COVID EPIDEMIC IMPACT ON EDUCATION THROUGH SPANISH-TURKISH-UKRAINIAN ASSOCIATIVE PERCEPTION

Вплив епідемії коронавірусу на освіту через іспанско-турецько-українське асоціативне сприйняття

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Abstract

The article depicts the perception of the concept of «coronavirus» in the linguistic consciousness of native speakers of Ukrainian, Spanish, and Turkish concerning the impact of Covid-pandemic on education. Using the methods of free association test, 30 associative fields to the stimuli specifying the concept of coronavirus: «Coronavirus, Covid-19, pandemic, social distance, lockdown quarantine, mask, tests, self-isolation, vaccine» are obtained. The data provide the clear picture with what social senses of the coronavirus concept associates in the linguistic consciousness of Ukrainian, Spanish, and Turkish students. The negative stimuli linked with danger, uncertainty, disaster and illness are prevailed in three samples. There are practically no reactions from educational subject area.

Key words: Covid, education, free association test, social distance, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine.
Introduction

Education is one of the areas most touched, affected and transformed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic of COVID-19 required that practically all countries worldwide to suspend face-to-face teaching and to move to online classes. Following shut down of the face to face education in March 2020 in many countries with an aim of continuing education, universities adopted learning management software and open-source digital learning solutions. This brought risks for the achievement of the expectation for education but also opportunities for increased use of ICT technologies in higher education.

UNESCO conducted a global survey aimed at providing an evidence-based overview of the current situation of the higher education system at national and global levels. The results reveal insights on how some countries were able to transform challenges, brought by the rapid digitalization of education, into opportunities through strong government support and international cooperation, and how several countries practically have failed this challenge (COVID-19 and higher education: Today and tomorrow. Impact Analysis, policy responses and recommendations, 2020). The survey also tries to evaluate the impact the pandemic had on higher education systems in terms of access, equity and quality of teaching and learning, university operation, national challenges, emerging issues, and strategic responses. The major impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning is the increase in online education. The hybrid mode of teaching (blended learning) has become the most popular form (ibid). The main impact covers access, international mobility, university mobility, disruption of research and extension university activities, deepening Digital Divide, cutback of University operations, transition from higher education to work, etc. (ibid). In addition, much research indicates that for many countries the data obtained in this subject area are unstable and dependable from national and cultural factors also (ibid). Thus, the question of COVID pandemic effect on education is nationally and culturally savvy.

Thus, this study compares the university students’ perception of COVID-19 concept in three countries which reveal political, cultural and socio-economic development differences.

Turkish case: The higher education institutions responded to the disruptions with the outbreak of a pandemic by agile policies in Turkey. Many measures including physical distance to inhibit the spread of COVID-19 have been taken by the government since the early March, 2020. Turkey declared lockdown on March 13 2020 and all school, colleges and universities were closed. Total duration of school closures in Turkey was 49 weeks in 2020-2021 academic terms (UNESCO, 2021). Turkish people shown positive attitudes towards these measures. A
research (Bostan et al., 2020) assessing the attitude of the Turkish public towards COVID-19 and to the protective measures showed that the people with high levels of sensitivity to the pandemic exerted the maximum effort for protection and social trust was above the average.

The pandemic process has affected people’s mental health due to changes in life, as well as posing a risk of death due to infection for themselves or their loved ones. The outbreak has triggered various psychological problems, such as depression e.g. (Qiu et al., 2020). A cross-sectional study with a sample of 358 undergraduates from 14 universities in Turkey, including 200 female students (56%) revealed that students’ mental health during the pandemic was at high risk. (Aslan, Ochnik & Çınar, 2020). Students reported high perceived stress, mild generalized anxiety, and low satisfaction with life. More than half of the students met the diagnostic criteria of Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) (52%) and depression (63%). Female and physically inactive students scored higher PSS-10 (Perceived Stress Scale) levels. This study’s “hierarchical linear regression model showed that after controlling for gender and negative CI (CI stands for Perception of COVID-19 Impact on Student Well-Being), anxiety and physical inactivity significantly predicted high perceived stress” (ibid.: 1). Studies also observed students having a fear of losing a family member due to the COVID-19 (Çetin & Anuk, 2020). The same study (ibid.) found the mortality experienced in the family or close environment due to the COVID-19 virus, the thoughts of the students about the country and their future, the idea of not being able to meet the basic needs in the future, general life satisfaction and what the first thing they wanted to do when the epidemic ended made differences on their psychological resilience and loneliness levels (Çetin & Anuk, 2020). The pessimistic view of the students who are experiencing the pandemic about the future of the country affects their psychology negatively (ibid.). When reporting negative impact of the COVID-19 on their lives, students underlined that the pandemic affected their daily life negatively and restricted their social life. This suggests that social life and peer relationships are very important for Turkish university students (Asıcı & Günlü, 2020).

