



Didactic Communication during the Emergency Period

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Abstract

We all live in an unusual time, in which human activities are disrupted, the educational process being the most disrupted of all, the process which relies on human communication, on influence and direct contact between the educator and educable. No one had any prior experience on this matter, causing anxiety, confusion, demotivation in both students and teachers, because the word "normal" will have a different meaning in the future, a meaning we have yet to discover and also because we do not have sufficient information to better define the danger that wanders near. In such conditions, educational results were not the expected ones, and the information that we need to manage and also to adapt in a suitable manner need to be collected from primary carriers, those being the students and/or teachers. The way students have been managing such a complex situation, to participate in the educational activities can be a great start to better understand what is happening at the individual and also group level.

Key words: Adaptation; behaviors; didactic communication; pandemic; student; teacher

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1. Introduction

Didactic communication, the important part of interhuman communication is the instrument by which formal or nonformal education can achieve its goal, to grow skills for the future. Didactic communication is instrumental communication (Cosmovici & Iacob, 1999), directly involved in supporting a systematic process of teaching. We need to highlight the fact that the process of didactic communication implies a premeditation and a clear intentionality in the sense of producing profound and long-term changes in the individual and in society (Sălăvăstru, 2004). The unfolding of this process implies a formally organized staff, the existence of a double theoretical basis, that is, the theory of education and pedagogy as well as the theory of the scientific field within which communication takes place. More than that, the efficiency of this type of communication is subject to evaluation regularly, and also evaluation by constant reference to the educational ideal. The character of this type of communication is intensely persuasive, which displays in action a whole set of means, channels and procedures that can and must be combined to achieve the set goals.

Contrary to certain preconceived ideas, physical education class relies on communication as much as any other class. More than that, in physical education class, there are also used complex gestural symbols, auditive signals with different meanings, movements, static postures, etc., that play an essential role in the system of didactic communication. In the conduct of physical education classes, a varied range of didactic methods are used, namely expository verbal methods, conversational verbal methods, but also methods that involve demonstrations in particular. Verbal messages are predominantly present in the form of orders, explanations, but also in the form of motivational, inductive and suggestive messages. It is noteworthy that a verbal message, the command for executing movement or a succession of movements, has the effect of triggering a motor action in the student. Motivation and persuasion have an extremely important role in the practicability of physical exercise, the teacher can only do this through the use of verbal messages, based on a close teacher-student relationship, so that the student's receptivity and availability to be assured to accept the suggestions made or to follow advice, to achieve performance.

We deduce that, in general, the feedback expected by the teacher is not always another verbal message coming from the student, but rather the motor action by which the student performs and the correctness/accuracy of the execution. In this way, the cognitive, communicative functions are activated but also those of persuasive and expressive, decisive fact for achieving the objectives in the physical education class. No less important are also the paraverbal elements which follow verbal messages, elements that should present the following distinctive elements (Dragnea, 2004):

- voice volume, which must be varied, based on the learning circumstances;
- the rhythm of pronouncing words, which must be in agreement with the rhythm of movements and with the requirements to support the verbal message;
- the tone of voice, which must go through a wide repertoire, from firmness to warmth, depending on the type of message and required feedback from the student;
- diction, which must ensure the clarity of the message.

Nonverbal communication has a large share in physical education classes and includes two correct ways of performing the physical exercise:

- gestural communication, which has supporting, filling and sometimes even replacement roles for the verbal message;
- action and behavioral communication, which creates the bridge between the field of motor behaviors and the attitudinal and ideational area.

An important part of nonverbal communication is the body language, which is achieved through special techniques:

- movements, parts of a movement or sequence of movements executed in a logical order and a specific objective;
- using static or dynamic hypostases, by tensioning different muscle groups;

Such techniques are usually used for expressing through body language, but physical education does not exclude the aesthetics of movement, on the contrary, successfully executed movements can be, most of the time, filled with grace and can convey emotions. One of the conditions of effective communication is active listening, which needs to characterize both the teacher and also the student. Both parties involved in the communication need to assume their role to maintain focus, to process the information, to ask for clarification and give the right feedback.

