



## Advantages and Disadvantages of Distance Learning during Covid 19 Pandemic

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### Abstract

**Aim:** *Distance learning plays a vital role, especially during the pandemic covid 19. As the virus is widespread, teaching institutions around the world have been closed because of health issues. In this critical time, education, including all other walks of life, suffers a lot. However, the distance mode of learning has helped a lot to teachers as well as students in continuing education and learning activities. It not only helped in teaching practices but also in assessment practices. Distance learning has been a sort of blessing during this pandemic. Nevertheless, there have been some disadvantages also associated with distance learning like lack of classroom environment, lack of effective teaching strategies, and lack of physical (eye) contact with students, etc. which result in a lack of interest for some*

*students. This paper takes into account the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning during the lockdown of the pandemic Covid -19.*

**Methodology and Approach:** *The study is based on the role of distance education during the pandemic Covid-19. Several types of research on Covid-19 throughout the world have proved that distance learning has been a sort of blessing during the pandemic. The author has consulted many researchers on distance learning and briefly discussed its main advantages and disadvantages.*

**Outcome:** *The distance mode of learning through different online platforms like zoom, blackboard, etc. has been a great source to continue the business of teaching and learning. Though there have been several disadvantages too, the positive aspects of online learning especially during Covid-19 have outweighed them.*

**Conclusion and Suggestions:** *There have been many advantages and disadvantages of distance learning. Nevertheless, given in the present circumstances, there is no scope left to consider the disadvantages during the pandemic. Distance education needs many improvements like training the teachers and students in online teaching and learning, requiring more budgets to buy electronic equipment and gadgets for teachers and students, making it more professional and accountable, etc.*

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Pandemic, Distance Learning, Advantages, Disadvantages

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Distance learning is a mode of teaching in which teaching and learning take place virtually without the physical presence of teachers and students. This mode of learning is specifically useful for students who cannot afford to attend daytime university classes. There may be various reasons, for example, some students do not have time to come to university as they are busy with their part-time or full-time job. Some students cannot afford the huge amount of fees of offline classes. Some students live in remote areas and it takes a lot of time to come to university. So, there may be several reasons why some students prefer to join the distance mode of learning.

Distance learning has been very helpful in times of epidemic situations. Since its foundation, universities, like any other social institution, have had to face devastating epidemics that have impacted their daily functioning. In 1665, Cambridge University was closed due to a black plague epidemic that struck England. Isaac Newton had to return to Wools Thorpe Manor, his home. One day, sitting in the garden, he saw an apple fall that inspired him to formulate his theory of universal gravitation or, at least, he told William Stukeley who included this anecdote in Newton's biography that he would publish after his death (Stukeley, 1752). The moral of this story is that in as much as the doors of higher education institutions have to be shut down, academic activities continue where there are spirits committed to science and training, and, sometimes, with surprising results. The epidemics cannot discourage students and researchers.

However, these days one more significant and inevitable reason is added to the list of reasons for joining virtual classes and distance learning. This unexpected reason is Covid-19 which has resulted in the lockdown of almost every country in the world. Incidentally, the University of Cambridge has closed its doors now in 2020, for the second time in its history. Currently, the temporary closures of higher education institutions (HEIs) due to the COVID-19 pandemic

are no longer news, because most countries have stopped face-to-face teaching in most of the institutions. (IESALC 2020)

The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the delivery of instruction in K-12 and institutions of higher education to almost entirely online. They have tried their best to inspire the students to join classes virtually with full enthusiasm and positivity. This is the perfect opportunity to educate students about the importance of equality, and anti-discrimination, investigate harassment and bullying complaints promptly and prohibit xenophobia.

This pandemic has presented us with many challenges. However, this is the opportunity for school officials to build community, albeit remotely, which can make a positive impact on the future of education. (Arellano, 2020)

Distance learning is not new to the current education system and thus emerges every year in several educational institutions with the promise of distance education quality. There are institutions like the DEAC Distance Education Accrediting Commission, which have the sole function of crediting quality educational institutions. The DEAC was founded in 1926, in the United States, to promote the quality of education and ethical practices for distance education mode. She created and regulated standards and accreditation procedures that seek to examine and approve educational institutions for the distance mode of learning.

So, distance learning is not completely a new phenomenon. It has been in practice even in normal conditions. This time this mode of learning is of extreme importance as regular and physical classes are shut down almost all over the world. Thus, this study aims to identify the main advantages and disadvantages of distance education for both students and the institution as a teaching mode, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. (Oliveira, Penedo & Pereira 2018).

