The advantages of face-to-face education: a statistical study

Introduction

As it imposed deep restrictions on our lives, the COVID-19 pandemic had many impacts on people all over the world – forcing us to adapt our lifestyles and in the way we practiced our various activities, from family meetings to social events. It also included major changes in our approach to education.

Perhaps students, in general, were the ones most affected by the restrictions and changes related to the pandemic, as families found themselves facing new challenges related to access and right to education: access to the devices necessary to study (computer, Internet services), parents' diligent follow-up to the education process, homework, exams, and the imposed continuous presence of children at home, away from school environment and class friends – the environment in which they can learn and build a balanced personality both scientifically and socially.

This paper deals with the results of a statistical study conducted during the academic year 2020-2021 on members of the educational and administrative staff in the schools of the Latin Patriarchate in Jordan, as well as on students' families. The study collected opinions about their various experiences in distance learning, and what type of education they prefer for their children. Accordingly, let us begin by identifying the elements of the study, before we present its results, to conclude by discussing them and drawing recommendations.

Study Items

a. Background and purpose

This study aimed to explore the views of students' parents about distance learning and the education they would prefer their children to receive during the next academic year, in light of the development of the epidemic situation in Jordan and the government decisions related to it. About education, three scenarios can be expected:

1. Face-to-face education, which implies the return of all students in schools, under strict health requirements.

2. Online learning, meaning education on educational platforms found on the Internet, which has prevailed during the past two years.

3. Mixed education, meaning a combination of the two types of education mentioned above, either by having days designated for face-to-face education, and others for distance education, or by having students follow distance and face-to-face classes every day.

b. Method and duration of the study

In order to achieve this end, a special questionnaire was made based on scientific studies conducted in this field, taking into account the specificity of the work of the Latin Patriarchate Schools, and the cultural and social differences that characterize Jordanian society.

In light of the epidemiological situation in Jordan, Internet programs were used to send the questionnaire (via Google Forms). The participants were given two weeks to answer.

c. Target group and participants

The participants to this study were parents with children studying at the Latin Patriarchate schools in Jordan (7,984 students for the academic year 2020-2021), as well as school staff, educational specialists, and priests of the Patriarchate. The number of those who answered the questionnaire reached 1 630 individuals, most of them being parents. Overall, the percentage of participants in the study was 20.4%.

Participants included 43.37% of males and 56.63% of females. In total, they constituted 91.41% of the students' parents in all academic levels, and 8.53% from other categories, in different geographic areas split between the north (Irbid, Ajloun, Anjara, Al-Wahadna, Mafraq, and Zarqa), the center (Fuheis, Safout, Salt, Amman), and the south (Madaba, Al-Karak, Al-Wasiyah, Al-Smakiah, and Adir) of Jordan.

d. Results

The responses of individuals to the questionnaire were analyzed using appropriate statistical programs. The degrees of approval for each type of education were selected based on the participants' choice of preferred learning style among the suggested patterns, as shown in the attached table. This has been studied according to the gender of the participants, their area of residence, their relationships with students, and the educational level of the students

The results came as follows:
("5" represents the highest degree of approval for the question related to the specific education style, while "1" represents the lowest degree)

