

HOW ESP SPORTS STUDENTS COPE WITH HYBRID E-LEARNING DURING CORONA CRISIS

Danica Pirs¹, Solzica Popovska², Tea Pirs³

¹University of Nis, Faculty of sport, Nis, Serbia

²University of Sts Ciril and Methodius, Faculty of Philology "Blaze Koneski", Skopje, North Macedonia

³University of Nis, Faculty of Philosophy, Nis, Serbia

¹danicapirs@gmail.com, ²solzica_popovska@yahoo.com, ³eratotea@yahoo.com

Abstract: The involvement of students refers to types of interaction that can take place in the blended learning environment applied at the Faculty of sport (PE) in Nis, Serbia. We should emphasize that, according to the Serbian law on higher education, in a distance learning mode, exams are taken at the Faculty premises, requiring thus students' physical presence. But meanwhile, tutor-student interaction can also be performed through a video conferencing system. Referring to the PE faculty in Nis example, when teaching students in Bulgaria, Serbian teachers use a video link to deliver lectures on biomechanics, tennis, corrective gymnastics, etc. Generally speaking students can interact mutually, or they interact with computers, find the task assigned, and seek help from other students to solve a joint task. When administering online courses which was a necessity during Covid 19 crisis environment, learning situation and triad participants- students, instructors, and the institution are to be observed. Students value the most flexible and convenient access to courses. Instructors insist on satisfaction and reliable technology, possible difficulties with technology and instructors' imagination, expertise, and willingness to provide resources for distance learning. Teacher and learner roles also have to be taken into account. In blended learning teachers and students exchange constantly their roles which results in a higher level of students' autonomous learning. Students as highly digitally literate audiences can contribute immensely by adding some new technology points, some new forms of content, by finding new learning materials and suggesting more interesting topics for assignments. Thus the roles are intermixed, and the teacher can learn something new from the students. It was observed that during the critical coronavirus period students' online presence and continuous activities were by 75% higher than during regular environment studies. They reported more high-quality cooperation in their assignment execution, mutual forum discussions, higher personal engagement in budding activities, suggesting more novel forms of e-learning meeting and interacting.

Key Words: Hybrid e-learning, sports students, crisis environment, autonomous learning, digital competencies

1. INTRODUCTION

The updated model of digital literacy⁵ comprises photo-visual skills (critical for sports students to decipher and verbalize graphical displays contents in their anatomy, physiology or biomechanics courses), reproduction skills (sports students use digital reproduction to create new materials from preexisting ones which is especially critical in executing their pre-exam activities such as seminar papers writing, ppt power presentations preparation), branching skills (sports students have to construct knowledge from non-linear, hypertextual navigation), information skills (sports students have to be critical when evaluating the quality and validity of information which makes a perfect match of student-instructor interchangeable learning and teaching role), socio-emotional skills (those skills were accentuated as decisive in sports expertise acquiring by the panel of employers, as far as the South-East Serbia region is concerned). In addition to understanding the rules of the cyberspace sports students have also to apply this understanding in virtual communication, and finally the real-time thinking skill implies the ability to process large volumes of stimuli at the same time, as is the case in video games or in online teaching. It is worth noting that students utilize their e-sports knowledge and skills, for example when describing coaches' expertise competence and behavior patterns in selecting and leading a team in any sport.

2. TYPES OF VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION

Tutor-student interaction can be performed in many different ways and we here emphasize the possibility of using a video conferencing system which referring to the PE faculty in Nis example, was used when teaching students in Bulgaria, when Serbian teachers used a video link to deliver lectures on biomechanics, tennis, corrective

⁵ Eshet-Alkalai, Yoram, *Thinking in the Digital Era: A Revised Model for Digital Literacy, Issues in Informing Science and Information Technology*, Volume 9, 2012, pp. 267-276.

