

COVID-19 PANDEMİYASI DÖVRÜNDƏ AZƏRBAYCANIN TƏHSİL MÜƏSSİSƏLƏRİNDƏ QARIŞIQ ÖYRƏNMƏ ÜSULUNUN TƏTBİQİ

AYDIN ƏLİYEV, Pedaqogika üzrə fəlsəfə doktoru, Azərbaycan Dövlət İqtisad Universiteti. e-mail: aydinaliyew@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4914-3788>

DÜNYA ƏHMƏDOVA, Azərbaycan Dillər Universiteti.
e-mail: dunya.ahmadova2000@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4740-4040>

NƏZRİN BABAYEVA, Azərbaycan Dillər Universiteti.
e-mail: nezrin.babayeva02@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3028-4879>

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ANNOTASIYA

Tədris texnologiyalarının geniş vüsət aldığı indiki dövrdə ənənəvi tədris metodları öz xüsusiyyətlərini dəyişmiş, COVID-19 pandemiyası təhsil müəssisələrində dərslərin onlayn şəkildə təşkil olunmasını qlobal miqyasda zəruri etmişdir. Məqalənin yazılmasında məqsəd həm müəllimlərin distant öyrənməyə olan münasibətini dəyərləndirmək, həm də Azərbaycandakı təhsil müəssisələrində qarışıq öyrənmənin zəruri olub-olmadığını müəyyən etməkdir. Məqalə nəşrə hazırlanarkən məlumatların toplanmasında kəmiyyət metodu tətbiq edilmişdir. Google anket formalarında hazırlanmış suallar, əsasən, çoxsaylı seçim və qeyd xanaları növlərindədir. Sosial media mesajlaşma platformaları (əsasən, WhatsApp və Telegram) vasitəsilə sorğunun bağlantısı Abşeron yarımadasındakı (Bakı, Xırdalan və Sumqayıt) beş fərqli özəl təhsil müəssisəsinin müəllimlərinə təqdim edilmişdir. Toplanan məlumatlar cədvəl şəklində əyani olaraq təsvir edilmiş və ətraflı müzakirə olunmuşdur. Bu tədqiqatda 147 müəllim iştirak etmiş və aydın olmuşdur ki, texnologiyanın olduqca inkişaf etdiyi bir dövrdə rəqəmsal məntiqə əsaslanan şagirdlərə (tələbələrə) dərs demək çətinidir. Tədqiqatda həm də qarışıq öyrənmə məsələlərinə toxunulur, tədqiq olunan mövzular təhlil edilir və bu cür öyrənmənin müasir təhsil sistemindəki əhəmiyyətindən bəhs olunur. Bu nəticəyə gəlinir ki, müəllimlər onlayn şəkildə təhsilin tərəfdarı deyil, buna görə də qarışıq öyrənmə tədris prosesindəki tarazlığın qorunması üçün daha faydalıdır.

Açar sözlər: Qarışıq öyrənmə, onlayn öyrənmə, ənənəvi öyrənmə, İKT, təhsil.

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IMPLEMENTATION OF BLENDED LEARNING AS A RECOVERY METHOD IN EDUCATIONAL CENTERS IN AZERBAIJAN DURING THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

AYDIN ALIYEV, PhD in Education, Azerbaijan State Economic University.

e-mail: aydinaliyew@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4914-3788>

DUNYA AHMADOVA, Azerbaijan University of Languages.

e-mail: dunya.ahmadova2000@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4740-4040>

NAZRIN BABAYEVA, Azerbaijan University of Languages.

e-mail: nezrin.babayeva02@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3028-4879>

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ABSTRACT

Technology-embedded context became quite prevalent in contemporary classes. Traditional teaching methods changed their nature and moved to a new stage through integrating modern technologies. Particularly in the COVID-19 period, the situation has forced educational institutions to go online on a global scale. The goal of this paper is to measure teachers' attitudes towards remote learning in Azerbaijan. The study also aims to analyze the necessity of the Blended Learning approach during the pandemic period. A quantitative method was applied in data collection. The questionnaire was prepared in Google forms, with multiple-choice and checkboxes types of questions. The link to the survey was introduced to the teachers of five different private educational centers in the Absheron peninsula (Baku, Khirdalan, and Sumgayit) via social media messaging platforms (mainly WhatsApp and Telegram). Data collected was illustrated visually in the form of a table and was discussed in detail. The questionnaire that was conducted on 147 teachers reveals that advancement and improvement of digital innovations could be face-threatening and arduous for instructors whose current and future students are more and more digital natives (were born in the Information and Communication Technology world). The presented study addresses the concept of blended learning and analyzes the literature on the issue under a study. Furthermore, the article highlights the necessity of blended learning in the process of transition to online education. The research concludes that teacher-subjects do not advocate e-learning, so blended learning would be beneficial to keep the balance between online and in-class education.

