Reluctance shown by university students to go back to face to face classes post Covid-19: different ways of motivation

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Abstract

Since its spread around the world, COVID-19 has been the most disruptive global health disaster known in history in terms of its impact on education. Education stopped almost in most countries of the world as a result of the measures taken to prevent the spread of the disease. About 1.9 billion students around the world have been affected by these measures, including nearly 8.2 million university students in Turkey. Among the measures taken was moving to online education instead of face-to-face, which greatly contributed to limiting the repercussions of the crisis on students. Despite certain drawbacks compared to face-to-face education online education has been well received by both teachers and students. However, the continuation of the crisis for a relatively long period increased certain shortcomings such as students getting used to rest and obtaining high grades with less effort, as well as the negative impact on the practical skills of students, especially students at schools of sciences. The study has shed light on the most important negative effects which curb students' motivation to return to face-to-face education post-COVID-19. Also, some suggestions were presented that may contribute to addressing these negative effects and increasing students' motivation to return to face-to-face education.

Keywords: COVID-19, E-learning, motivation, university, face-to-face.

Introduction

The emergence of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in late 2019 caused significant changes in all walks of life including economic, educational, social, and religious sectors. COVID-19 has led to the massive closure of face-to-face educational activities in most parts of the world, including Turkey. Consequently, there was a shift to online education as a result of the rapid spread of COVID-19 pandemic and the increase in the number of infections and deaths. Online learning continued via the Internet until the preparation of this study (approximately a year and a half). Students have got accustomed to a certain style of education that has some good sides and bad sides. Online education has contributed to solving the problem resulting from COVID-19, but in return, this type of education has also some negative factors that may have repercussions on post -COVID-19 period. The point to make here is that we have always been in the university so why we cannot go back to where we have always been! Why we cannot go quickly to things as they were! We need to pause and acknowledge that the pandemic is a big deal. The way business is being done has changed and certainly, we have changed so just to return to things as they were, is not honest and it does not do justice to everything that we have been through. There is the level of COVID-19 whether you got COVID-19 or someone you love got COVID-19 or whether you lost someone to COVID-19. There is also a whole umbrella of things that fall under the pandemic that affect us from our personal finances to anxiety, to figuring out how to work from home if you got a house full of people or conversely if you live alone to deal with that loneliness when you are counting on your workplace for camaraderie. Many things go into that. To pretend that nothing has happened does not do us good at all. We need to pause and acknowledge that the pandemic is a big deal. How can we do that? How to pause and acknowledge! First of all, we need to be kind to ourselves. We have experienced COVID-19 collectively but it is still a personal thing whether someone got COVID-19 or people they love got COVID-19 or lost their job or housing all of that place a role in the self you bring to the workplace. It is helpful to be patient with students. We might not understand that people still do not want to shake hand even though they are vaccinated and they still want to distance. We need to recognize, appreciate and accept that as it is not wrong and it is just a different point of view. It is difficult for us to know how this has been for everybody. It is recommended to apply a space for grace attitude to transition back into the workplace (Deans, Oakley, James, & Wrigley, 2006). When people are aware of their thoughts, they are no longer their thoughts but they are the observer of their thoughts. That makes all the difference! Our thoughts drive our emotions and our emotions drive our choices if we are not aware of our thoughts we are not aware of what is making us do what we do or choose what we choose. To successfully get back to the normal routine and improve quality of life across the board, we need to manage stress, reduce anxiety, and cultivate a keen sense of self-awareness. We need to tune into our thoughts to hear them. Dropping in on your thoughts is a must to get our act together (Purdon & Clark, 2002).

In 2005, the National Science Foundation published an article summarizing research on human thoughts per day. It was found that the average person has about 12,000 to 60,000 thoughts per day. Of those thousands of thoughts, 80% were negative, and 95% were

exactly the same repetitive thoughts as the day before (Antanaityte, 2016).

We can see that one of the tendencies of the mind is to focus on the negative and play the same songs over and over again. There was another interesting study in which scientists found out that 85 percent of subjects we are worried about never happened. With the 15 percent that did happen, 79 percent of subjects people discovered either they could handle the difficulty better than expected, or the difficulty taught them a lesson worth learning. This means that 97 percent of what we worry over is not much more than a fearful mind full of exaggerations and misperceptions (Goewey, 2017). These baseless worries are a major source of stress, tension, and exhaustion not only for the mind but also for the physical body. We have heard many times that our inner state of mind is the main influencing factor on why we do what we do, how we live our life, and what we achieve. In short, the quality of the state of our mind has an impact on the quality of our lives. We should manage our minds to deal with uncontrollable stream of thoughts. We shouldn't cling onto negativity and should prevent it from depleting our physical energy (Goldsmith, 2010). In order to have positive thoughts we need to experience beauty in the present moment, focus on the task we have at hand, kindle creativity, feel gratitude, foster real connection, and notice things we love. It is the duty of educators to instil all of the aforementioned into the minds and souls of our students.

