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**Три года онлайн-обучения во время пандемии COVID-19:
ожидания и отношение болгарских студентов и преподавателей****Антоанета Г. Гетова¹**¹Софийский университет Св. Климента Охридского, г. София, Болгария
e-mail: tony22a@gbg.bg**Аннотация**

Пандемия COVID-19 серьезно повлияла на образовательный сектор, поскольку во многих странах, также и в Болгарии, образовательные учреждения, в том числе университеты, должны полностью перевести свои курсы в онлайн-режим в очень короткие сроки. То, что ранней весной 2022 года выглядело как временная мера, продолжалось в течение двух следующих учебных лет в большинстве болгарских университетов. Столь длительное время онлайн-обучения привело к тому, что студентов бакалавриата, имеющих больший опыт онлайн-обучения, чем традиционного, стало гораздо больше. В этом аспекте важно исследовать влияние онлайн-обучения на основных участников образовательного процесса: преподавателей и студентов и возможные различия в их отношении и ожиданиях к нему, что является основной целью данной статьи. Анализ основан на данных третьей волны онлайн-опроса студентов и преподавателей различных болгарских университетов. За третий год пандемии в опросе приняли участие 256 студентов и 55 преподавателей.

Ключевые слова: COVID-19; онлайн-обучение; цифровизация; высшее образование; онлайн-исследования.

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**Three years of Online Learning during the Pandemic:
Expectations and Attitudes of Bulgarian Students and Lecturers****Antoaneta G. Getova¹**¹ Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Sofia, Bulgaria
e-mail: tony22a@gbg.bg**Abstract**

The pandemic of COVID-19 affected gravely the educational sector as in many countries and also in Bulgaria, the educational institutions, including the universities had to move their courses completely online in a very short period of time. What looked like a temporary measure in the early spring of 2022, continued during the two next academic years in most Bulgarian universities. Such long time of online learning led to a situation where the BA students that have more experience with the online education than with the traditional approach are much more. In this aspect is important to research the effects of the online learning on the main participants in the educational process, lecturers and students, and the differences in their attitudes and expectations towards it, that is the main goal of this paper. The analysis is based on data of the third wave of a survey made online with students and lecturers from different Bulgarian universities. During the third year of the pandemic, 256 students and 55 lecturers took part in the survey.

Keywords: COVID-19; online learning; digitalization; higher education; online research.

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Introduction

After three years, the end of the pandemic of COVID-19 still looks too far in the future. Although most countries began to come back «to normal», avoiding the lockdowns even during the new pandemic peaks, the social consequences of this crisis are still present and

most probably will have their effect in the future, especially in the educational sector where the process was held online during large periods of time. The universities were affected to bigger degree than the secondary and primary schools as happened in Bulgaria where the educational process was held online in most departments and programs even during the third year of the pandemic; with the exception of the last months of the second semester when some of the universities went back partially or full on-site. It means that, in the end of the academic 2021-2022, the share of BA students in the country that have more experience with the online education is bigger than the share of students that are more familiar with the traditional approach; for the students in first and second grade it should be also included their experience with the online learning in the secondary school. Such situation is quite unique for the higher education in the country and it should be expected to have an impact on the attitude and expectations of the students towards the online education but also to their interaction with their lecturers. The latter have their own challenges with the continuing online education: from one side, the lecturers were those who had to made the abrupt transition from traditional to online learning during the spring of 2020 and also to adapt to a relatively unknown situation for them. Notwithstanding some of them had some partial experience with this educational approach before (Halachev, 2009), holding the whole educational process online was an unprecedented situation. That's why, for better understanding of the changes that the long online learning caused in the higher education is necessary to analyze not only its effects on the students but also on the lecturers. Many researches focus mainly on students (Doolan, 2020; Firang 2020; Tockmakova, Bondarenko and Lunitsina, 2020) and this paper will focus on both students and lecturers with the purpose to understand better the long-term effects of the of the online learning on the educational process as a whole.

