

There is another way: A support model for students pursuing a master's degree in the field of education

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Abstract

Today, distance learning is an integral part of the higher education system in the State of Israel.

This study examined the perception of 155 graduate students in the College of Education for distance learning, namely its advantages and disadvantages, where they experience difficulties, and what strategies lecturers have adopted to help them cope with the situation. Participants answered a research questionnaire posted on social media.

The results of the study indicate that most students feel the benefits inherent in distance learning alongside new challenges that they face, primarily in social and emotional challenges.



Background

The Transition to college entails changes in many areas: personal responsibility, social support and adaptation to a particular institutional environment (e.g., Astin & Astin, 2015; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2009).

Moving to college requires a significant change in a student's life (Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006).

Studies show that starting college causes increased stress among students and demand for self discipline skills (The American College Health Association [ACHA], 2014).

The college has the ability to assist and influence the design of the student's academic well-being. As well as, to assist a student in succeeding in significant tasks and assignments during their studies (Byrd & McKinney, 2012; Masten et al., 2004).

The purpose of the study

Examine how graduate students experience distance learning: what areas they experience difficulties in, and what strategies lecturers adopt to help them cope with the situation.



<https://mosdot.education.gov.il>

Method- qualitative research

Demographic questionnaire – Personal details: Age of the respondent, occupation, seniority in teaching, marital status, number of children, the field of study, year of study in the master's degree, etc.

Research questionnaire - sample questions: Describe your experience as a graduate student during the Corona period.

How did you deal with distance learning?

Have you considered dropping out of school at some point?

What are the benefits in your opinion of distance learning?

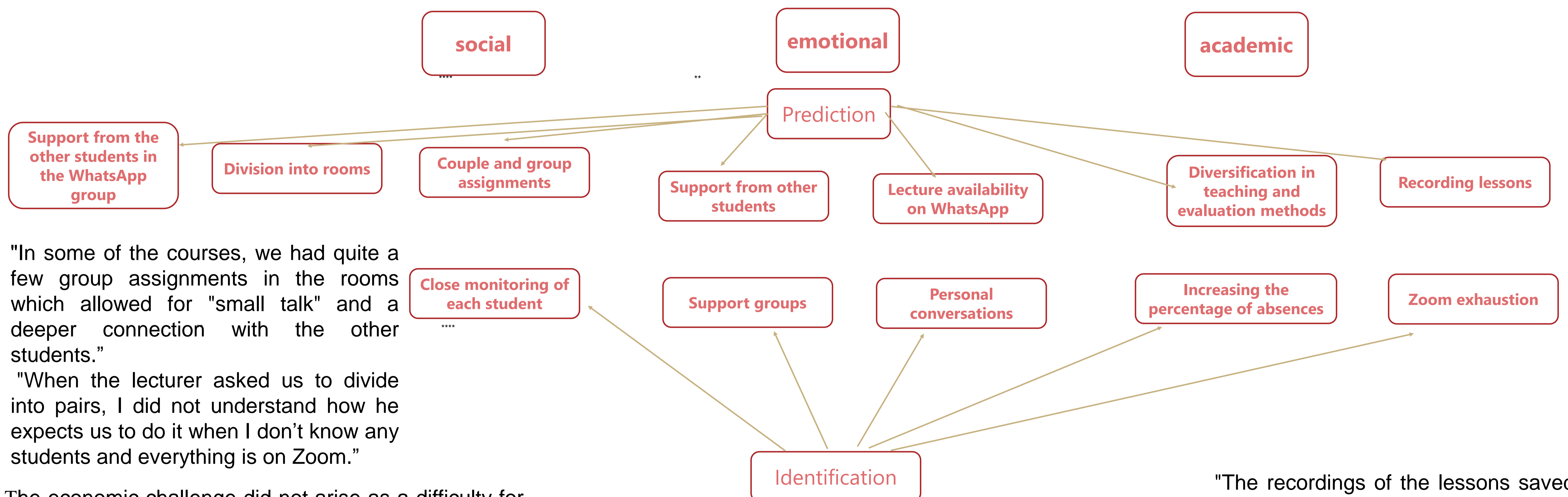
In your opinion, what are the disadvantages of distance learning?

