Psychological Problems
in Working and Learning Online

TEACHING CHALLENGES IN SPORTS EDUCATION DURING THE PANDEMIC COVID-19

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Abstract. The aim of this study was to establish and compare the experienced difficulties during on-site and distance studies and to establish lecturers' emotions connected with distance teaching in several online teaching situations during COVID-19. This online study was conducted at the end of May 2020. Participants were 67 university lecturers in the field of sports education, between the ages of 25 – 70 years, divided into groups according to their gender, age, professional working experience, academic positions. The research methods included a questionnaire designed especially for our survey. The data were collected with an anonymous, self-reported electronic questionnaire, two weeks after the lockdown in Bulgaria. The comparative analysis between the difficulties which the lecturers faced into two different ways of teaching students – "face-to-face" and distance teaching (Mann-Whitney) showed statistically significant differences along all researched indexes. It was established that the most prevalent negative emotions in the researched situations during online studies were: indignant and annoyed, and the most often experienced positive emotions were: satisfied, inspired, optimistic, and interested.

Keywords: distance teaching; face-to-face teaching; sports education; COVID-19; lecturers

Introduction

Distance studies are becoming much more favoured compared to the on-site learning. In the last decades a lot of authors have researched the possibilities, means and efficiency of such form of education (Nedev, Varneva & Velikova, 2014; Doncheva, 2016; Kuleva, 2017). The emergency situation all over the world in relation to the pandemic COVID-19 imposed online studies as the only option the educational institutions had. It was a massive, disruptive shift to move all the existing courses online in a matter of days. In general, a complete online course requires an elaborate lesson plan design, teaching materials such as audio and video contents, as well as technology support teams. However, due to the sudden emergence of the COVID-19, most faculty members faced the challenges of lacking online teaching experience, early preparation, or support from educational technology teams (Bao, 2020). Since all the courses were switched to online education mode, the computer servers were

not be able to host such a large scale of new users and the online education platform often shut down. In traditional in-class teaching, body language, facial expressions, and teachers' voice are all important teaching tools. However, once a course was switched to online teaching, body language and facial expressions were under restrictions as it was difficult to use these tools through screens, and only "voice" could be fully functioned. Compared with traditional in-class lectures, faculties had less control over online teaching, and students were more likely to "skip the class". Insufficient pre-class study preparation, limited participation in class discussions, and inadequate discussion depth are common phenomena in traditional in-class teaching, similarly, those issues should not be overlooked in online teaching.

The emergency situation posed high requirements to both students and lecturers' skills and knowledge and to their strategies for coping with the existing stress and self-regulation of emotional experiences related to fulfilling their obligations.

For distance instructors, knowing how computers operate and understanding how educational technologies operate is not adequate preparation to work with adult learners. According to Olcott & Wright (1995), technology itself does not ensure high-quality teaching – only the creative talents of the instructor can. Raths (1999) asserts that instructors who thrive in the distance environment combine the skills of a traditional classroom instructor with those of a technical support representative. Online instructors can use a variety of techniques to enliven courses, such as small group discussions, role-playing, student presentations, brainstorming, and simulations. Effective distance teachers give individual attention in private messages and provide summarizing comments in the general discussion to keep the conversation on course. Teaching online courses requires more time, patience and understanding than teaching a traditional course. The instructor must have advanced technological knowledge, or the instructor will be dependent on a computer technician to answer the simple questions from students. This type of learning can be frightening for the instructors (Perrin, 2000).

The need of continuation of the educational process, despite the health threat for all the participants in it, created a number of prerequisites for innovative, creative and timely decisions on different levels of management and participation in the educational process.

Aim of the research

The aim of this research was to establish and compare the experienced difficulties during on-site and distance studies as regards: technical skills, knowledge and tools to present teaching materials; attention and behavior management; feedback about student's work; organization of team work (or groups projects); duration of time to present the teaching material attendance in classes; evaluation of students work; estimation of emotional experiences and socio-psychological interaction within the group (class) and to determine lecturers' emotions connected with distance teaching in several online teaching situations during COVID-19.

