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UWP 001

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The Zoom Conundrum: Student Well-Being During the Pandemic

Introduction

This research project will investigate the correlation between online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the mental well-being of students. With the COVID-19 pandemic, many schools have switched their courses to online learning for over a year in the United States. Classes are now taught through Zoom, which allows students to sit in a virtual meeting room with their teacher. However, typically these meetings consist of the teacher with their camera on while students have theirs off, causing a lack of face-to-face interaction with another. Some students are able to work with this new system while others struggle due to the responsibilities of time management and the lack of connection between colleagues. Considering all is online, there is no surveillance from using other electronic devices during class time compared to being in a classroom. Thus, the prevalence of going onto social media or being distracted during lectures has gone up now that it is not being monitored. These issues hold many students down and cause them to struggle to learn their academic material to their fullest potential. Although being at home has left more time for students to have more time to themselves, this research will measure the impact COVID-19 has left on students as they deal with online learning.

Research Question

1. How does the pandemic affect the well-being of students and their ability to learn?

2. How does the pandemic intensify the pre-existing struggles students face?

Literature Review

The first theme across online learning during the pandemic made it more difficult to be motivated and stay focused in class. In the article "Student and instructor perceptions of engagement after the rapid online transition of teaching due to COVID‑19", the authors explain possible causes that lead to a lack of engagement in lectures. Many students who go on online classes at home do not feel the need to attend their lectures due to the "lack of accountability for attending class online" (Walker, A., Koralesky). A majority of classes, especially those with more students, do not take attendance, which encourages students to skip them to do something else. It can be hard for students to be engaged due to the inability to replicate discussions or lectures in-person (Walker A., Koralesky). Not only does this discourage students from attending class but it causes students to be "not interested in e-learning because it is less enjoyable than learning in a physical classroom" (Al-Kumaim). The environment of the area students learn has a great effect in how well they can stay focused. For a majority of students, they will be at home to do online learning, "27.8% of students declared that being with their families during COVID-19 allowed them to focus on their studies. Meanwhile, 51.6% and 20.6% of students respectively declared that staying at home with their family caused difficulties and challenges to focus on their online studies" (Al-Kumaim). Research has shown that the isolation of teacher-student interaction increased due to the pandemic's cause of online learning. One of the most common forms of teaching online is through a course discussion board or watching pre-recorded video lectures, but "Approximately 50% of students rated lower engagement" for these methods (Walker, A., Koralesky). Some students may have trouble using online platforms due to technical issues or insufficient technical knowledge in the use of devices (Al-Kumaim). In Adios K.

Bolatov's article "Online-Learning due to COVID-19 Improved Mental Health Among Medical Students", a survey shows that technology issues among students included "poor Internet connection (51%), lack of a personal computer (31%), lack of a webcam (13%); and 33% of students indicated that they did not encounter any difficulties during the [online learning] period. Pointing out the main problems of organizing online learning, students indicated the following: insufficient control of their knowledge and skills (47%), unclear discipline requirements (17%), insufficient feedback from teachers (6%)" (Bolatav). Problems that arise from students relying on technology that they may not understand can lead to having the disadvantage to getting the content they need. This theme connects to how the pandemic had deterred students from focusing on their academics. This relates to my research question because it shows that the motivation of students had dropped due to them not feeling engaged with the material. Those struggling with their well-being feel the effects more strongly.

The second theme is that the pandemic has decreased the mental well-being of students through various factors. With COVID-19 being on the rise, people worry about how they can protect themselves and their loved ones from getting infected. With the high mortality rate, it is difficult to be confident in one's safety if one goes outside. The national quarantine had encouraged everyone to stay in their homes to prevent the spread of the virus and most people have adapted to this new life. Yet, despite the comfort of staying indoors, "the new normal, time, technology, education, purpose, and grief/loss overlapped each level of the explanatory model. The new normal shifted daily routines, living arrangements, and methods of socialization. Participants described the adjustment to the new normal as complicated and stressful" (LaRosa). Julianne LaRosa's article "Life During COVID-19: The Student Experience" showcases how having to deal with these new issues leads to exhaustion, anxiety, and depression (LaRosa).