Keywords: Blended Learning, e-learning, face to face learning, ICT, education.

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INTRODUCTION

Blended learning appeared with the popularity of web-based instruction. Along with the introduction and spread of internet-based instruction, many threats, dangers, and barriers have also occurred. With Internet-based education, learners can be anxious about losing control of the learning process and may feel forgotten in the complexity of ICT. For example, learners may not know how to study and what to study, or they may not understand definitions and clarifications about their subject in an online written way. Sharma & Barrett (2007) stated that rapid technological changes might be challenging for teachers whose current and future students are digital natives. Also, some teachers in the digital era who are often regarded as digital immigrants may need to adapt themselves to fast improving and changing digital innovations (Wang, 2013). For many teachers, it may be difficult to control the teaching process, like explaining something, giving feedback, and so on. As a completion and balanced education, many scholars agreed on blended learning. Therefore, the blended learning approach -the integration of face-to-face and online learning – has been seen as a hopeful opportunity for traditional teaching and learning (So & Bonk, 2010; Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Shea, 2007; Mahaye, 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Simply, “blended learning is the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences” (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004, p. 96). In addition, BL is interpreted as pedagogically organized courses that combine online lessons with traditional face-to-face classroom practices. Also, Colis & Moonen (2001) comment blended learning as a hybrid of the internet and traditional face-to-face education since instruction takes place both online and in the classroom, where the web component becomes a natural production of in-person instruction.

Shea (2007) states that blended learning often combats the access problem. Due to the fact that some parts of blended learning take place online, with less demand for physical classroom space, institutions can care for more learners with the same opportunity.

In their study about the flexibility of the BL materials, Collopy & Arnold (2009) concluded that flexibility of the use of the sources is another significant plus of blended learning. The authors also emphasize the appropriateness of sharing various teaching materials in BL. Additionally, individual teachers could also match and mix face-to-face and online materials within courses just as they continue both online and in-class discussions. All these opportunities contributed to improved flexible learning and teaching environment.

In his recent article, Mahaye (2020, p. 19) states that “Blended learning would enable learners have access to online learning materials as well as being able to interact with each other and teachers or instructor. This can be a useful system for curriculum support and recovery during and after COVID-19 era”.

In accordance with North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL) (2013; as is cited in (Camahalan & Ruley, 2014)), it is very likely that blended learning will be the predominant model of the future and will become much more familiar than just online or face-to-face learning alone.

On the other hand, some researchers are not in favor of blended learning. For instance, Mswazi et al. (2014) argue that blended learning accepts the term “blending” from teachers’ viewpoint and does not incorporate the perspective of the student. Also, they point out that blended learning requires systematic and logical instructional techniques in order to make the educational process meaningful, which is hard and will take careful planning to achieve. Besides it, only a few learners could absorb and deal with all the units of blended learning. So, there is no need to make such an effort. Some other disadvantages may include computer and internet accessibility, limited knowledge in the

use of technology, lack of computer labs on the university campus, and so forth.

METHODOLOGY

Research Question

This study has tried to investigate the following questions:

1. Are teachers satisfied with compulsory e-learning?
2. Is there a need to implement blended learning?

Design of the study

The study was set out to figure out whether teachers in Azerbaijan support online learning and if it is necessary to apply blended learning. Quantitative research was applied in this research. The questionnaire was prepared in Google forms in the Azerbaijani language so that all teachers can understand it, and then it was translated into English. The link to the survey (https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSffcqJckac6qPzkiUSzOnUGRWLtbll0Wa_D0ACQn8hamD9paw/viewform?usp=sf_link) was introduced to 5 different private educational centers (TESL, Ulduz, Zafar, Ideal, Hedef) in Baku, Khirdalan, and Sumgayit, and teachers voluntarily asked to respond to the survey. The reason to choose these education centers is that conducting a study was more accessible because the researchers were employed in those schools on an hourly basis. After volunteer participants answered the questionnaire, responses were analyzed and described.