Methods

The research methods included a questionnaire designed especially for our survey. The data were collected with an anonymous, self-reported electronic questionnaires, two weeks after the lockdown in Bulgaria (end of May 2020).

We examined the differences and difficulties in two types of teaching – distance and face-to-face teaching with a questionnaire designed especially for this research; the emotional experiences that lecturers met in seven hypothetical situations connected with online exams, and evaluation of students' work and feedback.

Here, we present part of the data from a broader research which examined the psychological characteristics: well-being, post-traumatic stress symptoms and perceived stress (Domuschieva-Rogleva, Savcheva, in the press 2020).

Data analysis

The data were analyzed with SPSS Version 23.0. We used a number of statistical procedures: variation, frequency and comparative analyses (U-criterion of Mann-Whitney, H-Criterion of Kruskal-Wallis).

Participants

Sixty-seven university lecturers in the field of sports education, between the ages of 25 – 70 years were surveyed from two different universities in Sofia, Bulgaria (National Sports Academy "Vassil Levski" and University of National and World Economy /UNWE/).

The surveyed people were divided into groups according to their gender, age, professional working experience, academic positions (Table. 1).

Table 1. Researched individuals differentiated in groups

		N
Gender	Women	31
	Men	36
Age	25 – 40	22
	41 – 55	27
	56 – 70	18
Years of professional working experience	1 – 5	11
	6 – 13	20
	14 – 21	6
	22 – 30	15
	over 30	15
Academic positions	Assistants	20
	Chief assistants	10
	Associate professors	29
	Professors	8

Results

The results from the questionnaire related to distance studies process showed that most of the lecturers started using distance studies method at the beginning of the emergency situation. Twenty-four percent of them had previous experience of 1 – 5 years in online education, and 10% had been working in this way for 6 or 10 years (Figure 1)**.**

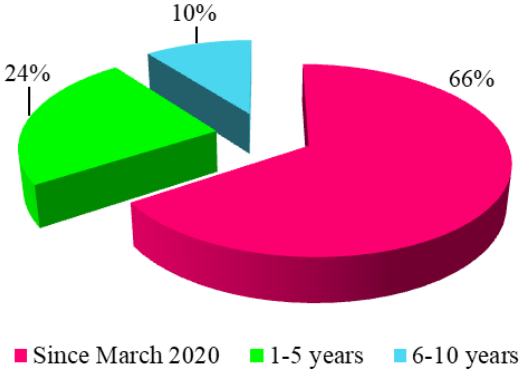

Figure 1. Experience in distance teaching

Most of the lecturers used distance studies platform and uploaded the materials in it. Twenty-three percent uploaded written assignments in the platform, and the smallest percentage (9%) worked only online (video connection) with their students (Figure 2).

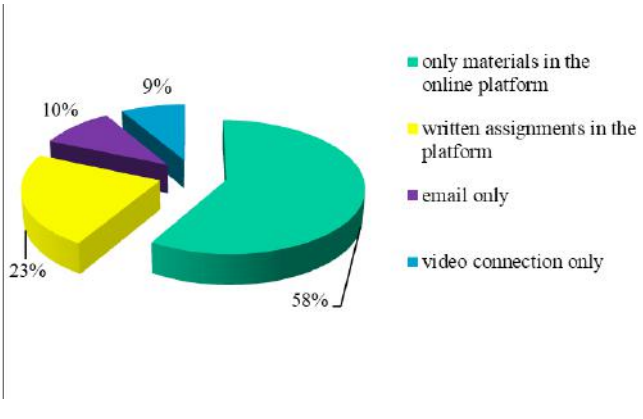

Figure 2. Distance teaching preferences

It took most of the lecturers between 1 and 3 hours to prepare one lecture or practical task, followed by those who spent between 4 and 5 hours. The least of the researched individuals spent more than 9 hours to get prepared (Figure 3).