The union of every type of communication (verbal, nonverbal, paraverbal), in equal proportions, is the key to obtain success in didactic communication. The teacher is the one leading the process, therefore one must be capable to formulate messages and instructions, and the student needs to execute the moves or answer according to the subject. During the physical education class, the success of the didactic approach depends on how the teacher manages to initiate and maintain balanced social relationships, as well as obtaining the trust of students, so as to ensure the required authority and develop the student's attachment to exercise. These desideratums can only be reached through effective and good quality didactic communication, which depends on both the qualities of the transmitter, the teacher, as well as the mental development and abilities of the receiver, the student. It is imperative for the student to have the linguistic repertoire that includes specific terms of physical education, and the teacher's intervention to come at the optimal moment, so that the student understands the meaning of communication.

2. Investigating the specifics of the teacher-student communication during the declaration of the state of emergency - the preamble

2.1. The research problem

The declaration of the state of emergency by Decree 195/16.03.2020 and the extension of the emergency state for another month, led to the radical change of the normal course of things from the point of view of education. Educational activities have been transferred sooner or later, with more or less difficulty, to the online environment, which has led to unusual behavior in students, but also teachers. Direct student-teacher contact disappeared, the school year ended without the students enjoying the closing activities and without obtaining the long-awaited rewards: awards, crown books and diplomas, but especially the public recognition of the effort made throughout the year. Not only the students from the primary cycle but also the older ones, from the middle or high school cycles suffered because of school closure. They are at an age where they assimilate rule sets for social behavior, interaction, they acquire useful skills for life, ingraining in the subconscious a specific type of normality. The danger in this regard comes from the fact that students that go through this time, can integrate as normal social distancing, contact with peers as limited as possible and transferring most of one's life to another environment, the virtual one, where the boundaries are more vague and where one can deceive another much easier and mistakes are more frequent, students not being directly supervised. Personal and social effects begin to appear (restlessness, frustration, revolt), but will probably be more visible and consistent in the future when these children and teens will become adults, parents and teachers in their own right. Emotional intelligence develops at young age, therefore isolation and lack of direct communication will speak for themselves. In what way? We will see, because we go through a time that has not been experienced in the last 60-70 years, therefore we lack the experience and valid information. The need to collect and interpret information, therefore, seems undoubtedly useful for the future.

As a teacher with over 20 years of experience, I have been preoccupied with the wellbeing of my students, the way they are able to deal with the stress generated by isolation, the existence of a large number of prohibitions that made social life non-existent during this period and the way in which they managed to mobilize and motivate themselves to participate in teaching activities. Since there were no ways for me to make direct contact with them, I could not help but give them advice, I designed a questionnaire to find out their opinions and how they managed to understand the situation, and in another way, to show them my concern for their wellbeing (Cozolino, 2017).

2.2. Participants

The participants to this survey are teenagers in the first high school year, 14-15 years old. The respondents' group was relatively balanced, and because of the fact that there was no predominant gender, it makes the results valid for the entire investigated group. The investigated students group consisted of a 46,8% female respondents and 53,2% male respondents.

Referring to the students' access to online lessons organized and conducted on the e-learning platform of the school, out of a total of 79 students, 78 chose the answer "I have access to the school's platform and have lessons there", a respondent having given no answer (Figure 1). Indeed, students were open to this solution and quickly learned how to use online tools in the instructional-educational process. Both the students, as well as parents, mobilized to be able to meet the requirements and not be left behind as much as possible.

Another variable aims how the students managed to adapt to the online didactic activities.

2. I have access to the high school platform and am having classes there

78 answers

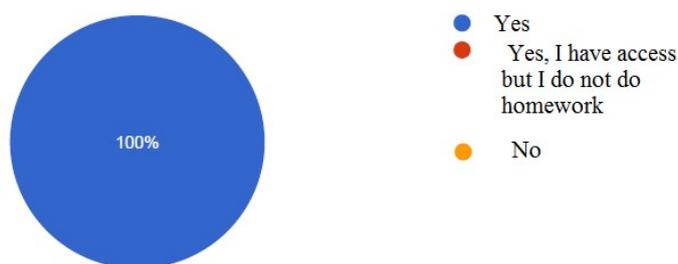


Figure 1. Graphical representation of the percentages regarding the distribution of the participants according to the variable E-learning access

2.2. Research instruments

The questionnaire application has been possible through the use of a Google form, given that this type of form offers a number of advantages that could be used:

- ease of construction, because it offers the possibility of using dual-answer, multiple-choice or short-answer questions;
- it can be applied online;
- the answers are automatically collected, including email address if necessary, and the statistic is directly generated by the software;
- ease of interpretation, due to statistics that is done directly, through graphs and percentages.