Main goal and hypotheses

As this is the third wave of the same research (see below) it had two principal goals. While during the first, preliminary phase the main goal was to follow the transition of the educational process online that had to be made in a very short period of time (as was the main focus of the research made in other European countries, for example Mulrooney and Helly 2020), during the second year it followed the continuing adaptation to the online learning and its main problems that lecturers and students are facing (Baetens et al, 2022; Podlogar and Jurišević, 2022), also the main changes in comparison with the first year of the pandemic. During the third year the most important problem was to identify if the students and lecturers already adapted to the new approach and the second goal was to register if there are differences in the attitude towards the online education between both groups of participants. It should be mentioned that during the first two years of the pandemic such differences were insignificant (Getova, 2021). The current paper is dedicated to the second problem.

The main hypothesis is that during the third year of the pandemic, there are significant differences in the attitudes of students and lecturers towards the online approach. The students already prefer to study (if possible) mostly online, while the lecturers are more inclined to come back to the educational process on-site.

Methodology of the research

The research was made in the end of the academic year 2021-2022 (May –June 2022). In it took part 256 and 55 lecturers of different Bulgarian universities. It is the third wave of the same research, including a pilot phase in 2022. The type of sample is snowball sampling, i.e. non-representative (Biernacki, and Waldorf, 1981); that's why the aim was to include

students and lecturers from more universities and different academic fields. This approach would allow the including of different types of participants (who belong to different subgroups of the population). The same approach was used in the previous wave of the research during the academic 2020-2021. (Getova, 2021). It should be clarified also that, as a non-representative sample is used, the differences that are commented are approximately 10% or more because only option here is to register some significant distinctions in the main tendencies due to the methodological limitations of the non-representative samples (Dietz and Kalof, 2009).

Analysis of the results

As was mentioned already, the main purpose of this analysis is to show if there is some differences in the general attitude of the main actors in the educational process in the universities (lecturers and students). First, it is necessary to know what is their opinion of the process of online learning as such during the third year of the pandemic. If, for example, they consider that there are too much problems during the third year, then their attitude would be different if it is compared to the case where they think that the process was improved.

As can be seen in the next figure, both students and lecturers evaluate positively online learning during the third year: the majority of both groups (respectively 88% and 84%) think that the educational process online was better (or good as) the last year. The only significant difference that can be found is that within the lecturers group, the share of those who think that the online learning improved during the third year is bigger than the respective share in the students group. It can be concluded that the students consider that the online learning was already improved before and during the third year it maintains its "status".

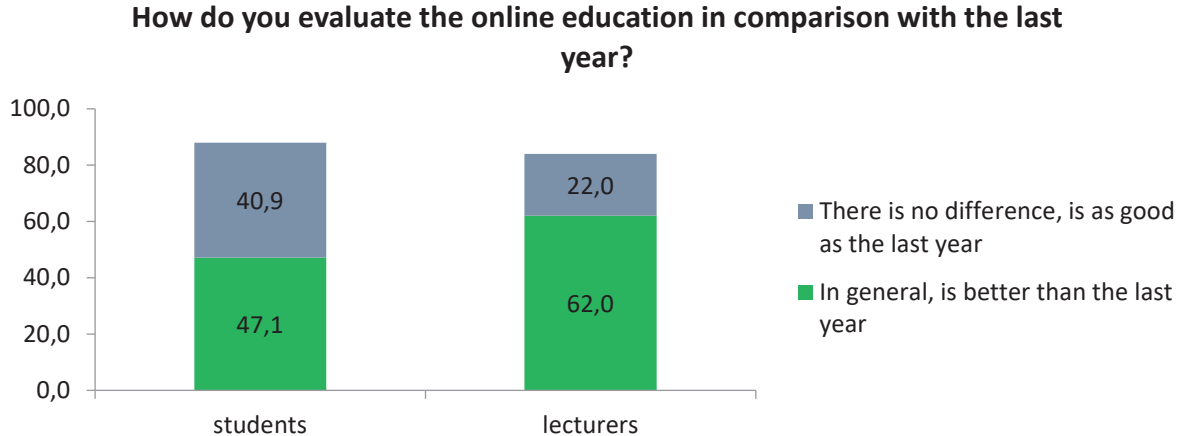


Figure 1. How do you evaluate the online education in comparison with the last year?