There are currently two types of education, namely the presence, also conventional call, to been used for centuries, and distance, more recent, but has increased its acceptance every day. Distance education, known acronym to call this type of education is a way of learning which is established by the use of technologies that allow interaction between the student and the teacher, although they are in physical environments and different timelines (Moran 1997).

According to an article published in *The Journal*, a North American journal specializing in education, distance education appeared in the year 1840, the year in which Sir Isaac Pitman had the idea of creating professional shorthand writing courses by correspondence. The concept was so successful that within a few years, the educational programs were already available in the UK, Germany, the USA, and Japan. In 1900, the first education department by correspondence appeared at the University of Chicago, and in 1911 it appeared in Australia, at the University of Queensland, in the Department of Foreign Studies.

In the United States, the first institution working with distance learning was the New York State's Empire State College (NYSE) in 1971. According to Bizhan (1997), NYSE aimed to make higher education more accessible to students who were unable to attend classes on college campuses. The created program provided the entry of several students who did not have the requirements for entering a traditional university. During this time, professors Charles Wedemeyer and Gayle Childs studied and were responsible for the advancement of research in distance education, which enabled the national and international growth of this type of education.

This type of education has gradually shown its intense increasing relevance because of its social bias, the inclusion point of view brought by the flexibility of the methodology used to those who hitherto could not attend educational institutions for lack of time availability or by the distance of the same,

it brings the possibility of access to students who were outside the universities and other institutions. The growing demand for education, not only due to population growth and, above all the struggles of the working classes by access to education, to learn socially produced concurrently with the development of scientific and technological knowledge is demanding changes in the level of function and structure of school and university (Preti 1996).

This inclusion becomes more apparent because distance education enables students to establish their study schedule, and the feasibility of this is provided by classes taught via the internet, most of the time, and through other media. The learner autonomy in the face of distance education methodology makes it possible that it has a chance to join various categories of courses such as graduation, graduate, technical courses, vocational, and further training (MAIA; MATTAR 2007).

According to Valentine (2002), the problems in distance education are of internal and external order and include among them: 1) The quality of education itself, which is also a factor to be overcome in traditional education; 2) The hidden costs, which often are not classified correctly and may generate future problems; 3) Misuse of technology, and this problem is relevant to educational institutions and students; 4) The attitudes of teachers, who cannot adapt to the ways of teaching required by distance education and 5) The attitudes of students, who must be more committed than the students of traditional teaching.

Baron and Shane (2007) define entrepreneurship as a business area aimed at innovation, whose actions are performed by specific individuals, which seek to identify means to put their ideas into practice by identifying an opportunity. In addition, the entrepreneur should be equipped with skills to manage the new business and project. Entrepreneurship is now socially better accepted and being an entrepreneur is an option respected by the population. The media also

contributes positively to this social dynamic, particularly for the attention and prominence it gives to successful cases, such as cases of leaders and entrepreneurial spirit that some people manifest. Thereby promoting the enterprise, making it a socially acceptable option. (FERREIRA; SANTOS; SERRA, 2010, p. 18).

However, the idea that distance education is more cost-effective than traditional teaching is not unanimous among the subject experts. According to Dr. LennAnnetta (2004), from the State University of North Carolina (USA), administrators of educational institutions are investing all their resources in distance education to control the overall institutional costs; however, such an attitude is risky. They believe that distance education costs are lower than traditional education costs, but due to high wear and high dropout rate in this mode, the cost per student ends up being the same or even more than traditional teaching costs. According to analyses carried out, the dropout rate in distance education reaches 35% of students, while in traditional teaching that content is only 20%. If calculated all costs in distance education, such as the cost of time, experience, and the necessary technology, among others, the modality of distance education, high-quality being, will have the same or higher cost per student of physics school.

According to Litwin (2001), the development of distance education contributed to the implementation of various aspects of education, such as training courses, job training or popular science, literacy campaigns, and also formal education at all levels and fields of the education system. Such flexibility in this mode favors more investment in this sector because the educational institution has enough possibilities in case there is a need to adapt to market changes.

There is no need for a physical space: the need for a physical space in classroom courses ends up generating a series of bureaucratic and costly

processes, such as the need for business licenses and adjustments in physical facilities. The distance learning courses eliminate this need because the classes can be taught in virtual environments and other contacts that are relevant between student and institution can also be made between this and other non-personal means; • A single class (video) serves several classes: in the case of regular classes, the teacher must teach the same class for various classes at varying times. In distance education, the teacher and tutor have their lessons recorded in video format, for example, and the institution offers these videos to students, or the teacher teaches the content once. There is a need to record a new video just to update the content. (Oliveira, Penedo & Pereira, 2018).

