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Abstract. The Covid-19 pandemic has influenced education at all levels and in different ways. Educators and institutions had to instantly respond to an unforeseen and unwilling transition from face-to-face to remote teaching. The pandemic generated a new term called the new normal, which is one of the most used during this period of time. The new normal in education is the new concept which requires an intensive use of online learning resources. A great number of educational institutions have been looking for online learning platforms or created them in order to be able to support and advance in the process of education. They also had to create learning environments for students, teachers doing their preparation in accordance with the requirements of teacher education programmes and the conditions in which both universities and schools had to operate. As it happens with almost all the new teaching techniques, online learning has its own set of advantages and disadvantages as well. Deciphering and understanding all these aspects will help educational institutions to create strategies for a more accurate delivery of lessons, and guarantee a continuous learning process for students.

Key words: *pandemic, new normal, online teaching, online learning tools.*

The literature associated to online teaching and learning in the context of teacher education has been developed a lot starting with the year 2000 up to the present moment. Why 2000? Because it was then when the World Wide Web (WWW) started to develop and the Internet invaded many homes and as consequence the online learning began spreading. Another factor was the Bologna Process (1999) which emerged virtual learning initiatives within the European higher education institutions. Online teaching and learning practices were identified and the discoveries drew attention to the need for an exhaustive view of the pedagogy of online education that integrates technology to support teaching and learning.

The new normal in education is the increased use of online learning tools. The Covid-19 pandemic has generated lots of new ways of learning. Therefore, all around the world educational institutions are assiduously looking toward online learning platforms to continue with the process of educating students. This new approach to education has been adopted by a great majority of educational institutions and digital learning is seen as a necessary resource for students and schools all over the world. The online learning has developed as a matter of course and it is applicable not only to learn academics but also to learning extracurricular activities for students as well.

Like most teaching methods, online learning has its own positives and negatives facets as well. Deciphering and acknowledging these positives and negatives will help educational institutions in creating strategies for more accurate lessons, ensuring a constant learning journey for students. Online learning has proved to be a great alternative to the traditional one. Students are not constrained by place, so they can access resources wherever they are having the freedom to choose the time for study, on condition they have an internet connection. Therefore, the students are offered the accessibility of time and place in education which leads to another advantage, an improved student attendance of classes. This type of learning offers teachers an efficient and varied way to deliver

lessons to students by using PDFs, videos, podcasts, turning them into more efficient educators. Affordability is another advantage of online education, because of the reduced financial costs (no transportation, meals, or real estate) and additionally the study materials are online, in this way creating a more affordable learning environment. Another advantage worth mentioning is that online education implies a variety of learning methods which can be personalized and suited to the needs of each and every student.

Besides the advantages, we should take into consideration the disadvantages as well. The most important is the lack of human interaction. A person can develop properly in a group of people, making friends and learning to be patient, getting rid of disappointment, and last but not least, competing. Competition has proved to be stimulating and students will only benefit from it. Online courses cannot deal with thousands of students who try to join discussions. One of the biggest challenges is that online learning is much more difficult when practical activities are involved. Other disadvantages could be:

• Inability to concentrate on screens (there is a permanent struggle to focus on screens for long periods of time, therefore teachers should engage their students in interactive classes to help them focus on the lesson);

• Manage screen time (it is connected to the previous disadvantage); to solve this problem, one can give students more breathing spaces from the screen in order to reinvigorate their mind and body);

• Sense of isolation (in online classes there are minimal or no physical interactions between teachers and students which lead to isolation; that is why it is imperious that the two parties communicate via other forms of communication, such as, messages, emails, video conferencing, whatsapp with face-to-face interaction to reduce isolation);

• Technology issues (internet connectivity with a decent speed; lack of internet leads to lack of continuity in learning which is detrimental to the educational process);

• Teacher training (teachers should have basic knowledge and more in using digital forms of learning, this does not apply to all the teachers, that is why it is very important for schools and universities to invest as much as they can afford in training teachers with the latest technology updates).

In order to create successful online education, and engaging in the same time, the teacher/instructor should take into consideration some tips, which are very useful. First of all, there should be a group effort in a faculty/university, meaning that faculty members need training in designing an online course. Secondly, you should focus on active learning; that means you do not have to rely on long lectures like in a traditional class meeting, on the contrary, the online course should mix chunks of discussions, short video and audio clips, or even brief video lectures, and create an active learning classroom online. This is a good tool for face-to-face classrooms as well, and little by little, teachers become familiar with this type of active learning and boost their way of teaching, either online or face-to-face. Another important aspect is that the teacher/instructor be there all the time, be present both physically and mentally, no matter the teaching and learning processes take place. The teacher presence is compulsory to students' success in a virtual class, but in the same time is quite effort consuming for the instructor/teacher if you try to respond to all questions students post online. You have to choose what to respond to and manage your time as reasonably as you can and not be available all the time and turn your class into a one-and-one interaction.

