Experience of students of University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra with distance education

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Abstract

Scientific researchers of the Department of Technology and Information Technologies of the Faculty of Education of University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra are solvers of the KEGA project Remote laboratories in distance forms of education, which aim is to create remote laboratories for students of the department in university environment. One of the aims of the project was to find out whether students studying at the university were educated in addition to contact lessons as well as distance forms of education. The aim of the paper is to map what forms of distance learning are used in education in various fields of study and which form of education students prefer. In the paper we present the results of a survey carried out on a sample of bachelor students studying at various faculties of University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra.

Keywords:	Schlüsselwörter:
Student experience	Schülererfahrung
Self-study	Selbststudium
distance education	Fernstudium

1   Introduction

All around the world educational institutions, including universities, are using distant forms of education to educate adults. The website of The Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra has a bookmark called Information Systems, which include the Educational Portal (EDU). The educational portal contains courses created in Moodle (Modular Object Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment). The Software package Moodle is intended for creation of educational systems and e-courses online. Education in Moodle is realized in courses, which are created by teachers themselves for certain subjects.

The employees of the Department of Technology and Information Technologies of the PF UKF in Nitra solve the research project KEGA 011UKF-4/2017 Remote Laboratories in Distance Forms of Education. The main goal of the project is to create a course for distance learning of students for the training of simple and complex pneumatic and hydraulic systems by means of building supervision and verification of effectiveness of the given form of education compared to the results of students educated at the faculty (Tomková & Bánesz, 2018). Another goal of this project is to map the knowledge about distant education and find out what forms of distant education they were educated during their studies at university.

2   On the issue of distance education in the world and Slovakia

Distance education is defined as any form of study, where the student is not under constant or direct supervision of teachers/tutors, but is using plan, guidance and consultations of supporting organization (educational institution). For distant education is typical self-study and therefore it is dependent on quality design of educational materials, which are supposed to substitute the interaction between student and teacher, which is typical in present educational form. In distant education the role of teacher changes to tutor

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and he is supposed to offer educational guidance. For teacher, this implies the need to acquire a number of new practices and skills needed to create study materials as well as to use the Web dynamically (e.g. consultation trough online discussion group, multimedia content, animations, etc.) Hennyeyová, K. Self-study is always complemented by tutors support and other supporting service (Janošcova, R., 2013).

Distance education professionals perceive distance education as a suitable form of adult education (Rogers, A., 1989; J. Průcha et al.,2009; Juszczyk, S., 2003; Qureshi, E. & Morton & Antosz, E., 2002). As Rogers (1989) motivation in education is the compulsion that keeps a person within a learning situation and encourages learning. While it is not customary in Slovakia to use distance learning as the only form of qualification, online courses abroad are commonly available to complete the necessary qualifications after completing academic education (Qureshi, E., 2002; Kurzman, 2019). According to research carried out by Qureshi, E et. al (2002), up to 80% of students enrolled in distance education courses had completed university education. On the basis of the above, they stated that distance learning participants / students could not be characterized as an ordinary adolescent, but as an adult with approximately the same characteristics as defined by Rogers (1989) as follows:

- The students are adult by definition (maturity).
- The students are all engaged in a continuing process of growth (value learning).
- The students bring a package of experience and values (experienced).
- The students usually come to education with set intentions (motivated).
- The students bring mature expectations about education itself (realism).
- The students often have competing interests (employment, family, social life).
- The students possess set patterns of learning (developed or ingrained strategies).

3   Survey objectives and characteristics of the survey sample

Within the project KEGA Remote Laboratories in Distance Forms of Education, the research team has set several partial goals. At the beginning of 2018, we conducted a survey on a sample of UKF students in Nitra in order to find out if they knew the forms of distance education and also what are their experiences with distance education at the university. The basic research method of research was a questionnaire for college students consisting of 15 items. The questionnaire was filled in by the respondents in printed form or online via the GoogleDocs form. The survey was attended by 39 randomly invited students studying at the UKF in Nitra. Data collection was conducted in April and May 2018. The research sample was made up of 32 (82%) of Bachelors, 5 (13%) of Masters and 2 students (5 %) said they were PhD students.