The questionnaire consists of 11 questions, to be easy to manage by the respondent, given that the entire activity was online and an additional task could have created a rejection reaction, had it been more complicated (more questions). There is only one question that distinguished the

group based on gender (M/F), the rest of the questions referring to the actual activities. The other questions were with multiple answers, except for the last one that offered the opportunity to give a short answer, based on personal experiences. In elaborating this questionnaire the questions with multiple choice answer were preferred, because based on the discussions I had with the students I managed to highlight some important problems that they were dealing with, but I have also observed that they were having trouble identifying the problems with clarity. That is why I considered that their multiple-choice answers would be more relevant and easier to measure if I gave them the possibility to choose from 3 already established answers. The questions and answers were designed in a simple and accessible way, in the way of making it easier to choose the appropriate responses (as can be seen in the images below). The results cannot be generalized to the whole population of high school students because there has been no statistically rigorous sampling performed, given that the successful conduct of the investigation depended on the goodwill of the respondents. There have been 79 answers collected from students that have agreed to take part in this investigation, where 46.8% were female and 53.2% were male.

3. Results

Referring to the difficulties faced during the adaptation process on the new work routine in the classroom, all 79 respondents provided an answer, from which, as can be seen in Figure 2, most of them stated that they had no major adaptation difficulties (43%), but we need to keep in mind that a very close percentage stated having adaptation difficulties (39.2%).

3. It has been hard for me to get used to the new work flow
79 answers

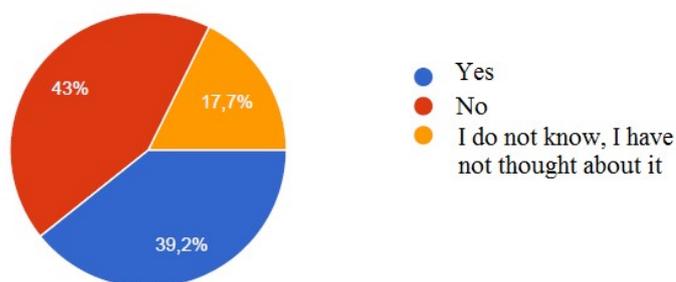


Figure 2. Graphical representation of the percentages regarding E-learning adaptation process results

A significant percentage (17,7%) confessed that they have not thought about it much, given the fact that the isolation period came with a very large amount of information, some contradictory, with fears concerning personal and closed ones' health. A lot of the students have parents or relatives who work in other countries, this fact raising restlessness, anxiety concerning the future and the wellbeing of the family.

Also, in the beginning, no one thought that the emergency state of suspending the on-site courses will last this long and the students were more than happy to stay at home, having no idea that things are that difficult and that they will miss the days when they had to be present at school.

Referring to the students' perception of the way online lessons were conducted, from the 78 responses collected, as it shown in Figure 3, for a large part of the surveyed students, the lessons appeared to be "ok" (66,7%), taking place in an environment that was familiar to them. On top of that, many students commute from rural areas, for some this means enough time spent in bus stations, bus stops or other means of transport. The e-learning type of school made the situation

easier and the students' time to be spent more at home. Almost 20% of students (19.2) had difficulties in adapting, the e-learning type of study not being suitable to them.

4. Online classes feel like
78 answers

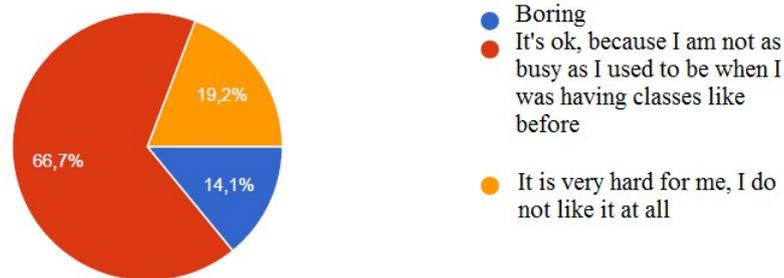


Figure 3. Graphical representation of the percentages regarding the way students perceive lessons in the virtual environment

A percentage of over 14% got bored and from some confessions made during classes I found out they have trouble mobilizing, because going to school meant a certain discipline which they now lack. Moreover, after about two weeks, they began to realize that face-to-face lessons cannot be replaced, they began to accumulate gaps, having to make an increased effort to meet the requirements.