gymnastics, etc. This was a part of a wider IPA Cross Border Serbia Bulgaria Project on using IT platforms to teach sports science students in both countries and in a way, it heralded a precursory online teaching as a must in critical crisis environments such as COVID-19 one. The crisis once again showed that the triad participants - students, instructors, and the institution have to be observed. Students value the most flexible and convenient access to courses. Instructors insist on satisfaction and reliable technology, but they also emphasize possible difficulties with technology and insist on the instructors' imagination, expertise, and willingness to provide resources for distance learning. Thus, the role of educator was proven time and again as crucial for teaching process even in a hybrid online teaching. Teacher and learner roles as interchangeable also have to be taken into account. In blended learning teachers and students exchange constantly their roles when communicating the teaching materials, which results in a higher level of students' autonomous learning. Students as highly digitally literate audiences can contribute immensely by adding some new technology points, such as creating interactive videos showing their skills and sports results achieved, suggesting some new forms of content, by finding new learning materials and suggesting more interesting topics for assignments. Sports students particularly emphasized socio-emotional skills during COVID-19 crisis online teaching and learning. This skill was especially important when forum chatting, mutual materials creation, communicating with their teachers to produce pre-exam obligations such as seminar papers, ppt power presentations, video clipping making, etc. Students activities were by 75% higher than during regular environment studies. They reported more high-quality cooperation in their assignment execution, mutual forum discussions, higher personal engagement in budding activities, suggesting more novel forms of e-learning meeting and interacting.

3. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN BLENDED E-LEARNING CRISIS ENVIRONMENT

The crisis teaching and learning environment brings forth both expected positive and sometimes unexpected negative elements. Knowledge management model usually comprises following elements of knowledge conversion: socialization, externalization, combination and internalization (Yeh, Huang, Yeh, 2011).⁶ The first element of socialization is strikingly missing in the virtual environment and even more so in the COVID-19 crisis hybrid learning. Both teachers and students were and still are directed to communicate through e-mails, Viber or Zoom meetings and Zoom classrooms, or any other available digital tool. There is no personal contact, eye contact, tone of voice, facial expressions to follow, just mediated contacts with the mutual aim to pass the knowledge and on the part of the students, to acquire the knowledge. All of a sudden there is this crucial element of the learning situation and the surrounding conditions alleviating or aggravating the teaching process itself. What was the most satisfying moment of the teaching in such seemingly alienating setting is the students wish and need to communicate with the teacher on a daily basis on each and every aspect of the pre-exam obligations. In more than 2500 emails sent sports students were eager to know the tiniest details of their seminar papers possible topics, mechanics and templates, video and video clippings creation and presentation, colloquial essays assignments, etc. However, one thing stood out as a wonderful signpost and that is their complete determination to know the structure of grade formation and the wish to do more as to acquire higher grade through better preparation and more points earning during the pre-exam phase. The crisis teaching environment has shown us that students desperately need contact with their teachers, they need to have explanations, they need to know the purpose of every single activity and how these isolated tasks and assignments are contributing to the formation of the highest grades they can earn. Sports students are adrenalin driven not only in their respective sports disciplines but also equally so in their learning endeavors. If they earned enough points, they always wanted to know what additional activities they could fulfil so they could achieve top results. The teachers were pleasantly surprised that sports students have constantly been in contact, they passed on to other students infected or temporarily not able to join the teaching activities, all assigned topics, deadlines and instructions. In the light of Graham (2006)⁷ claims defining the functions of blended learning as enabling, enhancing and transforming, we could say that sports students have and still are heading towards transforming blended learning. The teaching staff is trying to emphasize the enabling function by increasing accessibility and convenience of sports related hybrid e-learning courses for students. By aiming to increase instructor or student productivity teachers are enhancing blended learning. Setting a goal to improve old-fashioned pedagogy and move away from simple passing on the knowledge, teachers are heading for pro-active learning pedagogy, thus making a transforming blended learning. Thus the sports students themselves produced videos and video-clippings with their own sports competitions and top results achieved when asked to prepare and present their seminar papers. Thus they deployed the experiential learning using their own practice and experience and in this manner connecting the dry textbook knowledge with the hands-on material. The highlight of this activity was the ability to post such a seminar paper so everybody enrolled in the course could add on, comment, suggest or revise

⁶ Yeh, Y., Huang, L., Yeh, Y. (2011). Knowledge management in blended learning: Effects on professional development in creativity instruction, *Computers & Education*, 56(1), 146-156.

