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What motivates and influences students learning English in the hybrid mode of studying?

Co motywuje i wpływa na uczenie się angielskiego przez studentów w trybie nauki hybrydowej?

Abstract

The article presents a study that aimed to establish what motivates and influences the process of learning English in students of linguistics in business in the semester of hybrid education (face-to-face and online, depending on the COVID-19 cases among students). The study was conducted among a group of 40 students. A mixed qualitative-quantitative approach was taken to analyse the data. Results show that there are various intrinsic and extrinsic motives driving students' learning in the hybrid mode, as well as online and offline factors that influence it. The extrinsic, or instrumental, motives are, for example, learning to use the skill to find a good job after graduation, the use of English for travelling or studying because of tests. The intrinsic, or cognitive, motives include learning because of the fascination with the language and its countries or interest in the subject. It was also established in the study that the students did not cope well with the constant shifts in the studying mode, finding the instability and unexpected changes disturbing. The participants, however, appreciated the contribution of technology thanks to going online and still stick to some of the technological solutions, even if now they are back in the face-to-face mode.

Keywords: motivation, blended learning, hybrid learning, studying English, university students, COVID-19, EFL

Abstrakt

Artykuł przedstawia badanie, którego celem było ustalenie, co motywuje i wpływa na uczenie się angielskiego przez studentów lingwistyki w biznesie w czasie semestru nauki hybrydowej (w trybie stacjonarnym oraz online, w zależności od przypadków COVID-19 wśród studentów). Badanie przeprowadzono na grupie 40 studentów. Do analizy danych zostało zastosowane mieszane podejście jakościowo-ilościowe. Wyniki pokazują, że istnieją różne czynniki, zarówno zewnętrzne, jak i wewnętrzne, motywujące naukę studentów podczas trybu hybrydowego, jak również czynniki związane z internetem i niezależne od niego. Czynniki zewnętrzne lub instrumentalne to np. uczenie się umiejętności w celu

znalezienia dobrej pracy po ukończeniu studiów, używanie angielskiego w czasie podróży lub uczenie się z powodu testów. Czynniki wewnętrzne lub kognitywne obejmują uczenie się z powodu fascynacji językiem i jego krajami albo zainteresowanie przedmiotem. W badaniu ustalono również, że studenci nie radzą sobie dobrze z ciągłymi zmianami trybu nauki, uważając brak stabilności oraz niespodziewane zmiany za zakłócające. Uczestnicy uznają jednakże wpływ technologii dzięki trybowi online i stosują niektóre rozwiązania, nawet gdy znowu uczą się stacjonarnie.

Słowa kluczowe: motywacja, nauka mieszana, nauka hybrydowa, nauka angielskiego, studenci, COVID-19, nauka języka angielskiego jako obcego

Introduction

The aim of this article is to present a study on the motivation for learning English, conducted on a group of students studying linguistics in business in the Winter term 2021/22 at The Warmia and Mazury University in Olsztyn, Poland. These classes were taught in a hybrid format – that is to say, classes would take place face-to-face, however they would be transferred online if someone tested positive for COVID-19. In this article, ‘hybrid’ shall refer to this combination of standard in-classroom and online learning. The purpose of the study is to answer the following question: ‘What motivates and influences learning English among students during hybrid learning?’. The article starts with an overview of relevant literature. The methodology for the study is then presented, followed by the findings and their interpretation. Conclusions close the article.

Literature review: motivation in adult life and in language learning and blended learning

For the purpose of theoretical preparation as well as construction of the questionnaire, relevant literature was reviewed. It encompassed various works, ranging from those of classics on motivation in adult life (Maslow 1943; Lindeman 1926; Rogers 1959; Knowles 1973), those of experts in motivation in education (Schunk et al. 2008) and those of experts in learning and teaching a foreign language (Komorowska 2009; Ur 1999; Krashen 2013). The author’s PhD dissertation concerning motivation for using online resources for learning (Kozinska 2013) was also considered. A section exploring definitions of blended learning (with a fragment on definitions of motivation for learning online) close the literature review.

