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CHAPTER 14

STUDENTS’ OPINIONS ON THE ONLINE TEACHING OF THE MUSIC SUBJECTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AT THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION – SKOPJE

Abstract: The COVID-19 initiated the replacement of classical with online teaching education in the RN Macedonia. The educational system faced challenges and uncertainties in organizing and implementing online teaching since Macedonia does not have a developed information infrastructure, especially in rural areas. This research was initiated to detect the problems and improve online teaching at the Faculty of Pedagogy “St. Kliment Ohridski” UKIM in Skopje. The case study examined the Turkish student’s (N14) attitudes about studying the group of music subjects (The fundamentals of music art education with musical instruments, Music art education with didactics, and Creative music workshop). In this case study, data was collected through semi-structured interview questions and was processed through content analysis. Results show the benefits of online teaching in terms of cost reduction for transport and living expenses (100%), ability to re-watch recorded lectures, presentations, and video materials (71%). The disadvantages are in sufficient socialization, interaction, and communication (78%), opportunity to do an internship (100%). The respondents had problems in playing pitches (42%) and rhythm (36%) correctly when playing. As a result, teachers and students should

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undergo training on innovative technology for developed music software and special programs for virtual internship in school classes.

Keywords: *COVID-19, online teaching, music, Student conditions for online classes, Effect of online music lessons, Student attitudes.*

INTRODUCTION

The pandemic brought about by the corona virus has changed the discourse of living and working in all segments of social life in in large numbers of countries in the world, including RN Macedonia. One of the areas on which the effects of the pandemic were most felt was education. In addition to all the basic regulations such as social distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19, all experts and administrators agreed that distance learning is the best practice to achieve that in education. Taking into account a current situation with the pandemic, Government of the Republic of North Macedonia (Zapisnik od 48-ta sednica na Vladata na Republika Severna Makedonija 2020) decided that the entire educational system in primary, secondary and higher education should be transferred to online education. Thus on 24.3.2020 a national platform for supporting online learning in primary and secondary schools (www.eduino.gov.mk), prepared by the Ministry of Science and Education, Bureau for Development of Education, and Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (teachers and educators) with the support of UNICEF was promoted (Nacionalna-platforma-za-poddrshk a-na-uchenje-od-doma).

The universities allowed, depending on the activity of the faculty, the units to autonomously decide on which platform they will conduct the lectures. So that on some of the units they worked with Microsoft Teams, some with Zoom, some with Google Classroom in order to have two-way electronic communications, that is, to develop discussions between professors and students). Distance education is quite different from standard education in terms of the physical presence of the student or teacher (Zawacki-Richter & Anderson 2014), and must find a delicate balance between technological proficiency, and subject-matter expertise. In that direction, many of the professors have pre-recorded the lectures so that there is more time for those online discussions between professors and students (<https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/30586225.html>). In this respect, both teachers and students were faced with very new and unexpected educational situations and systems (Bozkurt & Sharma 2020; Yamamoto & Altun 2020; UNESCO 2020).

“Due to the enormous and complex responsibility, the teacher’s education is of the utmost importance in the development of knowledge and skills in a systematic way. Hence, the aim of the study programs in educational faculties is to develop competences and skills of future teachers for each subject area separately. The mu-

sical abilities of the future teachers represent the basic prerequisite for absolving the knowledge and skills in music courses with all the provided curriculum topics and contents. In order to achieve great educational benefit with optimization of music education” (Islam, Leshkova 2019: 5).

In this paper, we refer to the online teaching of a group of subjects in music education at the Faculty of Pedagogy at UKIM Skopje, which are studied both theoretically and practically. The area of music education covers three subjects - Basics of music education with musical instruments, Music education with methodology and Creative music workshop. The process of studying the musical matter, especially playing the musical instruments, is still mostly dependent on the classical teaching no matter to what degree are these e-methods developed and to what extent implemented in education. Considering specificity and uniqueness of the study of musical art, in addition to theoretical, they also require a practical approach (Islam, Leshkova 2011: 1365). General goal of the subjects for future teachers and educators is acquiring musical literacy: reading, writing, reproducing, intoning musical text, mastering detailed analysis of musical text. During the pandemic, teaching was carried out through the Zoom platform and recorded video materials of the teacher for practical part of the teaching.