Concerning Ukraine, the pandemic shows that Ukrainian universities are no longer keeping up with the speed of the world (Donnelly, Patrinos & Gresham, 2021). Today students are required to have one set of skills, and in the future the set of skills would change. Life-long learning and corporate education are becoming increasingly important for young people in the COVID-period. The urgency of the problem is exacerbated by the transition to a blended form of education with priority of distance learning technologies and a shift to self-directed autonomous learning that is suggested in the curricula of higher education institutions (ibid.). In addition, the advancement of digital education technologies
and widespread of blended learning formats of education also contribute to the student-centered approach in education, personalization of learning and development of lifelong learning. One can argue that the COVID-pandemic provides the chance for Ukrainian higher education to turn the crisis into its opportunity, and education becomes a powerful potential for scientific and social achievements as a whole.

The 14th of March of 2020, in response to the emergence of COVID-19, the Spanish government invoked a legal procedure denominated as State of Alarm that was put into action for the whole Spanish territory. It lasted for 3 months and implied several restrictions, such as a strict lockdown. After this period, the measures became less restrictive and the country (and the world in general) transitioned to what it was called the “New Normality”. This set of new norms also affected every domain of activity, therefore reaching the education system. The most important change consisted in the suppression of any face-to-face activity at any level of the education system, including the universities. In response to that, teachers needed to introduce modifications in the teaching methodologies, with the emergence and application of online teaching that both required students and professors to have the necessary equipment and training in using ICT resources.

The transition to the new learning modalities was not easy though for students. Research indicated that face to face learning was preferred rather than other methodologies such as online or blended learning, the latter specially put into place from September 2020 with the universities deciding how to administer their education in a more liberal way (Verde & Valero, 2021).

Additionally, Spain was the third country most affected by the pandemic, that created great uncertainty and invoked significant adverse consequences for mental health, especially in terms of anxiety and depressive symptoms (Shigemura et al., 2020). For this reason, it is crucial to analyze the experience of members of the university community during the COVID-19, so to develop measures and implement psychological interventions properly (Odriozola et al., 2022). Also, the widespread close down imposed on the Spanish population as a result of the COVID-19 had sad impact especially on children and youth who have rendered their everyday lives as completely disrupted. For many weeks, social contact was confined only to their family life in the house, occasional online interaction with extended family and friends, and access to educational and extracurricular activities which had been made available online with more or less success (Díez-Gutiérrez, Gajardo & Espinoza, 2021). The crisis caused a sudden change from face-to-face teaching to online education for all levels – preschool, compulsory and higher education, with no or little training or provision of resources. Many students were cut off due to the digital divide associated either to unequal access to
technology, generally due to economic and infrastructure issues such as internet connection, data or equipment limitations, but also due to the family’s low level of cultural capital (little or no digital literacy) or lack of effective support at home or from the school (Valle & Olagüe-Smithson, 2021).

Basing on the theoretic analysis one can organize the research through cross-cultural perspective about the perception of pandemic COVID-19 among students. The research objective is to reveal and depict perception of COVID-19 pandemic through Spanish, Ukrainian and Turkish students’ linguistic consciousness, fix and describe the similarities and differences among them.