Maslow (1943) is known for creating a so-called pyramid of human needs that reflects their hierarchy. At the bottom of the pyramid lie human

physiological needs, e.g. the need of sleep or food. These lower-order needs, Maslow claims, have to be met as a pre-condition for us to strive to achieve those higher ends, like a foundation to the pyramid. Safety comes next in the hierarchy, e.g. stability at work. Further up still in the pyramid are the needs of belonging, e.g. love, friendship, belonging to a group. Acknowledgement comes next and self-actualisation is at the top of the pyramid. Acknowledgement is reflected in our need of success, respect of one's environment or prestige. Self-actualization is, for example, the need to develop one's talents and taking care of one's own spiritual life.

Self-actualization is a concept that was also used by Rogers (1959). Another theorist of adult education, Lindeman (1926), asserted that enjoyment plays a major part in motivating adult learners. Knowles (1973), a theorist of andragogy, stressed that self-direction is typical of learning in adult life and also wrote about so-called "life roles" within which one acts in life, e.g. when we act in the role of a friend, worker, learner, citizen.

As regards motivation specifically in education, Schunk et al. describe motivation as 'the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained' (2008: 4). The authors stress the significance of goals in motivation as they serve as a stimulus and direct one's actions while learners are attempting to achieve something (Schunk et al. 2008). Schunk et al. observe that motivation is linked to such activities as planning and organizing one's learning. Setting oneself goals is a sign of high motivation, they claim. Analogically, low motivation will be manifested in problems with responding to difficulties, lack of persistence or not setting oneself goals.

Bandura (1988), too, observed the importance of setting oneself goals, planning actions to fulfil specific objectives, as well as anticipate likely outcomes of one's own actions.

In relation to language learning, Komorowska (2009) notes that motivation is decisive to achieving results in language learning. Komorowska talks about motives, e.g. safety for those suffering from low esteem or anxiety or approval from the parents, the teacher or colleagues, and also achievement (Komorowska 2009).

Other motives for learning a language that Komorowska (2009) mentions are:

- Cognitive motive related to the pleasure of learning a foreign language and about a different country,
- Integrational motive related to a fascination with the language and culture,
- Instrumental motive when the learner has a well-paid or interesting job in mind thanks to learning the language.

Conversely, a lack of motivation can be related to doing something in conflict with the learning, e.g. being occupied with one's hobby or acting in opposition to everybody (Komorowska 2009). In this case teachers can introduce 'external motives, so coercion motives' (Komorowska 2009: 129). Penny Ur (1999) also writes about external motivators, for example tests. Tests are tools of motivating extrinsically. Ur (1999) stresses the importance of a good teacher in motivating students, whilst good may mean many different things.

Ur (1999) writes on extrinsic motivation, beginning with success and failure, observing that previous successes are likely to motivate students to get involved with the task again, while failure is avoided. Ur continues to write about authority, stating that the sheer power of the teacher to assign tasks to students is extrinsically motivating. Lastly, competition is also an extrinsic motivator (Ur 1999).

One of the intrinsic motivators that Ur (1999) states is interest. Krashen also stresses that to keep students motivated, not just interesting input is required, but 'compelling' input (Krashen 2013: 1).

Finally Ur proposes a description of possible relationships between a teacher and adult students: 'authority – subjects to authority, assessor – assessed, transmitter – receivers, motivator – people to be motivated, activator – people to be activated, counsellor – clients, seller of services – buyers of services, resource – users' (Ur 1999: 133).

Attitudes are significant in motivation. As Komorowska writes:

'One's attitude towards the society and culture of the language, if positive, can bring about integrating motivation which is strongly cognitive, which is the way to success in learning... Motivations and attitudes are not given once and for all, therefore you can shape them, and a lot depends on the teacher' (Komorowska 2009: 129).

As far as age groups and motivation are concerned, youngsters, based on Komorowska (2009) are often motivated by their attitude towards the teachers, i.e. their motivation to a large extent depends on whether they like the language teacher or not. Young students are often motivated by their interest in the topic of the subject, Komorowska (2009) continues. Self-evaluation and autonomy are also important in motivating young students.

