

# The COVID's period - A shifting point in acceptance of online teaching for the academic community of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies

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## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has precipitated a notable shift in the adoption and acceptance of online teaching within the academic community of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. This period served as a pivotal moment, compelling institutions to swiftly pivot from traditional face-to-face instruction to remote learning modalities. This paper examines the transformative impact of the pandemic on the educational practices of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, focusing on the rapid integration of online teaching methodologies. Through a synthesis of empirical data and anecdotal evidence, this study elucidates the challenges and opportunities encountered during the COVID-19 period. It investigates the pedagogical approaches employed by faculty members to deliver engaging and effective online instruction, highlighting the role of technological infrastructure and institutional support in facilitating this transition. Additionally, it explores the evolving perceptions and attitudes towards online education among stakeholders within the institution. The COVID-19 pandemic has catalyzed a paradigm shift in the acceptance of online teaching within the academic community of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, underscoring the resilience and adaptability of higher education institutions in response to unforeseen challenges. Research results show that after this period teachers are more open to teaching online, even if they prefer to recommend books in physical format and increasingly use online resources. In addition, e-learning is becoming a viable alternative for them.

## Keywords

e-learning, Covid, higher education, digital resources, educational process

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## Introduction

The use of Internet technologies has been an essential element in the transformation of today's society. It has made space and distances between individuals irrelevant, which has meant that the phenomenon of globalisation has encompassed all economic and social activities. Education could not fail to be affected by these two factors. The Internet and globalisation have made it possible to access scientifically relevant information more quickly and to use new methods and techniques in the educational process (Kocaleva, Stojanovic and Zdravev, 2015).

In addition, the educational process is more efficient and cheaper, by using of the Internet and information technology, because the virtual environment allows for better adaptation to the needs of each individual and more efficient transfer of information and knowledge. The effectiveness of this process is also due to the fact that it allows the combination of different teaching and learning techniques by using individualized teaching techniques for each learner as well as the delivery of general material in text, audio or video format

(Hubackova, 2015; Popovici and Mironov, 2015). All this is possible because learning through the online environment allows the teacher to adapt the educational content to the needs and learning dynamic of students (Suresh Babu and Sridevi, 2018). However, the online learning system also has its vulnerabilities such as lack of direct interaction with the teacher and other members of the group, lack of constant communication between teacher and learner or the possibility of using tools or methods that are ineffective or not adapted to the learner's needs (Keller and Cernerud, 2002).

At the same time, it is worth noting that the computer-based educational process has evolved greatly, moving from the transmission of text-based teaching materials in electronic format to a multitude of IT solutions that allow the construction of teaching materials in any format needed (text, audio, video) and platforms through which materials are provided and educational activities are conducted (Freire, Arezes and Campos, 2012). The development of these online platforms allows for better interaction between teacher and learner and more efficient management of available resources. The use of discussion forums, individualized messages, synchronized content transmission systems and virtual tutors are just some of the tools made available by virtual education systems (Piotrowski, 2010; Benta, Bologna and Dzitac, 2014; Veeramanickam M. R. M. and Ramesh, 2022). If we add to these the portals that provide information on web addresses where relevant information on the field of study can be found, we can have a complete picture of the usefulness and efficiency that information technology offers in the educational process (Stecula and Wolniak, 2022).

Amid the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, which brought a challenge for all the factors involved in the educational process, the entire educational activity was forced to move online. Even if online learning is not a new concept, we consider the challenge to find solutions for the development of a fair environment for both learning and teaching to be an issue that requires further attention.

Although there is abundant information in scientific literature regarding online teaching and learning amid the Covid-19 pandemic in different countries worldwide, significantly little research has been done with regard to acceptance of online teaching for the Romanian academic community. Here are to be mentioned the studies of Vlachopoulos (2011), Toquero (2020), Hofer, Nistor and Scheibenzuber (2021), Selvaraj et al. (2021), Al-Ansi (2022), Saha et al. (2022), Adedoyin and Soykan (2023) that investigated the challenges of the accelerated transition from the traditional physical classroom to online learning environments and the e-learning practices, in the attempt to understand the users' experience and to determine the perspectives for this form of education after the COVID-19 pandemic. The common insights provided by these studies showed that teachers accepted the transition from offline to online teaching and after the pandemic period they continued to use both types of teaching.

In this context, the aim of the present paper is to fill this gap by gaining insights on how teachers have adapted to the transition from face-to-face to exclusively online learning and if they want to use online teaching after the pandemic period at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. For this we wanted to determine what type of teaching materials they now use and how their perception of online teaching has changed. Therefore, exploratory research was performed, conducted online through a self-administered structured questionnaire. This allowed us to argue that after this period teachers are more open to online teaching and, although they still prefer recommending printed books they are using online resources more and more. In addition, e-learning is becoming a viable alternative for them. This approach can be useful to scholars, specialists, and other decision-makers in the field of higher education.

The study begins with an introductory section providing some background elements and presenting the general framework of online learning through the pandemic period. Items of previous research in the area are also discussed in this section. Next section is dedicated to the presentation of the methodological approach, emphasizing the steps followed in conducting the study. The third one includes the presentation of the results alongside the discussion of their significance. Finally, there is a section comprising the conclusions and the implication of the study.