This new challenge brings about lots of advantages in online classes for both teachers and students. Virtual classes have a positive impact on students, as well as on teachers, as it requires an improvement of technology and communication skills as going online is already the new norm be it for education or a job. Teachers also have to increase their level of mastering the new technology sources and develop their technology infrastructure. There is also a certain level of stress, both mental and physical on the two parties involved in the education process. Both teachers and students have to set up classes to be comfortable, and the channels of communication should be their main challenge in order to create a good interaction within the online learning environment. A large number of resources

on the internet offer students new dimensions of learning that might prove beneficial to them. We can assert that online classes are more challenging for teachers than for students, as they have to invest more effort and time, and to bring forth new teaching methodologies. Therefore, the technological infrastructure should be up to date to cater for the new requirements, and in this respect, the pandemic may have proved to be useful in reassessing various aspects of the education system. Teachers and students should have the right equipment which is compulsory to be functional: laptop, desktop or tablet; microphone (already built in your device or part of a separate headset; headphones or ear buds; webcam; internet or a wireless hotspot. All these help us to face the challenges of the online classes, and design attractive and high-level standard lessons.

Based on observations of online teaching in different universities in the world, researchers have come up with a classification of instructional strategies in order to improve students' learning and engagement to attain a smooth transition to online learning. Some of these are: make emergency preparations for unexpected problems, in the case the education platform shuts down because of overload; emphasize the use of voice in teaching, meaning the teachers slow down their speech in order to allow student to capture the key knowledge points; divide the curricula into smaller sections to help students concentrate; intensify students' active learning ability on the outside by using various methods to modify their homework and reading requirements; last but not least, combine online learning and offline self-learning effectively, meaning that in the offline phase students are required to study the course literature and submit assignments based upon the reading, and faculty should use a discussion phase for students to exchange their ideas based on their reading. In this way, students avoid the ambiguous, fragmented knowledge and experience a deep learning during the discussions. All these strategies are of high impact in delivering online education and help students to actively and efficiently engage in online learning. Interactive learning operates with live meeting tools which often have a screen sharing feature that allows teachers and students share the screen, especially when students work on projects and you want them to share their presentations to their peers and talk through them. For assignments or activities where you want your students work together, they use tools like Google Docs or Sheets or some other kind of collaborative software. When implementing deadlines for assignments, teachers/instructors should be flexible and use flexible methods (flexible deadlines, use of phones, tablets for accessing class or submitting their homework, reaching teachers by phone and email, not just by video chat).

Online courses have their own peculiarities: the course design is focused on developing learners' thinking skills, and both interactions and learning activities should challenge learners' comprehension of content. For the online instructor the process of teaching comprises a deep cognitive effort by presenting the information in an engaged way in order to keep the class focused, assist students in attending a comprehensive discussion, and stay committed in a conversation with the learners. All these approaches to teaching require an emotional effort in order to create a climate of respect and trust, and provide support and encouragement to learners. The online instruction takes time and preparation, it is definitely time-consuming, but it is rewarding as well, because the instructor is learning by doing, reflects on how to teach in different new ways, on how to connect better with the learners, and finally gains satisfaction from interaction with learners. We dare say that teaching and learning become a partnership ensuing from learner-centered environments, where teaching becomes a constructive process, and knowledge becomes an activity shared by the online learning community.

Although the pandemic struck hard not only in the education system, but also in every walk of life, teachers and students continued their journey, setting up remote learning platforms using different online tools at hand, without a decent training or a pre-planned course, and compelled to adapt to this sudden change. The evolution of online learning has always been predicted in previous studies, and at present a large number of them are available for almost every subject and field. There are still different opinions regarding the online education. While some consider that the unpremeditated and quick move to web based sort of schooling will result in a poor user experience, others believe that a new cross-breed type of education will come up, with significant satisfactions: "I believe that the integration of information technology in education will be further accelerated and that

online education will eventually become an integral component of school education", says Wang Tao, Vice President of Tencent Cloud and Vice President of Tencent Education. Will the move to online tuition be able to put forward the stimulant to create a new, more efficient method of educating students? It is not an easy question to answer, having in mind that some educators worry that the rapid nature of the transition online may have hampered this goal, while others plan to make online learning part of their "new normal" after experiencing the benefits immediately.

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