That presumably optimistic attitude doesn't necessarily mean that both groups have a positive attitude towards the online learning in general. That can be seen from the results of the questions regarding the main advantages and disadvantages of the online learning. While there can be found some common tendencies in the attitude of both groups, there are also significant differences.

Regarding to the main advantages of the online learning, both parts appreciate the technical and organizational aspects of the online education as some its big strengths: it saves time, can be reached from everywhere and also offers more effective work with resources (easier access for the students and better organization for the lecturers). As can be seen in the next figure, in all these aspects the opinion of students and lectures practically coincide. Also, the percentage of people who think that the online learning has no advantages at all is

insignificant within both groups. The students however, are much more positive towards the online education than the lecturers: the average number of advantages mentioned by one student is 5 in comparison with only 3 mentioned per lecturer.

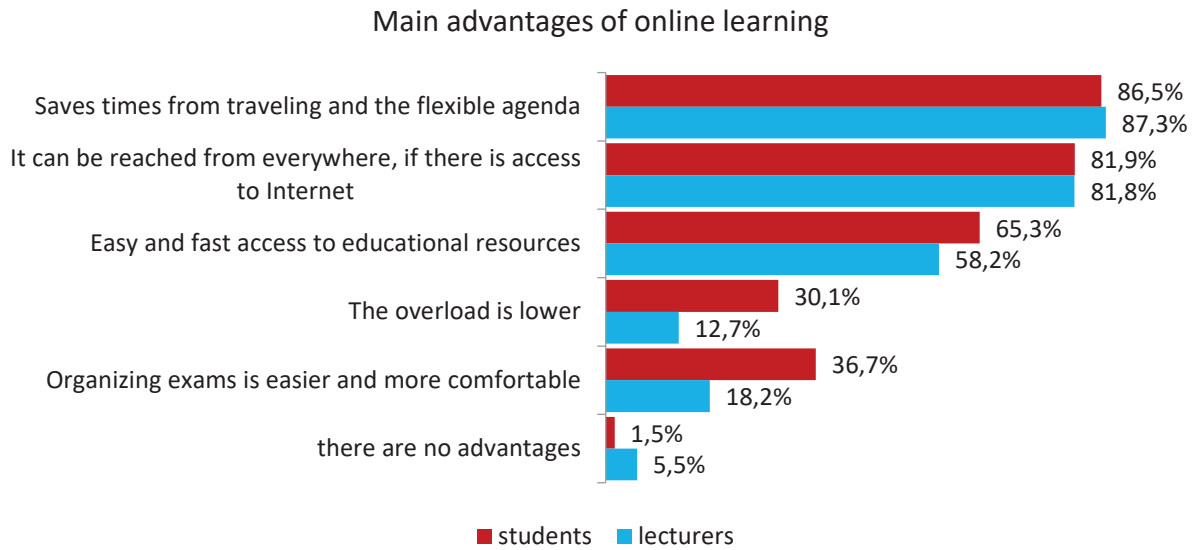


Figure 2. Main advantages of online learning

In this aspect, is worth mentioning that only 13% of the lectures and 30% of the students consider that their respective overload is lower during the online learning; moreover, significant part of the lecturers think that the overload is one of the disadvantages of the online learning. However, most of the lecturers don't think that the overload of the students is bigger when the process is online, so here again can be seen a distinction between students and lecturers: while both groups mostly disagree that the overload of the students is higher, the lecturers think that they have much more work when the process is held online.

The main disadvantages are presented in the next figure.

The first distinction that can be seen is that the percentage of the lecturers who mention several negative aspects of the online learning is relatively higher than the respective share of students.