## **1. Research objectives and methodology**

In order to achieve the research objectives, exploratory research was performed, conducted online through a structured questionnaire uploaded on the free platform Isondaje.ro.

The observation unit was the members of the academic community of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies and the observation time was unique because I wanted to capture a state of affairs resulting from a unique phenomenon, the COVID-19 pandemic.

The constructed questionnaire comprised 10 questions, organized in three sections, as follows: the first section with identification questions, followed by questions related to how the eLearning activities were carried out in the second section, and the last one consisting of questions about the evolution of the perception of the quality of teaching in the online environment. The questionnaire was self-administered.

It was distributed to teachers of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, by sending them the web address. The reason why they were asked to answer the questionnaire was explained to respondents and also their consent to participate was asked for.

The research hypotheses were formulated in such a way that the statement is testable and has quality.

1. Teachers have used more digital resources than paper resources during this period.
2. Teachers needed training to improve their online teaching skills
3. Teachers consider that online teaching is more efficient

In order to measure as accurately as possible the phenomena being investigated, both metric and non-metric measurement scales were used.

Data were collected from a sample of 317 respondents. Data analysis was performed using SPSS 24.

## 2. Results and Discussion

In an attempt to conduct research, we distributed the questionnaire to teachers of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. Table 1 shows the distribution by teaching grade.

**Table no. 1. Respondents Degrees**

Assistant professor	8.1%
Lecturer	27.0%
Associate Professor	21.6%
University professor	43.2%

Regarding the teaching resources used in the teaching process, as shown in Figure 1, the full range of teaching materials needed in the teaching and assessment process was used quite frequently.

An obvious switch to the use of digital materials can be observed. For all the proposed variants the number of those who said they did not use such resources is below 10%. The only option for which this percentage is exceeded is that of homework on paper, which demonstrates once again that teachers have migrated to the use of digital materials, which confirms hypothesis 1.

We note that teachers emphasized the textbook, even though students said that they did not focus on studying it, preferring more the aids. Even though they emphasized the textbook and textbook-related materials, they also did not give up encouraging the study of printed books.

Confirmation that educators have adapted to working online can be seen from the fact that the percentages for Homework and practice activities assigned to students in digital form and Student's self-evaluation tools are identical. This shows that the digital platform provided by Bucharest University of Economic Studies was used intensively during this period.

After calculating the weighted averages for all the items proposed in this question we found that most of them have a value around 2.7, which confirms what we said earlier, that teachers have adapted quite well to the online activity. There are, however, two averages that do not come close to this value. These are Homework and practice activities assigned to students on paper which had an average of 2.37 and Homework and practice activities assigned to students in digital form which had an average of 3.27. The two results certify that there has been a shift away from offline activities and an emphasis on online activities, fact which matches with the results emerging from the studies of Toquero (2020) and Adedoyin and Soykan (2023).

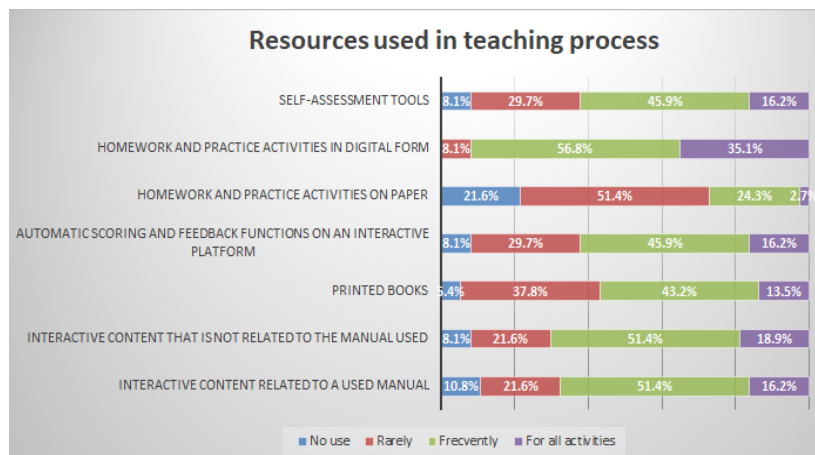


Figure no. 1. Resources used in teaching process

To find out how much teaching has changed, the next question was about how they used teaching materials in physical or digital format before the Covid-19 crisis began.

Table no. 2. Frequency of resource use

	Digital resources for the course / seminar	Books and other paper materials for the course / seminar	Digital resources for homework	Books and other paper materials for homework	Digital statistics (on the platform used) to monitor students performances and progresses
Use less	2.7%	73.0%	2.7%	70.3%	8.1%
Same use	18.9%	24.3%	21.6%	27.0%	24.3%
Use more	78.4%	2.7%	75.7%	2.7%	67.6%

There is a clear transition from paper to digital materials. This can also be explained by the fact that teachers had previously used the blending learning platform of the university. Broadly similar findings resulted from the study of Tartavulea et al. (2020), Vlachopoulos (2020) and Saha et al. (2022).