In 2018, we presented the results of the evaluation of respondents' answers to the question of what forms of education they belong to distance education. As the results of the survey showed, most respondents understand distance education as online education (90%) or e-learning (82%) (Tomková et al., 2018).

In this survey, we also asked students about their experience with distance learning. Item no. 10 surveyed respondents' opinion on the benefits of distance learning. In the answers they had a choice of the following range of answers: certainly yes - yes - I don't know - no - definitely no.

Respondents commented on the following benefits of distance learning:
   a)   more effective cooperation at a time of joint learning;
   b)   better accessibility and interaction with the teacher,
   c)   more complete course implementation,
   d)   flexibility and comfort,
   e)   positive learning experiences.

4   Evaluation of research results and interpretation of results

The evaluation of item 10a) showed, that 54% of respondents considered more effective cooperation at time of joint learning as advantage (31% of respondents considered distance learning very beneficial and 23% as

beneficial) – FIG 1. 36% of respondents expressed neutral opinion. As shown from evaluation of FIG 1, 10% of respondents do not perceive the positive impact of distance learning on improving student collaboration
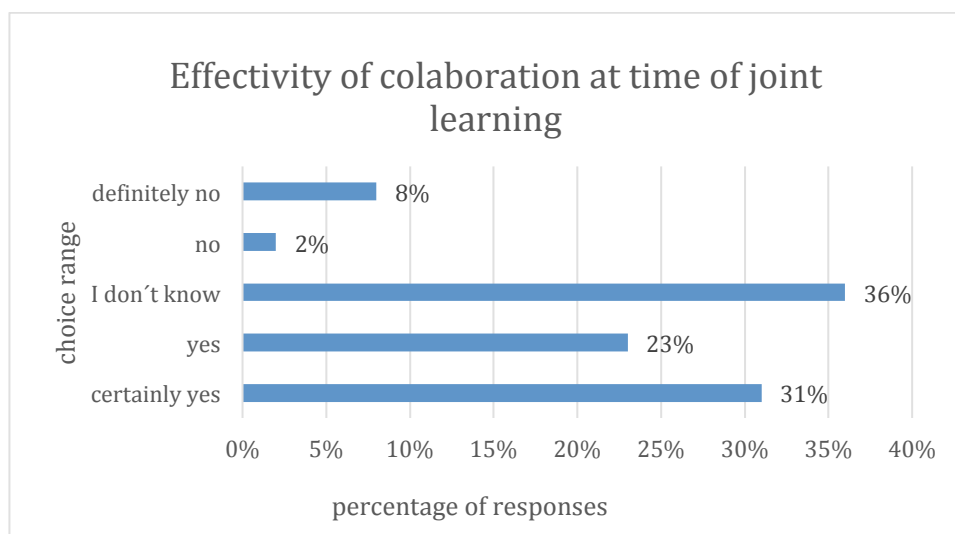

Fig 1 Evaluation of respondents' responses in item 10a)

Accessibility of teacher and communication with him/her is connected with communication diagrams of students. Kayser and Merz (2019) have also addressed this issue, stating that distance learning students can be divided into three groups according to their tendency to communicate: powerful communicators, regular communicators, and lone wolves. At the same time, they identified that students in later semesters prefer synchronous communication as opposed to asynchronous use of e-mail.