This study aims to study the impact of COVID-19 on university education in Turkey in terms of its impact on face-to-face education, social life inside the university, students' physical activities, counter-motivation, and the intrusion of electronic activities as well as its impact on students' lifestyle. This study also aims to research how to avoid the negative effects of COVID-19, as well as how to motivate students and push the practical and educational life to its previous era.

The Negative Effects of COVID-19

As a result of the long period during which the students stayed home and the continuation of online education during this period, it negatively affected the students at the university level. Among the most important of these negative repercussions is the decrease in students' motivation towards face-to-face education and their tendency towards continuing education online. One of the reasons that we believe may have led to a decrease in students' motivation is the decrease in the student's academic effort to obtain the required grades, and often the grades that the student obtains are greater than the grades he or she used to secure at the time of face-to-face education. One of the reasons is also getting used to sitting, resting at home and avoiding to be exposed to the problems and difficulties faced by commuting to the university. Moreover, some students have managed to get jobs with a monthly salary during the crisis. Earning their own bread and butter may have reduced their motivation to resume face-to-face education and return to university. Especially if we know the difficulty of obtaining another job after graduating from university due to the current economic crisis. Among the reasons is that some foreign students travelled to their countries of origin and continued their education online while enjoying being with family and friends. In the coming section, we will explain in detail the negative effects of COVID-19 on university education and its repercussions on students.

Face-to-Face Study

The impact of COVID-19 on face-to-face education is the greatest compared to other fields. COVID-19 has caused a complete halt to face-to-face education in universities in Turkey and elsewhere in the world. Since the appearance of the first cases of COVID-19 infection in Turkey on March 11, 2020 (Zorlu, 2020), the Education Council announced the cessation of education in both schools and universities on March 16, 2020 (Sabah, 2020), and since that date, there has been no normal face-to-face education for universities, except in limited cases for practical exams in schools of sciences. We shouldn't go without saying that a reasonable percentage of students and teachers feel satisfied with online education, as this was shown in a previous study for us at the beginning of the crisis (Elhadary, Elhaty, Mohamed, & Alawna, 2020). However, the continuation of the crisis for a long period may have a greater impact than expected on the students. Face-to-face education is of great importance because its absence affects all other factors that will be discussed below. In the absence of face-to-face education, students lose a large percentage of participation and interaction during lectures, and students may also lose role models due to the lack of direct contact with teachers, whether during the lecture, during practical lessons, or research participation. The interruption of face-to-face education also affects social life on campus, interaction and competition among students. One of the major negatives of the suspension of face-to-face education due to the crisis is the loss of practical skills by students at schools of sciences and training programs at schools of social sciences. The suspension of practical lessons will affect students' future careers if this matter is not addressed before the students graduate from the university. The students got accustomed to sitting at home during the crisis due to the interruption of face-to-face education and that led to laziness, procrastination and a decrease in their motivation especially since the lectures are available on university websites and can be viewed at any time. By following up on the students' visits to the university website to watch their lectures, we have noticed that a large number of students postpone watching the lectures until before the exams, and this phenomenon, unfortunately, has increased with the continued suspension of face-to-face education. The same result was reached by Chaturvedi and his colleagues, where the study showed that the time that students spend in online lessons does not correspond to the time specified by education experts (Chaturvedi, Vishwakarma, & Singh, 2021).