Referring to what students liked about this period, regarding the way of carrying out the didactic activities, there are 77 collected answers. As the Figure 4 shows, given that some activities were asynchronous, most of them (71,4%) confessed that it is convenient that many lessons can be taken at their pace when they have the availability to do so.

5. What I like the most
77 answers

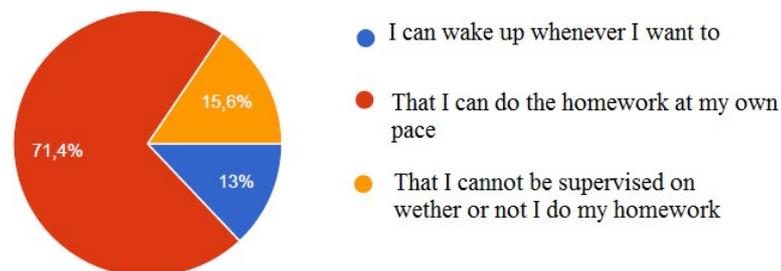


Figure 4. Graphical representation of the percentages regarding the positive elements of e-learning in students' perception

In a relatively close percentage, there have been opinions manifested regarding the lower supervision of how they participated in classes (15,6%), as well as waking time (13%), which could be overtaken, which also meant class skipping in the morning. Another factor favoring this behavior was the avalanche of contradictory information provided by the ministry of education, information that did not help the teachers in their work, reaching the point where some students told teachers they do not care that much, for they are not allowed to have failing students. The lack of coherence in formulating solutions to the higher forums led to situations in which students

ignored teachers' advice and warnings, imagining that school did not represent a place of interest and that they could treat the situation with indifference.

Referring to no. 6 question, we came with a formulation contrary to the previous one, trying to catch what the students did not like, where they encountered difficulties, or what students considered to have lost by taking classes in the online environment. Thereby, there have been 78 answers collected, showing us that every student was eager to show the problem he encountered in the mentioned period (Figure 5).

6. What is the hardest for me to
78 answers

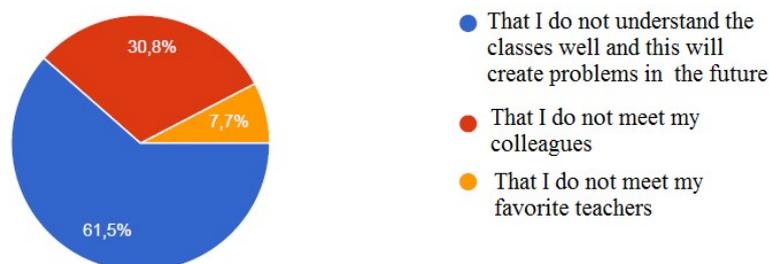


Figure. 5. Graphical representation of the percentages regarding negative aspects of e-learning teaching

Therefore, 61.5% are worried about the lack of direct contact with the teacher leading to a lower level of assimilation of the information received, a point which in the future could manifest as poor results, implicitly through a weaker reception of future information that should be supported by current ones. In addition, 30.8% acutely feel the lack of socialization with colleagues, students being at an age where a series of attitudes and social competencies for life are consolidated when many of the acquisitions are made experientially when everything may be either white or black, wonderful or catastrophic.

Concerning the interaction with teachers, a percentage of 7,7% feel the need to meet with their favorite teachers. We believe that they are still at an age where they search for a model and the school is not always such a place to search for, being more tempted to identify with personalities promoted by the massmedia, which are not always role models to be followed. Anyway, this searching period can also lead them down a good path if they have the inspiration to also look around them, not just in the press or showbiz if someone opens their eyes and shows them where to look.

Regarding how students felt about the quality of communication during the state of emergency (Figure 6), 46,8% stated that they missed the interaction with their colleagues. It is true that they come from diverse families and equally diverse backgrounds, therefore the exchange of information and experiences was a constant of the students' class group. Even if they communicated through the use of social media, the lack of face-to-face interactions had its say, studies showing that, at that age, direct interaction is vital. Let us not forget that the high school period is also the time of romances, of first loves, most of the time between high school students. They are friends, they advise each other or they entrust each other their secrets, therefore the lack of students was noticed, because family members can have other social roles, rarely a friend's role.