On the accessibility of the teacher and the interaction with him, we surveyed respondents' opinion by item 10b. 18% of respondents chose certainly yes and 33% chose yes FIG 2. This means that 51% of students perceive positive interaction with the teacher. 31% of respondents couldn't answer and 18% did not think that distance learning contributes to improving interactions with the teacher.
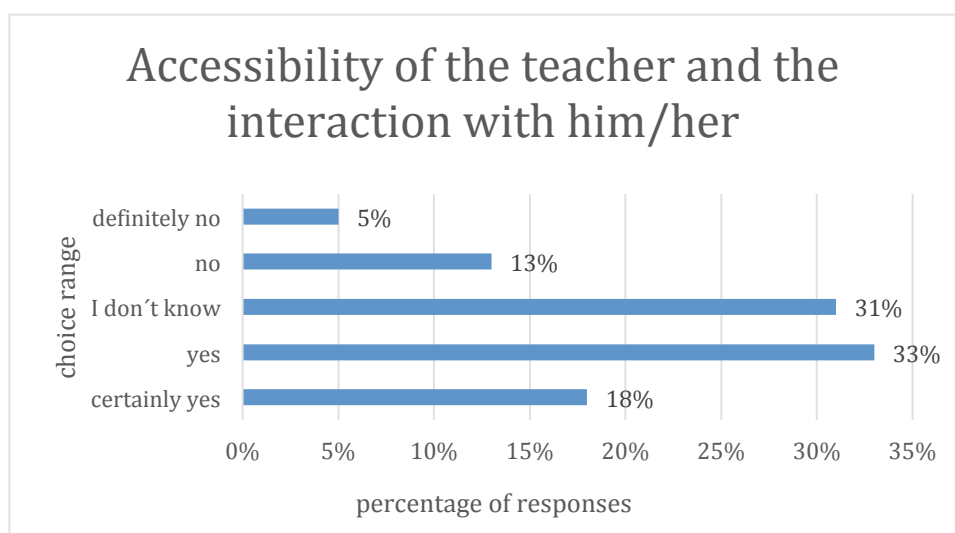

FIG 2 Evaluation of respondents' responses in item 10b)

Among the main advantages of distance learning, many authors cite easy access to teaching materials, the possibility to share new information not only in the form of text, but also in videos, presentations or sound recordings. We were wondering whether our respondents also had the same opinion on the benefits that training courses offer. Respondents in item 10c responded to this fact. As can be seen from the answers that we reviewed in Figure 3, our respondents consider it an advantage to have all the necessary study materials available in one place. Up to 62% of all respondents were positive. Only 10% of respondents do not regard the coherence of the course as an advantage. 28% of respondents were unable to answer the question.
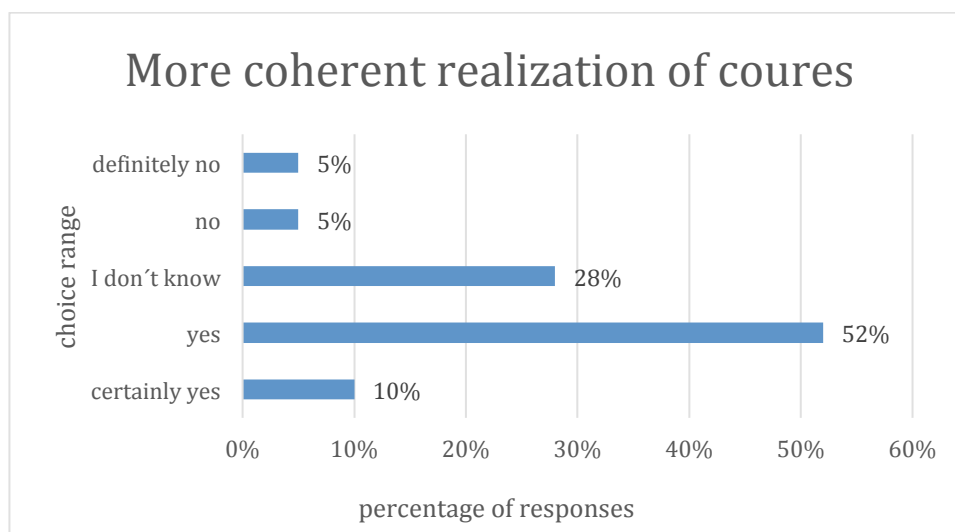
FIG 3 Evaluation of respondents' responses in item 10c)