In such circumstances, this research was conducted to examine the advantages and disadvantages of students’ attitudes toward online teaching of music subjects. The population of the research were the students of the Turkish language teaching, for which one of the authors is a professor in the subjects of this field. It is very important to emphasize that the major drawback of this research is the small sample, but that due to the small number of students in the Turkish language course.

METHODOLOGY

The thesis of this research is that online teaching meets the needs for learning the teaching content in the group of music subjects. The goal is to find out how suitable is online teaching the music subjects. Hence, the main task was to examine students’ opinions on opportunities and obstacles of the online teaching of music education. For this purpose, we used a questionnaire with 16 open-ended questions that referred to: a) students’ technological and spatial conditions, b) the effects of online teaching on the educational process c) the effects of online teaching on the music education process, and d) the opinions of students towards online learning of music education. The case study was conducted online during the winter semester of 2022, and the population included all students (N14) from the group of Turkish language of instruction who had completed the online teaching in the previous two years. Respondents’ responses were processed using a content analysis method.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

First three questions concerned the status of educational technology tools and spatial conditions in online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1: Students’ technological and spatial conditions

	N	%
1. Did you have a problem connecting to the Internet during the lesson?		
Yes	9	64
No	5	36
2. Which of the following items do you personally own and utilize in your musical education? (you can choose multiple answers)		
Personal Computer or laptop	9	64
Tablet	4	28
Smart Phone	1	8
3. Problems with the spatial conditions for monitoring teaching		
Yes	4	28
No	10	72

Regarding the problems with Internet access, 64% of the respondents answered positively mainly due to the fact that several members of the family were using it at the same time. As a tool for monitoring teaching, 64% of students used a laptop or personal computer, four a tablet, while only one (8%) used a phone. The results show that a large part of respondents (72%) had no problems with spatial conditions.

The following questions relate to the effects of online teaching caused by COVID-19 in the educational process.

Table 2: Effects of online teaching

	N	%
4. Advantages of online teaching		
Savings in transportation time, lower costs, comfort, greater concentration, greater opportunity for regular attendance	14	100
Possibility to re-watch recorded lectures, presentations and video materials	10	71
Simultaneous use of different Internet sources	8	57
5. Disadvantages of online teaching		
Insufficient socialization and interaction through discussion and communication	11	78
Lack of practical work	14	100
Technical problems arising during teaching	9	64

6. Subjects in online education that caused the biggest difficulties		
Subjects that have a practical part (mathematics, art, music)	10	71
No difference between subjects	4	29

As can be seen in the table, all respondents see the advantages of online teaching in: savings in transportation time, reduced material costs, comfort, less fatigue, possibility of regular attendance (100%), possibility to re-follow the recorded lectures, presentations and video materials (71%) and simultaneous use of various Internet sources (57%). The disadvantages are insufficient socialization, interaction and communication (78%), opportunity to do an internship (100%) and technical problems arising during teaching (64 %) due to the fact that live in rural areas with a weak Internet connection. The respondents answered that the subjects that have a practical part such as mathematics, music and art presented a problem for them (71%) in following the teaching.

Hereinafter, we focus specifically on the group of subjects in music education that students listen to in the V, VI and VIII semesters.

Table 3: Effects of online teaching on the Music education

	N	%
7. Problems in learning the subject Fundamentals of music education with music instruments		
Counting the more complex rhythm patterns	5	36
Memorizing the notes on a keyboard	6	42
I didn't have any problems	3	22
8. Problems you faced in learning the subject Music education with didactics		
Intonation of the recorder (block-flute)	5	36
Performance of more complex songs on the piano	2	14
I didn't have any problems	7	50
9. Problems you faced in the subject teaching Creative Music Workshop		
I didn't have any problems	14	100
10. Do the listed problems arise from online teaching?		
Yes	5	36
No	9	64
11. Were the video materials of great importance to you for studying the practical part?		
Yes, exceptionally important.	14	100
12. Did you use other Internet sources related to teaching topics?		
Yes	12	86
Sometimes	2	14

The respondents had problems in memorizing/playing the keyboards (42%), rhythm-timing (36%), and intonation on recorder (36%). One of the solutions to overcome this type of problem can be educational software, apps and music platforms, online tools that contribute to facilitating and personalizing learning, practicing new skills, and checking the knowledge.