With adult students the teacher's role in motivating is weaker. This is because adults usually learn a foreign language or study foreign languages out of their own free will, and so are already motivated. As Komorowska (2009) notes, their motivations are usually positive so the 'role of the teacher is only to sustain the earlier motivation' (Komorowska 2009: 130).

As the study was conducted in a hybrid, or blended, learning mode, it is worth reflecting on some definitions of blended learning. Muller and Mildenerger (2021) state that virtual or asynchronous learning use online technologies and blended learning, also called hybrid, mixed-mode or flexible, refers to incorporation of face-to-face learning in the classroom.

The authors postulate that between 30 and 79 per cent of content delivery in blended learning is online, while the rest is in the traditional format (Muller and Mildenerger 2021). Graham (2006) writes that 'blended learning systems combine face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction' (Graham 2006: 5 in Muller and Mildenerger 2021: 2). Moore et al. rightly observe that 'research associated with the distance learning realm can be even more difficult to use as there are different environments with a variety of characteristics' (2010: 1). Garrison and Kanuka (2004) write about a thought-through 'integration' of what can be referred to as face-to-face learning in the classroom with experiences of learning online. Allen, Seaman and Garrett (2007) 'employ the online proportion of a learning environment as a differentiation criterion for the four modalities: traditional, web-facilitated, blended/hybrid and online learning' (in Muller and Mildenerger 2021:2). It can thus be concluded that blended learning is simply a mix of both online as well as traditional, in-classroom teaching and learning.

Various researchers have established that what motivates learners online are the interactions with and contributions of other users (Kreijins et al. 2003; Preece and Shneiderman 2009), while in some cases the motivations are related to their professional situations and personal hobbies (Kozinska 2013). Jiang et al. (2022) conducted a study in Iran in which they explored the effects of learning online on EFL learners' motivation, anxiety and attitudes at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. They discovered that the students' motivation increased due to online learning, while their anxiety level was lowered. Positive attitudes towards the second language learning were shaped in the online learning process. It is thus worth examining in this paper whether the results of this study confirm the results. Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) who conducted a study on learning online at the time of COVID-19 pandemic concluded that it is 'evident that online learning is different from emergency remote teaching [and] online learning will be more sustainable while instructional activities will become more hybrid provided the challenges experienced during this pandemic are well explored and transformed to opportunities' (Adedoyin and Soykan 2020: 1).

Methodology

The aim of the research was to answer the following main question: “What motivates and influences learning English among students during hybrid learning?”. The following were the sub-questions posed to help generate the answer to the main question.

- a) What are students’ goals in learning English?
- b) What online and offline factors influence learning English?
- c) What do students like and dislike in learning English in the hybrid mode?

The author’s previous work on motivation (Kozinska 2013), where main questions were answered with the help of subquestions, served as the basis to formulate these questions.

The main tool used to gather data was a questionnaire that was administered in the classroom. Questionnaires had previously been used by the researcher (Kozinska 2013) in examining the phenomenon of motivation successfully, and also applied in a large-scale study researching motivation for using open educational resources called The Open Learn Research Report (McAndrew et al. 2009), thus chosen to be applied in this study, too.

Participants were recruited from the cohort of third-year students of Linguistics in Business (who had longer experience in studying than the first- and second-year students). All students had been informed of the purpose of the study, its voluntary character and the fact that their answers would be anonymous. Informed consent was obtained. Amongst the cohort, English was the most commonly studied language, alongside German and Russian, as well as economics subjects. The level of English for most of these students is C1 of the CEFR Framework (Council of Europe 2020). In conducting the study, the researcher was aware of The Code of Ethics for Research Workers of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Instytucja PAN 2021).

As Miles and Huberman state ‘sampling is crucial for later analysis’ (1994: 27). The sampling in this study was convenience sampling, where ‘advantage is taken of cases, situations or informants...close at hand’...[and purposive, meaning] deliberate...with some purpose or focus in mind’ (Punch 2005: 187). The sample was not too large but, as Miles and Huberman assert ‘qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in-depth – unlike quantitative researchers, who aim for larger numbers of context-stripped cases and seek statistical significance’ (Miles & Huberman 1994: 27). Authors also observe that qualitative samples tend to be purposive (Miles & Huberman 1994).