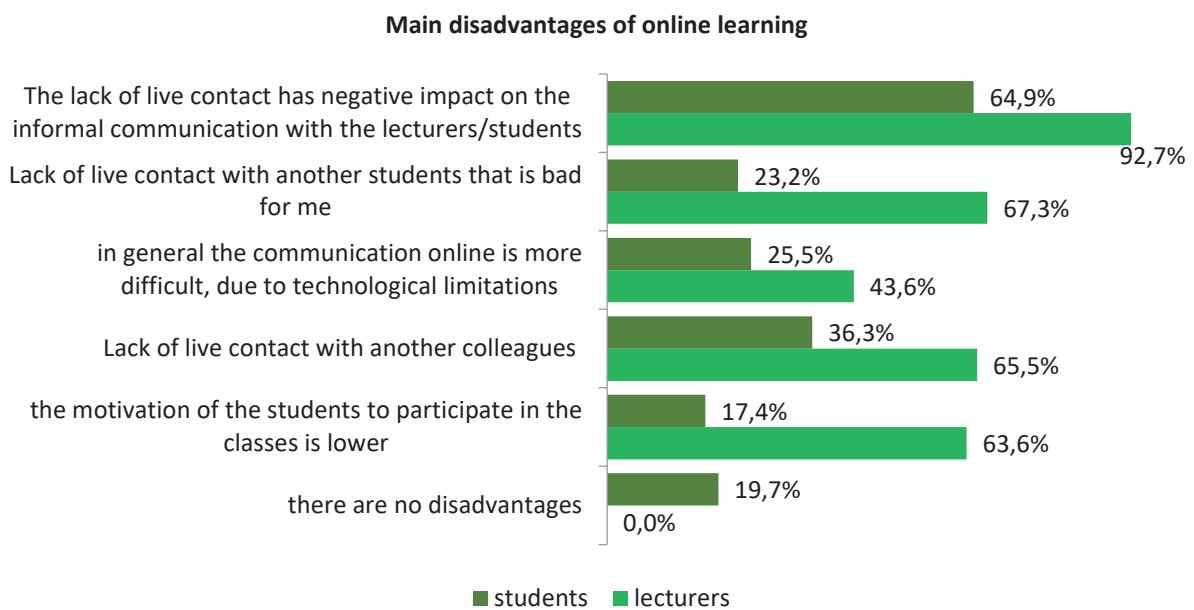


Figure 3. Main disadvantages of online learning

The figure presents the most frequently mentioned disadvantages by both groups, however, the average number of disadvantages mentioned by the lecturers are between 5 and 6 and for the students the respective number varies between 2 and 3. As can be seen in the figure, the only real disadvantage for the students (mentioned by higher number of them) is the problem with the communication, especially the lack of live contact during the classes. Of course, this should be considered as significant disadvantage even for the fact that the communication from “a distance” is essential for the online learning (i.e. it cannot be changed), but is obvious that the students appreciate more the online education, a difference from the lecturers, who are much more critical towards it. Also, almost 1/5 of the students think that the online learning practically has no disadvantages and in this aspect the difference with the lecturers is even more obvious: there no lecturers who share such opinion. This tendency repeats itself from the first wave of the survey (Getova, 2021).

Also, there is a big difference in the opinion of students and lecturers, regarding to the students' motivation for participation in classes. The majority of the lecturers think that the student's motivation is lower and the percentage among students is less than 20%. The low motivation of the students was one of the main problems noticed by the lecturers and part of the students during the previous wave of the research (Getova, 2021). In the third wave the lecturers practically didn't change their opinion but the share of students that agree with this is even lower (during the second wave it was more than 1/3). Here it can be speculated a lot what are the arguments of both parts for their opinions. It is a fact that during the online learning part of the students take part only passively (without video and even without microphone) so the impression of the lecturers is that the students are even more passive during the online classes that during the live ones. On the other side, the students opinion that they motivation is not lower during the online classes can be attributed to the explanation that they already adapted to this form of education and therefore, they don't see any differences in their personal motivation to participate in the classes online or on-site. In both cases is obvious that in this aspect there is a split between students' and lecturers' opinion.

That's why is not surprising that significant part of the students (37%) prefer the online form instead of the traditional form of learning, as can be seen in the next figure. It should be mentioned that this percentage increases over time while the percentage of the lecturers who prefer to this that way continue to be low.