Table 4. Opinions of students towards online learning

	N	%
13. Is online teaching more adequate than standard teaching?		
Yes	5	36
No	9	64
14. Can sufficient interaction between students and professors be established in online teaching?		
Yes	11	79
No	3	21
15. Do you accept online teaching in general?		
Yes	3	21
Yes, but if all the necessary conditions are met	2	14
Yes, but as a combination with standard teaching	6	44
No	3	21
16 Do you think that the professors were sufficiently prepared for online teaching?		
In the course of time-yes	9	65
Some of them-yes, some of them-no	2	14
No	3	21

Table No. 4 shows the attitude of the respondents that online teaching is not more adequate than classical teaching (64%), although sufficient interaction with professors can be established (79%). The attitude of students is that online teaching is generally acceptable (79%) provided that all the necessary conditions are met and in combination with standard teaching. At the same time, students believed that most of the professors in the course of time mastered the challenges of online teaching (65%).

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Results of the research show an optimal degree of acceptance of online teaching during the time of COVID-19. Respondents showed flexibility and appropriate levels of abilities, behaviors and activities for distance learning. Most of the students declared that they have computer skills and that they mostly have access to internet

services with an adequate internet connection, with occasional problems especially in rural areas. Most of the respondents used laptops and their own computers, and only one used smart-phone.

Online learning is cheaper in terms of transportation charges and it saves time. With the increase in free time, the time for practical part of teaching as well as for broader research related to the assigned teaching topics also increases.

Respondents are aware that one of the biggest advantages is that it provides the student with acquired knowledge that can be accepted anywhere in the world. Here lies the essence of the advantages with easy access to all materials and lectures with detailed explanations, and they remain recorded in electronic form or videos for the student to constantly follow them.

According to the respondents, negative sight lies in the absence of socialization, interaction and communication with the colleagues. Also, online teaching assumes a series of technological problems, including the availability of technical specifications such as cameras, microphones or speakers with special characteristics in order to avoid some distortions. At the same time, a major handicap is the mandatory internship and practice in schools due to the impossibility of gaining experience in direct interaction with students. This problem can be overcome through software which have the potential to create a sense of presence, making students feel as though they are physically present in the virtual environment.

Regarding the study of the group of subjects from music education, the students mainly had a problem in practical musical activities of the subjects, as well as in occasional technical problems that occurred during the course of teaching, especially in rural settlements. Some of them point out that there are difficulties in applying practical activities of music teaching such as timing the note values, finding the notes on the keyboard and singing accompanied by playing the keyboard. Students find that learning to play an instrument through online videos produces good results. In that sense, the recorded video materials on which the professor clearly shows and explains the contents and activities have a major role.

In addition to above positive and negative aspects of this type of education, more than half of the respondents declared that with the improvement of infrastructure and the resolving of occasional technical problems, online teaching is suitable for studying music education subjects and other study program subjects. According to them, online learning, if necessary, can be an optimal substitute for standard teaching with compulsory digitalization of all teaching materials. They are unique in the view that teachers and students should undergo training on innovative technology for developed music software and special programs for virtual internship in school classes. It could enable students to gain experience in a simulated classroom environment and practice teaching strategies which will help them to develop problem-solving skills by encountering various classroom scenarios.

Therefore, educational institutions should consider using virtual reality technology as an innovative tool to provide an effective internship experience for students.

Such research can facilitate educational institutions and policy makers to bring online teaching to a higher level since e-learning is increasingly becoming a modern way to improve the education process and to improve learning performance.

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