The data gathered was analysed using Miles and Huberman’s (1994) framework for analysing qualitative data. First the data was ‘condensed’,

allowing themes to emerge from it. The themes would then be organized in groups to answer specific research questions. Available citations are also shown in support of the findings. Simple counting of the answers was also conducted, so some statistical trends that emerged in this small-scale study are also shown. It could thus be said that a mixture of qualitative and quantitative approach was taken.

During one of the classes 40 students present were invited to fill in the questionnaire with 18 questions. All of them provided responses. The results were counted manually and are compiled into answers to sub-questions and the main question. The questionnaire was in Polish and all answers were translated into English by the author of the article.

Findings

The sub-questions are analysed first before looking at how they help answering the main, or central, question of this paper.

a) What are students' goals in learning English?

Question 3 in the questionnaire concerned the feeling of satisfaction out of a correct response or a well completed task. 28 students (70% of total answers) answered that 'yes, it is very satisfying', 6 people answered that it was 'hard to say' and only 6 answered 'no, it does not matter to me'. A successful completion of a task, then, emerges as a motivating factor, a goal that might drive student's interactions.

In question 6 of the questionnaire students were asked if they liked to demonstrate their skills and knowledge. 19, so almost a half, said 'yes'. 7 answered 'no' while 8 said 'no difference'. Demonstration of skills and knowledge emerges as a goal that might drive the students' learning.

Question 7 concerned the students' opinions on the skill of communicating in English. Here students could circle more than one answer or write in the field 'Other'. The first option was 'it is key for me to become professionally successful in the future'. 34 people circled that answer. The next option concerned the importance of English for private plans, e.g. travelling and meeting people. 37 participants circled that answer. The third option was 'this is simply a necessity nowadays'. This option was circled by 22 respondents, so over a half of all those questioned. The next option was 'I am fascinated by the foreign language and countries'. 15 people circled that answer. 'It is a pleasure for me and satisfaction out of knowledge gained' was circled

by 15 people. 'It is important for gaining recognition in one's environment' was chosen by 1 person. 'Grades from the subject are important for me' was chosen by 2 people. 'I like the teachers' was chosen by 11 students. 'There are a lot of tests so I study' was chosen by 10 individuals. There was a field called 'others' and one person wrote in that field that 'while being a student one should work on fluency and spontaneity, especially in English'.

Question 9 asked the participants: 'do you plan the time spent on studying?'. 'Yes, I like to have everything planned and organized' was chosen by 17 students, so almost a half of all those questioned. 'sometimes I plan and sometimes I study spontaneously' was chosen by 14 students. 8 people circled the option 'I never plan studying, I just do it when I have the time and feel like it'. The majority of participants plan their time spend on studies, then.

Question 10 asked 'How much time per week do you spend on independent study, revision and preparation for classes?' 11 people answered 'less than an hour per day', 13 people went for the 'more than an hour per day' option. And 'several hours per week' was chosen by 15 participants. The majority do spend a considerable amount of time on tasks related to their independent organization of classes.

Question 13 concerned the students' aims for the given semester, specifically asking: 'What goals have you set for yourself this semester?'. 8 people chose 'pass my English subjects as well as possible'. 25 people reported 'just pass'. 4 said 'none, I do not set myself goals'. 3 students wrote in the 'Other (Specify)' field. One wrote 'develop my skills', another wrote 'gain skills useful at work', and one wrote 'pass all subjects as well as possible'.