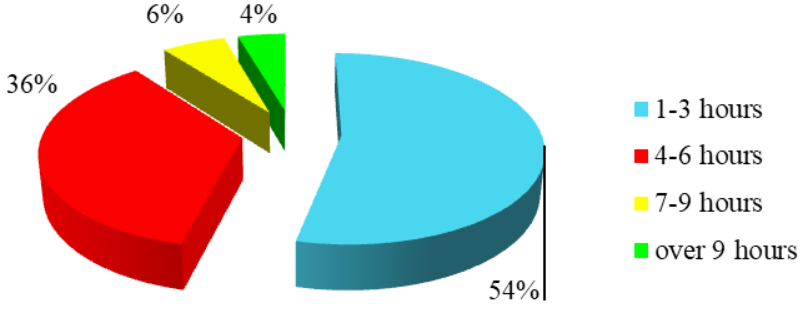

Figure 3. Preparation of teaching materials for distance learning

None of the lecturers indicated they preferred only distance form of teaching, 52 % were in favor of the blended learning with bigger percentage of on-site education, 43% were only for classroom-based education, and only 5% chose blended learning with bigger percentage of distance studies.

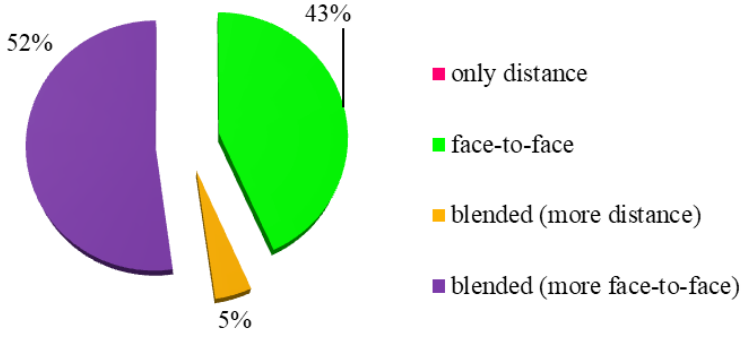

Figure 4. Preferences about the way of teaching

The comparative analysis between the difficulties which the lecturers faced in the two different ways of teaching – "face-to-face" and distance teaching (Mann-Whitney) showed statistically significant differences along all researched indexes: technical skills , knowledge and tools to present teaching materials (U=-3.730; α=.000); attention and behavior management (U=-3.557; α=.000); feedback about students' work (U=-4.091; α=.000); organization of team work (or group projects) (U=-3.153; α=.002); duration of time to present the teaching material (U=-1,998; α=.046); attendance in classes (U=-2.174; α=.030); evaluation of students' work (U=-2.035; α=.042); estimation of emotional experiences and socio-psychological interaction within the group (class) (U=-4.559; α=.000).

The researched individuals were absolutely certain that they were more dedicated, more able to direct and manage students' attention, more connected, more satisfied, calmer and more confident, less tired during the on-site education compared to the online studies (Figure 5).

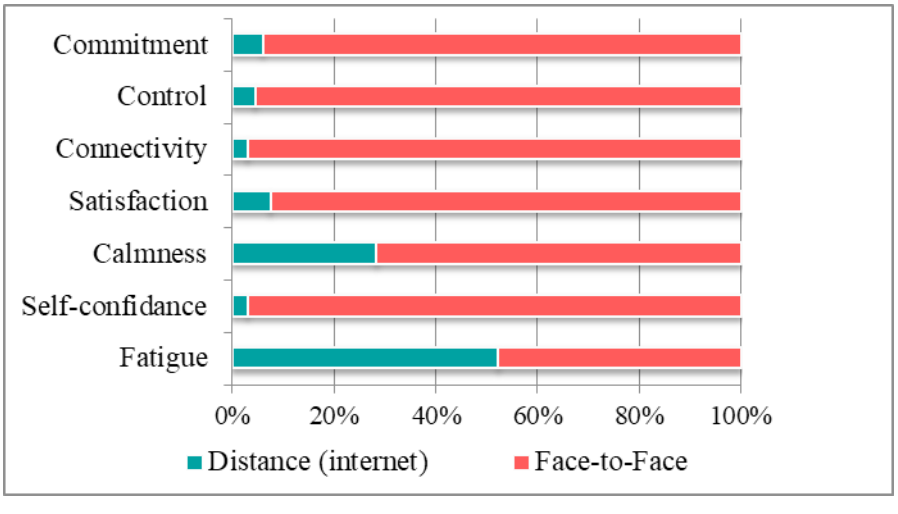

Figure 5. Comparison between on-site and online education

The comparative analysis by academic positions (Kruskal-Wallis Tests) showed statistically significant differences in "organization of teamwork (or group projects)" in distance teaching (H=7.954; p=.047) (Figure 6).