According to several authors, distance education is popular with adults and therefore with university students, mainly because education is not time-limited and is implemented without the direct participation of students in the traditional form of a teaching unit (Juszcyk, 2013; Průcha, 1999, Klement, 2012), Zounek et al, 2016; Rogers, 1989, Kurzman, 2019 et al.). As university educators, we also consider the possibility of "direct" contact to be advantageous in terms of student education at the university. If distance learning is carried out through courses that are well prepared, they provide the teacher and the student with many feedback options (control questions, tests, homework, checking the ongoing solution and evaluation, solving joint projects, etc.)

Based on the above, we have assumed that our respondents will also positively assess the flexibility and comfort that distance education allows (item 10d). Our assumption was confirmed (Figure 4). Altogether 77% of respondents consider flexibility and convenience to be the most important advantage of distance learning (46% - certainly yes, 31% - yes). As in the previous question, 10% of respondents do not regard flexibility and comfort as an advantage and 13% were unable to express themselves.
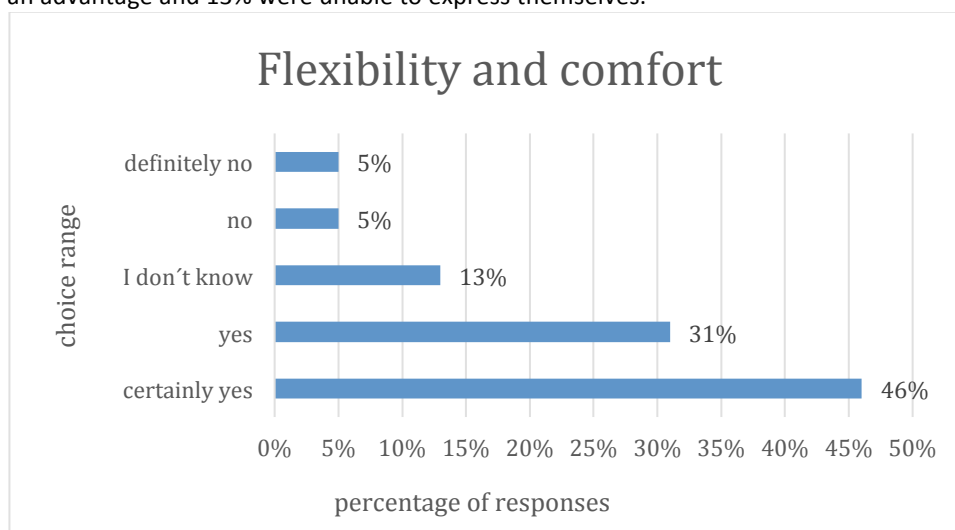

FIG 4 Evaluation of respondents' responses in item 10d)

Qureshi, E. & Morton & Antosz, E. (2002) discussed the issue of student motivation for education. Based on the analysis of the results of available research aimed at motivating students to educate, it was assumed that distance-educated students are clearly more motivated than students educated in class, respectively. in the school campus. A significant factor was that distance learning participants were adult, more mature and oriented towards specific learning goals, and they show that orientation on success is a strong motivational factor. Qureshi et al. decided to do the same research. The results they obtained in their research were

inconsistent with the results of the research they have analysed in the past. Their initial assumption that distance learning students will have stronger motivational goals has not been confirmed. On the one hand, the effect might be attributed to the fact that on-campus students are willing to invest more effort in their studies. Perhaps, in the current "high-tech" milieu the distance education (DE) format is really seen as easier and therefore appealing to those with lower levels of motivation. On the other hand, another explanation could be linked to the motivational value of peers, an audience, or face to face experience—characteristics of on-campus courses. A more fine-grained analysis of motivation is warranted with respect to DE, perhaps looking at attribution theory, personality variables, social learning theory, multiple intelligences, and so on. Such an analysis could present a fuller understanding of the motivational characteristics of DE and on-campus students. As they state, "an unexpected finding (lower motivation for distance learning students) is a finding that requires further investigation" (Qureshi, E. et al., 2002, p. 8).