There are many other factors that contribute to the stress from online learning during COVID-19. In the article "Exploring the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on University Students' Learning Life: An Integrated Conceptual Motivational Model for Sustainable and Healthy Online Learning" written by Nabil Hasan Al-Kumaim, the author performed a survey on university students. The results revealed that there were five major factors to the stress students face: "(1) more than 62% of respondents report pressure from having too many online tasks included in these platforms; (2) limited and weak internet connection as stated by more than 51% of the respondents; (3) more than 51% of students reported unfamiliarity with the study environment and "new normal" study practices in their home; (4) 37.3% of students reported stress due to inadequate resources relevant to subjects they are learning; and (5) 20.4% of students worried they may become victims of COVID-19" (Al-Kumaim). Though technology is widely used these days, there are many people who struggle to work around it. Being on the internet allows instructors to send out assignments that could be beneficial to the learning process yet can get overwhelming. Sometimes the number of online tasks students have to complete and take note of leads to them spending long hours on the computer (Al-Kumaim). Surprisingly, online learning had improved some of the mental health of students. Research has shown that there was a decrease in stress because of the "elimination of spatial and temporal barriers, the motivation of self-education, and the decrease of costs of indirect expenses (transport, additional meals, and extra accommodation). Other factors that decreased burnout, depression, and anxiety are the ability to combine studying with personal and family life and lack of interaction with patients during clinical placements" (Bolatov). There are those who feel a sense of freedom and accessibility with everything being online because it saved money and lets them stay in their preferred environment. However, there are those who struggle with this who

will feel more stress and try to find solace through various means. Social isolation leads to the loneliness that students take care of through social media. Excessive social media use may lead to insomnia and negative general well-being (Dubar). The theme that the pandemic has increased the amount of stress/depression/anxiety for students relates to the research question because it describes how the pandemic has affected students, especially those that are already troubled with mental issues and self-motivation. Having extra stressors leads to an inability to learn.
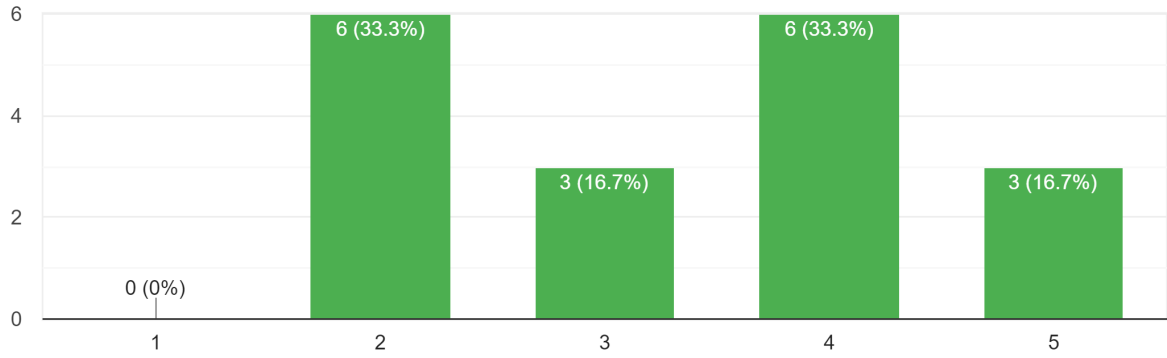
Research Methods and Sources

In the present study, I developed a Google Form survey in order to measure how the pandemic and online learning had affected their health and education. The survey consisted of Likert-type scales along with an open-question and closed-question design. There were thirteen questions in this survey. It started with one demographic question asking if the participant was a UC Davis undergraduate student, followed by two multiple-choice questions regarding how many of their classes were fully online and partially online. There were then eight Likert-type scale questions (1 being strongly disagreed and 5 is strongly agreed) asking the participants to rate how much they agreed or disagreed with statements regarding online learning, pre-existing struggles, and COVID-19. The last two questions were free response questions which asked what made online learning easier for them and what made it harder. The survey was sent out through the UC Davis Discord server and through Canvas emails to other UC Davis students. It allowed students to answer independently and anonymously for the sake of data collection There were eighteen participants in total (N = 18), all of which were UC Davis students. Although out of the total participants, only 13 out of 18 (N=13) answered the free-response questions.