The emotional experiences which surveyed people had during distance teaching situations are presented in Table 2.

The results about the first situation (students' showing up at the appointed hour) showed that 37 from the researched individuals did not faced that situation, and the

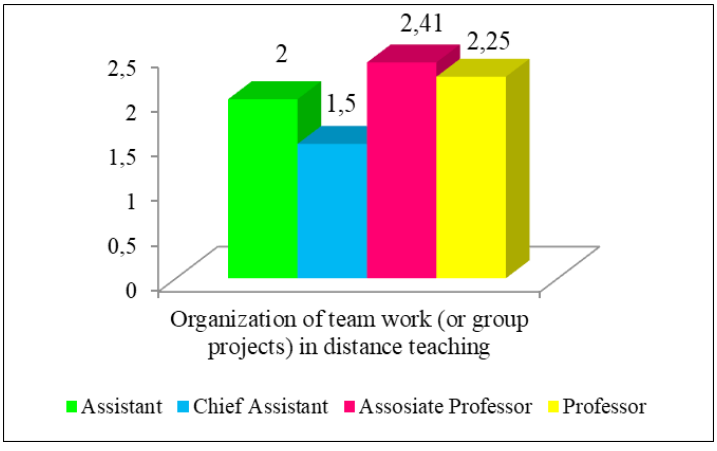

Figure 6. Mean values of difficulties in distance teaching by academic positions

others reported that they most often experienced the following emotions: indignant (10), annoyed (9), interested (7).

The results about the second situation (technical problems) showed that only one lecturer did not face such a situation. The other 66 did. The most often experienced emotions in such a situation were: indignant (10), annoyed (10), interested (7).

Table 2. Lecturers' emotional experiences during distance education process

Distance teaching situation	Emotions	Frequencies	Frequencies of researched lecturers that did not face such a situation	All researched lecturers
First (students' showing up at the appointed hour)	indignant annoyed interested	10 9 7	37	67
Second (technical problems)	indignant annoyed interested	10 10 7	1	67
Third (lack of visual contact)	indifferent annoyed active interested	11 6 6 6	29	67
Fourth (students' active participation in the discussions)	satisfied inspired optimistic	53 24 24	4	67

Fifth (technical problems during online exams)	worried active annoyed	15 14 12	19	67
Sixth (assignment completion and lack of students' interest)	annoyed indignant angry	23 19 15	17	67
Seventh (students' satisfaction with the online studies)	satisfied inspired delighted optimistic	54 26 24 23	0	67

The results about the third situation (lack of visual contact) showed that 29 of the researched individuals did not face such a situation, and the rest indicated that their emotional experiences in this context were: indifferent (11), annoyed (6), active (6), interested (6).

The results about the fourth situation (students' active participation in the discussions) showed that four of the researched individuals did not face such a situation, but the other 63 did. The most frequent emotional experiences were: satisfied (53), inspired (24), optimistic (24).

The results about the fifth situation (technical problems during online exams) showed that 19 of the researched individuals did not faced such a situation, and the others reported that the emotions they experienced at such moments were: worried (15), active (14), annoyed (12).

The results about the sixth situation (assignment completion and lack of students' interest) showed that 17 of the researched individuals did not face such a situation and the others indicated that their emotional experiences in the described situation were: annoyed (23), indignant (23), angry (15).

The results about the seventh situation (students' satisfaction with the online studies) showed that all researched individuals faced such a situation and their emotional experiences were: satisfied (54), inspired (26), delighted (24), optimistic (23).