We decided to examine whether positive learning experiences could be a motivating factor for our respondents. Educational courses allow the student to study the issue more closely, consult the assignment with a classmate or tutor, have the opportunity to use self-testing, etc., which can lead to the student's interest in new knowledge. The result is a deeper and more sustainable acquisition of knowledge, therefore also better educational outcomes. We tested these facts in item 10e). We wondered whether students also perceive positive learning experiences as one of the advantages of distance learning. The evaluation of respondents' answers is shown in FIG 5.
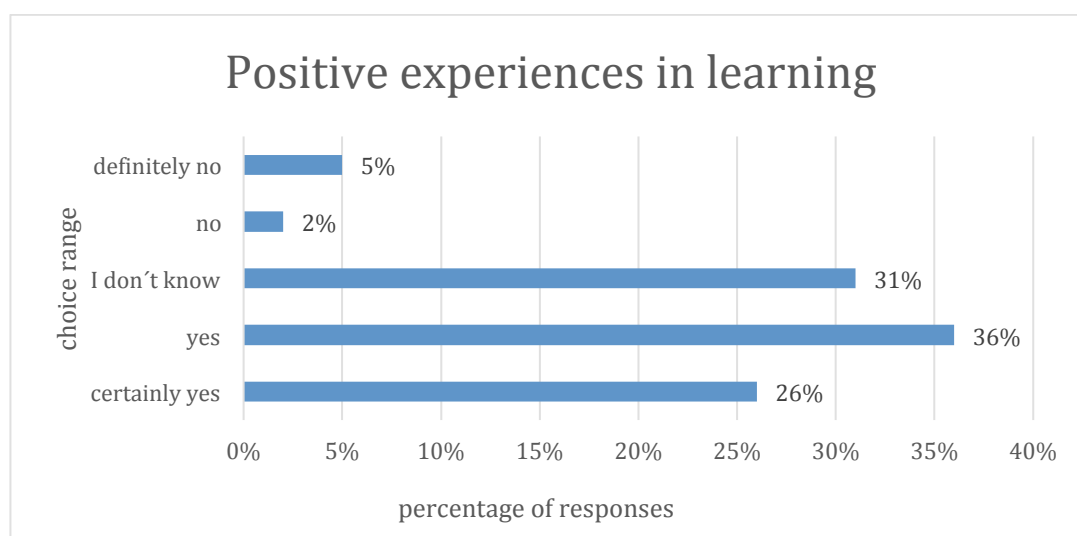

FIG 5 Evaluation of respondents' responses in item 10e)

As can be seen, the evaluation of the answers shows that 26% of the respondents answered certainly yes, 36% yes (62% evaluate the monitored factor as positive). 31% of respondents cannot comment on the item and 7% of respondents disagree with the statement.