Findings & Discussion Section

Something interesting I discovered from my survey data was that only half of the students thought that the pandemic affected their academic performance. We found that there is a balanced number of students who are and are not affected by the pandemic. About 50% of participants (N=18) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I have faced more barriers that prevent my academic success online compared to in-person classes". The survey shows that 66.6% of participants (N=18) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I get more distracted during online classes than in-person classes during the COVID-19 pandemic". Results also show that 55.6% of participants (N=18) agree or strongly agree with the statement "I feel like online learning has negatively impacted my academic performance since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic". Finally, Participants (N=13) were asked an open-ended question: "What were some barriers that prevented you from being as successful online?". 6 of the participants mentioned that the interaction and engagement of the instructors and lectures was their biggest challenge. 3 of the participants mentioned that staying home staring at a screen was an issue. 3 of the participants also stated that they had trouble with time management. 2 of the participants were caused by other factors.
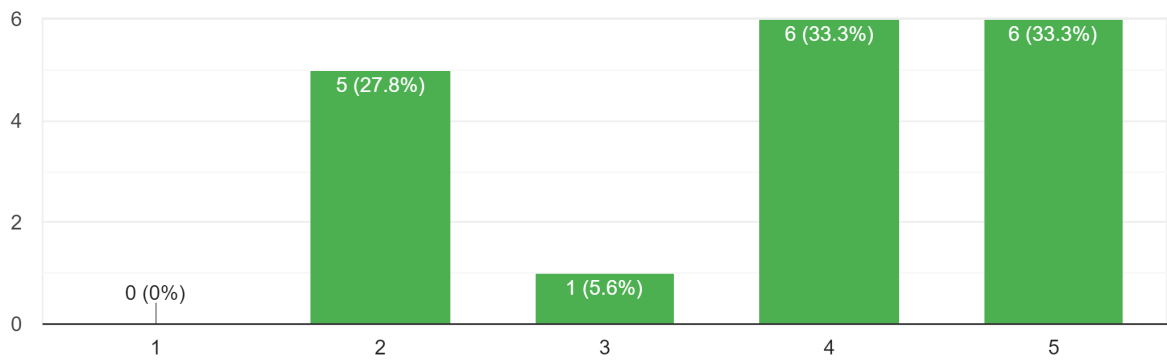
I have faced more barriers that prevent my academic success online compared to in-person classes
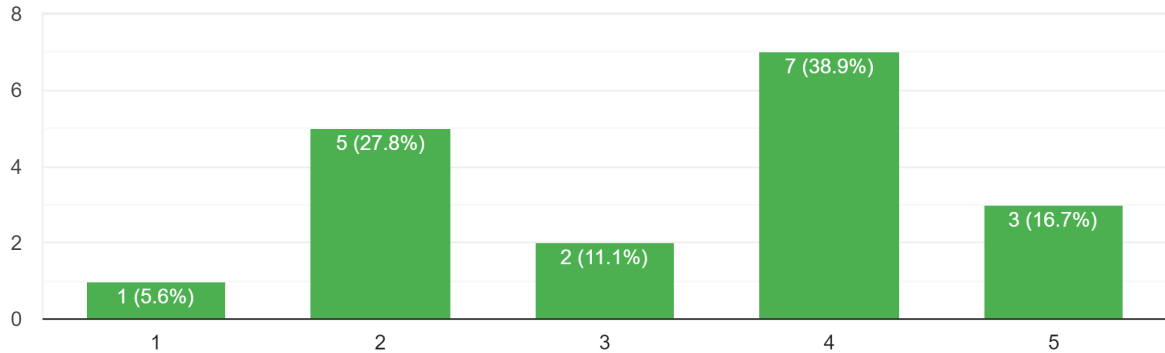
18 responses

I get more distracted during online classes than in-person classes during the COVID-19 pandemic

18 responses

I feel like online learning has negatively impacted my academic performance since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.
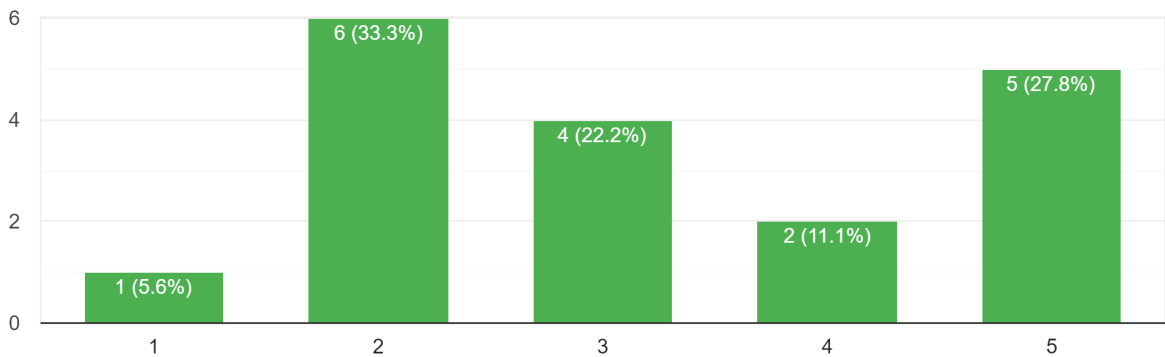
18 responses