In the same time, the percentage of the students who think that the online learning couldn't fully substitute the traditional approach is also relatively low, compared with the respective share of lecturers, the majority of whom agree with this statement. It can be concluded still from these results that the attitude of the majority of students and lecturers towards the online learning differs significantly. As a whole, the lecturers are more critical towards the online education: apart from the fact that they see in it much more disadvantages, most of them don't consider it as fully effective form of education but as such that could serve only as supplementary approach; they do not think that it is universal (suitable for every grade and every educational program). Therefore, it is logical why so few of them prefer this form of education. On the other side, the students are more positive towards the online learning. First, more than 1/3 of them prefer this form instead of the traditional approach. Also, only one third of them think that it couldn't fully substitute the traditional one, 32% consider it not suitable for first year students; almost similar is the percentage of those who think that the online learning is more suitable as supplementary form of education. Still, more than 50% of the students do not consider it as universal approach (for all type of educational programs) and this is one of the aspects where their opinion is closer to the attitude of the lecturers. The other aspect is related to the long-term effects of the online learning: approximately 1/3 of the

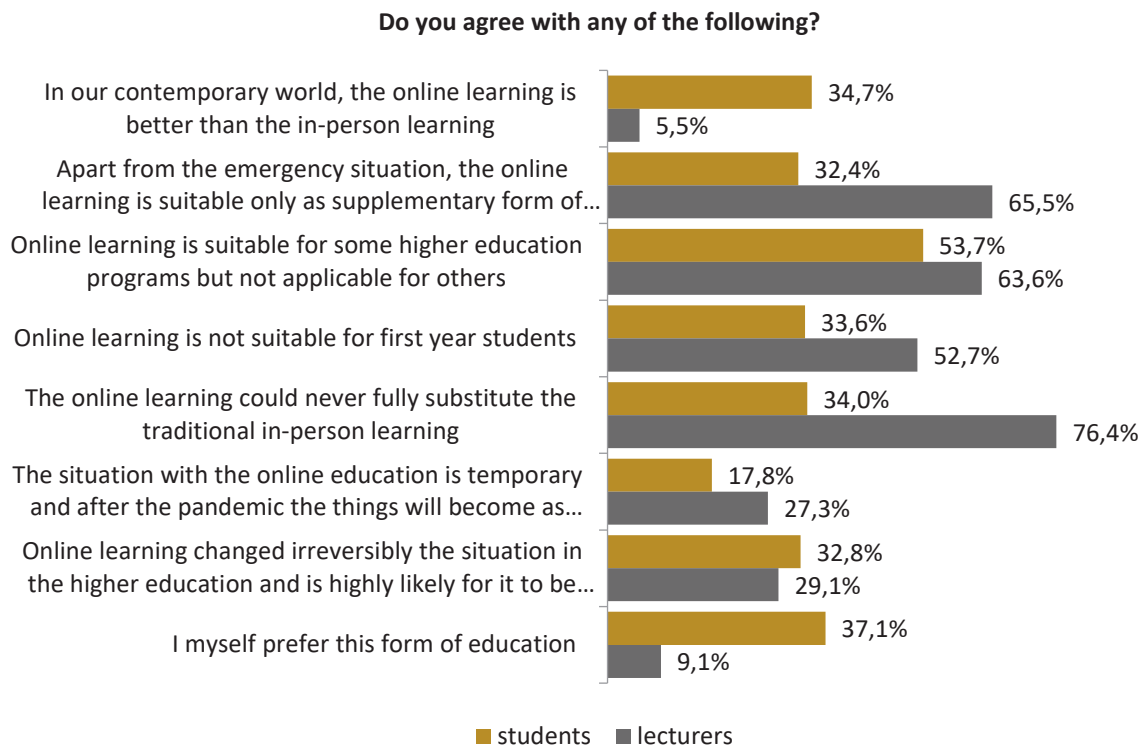


Figure 4. Do you agree with any of the following?

students and respectively of the lectures think that the situation is irreversible and the online learning changed completely the higher education (the share of “optimists” who think that the things would become as they used to be in both groups is lower).

It is interesting to know the final verdict of both groups regarding to maybe the most important aspect: the effect of the online learning on the quality of the received education.

As can be seen in the next figure, the attitude of the students and lecturers differs a lot. Most of the lecturers are convinced that it has negative impact (and this is the opinion of only 1/3 of the students). The biggest share of students, 44% think that the form of the education is not a factor regarding the quality and another 1/5 think that the online learning has even positive impact. It can be concluded that the lecturers evaluate the long term effects of the online learning mostly negatively, while most of the students are more optimistic and think that the online learning doesn't have negative impact.