Question 17 concerned students' additional reflections on goals and motivation in the hybrid mode semester. One student said that 'if someone wants to study, going online will not change anything in my opinion', while another that they had 'no motivation because of the constant changes of the mode of classes'. One student said that 'a lot of material to study is a hindrance in achieving objectives', while another that 'lack of motivation [had been] caused by the second foreign language'. The wish to develop one's language skills and graduate in time was a motivator for another one, while one student said that 'the greatest motivator is the fact that this is the penultimate semester'. For some it was worth setting goals 'to know why you get up in the morning'. Someone observed that 'keeping up to date with studies leaves you with more time for private life'. For others the motivation were 'good grades on my final diploma and self-fulfilment' or passing one's exams at the first attempt. Wanting to raise language competences, appreciating the approach of the teacher or being motivated by the Rector's scholarship were motivating. What was demotivating, on the other hand,

were the constant changes, multitude of classes, and the fact that some classes were just too time-consuming. Some students also mentioned that there were too many subjects in the curriculum meaning it is not possible to 'focus properly on English, which is 'a very useful language much needed in private as well as professional life'. For some the motivator was 'finding a good job' or 'liking the teacher'.

b) What online and offline factors influence learning English?

As far as being active during classes is concerned, the second question in the questionnaire concerned speaking during classes. 21 respondents, so almost a half, said that it depended on the subject whether they took part in spoken interactions. 13 people (32,5%) said they participated in such interactions both during online as well as face to face classes. Only 3 people said they only participated during online classes and only 3 during face-to-face classes. The subject itself influences participation and the learning of language.

Question 4 asked about teacher recognition for students' success in studying to which, the majority – 27 students – responded that teacher recognition of their academic success mattered to them. 6 people circled 'no', while seven – 'no difference'. Teacher recognition might thus be seen as a factor that influence learning.

Question 5 concerned peer recognition of one's academic success. Here, the majority were 17 students who responded that it did not matter to them, compared to only 7 who circled that, yes, it did. 16 students said that it did not make a difference to them.

Question 8 was 'How do you prepare for classes?' – 'I regularly do homework and read the assigned material' was chosen by over a half of participants – 22 people. 12 people said they sometimes did homework and read the assigned material and 6 said that generally they did not prepare. Assigned homework and material is then a factor that influences learning for the majority.

Question 11 concerned asking for help: 'Who do you ask for help when having problems with your studies?' Nobody chose the teacher. 30 people chose 'a friend or a close one' and 9 people said 'nobody, I solve it myself'. Seeking peer support influences learning then.

Question 15 concerned sticking to a plan or routine of studying during the semester. 10 people said that they had a plan or a routine and would

stick to it throughout the whole semester. The majority – 24 participants – however said that they ‘tend to start with a lot of planning but as weeks go by I have less and less self-discipline’. 5 people selected the answer ‘does not concern me’.

c) What do students like and dislike in learning English in the hybrid mode?

When it comes to the question of which mode of learning they preferred (question 1 in the questionnaire), only 3 students chose face-to-face mode as compared to those 14 (35%) who chose online learning. The ‘no difference’ option was chosen by 1 person and over a half of all respondents – 22 – answered that it depends on the subject.

Question 12 asked: ‘What experiences have you had with technology during online learning?’ 5 people reported that they had no problems with technology whatsoever. Two participants reported problems with something specific throughout the period, and the remaining 33 participants (so an overwhelming majority) reported problems with MS Teams, the internet or their equipment sometimes.

Question 14 concerned online learning as an alternative to face-to-face mode of study. 20 people thought that online learning was ‘a better alternative to face-to-face learning’. Only seven said it was ‘problematic’ and they ‘could not focus at home’. 13 participants said that ‘it does not make a difference’.

Question 16 allowed students to write their comments on their general impressions of hybrid education this semester (what they like and what they dislike).

The common and most frequent comment was on the disadvantage of constant changes between the online and the face-to-face mode and the uncertainty and disturbance it all caused. Here are some of the students’ comments:

- ‘I do not like the hybrid mode, there is chaos and organizational problems’.
- ‘it is jumping from one mode to another’
- ‘it is hard to get used to one particular mode of study’.

