



Students During Pandemic. Time Spent Studying and Courses

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Abstract: A great percentage of 94% of students were out of school worldwide during the peak of school closings, in April 2020, according to the World Bank. The pandemic year of Covid-19 posed education all over the world in a context of huge uncertainty. Students and schools had to navigate through options of either hybrid, remote learning, or no schooling at all. For the families, 2020 was a year with great stress and panic. Lockdowns changed people's lifestyles, so they moved to a new set of habits and consumer behavior.

This research aims to investigate students' behavior during 2020 regarding the variables: level of professional knowledge gained during 2020, the need for courses other than the academic ones, how many courses were taken as a response to the need and the number of hours dedicated to studying compared to the amount of time spent before 2020.

An online survey was conducted among students of higher education institutions, in Albania, which shows that more than 47.2% of the respondents have spent fewer hours studying during 2020 compared to the time they used to study before the pandemic. Regarding other courses taken during this period, considering to add value to their professional career, more than 60% of respondents declared that they did not take any additional courses, even though when asked about the need to attend these courses they answered with a mean of 3.68 in a scale (1 to 5, where 1 is not at all and 5 is too much).

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2020 the World faced the Covid-19 pandemic and, at the same time, measures taken to manage the risk of coronavirus have spread. According to the World Bank, at the peak of school closures in April 2020, 94 percent of students were out of school worldwide (World Bank, 2021). Governments suspended face-to-face teaching in schools, making 2020 the year of the largest disruption to education in history. Even in Albania, measures of movement restrictions and quarantine were taken, which changed the lifestyle for everyone. All activities were concentrated within homes and the limited time to go out increased the amount of time indoors, thus creating more free time.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education intuitions shifted to online learning or distance education programs, as one of its advantages is that it can allow students to learn at their convenience since it is needless to attend training centers and universities (Knibel, 2001).

There is a lot to discuss if the remote learning during the pandemic was effective, taking into consideration also the mental health conditions of the students and academic staff under the pressure and stress caused by the critical situation of infections in each country, therefore creating an unusual lifestyle.

According to Economy Policy Institute (2020) research, regarding online learning and teaching, it showed that they are effective only if students have consistent access to the Internet and computers, and if teachers have received targeted training and support for online instructions. These needed requirements for effectiveness have been largely absent for many, especially in the first

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months of the pandemic. This absence of remote education during the pandemic has impeded teaching and learning (Economy Policy Institute, 2020).

“One of the most critical opportunity gaps is the uneven access to the devices and Internet access critical for learning online. This digital divide has made it virtually impossible for some students to learn during the pandemic.”, states Economy Policy Institute, adding that the school lockdowns that started in the spring of 2020 reduced instructional and learning time, which are known to impede students’ performance, with disparate impacts on different groups of students (Economy Policy Institute, 2020).

Economy Policy Institute uses PISA data from 2018 for the United States to show that, while students have spent extensive time online prior to the pandemic, that time was heavily spent on social activities, browsing or seeking information, playing games, or accessing email, while what we also know is that remote learning demands that students ignore the distractions that come from the online world (Economy Policy Institute, 2020). In this context, online education poses the risk of exposure to increased screen time for the learner (Pokhrel and Chhetri, 2021).

The year 2020 was a year of anxiety and stress for most people. That stress may have caused apathy, even among students, by not translating the free time available to study into a genuine interest for studying. This research explores the extent to which student have felt the need to attend courses during 2020 and how much they have turned this need into action to take a course. Another goal of the research is to find out if students have spent more or fewer hours studying compared to the period before 2020.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An online survey was conducted among students of higher education institutions, in Albania, of which 87.4% were female and 12.6% were male. The average age of all respondents is 22.1 years. Data gathered was processed with SPSS, Version 22, using descriptive statistics, correlation and linear regression.

Variables investigated for this research paper are: Gender, Professional Knowledge Gained, Need for Courses, Courses Taken.