Data show that the percentage of non-use of digital resources before the pandemic is identical to the percentage of use of paper resources during the pandemic, i.e. 2.7%. This result best demonstrates that the respondents were consistent in their responses and thus consider the veracity of the results. In fact, the difference between the values obtained for "Same use" and "Use more" is due to the fact that some of the respondents were already using some of the facilities offered by the Bucharest University of Economic Studies online platform.

A question that was addressed to teachers, as we felt that they were less prepared for a sudden shift from offline to online, was how they improved their knowledge of e-learning methods and tools.

A large proportion of those interviewed said they did not need special training. This result refutes hypothesis 2. As mentioned above, this response can be explained by the fact that the Bucharest University of Economic Studies has been using an online platform for a long time now, which, while mainly used for students enrolled in distance learning courses, can also be used for students enrolled in on-campus courses. We found similar findings in the study of Suresh Babu and Sridevi (2018).

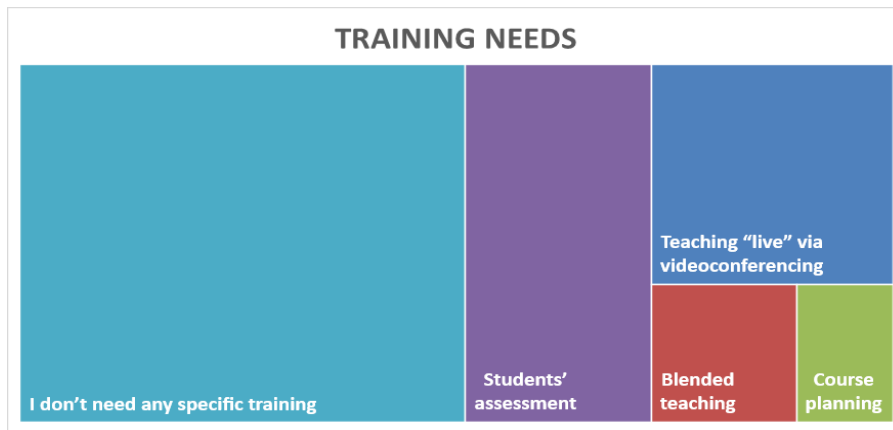


Figure no. 3 Training needs for educators

A proportion of respondents said that they needed to prepare for "live" teaching via videoconferencing, which is normal given that this type of teaching was not widely used before the pandemic (Sarbu et al., 2021). Another type of activity for which there was a need for training sessions was related to Students' assessment.

A final point to note is that none of the respondents stated that they needed additional training to improve communication with students, which is why this response does not appear in Figure 3.

Table 3 Teachers' perception regarding online teaching

		Before pandemic period have you thought that online teaching is more effective than physical teaching?	Do you now consider online teaching more effective than physical teaching?	Before pandemic period have you thought that for online teaching you need the same amount of time to prepare as for physical teaching?	Now for online teaching do you need the same time to prepare as for physical teaching?
N	Valid	37	37	37	37
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		2.16	2.41	3.19	3.92
Median		2.00	2.00	3.00	4.00

The teachers' perceptions of online teaching before and after going through the experience of the pandemic period has changed. As shown in Table 3, teachers consider that online teaching is more efficient and that they need more time to prepare effectively than in the case of offline teaching. Thus, we can consider that hypothesis 3 is confirmed.

### Conclusions

We can say that this period in which we were forced to change the way we taught and in which we had to adapt to a situation in which we were not fully prepared, was one in which teachers experimented and did their best to make sure that students did not feel the difference between on-campus and online teaching.

Teachers offered more digital resources than they usually did, but continued to rely on printed materials. At the same time, when they felt it necessary, they offered emotional support to students both during the lectures they gave and in private when asked. They did not limit themselves to providing information during lectures and application activities, but also offered additional clarification or study aids.

In terms of teaching skills specific to e-learning teachers said that their previous knowledge in this area was sufficient, the only problems they encountered were those related to teaching via video system, where at first, they needed guidance, and along the way they felt a dissatisfaction that students did not give them the same feedback they would have felt in the classroom.

We can say, however, that their confidence in online teaching has increased, but not enough that they prefer to continue teaching this way. Perhaps another reason why they would prefer face to face relationships is

that they need more time to prepare their lectures and to provide students with enough resources to understand the concepts being taught.

As a final conclusion to what we have presented so far, the teachers are concerned, they find teaching online and adapting to such a situation quite stressful and challenging, but in terms of teachers' perceptions of online teaching before and after going through the experience of pandemic period, we can say that they have changed radically.

Given the nature of this research, its limitations are obvious. The limited number of people cannot allow a statistical generalization of the results. Plus, the results are offering only the insights of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies and cannot be extended even to Romanian university education. However, the results and the proposed solutions could be used by the scholars who want to study the effects of the pandemic on university education and the transformations that have occurred as a result.

Further research is needed to predict the future evolution of higher education: traditional or a mix of online and traditional? The answer to this question depends on several factors, such as resources, already available and those which will be allocated, on the desire of students to learn and the adaptability of teachers to the online education, the legislative framework and the large public acceptance.

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