Revista Românească pentru Educație Multidimensională
ISSN: 2066-7329 | e-ISSN: 2067-9270
Covered in: Web of Science (WOS); EBSCO; ERIH+; Google Scholar; Index Copernicus; Ideas RePeC; Econpapers; Socionet; CEEOL; Ulrich ProQuest; Cabell, Journalseek; Scipio; Philpapers; SHERPA/RoMEO repositories; KVK; WorldCat; CrossRef; CrossCheck

2020, Volume 12, Issue 1 Sup. 2, pages: 34-38 | https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/12.1sup2/244

Facing the University Environment with Covid-19 Pandemic: A Comparative Analysis between Romania and South Korea

Mioara BORZA[1],
Jeong O. PARK[2]

[1] Lecturer PhD., "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Romania, ***Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, College of Central and East European Studies (2019-2020), mioara@uaic.ro

[2] Prof. PhD, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, College of Central and East European Studies, Seoul, South Korea, jopark@hufs.ac.kr

Abstract: The Covid-19 determined pandemic has affected all branches of socio-economic life, and the educational environment has not been bypassed. The students' reaction to the measures of the total transfer of the teaching-learning process in the online environment, by universities closure, is proving to be one of the challenges determined by the current global pandemic manifestation. The impact is highlighted by major changes with obvious patterns in the short time period. The academic world is witnessing this changing from the position of forced adaptation, both teachers, administrative staff, and students being in the situation of reconsidering the entire system, in organization and functionality. The on-line platforms have replaced the classrooms, the communication is made exclusively virtual, and the reactions caused by this form of reconfiguration are felt in multiple ways. The present paper approaches the students' reaction to this necessity for adaptation, by comparison between the university environment from Romania and the one from South Korea. The results indicate multiple similarities and minor differences between these two countries. A main conclusion is that in technically, organizationally and emotionally-affective perspective, the situation is very similar, the differences being present only from a financial point of view and about the intention in student-teacher communication.

Keywords: *on-line courses; pandemic; reaction; universities.*

How to cite: Borza, M., & Park, J.O. (2020). Facing the University Environment with Covid-19 Pandemic: A Comparative Analysis between Romania and South Korea. *Revista Romaneasca pentru Educatie Multidimensionala, 12*(1Sup2), 34-38. https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/12.1sup1/244

1. Introduction

At the present times, the condition of the whole world is directly and strongly affected by the action of the "Covid-19" phenomenon, surprising in its rapid propagation and its multiplier effects. The pandemic caused by Covid-19 determined, in a very short time, an overwhelming impact in all spheres of human life. Even if, by its novelty, the phenomenon we are witnessing is not clearly defined, it is still on display, we can formulate opinions of the reactions produced. We approach the short-term reactions (February-March 2020), identified as a result of the occurrence of the pandemic phenomenon in universities. The finding experienced and synthesized for two months of obvious impact allow us to formulate opinions about the connection "Covid 19" pandemic and the university area. We achieve a many-sided incursion into the suite of student's reactions, comparative for Romania and South Korea. The empirical research, as a practical study, shows the reactions of the students to adapt to the sudden situation, which involved the changing of the communication and teaching-learning paths, an invitation to tolerance and to careful management of the chain reactions.

2. Literature review

The literature on the effects of a pandemic on the universities, from the perspective of online learning is barren. We used information from the press releases, official institutions. World Health Organization, Lancet, Nature hold recent publications (2020) in this field, but without references to students` reactions. The World Economic Forum and the European Commission have references to the socio-economic aspects of the effects of the pandemic. A summary reference about the effects on the educational environment we find in the studies: "Covid-19 Global Education Outlook" (Holon IQ), "Corona Virus: Consequences for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps mobility activities", "COVID-19: ESU's reaction about the implications for students".

3. Methodology

The research is empirical-qualitative, a practical study. The used methods: observation, personal experience, interpretation, comparison. The collecting of opinions was done with focus-group, interview. The target group consists of students from Hankuk University of Foreign Studies

Seoul, South Korea - Romanian Department (80 students) and from the Faculty of Mathematics and Computer Science, Computer Science specialization - University of Bucharest (70 students). The two reference groups were compared on several ways, the aim being to highlight the similarities and differences between the two countries in terms of the students' reaction to the adapting to the emergency regime of online teaching. Since mid-February 2020, we have been following the reactions among the two groups.