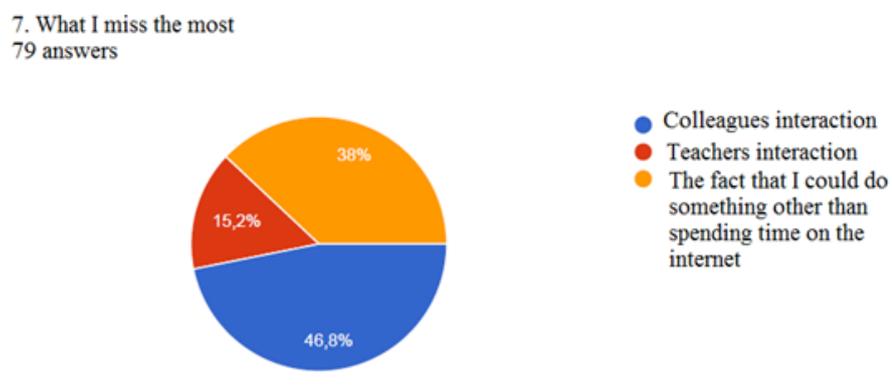


Figure 6. Graphical representation of percentages regarding online classroom communication missing things

They, therefore, saw that some relationships or persons cannot be easy to replace and usually, we notice their value when they are no longer around us, as a normality. The lack of direct communication with the teacher was felt as a negative element by 15.2%. During the state of emergency, students spent a lot of time online, having to attend classes, submit homework, or meet other educational requirements. What is certain is that 38% of them came to the conclusion that it would have been better had there been other alternatives to online activities, realizing that there needs to be a balance between the time spent in the virtual environment and in the real environment, full of challenges, but also full of satisfactions just as real. We know that adolescence is far from being a period of equilibrium, but rather one of zeal and courage. It is remarkable that they have acknowledged that they lack direct interaction with the teacher, that the virtual environment is not always the friendliest and that the shelter it offers is apparent.

Referring to the way in which the students' psyche processed and managed the state of isolation, of confinement, the results are shown in Figure 7.

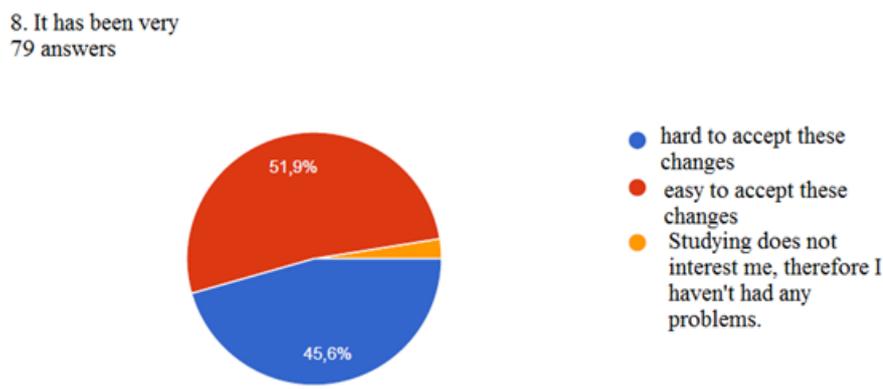


Figure 7. Graphical representation of the percentages regarding the level of adaptation to the exclusively online activity

Difficult or easy? How did students perceive the new work routine? Opinions are divided in relatively close proportions, 45,6% stating that they found it difficult to accept the new way of working, and 51,9% stating it was easy. A small percentage, 2,5% were not interested; it turned out that absenteeism could manifest itself during online courses as well. It is interesting to keep track of this value of 2,5% which appears in the area of school disinterest, from which a part of any social group suffers, including groups formed on pre-established criteria, on which those who belong to these groups can not intervene.

Referring to the future, to how students would like to carry out their learning activities, at this point, it seems that there is a prevailing trend of opinion (72,2%), to return to the situation before the declaration of the emergency state when classes were face-to-face, and the students and teachers could interact without obstacles and, also, without a possible danger (Figure 8). A percentage of 25,3% are not against a hybrid activity system, which means having both activities in the online environment, but also face-to-face. Only a small number of students, in a 2,5% percentage of the total said that they would like for the scholar activities to be conducted only online, the same as the value of the previous question, with refers to truancy.

