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Increasing motivation of university teachers to return office post COVID-19

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Abstract

In light of COVID-19, we are witnessing a noticeable change in the lifestyle, as there was a quarantine followed in most countries of the world, the closure of attendance for large gatherings, the suspension of face-to-face education, and its replacement with online education. Online education has become an inevitable option, especially since the World Health Organization has stated that COVID-19 vaccine would not be available before 2021. The paper is a call for collaborative and cooperative work both locally and nationally for all concerned parties to bear their responsibility to raise the alarm of boosting motivation to return to office particularly after COVID-19 crisis and resuming face-to-face education. It seems that one of the most prominent contradictions in this period is what teachers expressed their positive tendencies towards online education and the comfort of using e-learning methods. It has been observed that teachers find online more fun than just coming to classes. The study addresses the problem of motivating university teachers to return to face-to-face education. An important factor of successful education lies in the presence of a passionate, motivated, and dedicated teacher, and that necessitates offering them a safe teaching and learning environment equipped with appropriate techniques and aids. Besides, responding wisely to their fear and worries, listening to and meeting their demands would secure a smooth transit period to face-to-face education once again.

Keywords: Motivation, COVID-19, University, Teachers, Online education

Introduction

In March 2020, a novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic first broke out in Wuhan and has been spreading in whole China and has impacted almost every country and territory in the world (Mosier, Elhaty, Elhadary, & Safaei, 2020). As of November 17, 2021, there have been almost 255 million cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) worldwide (Worldometer, 2021). As a result, the World Health Organization recommended taking several measures to reduce the speed of the disease spread. The majority of countries have also taken measures that have had a significant impact in all sectors, including economic, educational, social, and religious activities. Among these measures are closing educational institutions, cutting face-to-face education, and switching to online education. Turkey has also taken the same measures and moved completely to an online education system (GÜRLER, Tuğçe, & DAŞTAN, 2020). Despite these measures, the rapid spread of the virus and the emergence of new mutations contributed to the continuation of the crisis until the preparation of this study. Suspension of face-to-face education and shifting to online programs continued to approximately a year and a half or three semesters (Sabah, 2020). During that long period, the teachers remained at home and delivered lectures, exams, and other activities via the Internet. Although online education has contributed to alleviating the problem of suspending face-to-face education, it may have led to teachers getting used to online lecturing. There is an assumption that teachers have a tendency towards preferring this type of education over face-to-face education. This study aims to assess the implications of COVID-19 on teachers in Turkey and its impact on students and university life. It also aims to explore how to avoid the negative effects of COVID-19 and how to address these effects. The challenge is how to motivate teachers to come back to the workplace and how practical and educational life could go back to the way they were before COVID-19.

The negative effects of COVID-19

There is no doubt that the prolonged continuation of COVID-19 crisis has had a negative impact on both students and teachers, and to a greater extent on students. During this period, teachers and students stayed at home, and continued online learning, responding to the procedures of the Higher Education Council and Ministry of Health in Turkey (GÜRLER et al., 2020). A previous study showed that the most important negative repercussions of COVID-19 on students are the decrease in students' motivation toward face-to-face education and their preference to continue online education (Elhadary, Elhaty, Mohamed, & Alawna, 2020). This may be due to the low academic effort required of students to secure the required results, which is often much greater than the results they used to get during the time of face-to-face education. The students' low motivation may be due to getting used to the comfort at home and not being exposed to problems and difficulties while commuting to the university. In addition to other reasons that negatively affected the students' motivation to return to face-to-face education. It can be said that the status of students, both in terms of poor participation, poor attendance, and lack of direct communication between the teacher and the student has affected the teachers' motivation. The academic level of students during this period may also be a factor in the frustration of teachers post COVID-19. In the section below, the negative effects of COVID-19 on teachers and its impact on their motivation to return to face-to-face education will be discussed.

Students participation

A previous study by us at the beginning of the crisis showed that a good percentage of teachers and students were satisfied with online education (Elhadary et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the disruption of face-to-face education after the emergence of the first cases of COVID-19 disease in Turkey and moving to online education had a direct impact on the participation and interaction of students during lectures. This phenomenon increased significantly over time as a result of the pandemic crisis. One study showed that 63% of teachers in Turkish universities acknowledged the low participation of students in lectures during the crisis (Sarac, 2021). Students' participation is important to the teacher because it gives the teacher the opportunity to elicit appropriate teaching styles in order to increase students' attention and reinforce information (Pelletier & Rocchi, 2016). The teacher also needs the students' participation during the lecture in order to assess the students' aptitudes, abilities and their comprehension (Bernaus, Wilson, & Gardner, 2009). The loss of these advantages negatively affects both the teacher and the student (Gherheș, Stoian, Fărcașiu, & Stanici, 2021).