⁷ Graham, C.R. (2006) Blended Learning Systems: Definition, Current Trends, and Future Directions. In: Bonk, C.J. and Graham, C.R., Eds., *Handbook of Blended Learning: Global Perspectives, Local Designs*, Pfeiffer Publishing, San Francisco, 3-21.

the concrete assignment by giving friendly advice on how to improve the performing technique, or the set of exercises, or the periodization of sports training. Thus, those who involved in the activity could gain more points, could continue the activity by adding their experience, could warn of the danger of overtraining, or alert on the bad sides of, for example, coaching a team incompetently or pointing to the good and bad characteristics of their previous coaches team leading styles.

Very often we need to hear and rely on the objective, non-biased feedback from the employers, stakeholders and the society at large. In this respect we have to directly contact and ask for the feedback of employers in the area of sport business on the rate of satisfaction with the sports career oriented graduates, in our case from the Faculty of sport in Nis. As a tool a comprehensive survey assessing the opinions of the region wide employers in sports business was administered, posted on a website of the Faculty of sport in Nis. To our satisfaction, it showed an overall satisfaction with our graduate students scoring high 81% satisfaction with their competence and domain specific knowledge in sport and physical education. However, the employers emphasized the need to install more and brush up their existing soft skills, since, it turned out our graduates are most frequently elected in the manager's position in primary and secondary schools, university settings and local community authorities. Thus, our graduates refer back to the faculty citing necessary requirements for better and more successful job finding in our still transitive economy. This is vital since the teachers when passing down specific knowledge and competencies also have to adapt learning communication skills throughout educational stages in specific distance learning mode study across all cycles and all study programs. The summer semester anonymous survey of the so called COVID 19 academic year teaching and study programs quality showed that our average grade was very high ranging from 7,56 for the first year of studies, 7,46 for the second year, 7,10 for the third year and 7,97 for the fourth year of the basic academic studies. Recommendations were given to the teaching staff to insist on the higher percentage of points earned during the pre-exam activities.

The authors would specially like to refer to the language part of this hybrid learning story. All that was missed out from the lack of the personal contact during the summer semester of the last 2020 year was restored and regained during the exams, which by the code of the Law on Higher Education have to be run at the premises of the Faculty. The teaching staff had a tremendous pleasant time while communicating with sports students in person. They wanted to calculate the preliminary grade points earned during online sessions on the course. Each pre-exam activity was reevaluated both by the teacher and the present students. Thus, the level of objectivity was very high and more autonomous students recognized the fruits of their independent work and they at the same time, motivated other shy students to speak freely and contribute to the discussions. Thus our exams turned into a pleasant teaching and evaluation process. Much more than language proficiency we evaluated and praised their efforts to create something new and to engage in the teaching and learning process equally. Generally speaking, sports students wanted more and they were prepared to compensate missing points with some extra prepared materials, frequently with some extra created power point presentations in different sports they played, free conversations on their sport related careers, professional or amateur ones. We even had a chance to follow the lecturing experiences of our coaches who were internationally located and engaged as lecturers in Norway, the States, Island, New Zelend, Romania, and especially in China. Needless to say their language proficiency was ranging from the intermediate up to the advanced levels of knowledge. However, their engagement level in the realization of the course was equally important and rewarded. In the end it is important to emphasize that this is a very time consuming activity having in mind small groups of students that could take the exam at the premises of the Faculty. Nevertheless, both teachers and students were satisfied with this type of rounding up their course and even after finishing their obligations they are still in touch with their teachers reporting on their sporting and teaching accomplishments worldwide. Thus, we could say that the last requirement of transforming blended learning was achieved. We transformed something virtual into something alive, into a pleasant and rewarding experience by winning our sports students trust and living up to their standards and expectations. Moreover, our analysis of the blended learning sports science students confirmed the findings of Yeh, Huang, Yeh, 2011, that blended learning, guided practice, observational learning, group discussion, peer evaluation, and timely feedback comprise important mechanisms guaranteeing the overall hybrid e-learning course success.

4. CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 crisis online teaching pointed out the fact that real-time thinking skill as suggested by Eshet-Alkala (2012), relating to the ability of users to perform effectively in multimedia training environments, prompts the sports students to process simultaneously large volumes of stimuli in real-time and at high-speed. Faculty's management also has to take into account that hybrid online learning is an enterprise with multiple discrete elements that have to be treated isolated with due care so as to produce smooth, finished product such as a successful online sports sciences related course. This calls for triple action on the management, teachers and students as well. Millennials as our students need more prompt action, versatile teaching methods, cutting edge teaching materials, expert tutors and crisis environment friendly management to understand and react according to students hybrid online learning needs.

The complex job of e-learning based study programs in sports implementation necessitates the management attention in that sport students need to fulfill different web-based tasks and communicate them between their peers and teachers as well. Vital aspects of creating fully communicative persons in their respective profiles of studies turned to be interesting for further studies since students have to pass their final exams not web based but direct in person at the premises of the Faculty. Thus, whatever content was posted on the Moodle platform used at the Faculty, now has to be communicated in real life situations, face to face with respective course teachers. Our question about the prevalence of the social competencies building throughout life span over other competencies, was also validated through a survey within students both in bachelor applied and master sports and physical education study programs. A list of attributes or characteristic traits for prospective employees was drawn up and it starts with empathy the ability to understand someone else's feelings and re-experience them so one can actively listen to what others say, the second ranked was appreciation- one can understand and appreciate others' views, the third ranked was focus on attaining the goal or task without conflict, and the fourth ranked was understanding emotional boundaries. Thus, it was proved time and again that organizational awareness implies knowing how to do things within the organization, and higher education institution is nowadays considered a vital enterprise, how to fully understand clients, employers and stakeholders, and act with the client's best interest in mind thus "producing" competent, communicative, pro-social and efficient prospective workers for the volatile labor market.

5. REFERENCES

- [1] Eshet-Alkalai, Yoram, *Thinking in the Digital Era: A Revised Model for Digital Literacy, Issues in Informing Science and Information Technology*, Volume 9, 2012, pp. 267-276.
- [2] *Digitalna generacija u visokom obrazovanju - buđenje kreativnosti*. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323254569_Digitalna_generacija_u_visokom_obrazovanju_budenje_kreativnosti [accessed Jan 24 2019]
- [3] European Commission Digital Agenda for Europe: A Europe 2020 Initiative. u: The Onlife Initiative: Concept Reengineering Exercise: Rethinking Public Spaces in the Digital Transition
- [4] Danica Piršl, and Solzica Popovska, *Critical thinking-autonomous learning and metacognitive strategies essentials in English for specific purposes (ESP)*, Godisnjak za psihologiju, 9, no. 11 (2013), pp. 1-11.
- [5] Pirsl, Danica, Nadezda Stojkovic, and Tea Pirsl, "SPORTS SCIENCE QUALITY FRAMEWORKS IN BLENDED LEARNING IN SERBIA." In the International Scientific Conference eLearning and Software for Education, vol. 3, 2017, " Carol I" National Defense University, pp. 188-193.
- [6] Yu-chu Yeh, Ling-yi Huang, Yi-ling Yeh, *Knowledge management in blended learning: Effects on professional development in creativity instruction*, Computers & Education, Volume 56, Issue 1, (2011), pp. 146-156.
- [7] Bonk, Curtis J., and Charles R. Graham. *The handbook of blended learning: Global perspectives, local designs*. John Wiley & Sons, 2012.