Did you experience any difficulties during distance learning? If so describe them.

What do you think your college has done and could do to make it easier for students without compromising the academic level of studies?

At the end of the corona period, would you like to continue distance learning? If so, how often?

Results - the research model



"In some of the courses, we had quite a few group assignments in the rooms which allowed for "small talk" and a deeper connection with the other students."

"When the lecturer asked us to divide into pairs, I did not understand how he expects us to do it when I don't know any students and everything is on Zoom."

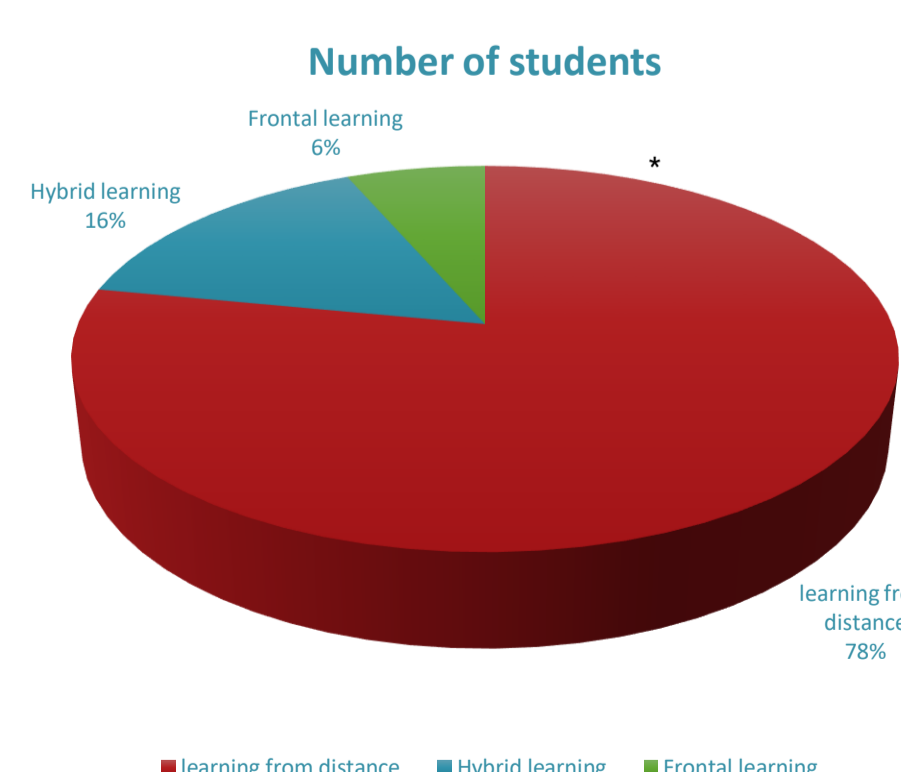
The economic challenge did not arise as a difficulty for the study participants. However, participants did indicate a need for social and emotional support.

And still:

121 of the study participants - were interested in continuing with complete distance learning.

24 of the study participants - are interested in combining distance learning with in-person learning

10 of the study participants - are interested in returning to in-person learning only.



"In WhatsApp, I saw that not only I have difficulties, but also other students experienced difficulties. This fact encouraged me"

"Studies are complex, the reality is complex, and I too as an adult was needed support and encouragement..."

"The recordings of the lessons saved me. I was able to watch the lessons at a convenient time and feel like I was present in the lesson in real-time".

"One and a half hours to sit in front of a computer in all of the courses- it is inhumane. The breaks in the middle of the lesson and the shortened class time were great for me."

Summary

The study shows that when students are supported academically and given emotional and social support, the distance learning experience is positive. Additionally, students actually enjoy the benefits of distance learning. These findings are consistent with studies showing that higher education institutions need to develop students' socio-emotional skills in order to improve their ability to cope well with stressful situations (Dvořáková, Greenberg, and Roeser 2019). Studies have found that cultivating socio-emotional abilities in the discourse of teacher education helps during extremely stressful times (Bai et al, 2020).

"When we can no longer change the situation, we are challenged to change ourselves"
Victor Frenkel