This finding extends the theme of online learning affecting the student's academic performance. The data shows that there is about an even number of students that did not seem too bothered by online learning and students that felt it was more difficult to learn. It was moderately difficult to manage classes. However, there is a correlation between those who have more online or hybrid classes to those who believe that online learning is impacting their learning ability negatively. online/hybrid. In Walker's article, the author found that "some students (12%) felt more engaged...overall, 57% of students felt less engaged after the rapid online transition." The large majority of students feel unengaged which supports the data that a majority of students cannot focus during online learning.
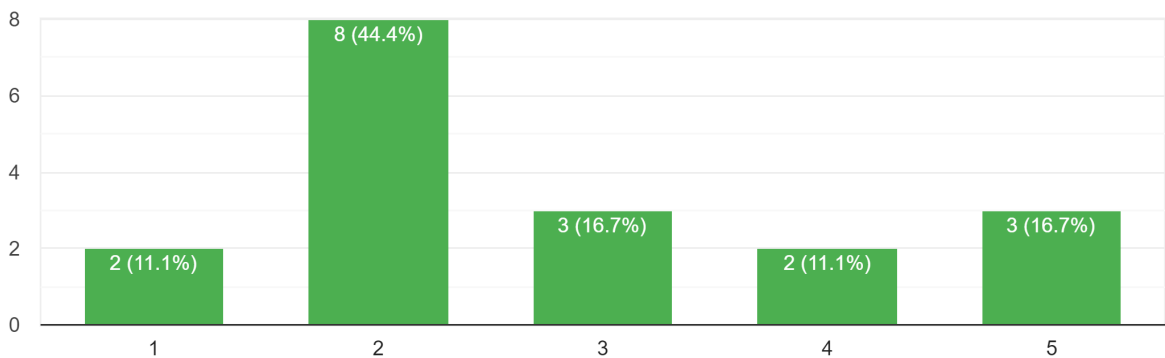
I found that a majority of students do not think the pandemic has affected their well-being in a high amount. A survey done of students' well-being does not seem to have changed much due to the pandemic. I found that 55.5% of participants (N=18) disagree or strongly disagree with the statement "I am currently dealing with external issues that make online learning difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic." Next, 38.9% of participants (N=18) disagreed or strongly

disagreed with the statement "Problems I've faced before the pandemic has gotten worse during the COVID-19 pandemic". 38.9% of participants (N=18) had also agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Finally, 66.6% of participants (N=18) agree or strongly agree with the statement "I am currently stressed out from the pandemic".

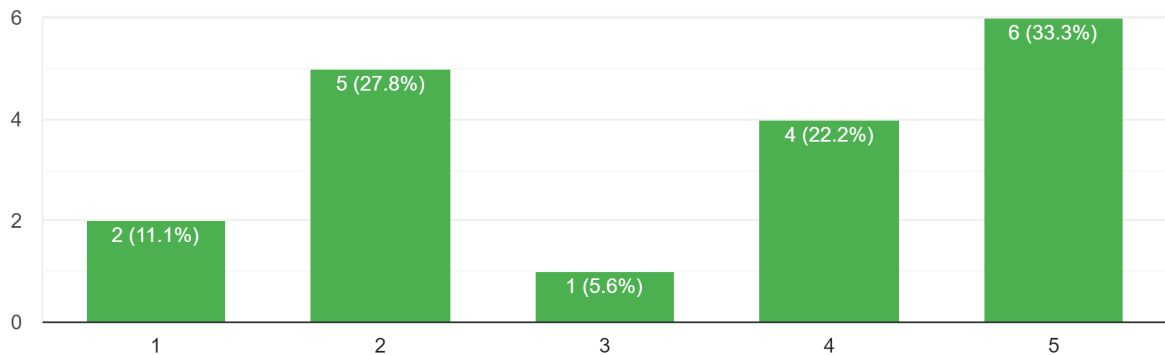Problems I've faced before the pandemic have gotten worse during the COVID-19 pandemic.
18 responses

I am currently dealing with external issues that make online learning difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic.
18 responses

I am currently stressed out from the pandemic.
18 responses

These findings extend the literature theme that the pandemic had led to stress among students' well-being. The data shows that most of the students felt like the pandemic is a moderate issue to their own self. The pandemic has increased the pre-existing struggles of the students, though there are a handful of students that are not struggling with something else. This connects to Al-Kumaim's article, where it mentions that "67% of students declared feeling stress during the COVID-19 pandemic, while about 28% declared no feeling of stress". The results of Al-Kumaim's study show that a majority of students do feel stressed, whereas a small percentage do not feel stressed, which could be true. However, the data was collected in 2020, months prior to most classes being available in person, so students may have their opinion changed.

Conclusion

COVID-19 has completely changed the course of higher-level education, going from being in a classroom to learning in an online setting. The pandemic gave everyone some degree of stress that affected their physical and mental well-being. Each student has their own strengths and weaknesses in terms of learning and managing themselves on their own. At home, there are many distractions, ranging from the environment to other devices, that could lead to being

unfocused on work. Some students have a lack of internet accessibility or technological literacy that could cause more conflict in learning. Many students struggle with staying engaged and absorbing information through a screen while others feel more comfortable and confident engaging through the internet when stuck on online learning. This research would be beneficial to discover how to make a classroom environment more engaging and supportive for students during online and in-class learning. Let professors know what they can do to make learning more engaging. Those who are struggling with finding a balance between problems during the pandemic and academics are not alone.

Citations

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