There is a weak to moderate correlation between the opinion of both groups of the quality of the education and their preferences for the respective form of the educational process. The Cramer's V coefficient for the students is 0.44 and respectively for the lecturers is 0.40. This coefficient is used in the analysis as the most appropriated for the type of the sample and indicators included (Kraska-Miller, 2013).

From these results can be concluded that those who prefer the online education in both groups are more inclined to think that it has no impact or has positive impact on the educational process. Respectively, among those who prefer the education on-site the share of people who think that the online learning has negative impact is bigger. It can be concluded that the preferences of people towards the online education is related indeed to the fact that they also think that the online learning doesn't have negative impact on the quality of the education. In this aspect the difference between students and lecturers is that the percentage of lecturers who think that the online learning doesn't affect negatively the educational process is too low.

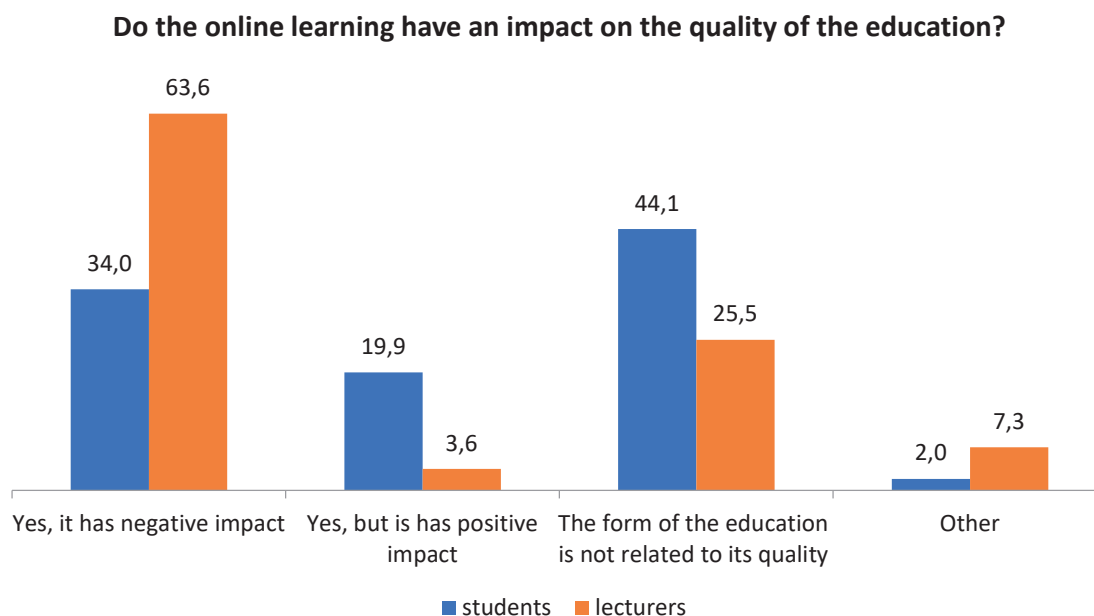


Figure 5. Do the online learning have an impact on the quality of the education?

Instead of conclusion

From the analysis can be concluded that the opinions of students and lecturers about the online learning differ significantly: the lecturers are much more critical towards it and very few of them have any inclinations towards this approach, while the students have much more positive attitude and significant part of them prefer this approach instead of the traditional one. It should be mentioned also that this difference in the opinions became clearer during the third wave in the research, while in the previous ones the differences were smaller (and fewer). Such attitude can be explained with the fact that at the moment of the third wave the majority of students, especially in BA, had more experience with the online approach than with the traditional one and in time, they began to appreciate more its positive sides than its problems. Respectively, the lecturers continue to be far more critical towards to online learning and don't consider it as effective enough to be able to substitute the traditional on-site learning. Such differences between the opinions of both groups could have their impact even in the future, as the expectations of both groups towards the online learning are practically opposite one to another: while more and more students prefer it, the lecturers in general are inclined to teach in the traditional approach. The different expectations and attitudes could produce a crisis in the future exactly for the fact that the opinions of the main participants in the educational process don't coincide and this could have a negative impact even to the transition to on-site learning that is expected to be done in the Bulgarian universities during the academic 2021-2022.

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