One student did not like ‘often unplanned and unexpected changes’, while another mentioned that ‘the continuous changes are tiring’ and that ‘[the changes] puts me out of the rhythm’. Another student said that ‘it is possible to forget many things because of constant changes’, while another that they would ‘rather have the whole semester in one mode, the constant travelling to the university is tiring and sometimes problematic’. For others the problem

was 'constant uncertainty', not clear what was done in the classroom and what in the online mode.

When it comes to the advantages of the online mode, students put emphasis on the comfort of working from home and the possibility of saving time on commuting and taking part in classes even if sick. Other advantages include better use of technology, e.g. for coursebooks, electronic dictionaries, electronic notes, etc. Concern for their health and the health of others was also mentioned. One student said that it was 'easier to focus and online classes are more convenient and one's time can be used more effectively'. Another student liked 'the comfort of being at home and participating in classes', while another mentioned 'better access to materials'. Some students valued the possibility of checking 'new words in an online dictionary', 'less time spent on commuting, more on studying', 'less concern for the health of yours and your loved ones'. Some mentioned it was easier to focus in this type of environment or that it was simply saving time on commuting and having the comfort of working from home.

Students' comments on the disadvantages of online mode included complaining about 'technical problems sometimes' or that there was 'no possibility of meeting friends' or 'a lack of trust of the teachers'. Someone mentioned that students cheated in online tests, while another said that what was missing was direct contact with people. Others mentioned 'too much time in front of the screen' or 'not enough movement. Someone else noticed that 'only some subjects should be online'.

Question 18 provided opportunity for additional reflections on the topic of the influence of technology and other factors influencing both online and face-to-face learning. One student mentioned that 'technology is very useful because I can get my coursebook as a PDF'. One student said that 'electronic notes are helpful and help with studying', while another that 'teachers were understanding when I had technological problems'. Someone claimed that the entirety of a degree should be online as they felt safe in the online mode and did not worry about the health of theirs and their loved ones. Someone said that technology helped a lot in studying as students could use online dictionaries.

There was some criticism as well, though, as someone noticed that 'online study allows you to save time and money on commuting but what suffers is our health, both mental and physical, e.g. sore eyes, spine problems, anxiety'. Another mentioned that 'sitting in front of one's laptop the whole day does not have a good influence on me'.

Findings and their interpretation

The main and central question that this study was trying to answer is ‘What motivates and influences learning English among students during hybrid learning?’. The following were established as factors that motivate and influence learning English among students in a hybrid mode of learning: successful completion of tasks, demonstration of skills and knowledge, becoming professionally successful in the future, importance of English for private plans, e.g. travelling. Moreover, students noted that English is a necessity nowadays, noted a fascination with foreign countries and language, pleasure and satisfaction from the knowledge gained in learning, liking the teacher, and passing tests and exams. Additionally, respondents mentioned learning because of a scholarship, wanting to improve one’s linguistic skills, passion for the subject itself. Moreover, the following was stressed: the stability of learning in one mode vs. the instability causing demotivation, the comfort of learning from home, time saved on commuting in the online mode and the possibility of learning from home when sick in the online mode. Furthermore, the advantage of using technology to support studying, and concern for the health of oneself and others (especially during Covid-19) were mentioned as positives for the use of technology. On the other hand, technical problems when using technology for studying, a lack of contact with peers, spending too much time in front of the screen, and insufficient physical activity were mentioned as downsides.

Students, in short, are motivated and influenced both intrinsically and extrinsically by various motives and factors, both online and offline.

Successful completion of tasks relates to the motive of achievement (Komorowska 2009), as is demonstration of skills and knowledge. Becoming professionally successful in the future is linked to instrumental motivation of which Komorowska (2009) writes but also to Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs. Being motivated by the importance of English as a necessity nowadays or for private plans is also motivated instrumentally (Komorowska 2009). Fascination with the foreign language and countries is, on the other hand, driven by the integrational motive (Komorowska 2009). Komorowska wrote about the so-called cognitive motive and that one is seen in the pleasure and satisfaction from the knowledge gained (2009), whereas the achievement motive (Komorowska 2009) is seen in wanting to improve one’s linguistic skills. Achievement-driven or instrumental (Komorowska 2009) is also learning because of a scholarship. It can be described as motivated extrinsically, as understood by Ur (1999). Tests are also extrinsic motivators (Ur 1999).