Discussion

The researched lecturers used different combinations of information channels (e-mails, internet platforms, written assignments in the platform or only video connection) to teach the material in their subject. This could be due to a number of factors such as technical skills, level of knowledge about the processes of online education, time to prepare the materials, flexibility of the curricula, students' possibility to go online, etc.

Researchers' interest in blended learning which combines classroom-based education with distance studies is growing (Willis, 1994; Birnbaum, 2001; Moore, Anderson, 2003; Sener, 2001; Neuhauser, 2002; Doncheva, 2015; Lazarova, Lazarov, 2019). The most prevalent definition of Blended learning (BL) or hybrid learning is: a

teaching method which combines traditional methods face-to-face in the classroom with computer-based activities (electronic learning). Such was the preference of the lecturers in our research. They were absolutely certain that the solely distant form of studies is not acceptable, especially in sports education where there are a lot of practical activities. Most of them prefer the blended form of education (52%) (with bigger percentage of the on-site education), followed by 43 % (only on-site education), and 5 % indicated the blended learning option but with bigger percentage of distance studies.

The researched individuals are absolutely certain that they were more dedicated, more able to direct and manage students' attention, more connected, more satisfied, calmer and more confident, less tired during the on-site education compared to the online education. These results show that the researched lecturers experienced greater comfort as regards their teaching role and functions in on-site education and greater uncertainty during the distance studies, which is not surprising. In this relation, it would be interesting to study the opinion of the same lecturers after a prolonged period of time when they have gained more experience in online studies, and to examine some personal characteristics which would provide a more detailed information such as extroversion/introversion, self-assessment, anxiety, etc.

We found out that the distance form of studies was perceived as more time consuming and more tiring (Bakracheva & Totseva, 2020), which was also reported by our colleagues in research with teachers. This form of education requires more time for preparation of the materials and skills which some of the lecturers have to develop and apply in order to do their job efficiently and be satisfied with the results.

According to the academic position, associate professors had greater difficulty in the organization of teamwork (or group projects) in distance teaching (M=2.41; SD=1.02), while among younger assistants this problem was less expressed (M=1.5; SD=.71). The established differences, according to the academic position of the researched individuals, provide clear evidence of the necessity to spare more time for preparation and organization of students' group work in online environment. This will also increase students' motivation and satisfaction as stated by other authors (Tosheva & Doncheva, 2017).

The most often experienced negative emotions in distance studies, related to the above mentioned situations, generally were: indignant (39) and annoyed (60), which were registered by other authors when surveying emotional experiences of teachers at high schools during the distant studies in isolation due to COVID-19 (Bakracheva & Totseva, 2020). The positive experiences were: satisfied (107), inspired (50), optimistic (47), delighted (24), and interested (20). The same authors (Bakracheva & Totseva, 2020) reported for the presence of experiences such as "satisfaction with the work done" and "inspiration for coping with the new challenges", which were often chosen by the lecturers in our research. In online studies the difficulties related to it provoke both negative and positive emotional experiences in lecturers.

The lecturers felt satisfied, inspired and optimistic when students took an active

part in the educational process and when they received a positive feedback regarding their interaction. No matter whether the situation was negative or positive, the lecturers were interested in the quality and students' problems in online education, which is a premise for a greater quality of the presentation of the materials in the distance studies and more efficient coping with the problems arising in the process.

The negative emotional experiences were manifested in the spectrum indignant and annoyed. This can also be perceived as lecturers' desire to provide a quality online education but can also be related to their inability to have greater impact on students' behavior, teaching materials, and assignment completion.

Conclusion

The situation of pandemic is characterized with uncertainty as regards health condition, future life plans, economic standards. In the field of education there is not clear frame and structure of the learning process. There are constant changes and requirements within tight deadlines both to students and lecturers. This greatly impedes the educational process, reduces the level of satisfaction, and creates premises for high psychic load and burnout among instructors.

Taking into account the difficulties which lecturers face during online studies, we could create conditions for reducing the level of stress and improving the efficiency of the educational process.

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