Social Life

Most countries have taken various measures to limit the spread of the virus and keeping people's health by observing quarantine measures, maintaining social distancing, and wearing a mask. These procedures and others have led to the isolation of people at their homes. The crisis has led to students not coming to university and sitting at home for a long period, and these measures may have long-term repercussions on the lives of students (Cohen, Hoyt, & Dull, 2020). The crisis negatively affected the students' social life, including the social relations within the university between students and their peers and between students and their teachers. One of the most important advantages of face-to-face education is boosting social skills, stimulating peer-to-peer interaction to work hard and learn more effectively, which may not be possible in an online learning environment (Chaturvedi et al., 2021). Humans are generally considered social creatures who tend to form social relationships with others (Leal Filho et al., 2021). These social relationships are essential to mental and physical health, and the more social relationships, the healthier the person is (Umberson & Karas Montez, 2010). Therefore, social isolation may lead to negative repercussions on students' mental and physical health. Because of shifting to online learning and not attending university campus, it is expected that social relations between new students, especially first-year students, will be non-existent or limited. Whereas the impact of this interruption on senior students may be less because they have already formed social relations with each other and with the university community before the onset of the crisis. Despite the aforementioned, this crisis has a positive impact on students' social life, such as increasing family interconnection as a result of family members' presence with each other for a long time that was not possible before the crisis. In addition to family relationships, students have learnt to appreciate the concept of life and death, the rearrangement of priorities in life, the practicing of environmental hygiene, feeling the unity of societal destiny, and solidarity with community members (Alghamdi, 2021). On the other hand, some students complained about the impact of the family's presence at home all the time, which negatively affected their academic performance due to the lack of a suitable environment for study with such a large number of family members inside the house, and their loss of services provided by the university.

Physical Activities

The World Health Organization and health authorities in most countries recommend physical activity because the movement has a positive impact on physical and mental health. Studies show that undergraduate students do less physical activity compared to the time before COVID-19 (Kwan, Cairney, Faulkner, & Pullenayegum, 2012). It is expected that the proportion of undergraduate students who did not engage in physical activities before the crisis could reach 41% (López-Valenciano, Suárez-Iglesias, Sanchez-Lastra, & Ayán, 2021). We believe that this percentage has increased a lot during the COVID-19 crisis due to the measures taken by countries to limit the spread of the disease, including maintaining social distance and not gathering. That has been the case in Turkey, which has resulted in the closure of health clubs, swimming pools, and sports clubs, in addition to closing universities and their recreation centers where students used to practice physical activities. Among the measures that are believed to have also limited the practice of physical activities is the curfew at night and on weekends. Most of the published studies confirm a decrease in the practice of physical activities among undergraduate students during the crisis compared to the status before. One study shows a decrease to 68% in physical activities among students by measuring the number of steps per day during the crisis (Sañudo, Fennell, & Sánchez-Oliver, 2020). Another study shows a significant decrease in walking, reaching a decrease of 365.5 minutes per week (Gallè et al., 2020). Sometimes sitting at home for a long time encourages some people to exercise using home devices, as a study showed that this practice increased to a maximum of 52.4 minutes per day (Gallè et al., 2020). In general, COVID-19 has a negative impact on the physical activity of university students, which is a reflection of the measures that have been implemented for the sake of protecting the lives of people, but unfortunately, the problems that may arise from these measures have not been paid attention to.

Overuse of Electronic Activities

After applying online education as an alternative to face-to-face education, the internet has been used for purpose of delivering lectures and communicating between students and their teachers. For the sake of completion, some of the online classes were recorded and some were live. The evaluation system has been applied completely online including exams, assignments, and activities. The application of this system was run with some errors due to the lack of sufficient experience on the part of some teachers and students, as well as the non-availability of electronic devices for some students. The reason may be due to the financial status of the student's family, and also the situation some teachers and students have found themselves in because of the lack of space inside the house and the presence of more than one person in the family. Besides, more than one family member could have a lecture at the same time, as well as the lack of internet at an appropriate speed (Elhadary et al., 2020). One study showed that 12% of Turkish students do not have electronic devices to attend online lectures and resort to borrowing these devices (Sarac, 2021). In order to overcome the lack of experience of some teachers and students, the Turkish Council of Higher Education in Turkey has conducted programs called "Digital Transformation Project at Universities" to train teachers and students to overcome electronic obstacles during the crisis (Sarac, 2021). As a result of the complete transition from face-to-face system to online, the student is forced to sit in front of the screen all the time to attend lectures and other educational activities. Studies have proven that some students cannot focus on the screen for a long time, and some students resort to browsing other websites during lectures. The complete reliance on e-learning reduces the chance of interaction between students and their teachers, which may lead to some students feeling isolated. Social isolation has reduced social skills to a minimum, as a matter of fact. The pervasiveness of electronic activities due to the crisis has led to the replacement of practical lessons with other online lessons in which the student does not have the opportunity to obtain practical skills that are acquired through practice and not by just watching online lessons (Ismail, Tariq, Rehab El, & Hilal, 2020). Some students feel that e-learning has encroached on their private lives, as one study showed that some students do not operate the camera during lectures for reasons related to feeling ashamed, anxious, or unwilling to present themselves, as well as their desire not to reveal their rooms in front of the professor and students (Gherheș, Șimon, & Para, 2021). Another study also showed that students do not turn on the camera for reasons related to lack of attention and participation during the lecture. They use the time of the lecture to

browse the internet, and they are not willing to abide by public morals such as wearing an appropriate dress during the lecture (Gherheș, Stoian, Fărcașiu, & Stanici, 2021).