Student attendance

At the beginning of the crisis, some Turkish universities resorted to recording and uploading lectures on the university's website, giving students the freedom to watch the video whenever they wanted without restrictions. During that period, there was no direct communication between the teacher and the students. Due to the availability of local and international online resources and platforms, a decision was made to move to online live learning (Ismail, Tariq, Rehab El, & Hilal, 2020). Although online live class platforms are better than the previous recording and uploading in terms of student participation, it remains less optimal than face-to-face education. The problem of attendance appears more clearly in universities that do not force students to attend online lectures, so the attendance rate drops significantly, especially with the provision of a recording of lectures that can be viewed at any time. In a study by Chaturvedi et al., they found that the time spent by students attending online lectures is less than the specified time (Chaturvedi, Vishwakarma, & Singh, 2021). The low attendance of students negatively affects both students and teachers, because attendance is important for students in terms of participation and refinement of and building students' personality. The low attendance of students is also negatively reflected on the teachers through the frustration of some teachers, especially when a great effort is made to prepare lectures and a small number of students attend (López-Bonilla & López-Bonilla, 2015). The attendance and effectiveness of the students during the lesson motivate the teachers to put in more effort and raise the level of productivity. The frequent absence of students, especially with the continuing crisis for a long time, may affect the students' academic levels, which will constitute a huge burden on teachers after the crisis and the return of face-to-face education.

Practical skills

Practical skills are considered one of the main pillars in schools of science, and these skills increase as the student moves to senior years at university. Practical skills are of great importance for the student's future career because these skills affect the student's chance of being accepted into the labor market and his chances of joining graduate studies (Gamage et al., 2020; Heiskanen, Thidell, & Rodhe, 2016). In a previous study, it was found that a large percentage of teachers (83.3%) and students (53.4%) believe that COVID-19 has had a significant impact on students' practical skills (Ismail et al., 2020). As a result of the continuation of the crisis for a relatively large period of the student's life experiences at the university, we believe that its impact on students is great, especially the first and second year students. Due to their lack of basic skills, senior students will not be able to acquire the higher order skills required to graduate from the university before the end of the crisis (Ismail et al., 2020). The student's lack of some practical skills may constitute a burden on teachers after the crisis ends and students return to face-to-face education. This may lead to a slowdown in the coverage of the syllabus material as a result of teachers trying to explain the missed basic skills to the students. As a result teachers may face more pressure and stress which may affect their other activities such as research activities and their social life.

Social life

With the spread of COVID-19 and most countries resorting to quarantine measures, teachers have been sitting at home and away from the university for a long time, and these measures may have long-term repercussions on the lives of students (Cohen, Hoyt, & Dull, 2020) and to a lesser extent on the social lives of teachers. Among the negatives that students may suffer during online education is the loss of communication between students and each other and between them and their teachers. Therefore, students may miss the stimulation of peer-to-peer influence and learning of social skills in the university environment (Chaturvedi et al., 2021). As a result of being social creatures, humans tend to form social relationships with others (Ammar et al., 2020; Leal Filho et al., 2021). Umberson and his colleagues found that social relationships are essential to mental and physical health and that increasing these social relationships improves mental and physical health (Umberson & Karas Montez, 2010). Although the crisis has led to a decrease in direct communication between teachers, the crisis has a positive side, as it consolidates strong family ties as a result of teachers spending a large amount of time with their families, which was not possible before the crisis. Among the positive sides, there is also an increase in the spiritual aspect as in appreciating the concept of life and death, and figuring out priorities in life, as well as concern for environmental cleanliness, and raising awareness of the unity of the societal destiny (Kwan, Cairney, Faulkner, & Pullenayegum, 2012). The increased attachment to the family, the tendency to physical comfort and the decrease in physical activities, as well as the difficulties of public transportation during the crisis have badly affected teachers' motivation toward face-to-face education.