Setting goals, planning one's work and doing homework is important from the perspective of motivation for learning, of which Schunk et al. (2008) write. Bandura (1988) also wrote about planning time spent on studies. Komorowska (2009) stressed the importance of self-evaluation in learning a language. Goals are also important when it comes to self-direction of which Knowles (1973) wrote in the learning of adults, although linked to time, in the questionnaire conducted, time came out as a factor contributing to lesser motivation.

The subject itself emerged as important and that is linked to intrinsic motivation, as understood by Ur (1999) who wrote about interest or Lindeman (1926) who stressed enjoyment in learning in adult life.

Teacher recognition is a motive of gaining approval (Komorowska 2009), Maslow (1943) and Ur (1999) who spoke of the teacher as the authority and linked to extrinsic motivation. Peer support of which Komorowska (2009) speaks also emerged as a factor motivating learning in the study.

Other factors that motivate and influence the learning of English in the hybrid mode are linked to the comfort and convenience of learning from home using technology, the importance of stability and the demotivating value of constant changes causing instability. Convenience or flexibility also emerged as influencing and motivating factors in the author's previous work on learning online (Kozinska 2013). Practical reasons also play a role, e.g. saving time on commuting or not risking an infection during the pandemic. Factors that are perceived as negative are technological problems, health problems and the issue of isolation when studying online.

The results of this study only partially relate to those of Jiang et al. (2022), where the online mode was a factor contributing to increasing students' motivation online, but it has to be acknowledged that this study was conducted on a sample of 40 students, whereas that of Jiang et al. (2022) on more than 200 students. In this study some students felt the constant change of mode was a demotivating rather than motivating factor. Also, the level of anxiety among some students was higher rather than lower in the online learning mode.

Conclusions

The main contribution of the study performed is the new and original context in which it was conducted– the first ever semester in which the students from the group who were surveyed had to study in the so-called hybrid mode (that is, a mix of face to face teaching and online learning if they happened to test positive for COVID-19).

The study yielded plenty of primary data which was interpreted using relevant literature.

A possible limitation of this research is that no examination of the correlations between different answers for specific users was performed. This could be conducted in a longer or a larger-scale study, however it is unlikely there will be another such semester of hybrid mode studies ever again to permit the circumstances to do this larger study. Another limitation could be the small sample, from which no generalizations should be drawn. Further research could thus include a larger sample of participants. Further investigations could continue with the same research questions or with different research questions and a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods to increase the validity and reliability of research.

The most concrete finding which the study yielded is that students do not cope well with frequent unexpected changes and the uncertainty that the situation of studying in the times of COVID-19 brought. However, even as the era of COVID-19 passes, it seems that hybrid learning uncovered that there are, in fact, many advantages to an online mode of studying, as many students observed, e.g. the affordances of technology or being able to protect one's health but at the same time study from home. Most of them chose the online studying option as the preferred one.

It is also not possible to separate some factors that motivate and influence learning from the context, that is to say: some motivators will be the same regardless of the pandemic and a hybrid teaching environment. For example, studying in order to secure an attractive job after graduating or being simply passionate about the subject or language are possible motivating factors across different teaching environments and settings.

At the time of finishing work on this article (i.e. March 2023), the University of Warmia and Mazury (Uniwersytet Warmińsko-Mazurski w Olsztynie 2023) has returned to face-to-face mode of teaching, however it introduced the possibility of conducting teacher duty hours online, via MS Teams, which is a convenient solution valued by many teachers and students. Similar solutions were introduced at other universities, e.g. Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan (Adam Mickiewicz University 2023). Some Polish universities have by now introduced hybrid teaching solutions in the form of online versus face-to-face classes days, e.g. WSB University in Poznan (WSB University in Poznan 2023). Further research could thus be conducted at that university to see how students cope with hybrid learning as a permanent solution. The results of this study could also be used by this university to better understand their students' needs in the mixed face-to-face and online learning mode.

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