Continuing A life of Mediocrity and Laziness

One of the most important negatives of the crisis is the students being cut off from the university and sitting at home for a long time, which may lead to getting used to laziness and unwillingness to return to face-to-face education. That would be immediately clear when we know that as commuters, students suffer from difficulties in public transportation due to traffic crowd which results in taking longer time to reach the university and vice versa, especially in Istanbul. Additionally, before the crisis, most students used to live in dormitories close to the university and had to return home during the crisis. Returning home has some benefits such as getting rid of the burden of household chores and accommodation costs, and therefore this may affect students' desire to resume face-to-face education. This also applies to foreign students who returned to their countries during the crisis and enjoyed living among their families. Paradoxically, students studying from home and obtaining great grades despite the less effort that has been made may encourage some students to wish for the continuation of the crisis and consequently, the continuation of online education. A study conducted in Turkey showed that 46% of students prefer to return to face-to-face education after the crisis ends, while 29% of the study participants prefer to continue online, and 25% of students prefer to use hybrid education, which combines online and face-to-face education (Sarac, 2021).

How to Avoid The Negative Effects of COVID-19 and Push Getting Back to School Further

Several studies showed the negative effects on students resulting from the continuation of online education during the crisis, which in turn affected the students' motivation to return to face-to-face education. Therefore, educational concerned parties must develop plans to enhance students' motivation. More confirmingly, collective collaboration among all parties including family, society, media, and students themselves should be emphasized. The following are some recommendations on how to avoid the negative effects of the crisis and promote students' motivation:

Universities can start hybrid education for a specific period, as we believe that it may help in encouraging some students who prefer to continue with online education. As such, the lack of motivation for face-to-face education can be dealt with gradually with hopes of enhancing students' motivation to get back to face-to-face education.

Students should play a role in overcoming the negative effects of the COVID crisis by setting a daily time management plan that allocates time for physical, social, and study activities. Students should bear in mind that restoring psychological and mental health helps get rid of stress and anxiety. The student must work hard to change the habits that he acquired during the crisis, such as oversleep, laziness, and procrastination. Working to improve social skills involvement, listening, thinking, and research skills through self-sufficiency skills or participating in lectures and courses held by the university.

Universities officials should help attract students to the university environment, increase their motivation, and compensate for the shortcomings that occurred during the crisis in all aspects. For example, sports, social, cultural, and artistic events can be held to increase student acceptance of face-to-face education and increase social relationships among students and between students and the university community.

Since some students, especially senior students who have obtained jobs and are afraid that they will not get another job after graduation, the university can help these students move to evening classes, and in this way, university provides them with continuing education and keeping their jobs at the same time.

The university and the competent authorities in the country should provide psychological support to students who have suffered from anxiety, stress, and frustration during the crisis. The teachers' responsibility is also great in raising students' motivation and providing the appropriate educational environment through the use of different educational means, as well as working to maximize students' participation during the lecture and using the incentive system to encourage students to participate. They can also allocate assignments and reports to be performed in groups to increase social relationships among students and motivate low-level students. Various scientific and other meetings can also be organized within the academic departments to increase the social interdependence between students, teachers, and the administrative staff.

To compensate for the lack of practical skills, workshops can be held in which students are given participation certificates to motivate them to take part. Simple research projects for students supervised by professors can also be introduced to provide students with practical and research skills. These projects can be held during the summer vacation or during work hours. Incentive allowances and certificates of participation should be offered to intensify students' motivation and zeal for the work.

Conclusion

The emergence of COVID-19 at the end of 2019 in China and then its rapid spread to all countries of the world caused major changes in the lifestyle of people all over the world. The change in daily routine included education, as universities were closed and education was transitioned from face-to-face to online learning. Although the online system has greatly contributed to alleviating the problem of closing universities, it has some negative consequences on the university community, especially students. Students got more accustomed to online teaching due to the ease of securing success and obtaining higher marks with less exerted effort. That situation has diminished their motivation to return to face-to-face education. Therefore, it is necessary to plan for post-COVID-19 phase and students should be motivated to return to face-to-face education by implementing measures that include students themselves, professors and the university administration. A plan should also be developed to compensate for the lack of practical skills that students experienced during the crisis.

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