Anxiety

Several studies have shown that teachers are concerned about infection with COVID-19 and the possibility of transmitting the disease to their families and loved ones during the crisis, which is reflected in their support for the continuity of online education during the crisis (Aiyer, Surani, Gill, Ratnani, & Sunesara, 2020; Elhadary et al., 2020). With the introduction of the vaccine and the start of vaccinating the population, this may lead to less anxiety (Bendau, Plag, Petzold, & Ströhle, 2021). However, the persistence of injuries and deaths despite vaccination may be a factor in the lack of motivation for teachers to return to face-to-face education. One study showed that 44% of teachers in Turkish universities prefer face-to-face and hybrid education, and 7% of them prefer the full online system (Sarac, 2021).

Academic and research activities

The negative repercussions of COVID-19 on teachers extended to the practice of academic and research activities as a result of the almost complete closure of universities and the transition to online teaching. Because of the quarantine measures, universities, including laboratories and research centers, were closed,

so projects and research that needed equipment and laboratories were almost stopped (Heiskanen et al., 2016). Therefore, the professors of scientific faculties were more affected than other faculties in terms of projects and research. As a result, some have stopped scientific research or resorted to other fields that do not need the practical component. One study showed that 39% of professors admitted that their research activities were affected during the crisis in Turkey, and 74% of them agreed that the crisis had a negative impact on their technological and educational skills (Sarac, 2021).

How to overcome the negative effects of COVID-19

Proponents of the idea of combining work from the office and from home stress the importance of trust on the part of the employer. Many teachers say that having both options, whether working from the university or working from home, would be the best way to go in a post-Covid world. Allowing work from the office or from home should be an option if at all possible. Allowing work from home will make company employees more skilled without requiring their physical presence in the workplace. Education authorities should learn from this experience and allow teachers to work from home whenever they want, instead of forcing them to go to the office. Perhaps Combining the two options would be better in terms of productivity.

The problem is using transportation to go to work and socializing with a lot of people, and that made teachers reluctant to go to work face-to-face. However, many of us should start using bikes more, jogging or even walking to work. A degree of flexibility is needed during the interval period from online learning and teaching to face-to-face. The idea of implementing the hybrid alternative would be a good option. Many educators believe that a person who works from home and doesn't finish work on time will probably not finish work in the office either; place doesn't change people.

It is important to reduce teachers' anxiety about contracting COVID-19 by implementing safety measures such as ensuring that teachers, students, and administrators receive both doses of COVID-19 vaccines. Moreover, the following measures should be strictly followed: wearing masks inside the university campus and in the classrooms, and observing social distance as much as possible.

The application of hybrid education may contribute to reducing student density in classrooms and university facilities, which contributes to limiting the spread of disease and alleviating the state of anxiety among teachers, thus increasing their motivation towards face-to-face education.

Classrooms set for hybrid education must be equipped with devices that enable the teacher to give lessons in person and online for students outside the university. In that way, neither hybrid nor face-to-face dominates the other. It goes without saying that the lack of appropriate classroom devices may negatively affect the performance of the teacher and cause the difficulty of communicating with students in the classroom and online students at the same time.

Another factor that may contribute to increasing the motivation of teachers to return to face-to-face education is the return of social contact between teachers themselves, which has been greatly reduced during the crisis. Therefore, we recommend holding some social events, which will relieve teachers' anxiety and fear of returning to face-to-face education.

Besides, social communication between teachers will have a positive impact on scientific research, in order to provide an opportunity for participation between teachers themselves. In general, the return of face-to-face education and social communication will have a greater impact on scientific research, which has been greatly affected by the closure of laboratories and university facilities.

Conclusion

After the emergence of COVID-19 at the end of 2019 in Wuhan, China, and its spread to all countries of the world, educational institutions, including universities, were closed and that led to the suspension of face-to-face education and moving to online learning. Online education has greatly contributed to alleviating the

negative repercussions of the crisis due to the closure of universities. However, the continuation of the crisis for a relatively long period had a clear impact on teachers' motivation to return to face-to-face education post-Covid-19 phase. The low academic level of students, the bad impact on students' practical skills, and teachers' anxiety about infection with Covid-19 are among the most important factors that may demotivate teachers to return to face-to-face education. Therefore, it is necessary to plan for post-COVID-19 phase by providing the appropriate environment to motivate teachers to return to face-to-face education. Certain measures should be implemented to guarantee the safety of teachers and enhance students' performance without adding new burdens on teachers. It can be concluded that universities cannot create a happy and productive working environment in unsafe and uncomfortable conditions. More effort should be allocated to find more creative ideas for making the workplace a safer environment for both students and educators. In the end, many see the current situation as an opportunity to reshape the features of work with more flexibility and an open mind, focusing on results, not place.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no competing interests.

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