In order to be able to objectively analyse the results obtained from respondents 'answers in item 10 a - e), we compared them with respondents' answers to item 7 of the questionnaire where we asked whether they were distance learning during their studies at the university.
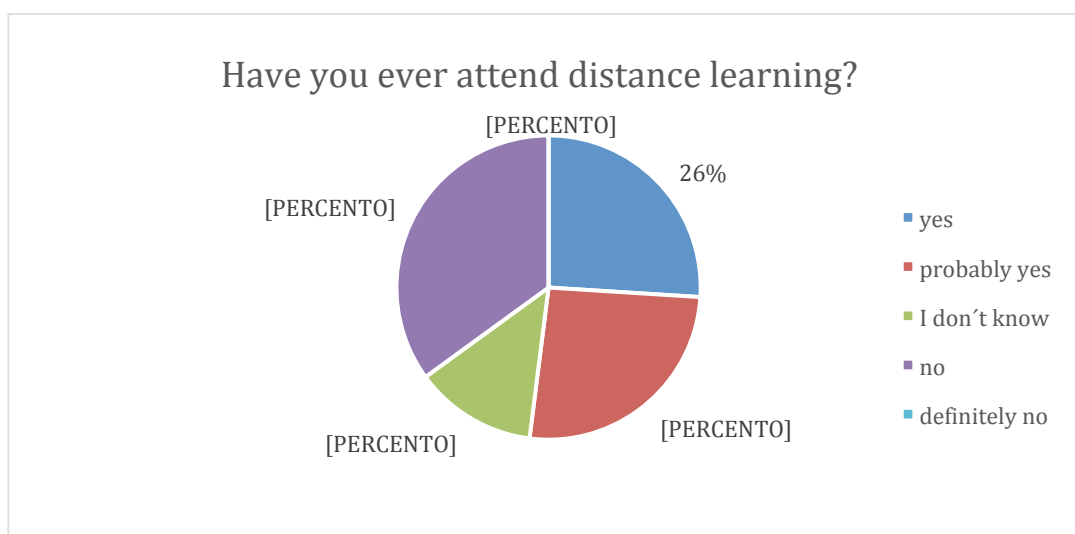
FIG 6 Evaluation of respondents' responses in item 7

From FIG 6 it is clear that 26% of respondents indicated yes and 26% probably yes (52% of respondents certainly have experience with distance education at university), 13% could not identify whether they were distance learning. Up to 35% of respondents were not distance-educated (not likely).

We were surprised that, despite the existence of the Edu Educational Portal and the training of teachers in Moodle to create courses, up to 48% of respondents were not distance learning. We decided to analyse the information about respondents, which was stated in the factual data in the questionnaire and we found out that all respondents who had no experience with distance forms of education were students of the first year, ie. distance education is more used in higher grades at university.

After this finding, we evaluated respondents' answers, especially answers I do not know-no-definitely no (TBL 1).

TBL 1 Review of I do not know - no – definitely no answer evaluation

answer	Evaluated items 10 (%)				
	10a	10b	10c	10d	10e
I do not know	36	31	28	13	31
no	12	13	5	5	5
definitely no	8	5	5	5	2
Overall	46	49	38	23	38

It is clear from the data in Table 1 that the summary of percentages in response options I do not know – no – definitely no in item 10a, 10b is almost identical to the percentages of respondents who have no experience of distance learning. As we can see, in item 10d, only 23% indicated some of the options – I do not know - no - definitely not. We think that, despite the fact that they have no personal experience in distance learning, they positively value the opportunity to learn at a time when they are interested in learning and fulfilling their duties.

5   Conclusion

Distance education specialists address the advantages and disadvantages of distance education (Rogers (1989) Klement, M. et al. Janošcova, R., 2013 Hennyey, K. Juszczyk, S. 2003, Kurzman, 2019). In his article, Kurzman cites L. H. Rose (2019, p. 289) according to which „well-designed online courses taught by professors at local universities can cultivate autonomous learning strategies and create opportunities for student-to-student engagement as well as student-to-professor engagement". Orientation to teaching and are comfortable with a more modern "guide on the side" approach, many would argue that distance learning is an entirely viable framework for professional education.

Distance learning is used as an effective form of lifelong or university education. In the survey we found out what experience with distance education students have at the University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra, Slovakia.

In the paper we analysed the factors that respondents perceive as the benefits of distance learning. By evaluating the respondents' answers, we found that the greatest benefit was the flexibility and convenience of learning from home, without being present in the classroom - 77% of respondents. Our findings are in line with the published results of surveys aimed at respondents' motivation to use distance learning. The choice of when and where the respondent will be educated is most important in assessing the benefits of distance learning.

Mayser & Merz (2019) found that lower-grade students do not consider online communication with tutors and classmates an advantage. Our research sample consisted of up to 82% of bachelor level studies respondents. The respondents' answers show that they also prefer offline communication in distance education when communicating with classmates and tutor / teacher.

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