4. Results

The multilateral aspects approached in the comparison between the two target groups are: the professional and personal attitude towards online activity, tolerance and responsibility, the socio-emotional reaction, the financial reaction, the cooperation with teachers, the attitude towards health. We ordered the obtained results according to the intensity of the aspects that highlighted a significant difference between the online teaching-learning environment and the face-to-face environment.

The health care: The Korean students are very cautious, respectfully following all the rules and are not opposing the system in any way, being convinced that in this way they protect their personal health and of the community they belong to. The Romanian students do not worry very much about their health, they have opinions about the pandemic and they are confident that their situation is stable in terms of health; they do not consider that they are directly exposed to the infestation.

The relationship with the teachers: Korean students - very responsible and involved, they show good online communication. Sometimes, they are even assertive and express their opinions openly. Affectionately, they tell the teachers that they want to see each other face-to-face and they are impatient in this regard. Some even say they miss seeing the teachers. The Romanian students are more reserved, they write to the teachers only if it is necessary. Affectivity is not directly expressed. Only between colleagues it is discussed that they would prefer to see some teachers.

In financial terms: Korean students pose the problem of reducing tuition fees, not considering the financial risks to which the university is exposed; Romanian students have not raised such a problem, but are worried that they cannot pay their tuition fees and would not like to have failures; Some have the discomfort of cash receiving their scholarships, but the university has adapted to facilitate online payments and receipts.

The technical functionality of online platforms: both Korean and Romanian students prove to be very adaptable to online platforms, most likely the age being an advantage. They do not express preferences in particular, accepting any way proposed by the teacher: online live video, video recordings, audio or on YouTube, materials sent by e-mail.
Communication and socialization: students from both groups prove to be empathic and eager to communicate, invoking the „online" as a blocking factor in this regard. Koreans are very protective and recommend to foreign teachers to take care about themselves; the end of some messages being: "take care of your health". The empty campuses and all the closed auxiliaries (library, reading room, sports hall, cafeteria) do not seem to affect the students of the two reference groups by the moment.
Table 1 shows a summary of the results regarding the analysis and the interpretation of the information gathered about the mentioned issues.

Table 1. Results compared between students' groups

Aspect	South Korean students	Romanian students
Professional attitude towards online activity	No differences for the online and the classical environment, the students being equally involved.	Minor differences - some students "take advantage" of the online environment to ease their involvement.
Personal attitude towards online activity	Prefer the classic version, but accept the virtual, following the decision of the management.	The cosiness and time economy caused by not having to travel to the University for online
Tolerance degree	Very high degree of tolerance and understanding.	They accept the situation, even if they are not entirely happy about it.
Responsibility degree	Degree of responsibility similar for classical and online teaching system.	No major differences; partial, minor reduction in online check vices.
Socio-emotional reaction	They prefer the face-to-face intercourse and they declare that directly to colleagues / teachers.	Prefer the face-to-face intercourse, because they miss their colleagues, or even teachers.
Cooperation with teachers	They are insistent and assertive: writing emails, messaging giving opinions and making proposals.	There are no major differences; the most responsible students contact teachers.

5. Limits and discussions

The time too short for research and positioning in the middle of the "Covid-19" pandemic alters the relevant conclusions, without solid forecasts. The lack of representativeness of the group, does not allow the generalization of the results. The methodology is incomplete, the focus group and the observation being insufficient for the chosen study topics. These limits will be corrected in the next research. The international relevance of our paper, is mainly for the practical aspects on the class management and student's sensitivity. A recommendation is to consider the qualitive consequences of the emotional, social and relational aspects included in a serious and invasive problem, that is the pandemic.

6. Conclusions

For the comparative groups, adapting to the online system was easy, the perception being of understanding the risks of the pandemic. Age can be an advantage for the transition. But students prefer face-to-face meetings, for the human relationships. In both countries, students hope to see each other, given that human interaction is essential for information and communication, including non-verbal language. The technical effort for the functionality of the online platforms is appreciated. We consider that in the educational environment, beyond the specific medical risks of the "Covid-19" pandemic, there are no major barriers in going to a new learning environment that could, why not, become an alternative in the near future.

Acknowledgments

This work has supported by Hankuk University of Foreign Studies Research Fund.

References

*** *COVID-19: ESU's reaction about the implications for students* (16.03.2020), https://www.esu-online.org/?news=7144

*** *Corona Virus: Consequences for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps mobility activities* (13.03.2020), https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/news/corona-virus-consequences-erasmus-and-european-solidarity-corps-mobility-activities_en

*** *Covid-19. Global Education Outlook* (16.03.2020), https://globaloutlook.holoniq.com/