Participants

49 (33.3%) male and 98 (66.7 %) female teachers who teach different subjects (English, math, history, biology, and so on) participated in this study. Of 46.9% of participants are aged between 22 and 30, and about 39 % are aged between 30 and 40. The rest of the teachers are aged between 40 and 60. It should also be noted that according to the survey the age of the majority of students is ranged between 15 and 18. The link to the survey was sent to the

teachers through social messaging platforms (mainly WhatsApp and Telegram) and voluntarily asked to complete the survey.

Data Collection

In the research, question types were multiple-choice and checkboxes, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Eleven questions were prepared in total about online education. Data collected was illustrated visually in the form of a table. In the following section, results were analyzed and interpreted by the researcher for the benefit of fellow researchers and educators.

FINDINGS and DISCUSSION

The first question aimed to reveal teachers' general attitudes towards online education. The majority of the participants (75 teachers) agreed with the importance of online education, which makes exactly 51%. 35 teachers (23.8%) in this case do not have a certain opinion. About one-fourth of the participants (25.2%) disagree (25 teachers) or strongly disagree (12) that online education is vital.

The purpose of the second question was to identify the prospects of online education among the teachers. The majority of the participants expect the continuation of e-learning in the future, with 44 teachers agreeing (29.9%) and 31 teachers strongly agreeing (21.1%). 23 teachers (15.6%) in this case take a neutral stance. 21.8% of participants disagree (32 teachers) and 11.6% strongly disagree (17 teachers) that e-learning is a forthcoming trend.

Teachers many times complain about the learning process in online education. As is illustrated by the table 1, 40 teachers (27.2%) agreed that it is difficult to deliver lessons productively and 52 teachers (35.4%) strongly agreed with it. 19.7% of participants (29 teachers) took a neutral position about this issue. The proportion of those who disagreed that it is not challenging to lead the students online was 8.2% (12 teachers). 14 participants (9.5%) strongly disagreed with this viewpoint.

Table 1 Survey questions and results

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
1. E-learning is inevitable in today's education	8,2%	17%	23,8%	38,1%	12,9%	147
2. E-learning will be implemented more in the future	11,6%	21,8%	15,6%	29,9%	21,1%	147
3. It has been difficult for me (teachers) to get adapted new system (in the COVID-19 period) – transformation onto an online platform	9,5%	8,2%	19,7%	27,2%	35,4%	147
4. The sudden change to online education was more challenging	5,2%	10,3%	5,2%	43,1%	36,2%	147
5. Having in-class lessons from time to time helped both us and the students	6,9%	1,7%	3,4%	36,2%	51,7%	147
6. The traditional teaching process (e.g., checking homework, giving feedback) is easier than online platforms	12,9%	22,4%	13,6%	32,7%	18,4%	147
7. Teaching online also has several advantages	12,9%	12,9%	12,2%	51%	10,9%	147
8. Teaching online is as effective as the traditional method	25,2%	50,3%	11,6%	11,6%	1,4%	147
9. It has been difficult for learners to adopt the new system	3,4%	7,5%	13,6%	52,4%	23,1%	147
10. Students tend to be better at using technology than teachers	2,7%	16,3%	16,3%	48,3%	16,3%	147
11. Students are more responsible in online teaching than traditional	27,9%	52,4%	4,1%	10,9%	4,8%	147

In the question about the sudden change to online education, only 5,2 % (7 participants) stayed neutral. The overwhelming majority of the respondents (79.3%) believe in general that the abrupt transition to online teaching was

more challenging, where 36.2% of them strongly agreed.

The teachers were also asked if continuing lessons in-class occasionally were helpful both for them and students. A hefty 87.9% of

teacher-subjects agreed in general that (51.7% strongly agreed) it was helpful. An insignificant 5% said that it was not beneficial.

It is debatable to claim either of the educational systems (online and in-person) to be easier. The share of the participants who agreed that it is simpler to make assignments, to check homework, to give feedback, etc. in the classroom environment was 32.7% (with 48 teachers). 18.4% (with 27 teachers) strongly agreed with this standpoint. 13.6% of teachers (20) did not have a clear opinion about this statement. The proportion of those who agreed that it is easier to teach efficiently online was 22.4% (33). 19 participants (12.9%) strongly agreed with this viewpoint.

