successful learning outcome in both offline and more online education. The online environment keeps people away from the campus and peer learners, which makes motivation a more important determinant of students' learning outcome and satisfaction. The motivation level of students' learning was affected by the sudden implementation of online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For many, the new format for their classes has left them with a lack of motivation that may affect their academic performance throughout the term. This effect can have many roots, with some describing a lack of structure with online learning in comparison to their traditional classroom.

All educational institutions were closed for face to face classes to prevent the transmission of the virus. And due to the continuous rise of positive COVID-19 cases, the government, through the Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova, implemented various policies to advocate the use of alternative modalities in delivering lesson content basic education to higher education institutions. COVID-19 forced the teachers and academic institutions to revolutionize and prepare their classrooms set-up to support distance learning or known as ***"New Normal Teaching."***

Distance learning has definitely affected students' ability to have a set routine every day, some students enjoy this freedom while for others not having a routine can lead to procrastination and not getting work done. While trying to learn at home, students find it can also be hard to gain motivation. With this new way of learning students are mostly just home every day from the minute they wake up and start school to when the school day ends. Some do not even go out a lot or at all because they are taking care of themselves and do not want to put themselves or others at risk. Going to school in person gave the students an everyday settled routine and they had the opportunity to talk to their friends in person and go out after school. The lack of motivation that many students experience holds them back from achieving and experiencing new things. Many have the potential to do better and succeed but do not have the motivation to do it.

It is agreed that several factors which are determinants for online learning have an important potential to diminish the students' motivation to learn [5].

Some scholars believe that several factors which are determinants for online learning have an important potential to diminish the students' motivation to learn [5,16]. The absence of the teacher-student relationship in a face-to-face format makes online interaction unable to provide for teachers the same opportunities to observe and analyse the students' reactions during the classes, in order to easily evaluate their level of attention and motivation. In addition, a close teacher-student relationship can be vital in motivating students to learn, but - as listed in many circumstances - online communication can often be impersonal, superficial, and disorganized. However, the online learning environment can provide a relative level of anonymity - students can virtually participate in online

activities, but their attention is possible to be focused on other issues. Finally, the difficulties related to comprehension may be higher during online lessons. The more difficult the lesson topic is, the less motivated the student will be to learn because the student will feel discouraged. All the radical changes recorded in world educational systems happened in a short period and have put teachers and students in the situation to rely solely on educative online platforms. During this distance learning period students feel the learning isn't as interactive and find it difficult to do the assignments by themselves. It is harder to learn at home because there are not enough available resources to help students understand the lessons and assignments. For hands-on learners it is harder to perceive what they are learning without in-person interaction with their teachers and lessons. Most classes during this distance learning time are work at your own pace, which does not allow students to have a set routine. Also, not every class is the same every day, with some classes requiring a google meet one day and then an assignment the next day. As Hornbaek and Hertzum pointed out the adoption and use of information technology is a central concern in *human-computer interaction* HCI. [15] The acceptance of the technology is driven by various factors, among which the most important is the perceived ease of use and the user's motivation to adopt and use a given technology [8]. In the context of the *technology acceptance model* (TAM), ***extrinsic motivation*** has been conceptualized as perceived usefulness and ***intrinsic motivation*** has been conceptualized as perceived enjoyment. [7] A motivational model explains technology acceptance with two key factors: *extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation*. While the former is instrumental, being goal-oriented, the latter is hedonic, being related to pleasure and inherent satisfaction created by a specific activity. [13, 14]

The concept of ***intrinsic motivation*** originated with William James, who used the terms "interest and instincts of constructiveness" to explain different types of human behavior. [17] "Interest" and "instincts of constructiveness" reflect the concepts of self-determination and competence, which today define intrinsic motivation. [20]

Deci and Ryan propose that controlling strategies cause a student to feel less independent or autonomous which produces an extrinsic motivational orientation and conclude that an approach that promotes autonomy and student independence induces a more intrinsic orientation. [8] In this

sense, perceived personal control, on the part of the participant, is an important factor that influences ***intrinsic motivation.*** [6] Ryan and Deci state that "Intrinsic motivation is defined as the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions rather than for some separable consequence''. [19] It is associated with internal factors like interest, fun or challenge an individual develops in doing activities, for the joy or satisfaction integrated in the activities. Furthermore, they also defined extrinsic motivation as "a construct that pertains whenever an activity done in order to attain some separable outcome". [19] It is related to external factors in doing activities such as reward or recognition from others. [12]

Helping students to stay motivated while learning remotely and without face-to-face support from the teacher or their peers can be challenging. On the other hand, teaching remotely is an ideal opportunity for teachers to try new ways of teaching, learn from their peers and colleagues and enable their students to become independent learners. There is no such thing which guarantee engagement in higher education, especially online. There will always be students who struggle, and some who drop out. But by adding elements that make online learning more appealing, you can improve the learning experience and demonstrate students that their success matters.

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