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Online Teaching of Romance Literature and Culture during Pandemic[2]

Extended summary

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic of the coronavirus desease (COVID-19). The measures taken to prevent the spread of the virus have dramatically changed the functioning of schools and forced teachers and students around the world to adapt quickly to virtual teaching with which many had no previous experience.

Three decades ago, when the Internet began to conquer the world, university professors took on the role of partners in student education. At the beginning of the 21st century, there were conflicting views on the impact of technology on learning, and over the past decade they have increasingly focused on collaborative learning, the use of digital materials, and the fact that new technologies necessarily require new pedagogies.

With the spread of the pandemic, this relation took on a new twist: students became the protagonists of the teaching process. From March 2020 until today, virtual competencies, although a saving solution for the global education system, have emphasized the shortcomings of that system and highlighted the socio-economic gap of its actors.

Trying to see the circumstances in which online teaching of French and Hispanic literature and culture took place at the Department of Romance Studies, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad between March 2020 and June 2021, we faced a series of questions to which we wanted to find answers: how students master new technologies; what is their attitude

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towards online teaching, what shortcomings did they notice and what made it easier for them to master the material, what differences, advantages and disadvantages did they notice between virtual teaching and classroom classes, did new circumstances affect their academic success, etc. On the one hand, the paper provides an overview of the selected literature published in French, Spanish, English and Serbian, which treats the previous and simultaneous experience in online teaching and learning. On the other hand, after conducting a survey among the students of the Department of Romance Studies at the Faculty of Philosophy who attended classes during the pandemic - which in addition to the closed-ended questions also contained several open-ended questions - we came to valuable conclusions on how to improve online literature and culture classes. Namely, the results of the investigation showed that the majority of the surveyed students (nearly 70%) have a negative or moderately negative attitude towards online teaching, reporting problems with concentration, motivation, and sporadic technical difficulties. Nevertheless, more than a half of the surveyed students rated online teaching as equally or less difficult than classroom teaching, recognizing as its main advantages a more flexible organization of time and, specifically for teaching literature and culture, greater opportunities for using the multimedia content. Based on the students' answers, it was shown that the achieved results measured by the number of the passed exams and grades do not differ significantly in relation to the lectures in the classroom.

It should be noted that the pandemic had a huge impact on university teaching, but did not stop education; it only changed it, forcing teachers to find an alternative way of teaching and students to adapt to it. Online teaching cannot be a mere transfer of analog content to digital one; teaching by using digital medium requires a different approach, but at the same time it is necessary to preserve the basic didactic principles of the lecturer and the curriculum, which has been a challenge for both teachers and students. Since this is a topical and universal problem, we hope that the conclusions we have presented will be useful and applicable to philological and to all other higher education domains.

Keywords: education during the pandemic, online university teaching, new technologies, Romance literature and culture, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad

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