During the survey, the participants were also asked whether online education has superior aspects. As the illustration depicts, almost half of the participants (75 teachers) agreed with the high productivity of online teaching, and 16 teachers (10.9%) strongly agreed with this statement. Conversely, 19 teachers (12.9%) disagreed with the perspective, and the same number of teachers (19) strongly disagreed. Of the 18 participants (12.2%) preferred not to state their opinion and stayed neutral.

Differing from the results of the previous questions, most of the teachers have hesitated to state that online education might be more efficient compared to offline education. In more detail, 74 teachers (50.3%) disagreed on the same efficiency levels of both systems, and 37 teachers (25.2%) strongly disagreed. 11.6% of teachers (17) did not have a clear opinion about this statement. Interestingly, 13% of the participants agreed (17) or strongly agreed (2).

As is illustrated by the table, 77 teachers (52.4%) agreed that it was difficult for the learners to adjust to online lessons and 34 teachers (23.1%) strongly agreed with it. 13.6% of participants (20 teachers) took a neutral position about this issue. The proportion of those who disagreed that it is not challenging to lead the students online was 7.5% (11 teachers). 5 participants (3.4%) strongly disagreed with this viewpoint.

The participants were asked whether students tend to be better at using technology than teachers. The majority of the participants said that learners are better at technology skills, with 71 teachers agreeing (48.3%) and 24 teachers strongly agreeing (16.3%). 24 teachers (16.3%) in this case take a neutral stance. 16.3% of participants disagree (24 teachers), and 2.7% strongly disagree (4 teachers) on the viewpoint.

As the table depicts, over half (52.4%) of the participants (75 teachers) disagreed on the learners' high responsibility for online lessons, and 41 teachers (27.9%) strongly disagreed with this statement. Conversely, 16 teachers (10.9%) agreed with the perspective, and 7 teachers (4.8%) strongly agreed. Of the 6 participants (4.1%) preferred not to state their opinion and stayed neutral.

Discussion

Natela, et al., (2020) conducted a study to measure teachers' attitudes and readiness towards online education in the COVID-19 period in many countries, including Azerbaijan. The responses implied that the introduction of compulsory distance learning turned out to be stressful for many teachers. Findings with respect to the teachers' attitude towards online education in the current study are in line with Natela's study. Although the previous study was conducted a year before the current research, beliefs towards e-learning have not changed much among the teachers.

In Mahaye's (2020) research, he reviewed the applicability of Blended learning in academic recovery in the COVID-19 period. He stated that the education system could be affected negatively by several factors such as natural disasters, pandemics, wars, and so on. Thus, Blended Learning can be applied to recover the loss in curriculum due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Apart from this, Mahaye emphasizes that the Blended Learning approach should be implemented as a vehicle from a traditional classroom to a digital classroom. In this

regard, the presented study also offers Blended learning as a recovery tool in Azerbaijani educational institutions. Questions in the survey, especially those are about abrupt change (79.3% agreed) and having lessons in person from time to time, allow us to hypothesize that blended learning is necessary for Azerbaijan.

Limitations of the Study

The main limitation of this study is that it was only conducted in the capital city and nearby cities. Results of the survey might not have been the same in regions of Azerbaijan. Thus, the general conclusion might not be generalized throughout Azerbaijan. Therefore, future studies will be directed at learners and surveys will be carried out in the other cities, and towns to draw more reliable conclusions about the implementation of Blended learning in Azerbaijan.

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

As indicated earlier, this investigation was guided by the following research questions:

- Are teachers satisfied with compulsory e-learning?
- Is there a need to implement blended learning?

The research reached the following conclusions and recommendations about teachers' attitudes towards online education and implementing blended learning in educational institutions in Azerbaijan.

Regardless of the fact that the majority of the teachers acknowledge that e-learning is inevitable in the modern education system and expect that it will be implemented more in the future, they find it challenging to get adopted this system. Teacher-subjects also held that the abrupt transition to online learning was more challenging; nevertheless, they also maintained that having some lessons in-class somehow handled the situation. On top of that, even though teachers agree that online education has advantages, they are still of the opinion that

traditional educational processes are more effective and efficient. Nonetheless, the vast majority of the teachers held that students had difficulty adjusting to online education. In view of all that has been mentioned so far, it could be concluded that teacher-subjects were dissatisfied with e-learning and prefer traditional teaching. Additionally, considering the respondents' perceptions regarding the sudden shift to online teaching and having in-class lessons from time to time, it could be suggested and hypothesized that blended learning would be helpful to keep the balance between online and in-person.

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