9. In the future I would to
79 answers

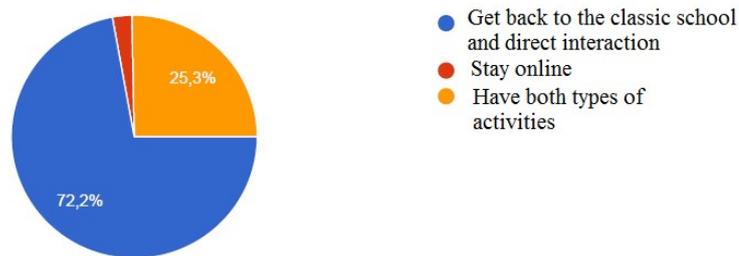


Figure 8. Graphical representation of the percentages regarding how do students want to carry out teaching activities in the future

Adolescent students are amazing characters, capable of extreme behaviors and manifestations. The answers from question no. 9 demonstrate that they can also be responsible, rational, preoccupied with the situation in which they are and also the challenges that they need to face. The fact that such a large majority believes that education can be efficient when it is conducted face-to-face, by interaction between mentor and learner, shows that they are aware, analyze the needs they feel and can identify solutions that are, most of the time, correct.

Referring to the opportunity offered to students to say what types of feelings and sensations they experienced throughout this period, the result are displayed in Figure 9. As we can observe, almost half of the students (48.7%) experienced unpleasant states, of anguish or sadness because of the acute lack of direct communication, in opposition to the ones that felt better in this period (37.2%), given the fact that there has been exercised a reduced degree of control over them and they felt like they could do anything. It should be noted that 14,1% of students often felt frightened because of the danger they felt and we have to keep in mind that, in that period, authorities and medicine specialists stated that teens are very little exposed to the disease.

10. In this period I have experienced
78 answers

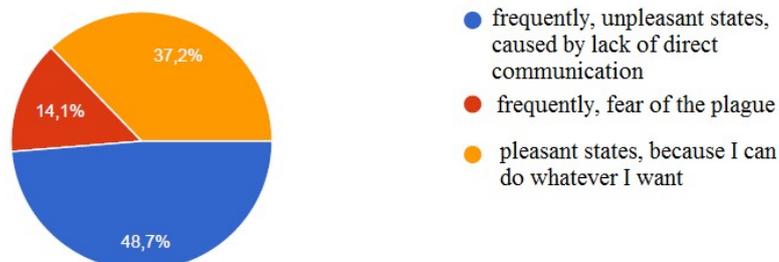


Figure 9. Graphical representation of the percentages regarding conditions experienced by students during the period of emergency

Thus, we note that unpleasant conditions, although for different reasons, actually experienced a percentage of 65.8% of respondents, so more than half felt negative effects generated by lack of direct communication and fear of disease, the lack of communication thus prevailing. Trying to have an open answer in line to offer students an occasion to share their opinions/personal states, we have formulated the 11th question. As already mentioned, the situation was not easy to manage both mentally and emotionally, as students were confused because of the totally unusual situation with which they have been faced, the end of which we still cannot anticipate.

Conclusions

We can thereby conclude that this questionnaire shows with certainty that students acutely feel the need for direct interaction with their peers, classmates or high school, with teachers, generally with those in the groups they belong to, normality being equal to them with interaction. Even if the online activity continued, it even intensified, they still realized that it cannot be considered equal to the direct one.

Noteworthy is that most have been aware of the impact that the period of confinement can have on their educational future. Communication is a key factor which shapes and forms characters, opinions, and the lack of all the elements that make communication an effective tool for training and education (nonverbal, paraverbal, communication), has led to the partial success of online educational classes. The fact that they used time as they wished, weakening the discipline of work, was considered an important point and was agreed by 13% of them, but we must remember that most are worried about their educational future, this being good news from a generation that is believed to be less interested in the long-term future and more interested in short-term goals. Almost 50% experienced unpleasant conditions during the specified period, which can only be a cause for concern for us, the educators, given that our students today feel many stressors that they have to deal with, and one more (or more, as the present investigation shows) can upset a fragile psychological balance, especially at this age. It is equally clear that most students want to return to the classic way of conducting teaching activities (72.2%), and a quarter of them would agree with a mix of online activities and direct activities. We can, therefore, say that students look at this difficult period with enough maturity, and the opportunity (even if unwanted) to experiment with other activities has increased their discernment and wisdom. I think that they will look at the education and the chance that it offers in life much more pragmatically and more rationally, that they will try to make better use of the opportunities that will arise and will value more the acquisitions made, both in the professional field and in the area of social skills.

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