

Chapter 77

Factors Influencing Student Engagement During COVID-19 Emergency Remote Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Student engagement is an important construct of education that is strongly correlated with the quality of learning outcomes. Educators have long been looking for ways to increase student engagement. It has become even more critical in the global COVID-19 pandemic where schools and universities switched to entirely online as a consequence of school closures. This chapter reports on the results of a comprehensive study on student engagement during emergency remote teaching. The aim of this study is to take a snapshot and explore the effects of personal and institutional variables on online student engagement. Research data was collected from 1,027 Turkish university students from both state and private universities. Data analysis showed that having a personal computer, owning a room for study and household internet connection, perceived information and communication self-efficacy, past e-learning experience, as well as course delivery format affect behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects of online student engagement.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 was a challenge for all the countries and education systems. Due to the outbreak, many educational institutions worldwide have canceled face-to-face classes and closed their campuses. School closures affected 94% of the world student population which is nearly 1.6 billion learners (United Nations, 2020). Most countries have developed quick responses using distance learning technologies and

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moved away from the traditional classroom to online learning. Developing a response is not an option; it is an obligation for the countries because school closures have a negative impact on student achievement. Baker (2013) found that interruption of education during the teacher strike in Canada has caused a significant decrease in test scores, especially in math. So, this mandatory transition led to the emergence of a new concept “*emergency remote teaching*” (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bond, 2020). In order for this concept to be fully understood, it must be distinguished from traditional online distance education. As it is already known, distance education is not merely putting educational content online, it is a complex process that requires careful planning and preparation (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). In contrast to planned online or blended forms of distance learning, emergency remote teaching (ERT) involves the use of online learning as an alternate modality to face-to-face learning. The main goal of ERT is to provide rapid and temporary access to instruction and educational support during an emergency or crisis.

Holzweiss et al. (2020) assert that “with proper support, students and instructors moving into the online learning environment due to a crisis could successfully recover with fewer obstacles”. However, neither students nor institutions were ready for this mandatory shift. On the one hand, international organizations reported that a substantial amount of students and teachers did not have access to digital tools and internet connection during the ERT. According to UNESCO (2020), 50% of the learners worldwide do not have a personal computer, and 43% do not have a household internet connection to keep up with online lectures during school closures. Moreover, across OECD countries on average 9% and in some countries over 30% of the students do not have a quiet place to study like their own room (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). Lack of technological resources and physical space affected not only students from disadvantaged families but also families with multiple children (Ferri, Grifoni & Guzzo, 2020).

On the other hand, instructors were expected to learn to teach online in a short, often unrealistic time frame (Johnson, Veletsianos, & Seaman, 2020). They have been asked to become both designers and tutors using the tools that only a few have mastered (Rapanta et al., 2020). It was a real challenge for those who had no experience in nontraditional learning spaces because online teaching and learning require a completely distinct skill-set. Without providing a sound pedagogical background regarding the use of digital tools teachers had to learn in the process. but it is difficult to say that they were successful in that. For instance, even early career teachers in Germany do not have sophisticated digital skills and more than half of the teachers don’t know how to assess student learning using ICT (König, Jäger-Biela, & Glutsch, 2020).

Unfortunately, most primary and secondary schools around the world had not previously needed to use distance education, so they did not have hardware software, or trained staff for remote education. But luckily, as the majority of the higher education institutions already offer online or blended courses before the pandemic, the transition to online learning was easier compared to other levels of the education system (Brooks, Grajek & Lang, 2020). During the ERT, some institutions adopted synchronous lectures using video conferencing software such as ZOOM, Big Blue Button, and Google Meet. Others used asynchronous course format using learning management systems like Moodle, Canvas, and Google Classroom. Some employed synchronous and asynchronous formats together to increase learner engagement.

Previous studies focused on the student experiences and views during ERT but the findings are controversial. For instance, Shin and Hickey (2020) report on the detrimental effects of COVID-19 on college students’ learning. On the contrary, Lee et al. (2021) claim that college students were flexible enough to cope with the challenges related to the pandemic. Another concern with the ERT for some institutions is cheating by sharing files or answers (Bilen & Matros, 2021; Lancaster & Cotarlan, 2021; Lee et al., 2020). Therefore, focusing on engagement rather than other parameters can give more accurate

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