Methods and Techniques of the Research

Meaningful and figurative associations constitute an integral and very important part of people’s linguistic consciousness representation. Associations themselves, conditions and mechanisms of their formation, results of their manifestation are studied in various sciences. In psychology, for example, a special trend has developed – associativity, which uses associations as an explanatory principle of the entire psychical life of a person (Golovin, 1998: 57). In sociology the associative approach is rendered as a method aimed at revealing the semantic connections formed in an individual's previous experience (Pautova, 2007: 150).

In psycholinguistics associative methodology presents the main tool in people’s mentality and linguistic worldview research (Goroshko, 2003).

The free associative test is used in this comparative research to clarify the social semantic senses describing and interpreting the pandemic impact in education.

The Spanish sample comprises of 139 persons: 103 females, 35 males, and 1 is NGA. There are 131 undergraduates, 3 undergraduate-new graduates, 1 graduate students, and 3 MA-PhD- new graduates.

The Ukrainian sample covers 702 persons: 345 females, 320 males and 37 persons are NGA. There are 573 students, 30 teachers, 72 others, and 27 – NGA among them.

The Turkish sample includes 428 persons: 272 females and 156 males, among them 316 undergraduates, 57 undergraduate-new graduates, 44 graduate students, and 11 MA-PhD-new graduates.

The scheme of research is the following: at the first stage free associative test is conducted. The proposed stimuli list covers “Coronavirus, Covid-19, pandemic, social distance, lockdown, quarantine, mask, PCR tests, self-isolation, vaccine”. The stimuli words are selected as descriptors concerning the COVID concept, or notions most frequent used for describing the state of pandemic.
The instruction for conducting a free associative test online is the following: Participants are asked to answer the first word that comes to their minds when they read the stimulus. All answers are written in Google form. The test is conducted in three languages: Spanish, Turkish, and Ukrainian. The samples are constructed with the help of a snowball method, accessing the subjects through other students that were already known by the research team.

**Results**

Thirty associative fields from Ukrainian, Turkish, and Spanish respondents are collected. To illustrate the data obtained the notion “social distance” is analyzed in three languages as an example. All reactions are arranged according to their frequency and alphabetic order. Unique reactions are not included in the current analysis description.

The Spanish associative field is construed from the following association: “Social distance, Mask – 13, Security – 10, “ – “, Sadness – 8, Isolation – 5, Loneliness, 2 meters – 4, Bars, Boredom, Friends – 3, Contagion, Distance, Far, Hugs, Measure, Necessary, Relieve, Shit, Space - 2”.


The Turkish associative field includes “Mask – 39, Distance – 30, “– “, 1,5 meter – 26, Protection – 15, 2 meter – 12, Necessary -11, Distancing, Longing, Necessity, Precaution, Rule – 9, Loneliness – 8, Health, Isolation, Must – 7, mandatory distance between people – 5, 1 meter, Far, Hygiene, Move away, Physical distance – 4, COVID-19, Illness, Lie, Meter, Nobody practices, Unable to contact, Unnecessary, Virus, Zero – 3, Asociality, Boring, Bullshit, Concert, Corona, Crowded, Fahrettin Koca, Good, Hard, Human, Human distance, I am ennuied, k (o.k), Keep distance with the loved ones, Must comply, Nobody complies, Not shaking hands, Pandemic, Safety, Spacing/Gap – 2”.

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Conclusions

As one can see, descriptive and negative reactions are prevailed in the three associative fields, especially concerning the restrictions in personal space.

One could fix very frequent use of rejections from associations (no reaction to the proposed stimulus at all) in all three samples. It can be explained a subconsciousness negation of this term. There are practically no words with positive connotations in all associative fields in three samples.

Ukrainian associations are very functional depicting the act of social distancing in itself (the distance, quarantine, mask, protection, rules, personal space, transport, health).

Turkish associations are more connected with the prohibition or restriction measures (necessary, necessity, must, comply, prohibition, quarantine) and much more negative than the Ukrainian ones (unable to contact, boring, bullshit).

Spanish sample contains functional reactions (social distance, mask, security, isolation) and reactions with negative connotation also (loneliness, bars, boredom, contagion).

There are no associations connected with the education in all three associative fields.

References