There have been several advantages of distance learning like

- **Flexibility:** Many students look for distance education courses just because they cannot or do not want to expose themselves to the rigidity required in physical classroom courses. In this sense, the flexibility offered by distance mode is configured as a great advantage. There have been several students who cannot join the regular classes because they engage in part-time jobs. However, during the Covid 19 pandemic, it is of great use as students and teachers can prepare a schedule of their choices and engage themselves in teaching and learning.
- **Content availability:** In most courses offered on-site, the students attend classes that are offered only once and must write down and find other means for the given content is saved for future reference. In classes taught at distance, however, the content (usually recorded on video and audio) is available to the student for this review whenever necessary. In the pandemic situation, the contents



are of great importance. Students can use these contents as per their schedule and with ease.

- **Low cost:** One can find on the market courses offered at various levels of education at much lower prices compared to the prices of traditional classroom courses. Moreover, students can save a lot of money and time on transportation. During the financial crisis of Covid 19, students and their families cannot afford expensive education.
- **Studying at home at any time you want:** One of the factors that made the distance learning courses a great success during the pandemic is exactly the fact that many students belonging to the target audience are already either in lockdown or facing health issues alone or with family. Accordingly, the lack of rigidity concerning the Covid-19 pandemic, the site may also characterize an advantage of distance education for students from the standpoint. Students have complete freedom to learn as per their choice and freedom. (Oliveira, Penedo& Pereira, 2018)

Although proved very advantageous, distance education has also some disadvantages namely:

- **Need for discipline:** To make distance learning a success, one needs to follow strict discipline as without proper discipline, it cannot succeed. Excessive flexibility can also represent a disadvantage to students who do not have enough discipline to be able to meet the required activities without the presence of a teacher to guide and supervise them.
- **Lack of proper attention:** In regular classes, students can have the opportunity to ask questions in the very moment they arise,

while in distance courses that does not happen so easily, causing the student to save his questions for some future time meeting or another contact with tutors and teachers. This proves as a barrier in teaching and learning situations. Most of the students do not bother to ask questions at a later stage. Moreover, most of the questions come only during the teaching.

- **A remarkable difference:** There is a major difference between traditional education and online education. For example, the institution may end up losing its quality when in classroom mode the student has no opportunity to contribute more actively in the preparation of lessons. During conventional classes, students can contribute with their experiences, questions, and considerations and thus make the class take different paths. While in the distance mode of learning, the student gets ready for the teacher's speech and is unlikely to change the parameters set by the recorded lectures. Thus, it may be that the student stays with questions that are not taken at the exact moment they arise and still presents difficulties in terms of content, in many cases, the teacher does not even take notice.
- **Feedback:** Students take longer. In traditional classes, the teacher gets feedback immediately, which does not happen in non-face classes. Therefore, the teacher takes longer to be aware if the student has obtained or is not efficiently learning.
- **Cultural aspect:** Despite distance education has already been spread throughout the world and has an ever-increasing culture, many countries prefer traditional classroom settings and teaching. Several students, administrators, and policymakers still have

certain prejudice with this mode of teaching and believe distance courses are ineffective when compared to classroom courses. However, during the present pandemic, there is no option left. (Oliveira, Penedo & Pereira, 2018)

There have been many advantages and disadvantages of distance learning. Nevertheless, given in the present circumstances, there is no scope left to consider the disadvantages during the pandemic. It seems that the distance mode of education cannot be successful and needs a lot of practice on behalf of students and teachers. Teachers are also struggling with the rapid transition to online learning, even those in countries with reliable infrastructure and household connectivity. They also need to be trained to deliver distance and online education. Again, developing countries like Saudi Arabia, India, etc. face a lot of challenges.

Audrey Azoulay, UNESCO Director General said, “While efforts to provide connectivity to all must be multiplied, we now know that continued teaching and learning cannot be limited to online means”. If the lockdown during the pandemic continues, one needs to engage other sources also like the use of community radio and television broadcasts, and creativity in all ways of learning. The main advantage for the institution is precisely the fact that distance learning enables service to a greater number of students, which would not be feasible to happen in the classroom mode if the intention was to maintain the quality of service. A classroom is always capacity bound and cannot go beyond its capacities. In distance mode, maintaining quality is one of the biggest challenges. The reason is correlated with the quality of the teaching provided. A poor-quality program will have a high dropout rate, and this will not reduce the costs if most of them are considered fixed. In the end, the cost per student will be greater than in traditional school, even if the total cost is not, due to the smaller number of

students present and active in the distance education programs. Because of this, a constant assessment of the costs and the quality of such education should be carried out by educational institutions.