Professional Knowledge Gained – represents the level of professional knowledge gained from students during 2020 on a scale from 1 to 10 (1 is not at all, 10 extremely much);

Need for Courses - represents the need of students to take different courses (others than the ones in the academic program) during 2020 on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 is not at all, 5 extremely much);

Courses Taken - represents if respondents have taken courses or not during 2020 (yes/no) - (courses others than the ones in the academic program)

Gender – Male/Female

This paper aims to give answers to the following research questions regarding the students’ behavior during 2020:

- At what level did students gain professional knowledge?

- At what level they needed to take courses of any kind?
- Did students take courses (outside the academic program)?
- Did students study more or fewer hours during the pandemic compared to the period before 2020?
- What is the relation between the need to take courses and the action of taking courses during the pandemic?

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND FINDINGS

In this online survey participated 254 students of higher education institutions, 87.4% female and 12.6% male (Table 1).

Table 1. Gender of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	222	87.4	87.4
	Male	32	12.6	100.0
	Total	254	100.0	100.0

Source: Own calculations

Students rated at a level of 61.9% (6.19/10) professional knowledge gained during the pandemic, while 73% (3.65/5) was the level of need for courses during 2020 (Table 2). Only 39.9% of respondents took courses during 2020 (Table 3).

Table 2. Means for variables in study

Descriptive Statistics	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Professional_Knowledge	253	1	10	6.19	2.217
Courses_Need	252	1	5	3.65	1.280
Courses_taken	253	1	2	1.60	.491
Valid N (listwise)	252				

Source: Own calculations

Data from students in this survey showed that the need to take courses of any type other than the ones in academic program is 3.65, on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 is not at all, 5 extremely much), where 34.9% have scaled extremely much (5) and 21.8% very much (4).

Table 3. Respondents data on Courses taken

Courses_taken	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	101	39.8	39.9
	No	152	59.8	60.1
	Total	253	99.6	100.0
Missing	System	1	.4	
Total		254	100.0	

Source: Own calculations

This study shows that 47.2% of students have studied fewer hours in 2020 compared to the period before 2020 (Table 4).

23.4% studied the same number of hours as before 2020, while 29.4% responded that they have studied more hours during 2020 compared to the period before the pandemic.

The data shows that there is a weak negative correlation between the variables Courses Needed and Courses Taken (Table 5).

Table 4. Hours of the study compared to the period before 2020

Study Hours_Comparison		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than before 2020	119	46.9	47.2	47.2
	More than 2020	74	29.1	29.4	76.6
	The same as 2020	59	23.2	23.4	100.0
	Total	252	99.2	100.0	
Missing	System	2	.8		
Total		254	100.0		

Source: Own calculations

Table 5. Correlation of Courses_Needed and Courses_Taken

Correlations		Courses_Need	Courses_taken
Courses_Need	Pearson Correlation	1	-.211**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	252	252
Courses_taken	Pearson Correlation	-.211**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	252	253

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Own calculations

Linear Regressions for these two variables, where the Dependent Variable is Courses taken, show that only 21% of courses taken are as a result of the need perceived to take a course.

Table 6. Linear Regression – Dependent Variable: Courses_Taken,
Independent variable: Courses_Needed

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.211 ^a	.044	.041	.481

a. Predictors: (Constant), Courses_Need

Source: Own calculations

4. CONCLUSION

The data gathered from 254 students, of average age 22.12 years, where 87.4% were female and 12.6% were male, who responded in this online survey, shows that:

- Even though during pandemic 2020 there was more time available to study as people had fewer outdoor activities, 47.2% of students have studied fewer hours in 2020 compared to the period before 2020. The factors that affected this can be the subject of another study.
- The level of professional knowledge gained during 2020, is 6.19 on a scale from 1 to 10 (1 is not at all, 10 extremely much).
- The need for courses during 2020 is at the level of 3.65, on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 is not at all, 5 extremely much), where 34.9% have been scaled extremely much (5) and 21.8% very much (4).
- Only 39.9% of respondents have taken courses (outside the academic program) during 2020.
- There is a weak negative correlation between the need and the action for taking courses. 21% of the courses taken are explained by the need of taking those courses. Other factors have affected the decision to take those courses. These factors may be the subject of another study.

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