The distance mode may remain constantly increasing, but it still seems utopian to say that at some point in the history of education, classroom teachings will be out of practice and thus be completely replaced by distance education. However, in the present pandemic, there is no idea how long it will continue. This is because not all students have the necessary profile to join a distance learning course, but rather need physical space, with conventional classes so they can absorb the content. In another moment it still can be examined systematically whether there are discrepancies between the management of classroom courses and distance learning courses and in which mode remain the greatest challenges. (Oliveira, Penedo & Pereira, 2018)

The traditional formulas of distance education, that is, those in which the teacher continues to teach a regular class that is broadcast live and can be retrieved on a delayed basis, seem to be the most appreciated by students because they are the ones that best reproduce the dynamics to which they are used. Initiatives that radically change operating rules and require students to leave their comfort zone without any prior training are less appreciated because, for quite different reasons, undergraduates tend to be more conservative than might be thought or be less prepared to change modes (Watts 2016).

Since January 2020, the spread of COVID-19 has affected the global travel of thousands of students. Since late February 2020, travel restrictions to various locations, including China, Iran, South Korea, Italy, and later Argentina, Brazil, Spain, Panama, and Venezuela, to name but a few, have impeded the flows of international students, faculty and university staff around the world. In

this critical situation, higher education institutions have the only option of virtual classes left with them. There is no other way out to continue the classes.

In this critical time, teachers are expected to do their best in virtual classes. They need to spend a lot of time preparing themselves for online classes. The most obvious impact on teachers is the expectation, if not the requirement, that they continue to teach using the virtual modality. In theory, at least, virtual education is present in most large HEIs and it is difficult to find one that does not have a virtual campus and, within it, a virtual classroom for each subject, as an extension of the physical classroom. In practice, the ability of each teacher to continue teaching largely depends on their experience in that regard. We must also consider that those subjects which include the development of professional competencies through practice (clinics, pedagogical residencies, design careers, engineering, science, and generally all those heavily dependent on practical workshops, laboratory work, or institutional practices) are a source of greater uncertainty, which will lead to a set of different impacts on the system of the individual university. Mathematics generally presents more difficulties in the virtual adaptation process.

Higher education systems have cooperated well in a solidarity way at a global level. It has acted uniformly: they have continued teaching using pedagogical modalities that do not require physical attendance. Doubts arise when one begins to hypothesize about the likelihood of a prolonged duration of this exceptional situation. Though it is hoped the situation will be better soon, it cannot guarantee future course. Although the concept of a governance network is not new and its original meaning has little to do with the technological aspects (Dal Molin & Masella, 2016), confinement and quarantine have led to the emergence, due to the circumstances, of policy communication modalities that are probably more in line with the 21st century.

How to validate distance learning? The natural recommendation is that diagnostic evaluation tests be carried out for each course to locate the level of competence of each student relative to what would be reasonably expected. These tests must be formative in the sense that they guide the teaching responses and that they allow for adequately differentiate of the levels of achievement of students. Various instruments for distance education assessment can be effective, although an issue that is not yet fully resolved, is the verification of the student's identity. Again, technology can be used as a support tool for personalizing the validation process. In this sense, there are some strategies that, despite not being frequently used in higher education, can bear good fruit, such as Individualized tutoring; Small learning groups to facilitate equal progress in critical subjects which are fundamentally important, and Summer (or winter) schools offering compensatory seminars. Inevitably, the implementation of initiatives such as these carries an associated cost that is not negligible, but the benefits in terms of quality of learning and equity, far outweigh the costs.

We usually say that in every crisis there is always an opportunity. Perhaps, in this case, it is an opportunity for a pedagogical review. It is therefore expected that many HEIs will undertake the path of a necessary pedagogical renewal that favors both quality and equality. (IESALC 2020)

There is no doubt in the fact that virtual classes have been no less than a boon during Covid-19. Teachers have tried their best to make online classes a success. However, if certain strategies of teaching are modified, there may be more benefits of online teaching. For example, teachers need to ask a few questions based on the lectures to ensure that students have understood the contents of the lectures. Teachers, at Duke, have used the term 'exit ticket' which denotes certain questions at the end of the lecture before they leave the session. Exit tickets, which ask students to answer a few short questions before leaving or

signing off, help instructors pinpoint specific student needs, confirm what they learned that day, and determine which aspects they are still having trouble with. In this way, students get an opportunity to ask their questions and their presence is also felt in an online class. (Duke 2020)

Teachers can also use certain questions as a warm-up activity for students which can help students feel more interested in the virtual classes. At Duke, The Graduate School, instructors asked certain questions such as, “What was a highlight of your week?” and “What is one challenge you have been facing while staying at home?” Students then responded individually in the chat window, and we briefly acknowledged and discussed their responses. This way, instructors were successful to engage students. (Duke 2020).

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