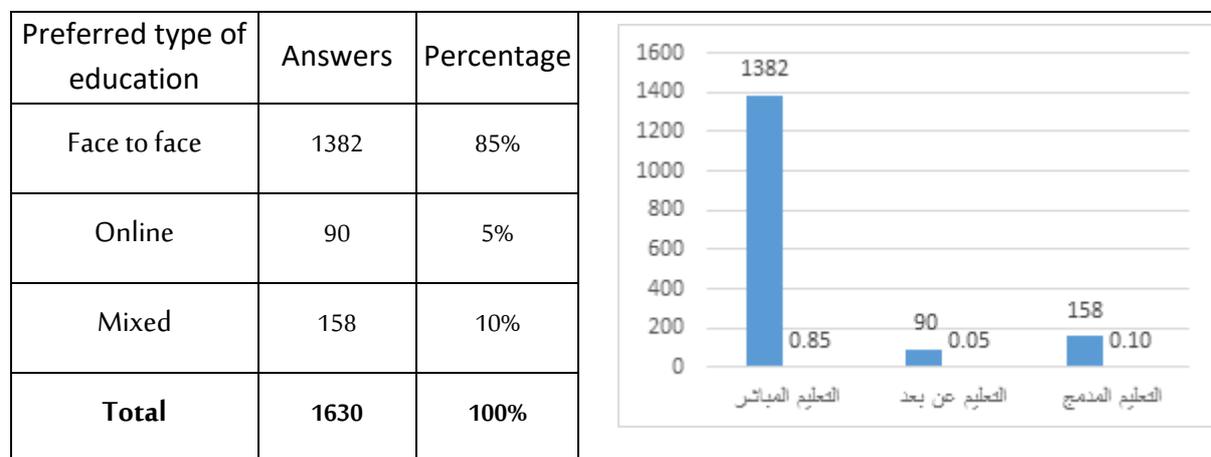| Preferred type of education	Answers	
Face to face	4, 61	
Online	2, 87	
Mixed	3, 17	
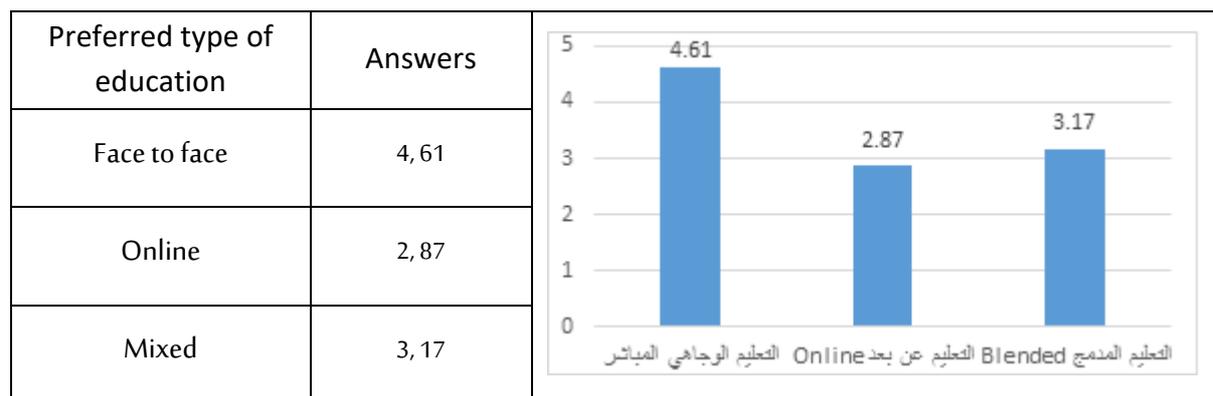
The table above indicates the general average of individuals' choices of preferred education. The results showed that face-to-face education is preferred by the majority of individuals, while the mixed option came in second place and online education in third place.

This result was the same for both males and females, and general among all participants, regardless of the nature of the relationships between participants and students, and regardless of the area of residence – despite an apparent increase in the average responses of individuals in the southern region to face-to-face education, compared to their responses in the northern and central regions.

However, one should notice that, according to statistics conducted based on educational level, individuals with younger children seemed to prefer face-to-face education, whereas individuals with older children tended, in comparison, to prefer distance or mixed education.

Whatever the case, the aforementioned hierarchy was taken, according to which the percentage obtained for each type of education was determined (determining the preference for face-to-face education, blended education, and distance education, as shown in the following table).

Preferred type of education	Answers	Percentage
Face to face	1382	85%
Online	90	5%
Mixed	158	10%
Total	**1630**	**100%**

Analyzing the results and making recommendations

a. Discussing the results of the study and its implications

This study comes as a continuation of the educational, religious and social role that the Latin Patriarchate Schools in Jordan has played since 1866. Its aim is to share with parents of students both their experiences in distance education and the education they prefer for their children.

Although we are aware that defining the method of education for the next academic year will depend on the Ministry of Education, and be based on the developments of the epidemiological situation in Jordan as well as related government decisions, we hope that the results of this study will allow some to understand the impact distance education had on parents and teachers.

In general, face-to-face education was the most preferred type of education by all participants in the study. This result can be explained by two factors: the absence of previous experience in distance learning and the urgent need to provide the material necessary to distance learning. The first factor implied for the parents to stay home to continuously monitor the

education process and students' performance, and the lack of social contact between students. The second factor implies costs and Internet subscriptions, which weighted heavily on families' incomes.

The final educational outcome of this period of distance learning also lies in the presence of a knowledge gap among students, and an educational loss that the official authorities are now seeking to compensate – in addition to the need to prepare the students to go back to school, especially since their immersion in distance education practices has led many of them to develop laziness and rely on Internet as a source of knowledge, instead of teachers and books.

In addition, the results indicated that both fathers and mothers had a preference for face-to-face education over other forms of education. If we take into account the general lockdown experienced by Jordan last year, and the fact that parents had to be with their children to monitor their education, we can conclude that the state of agreement between parents, no matter the sex, about their experiences in distance education, and their preference for face-to-face education, came as a result of the children's practices during distance education, and the social isolation they experienced, which parents observed over the course of an entire school year.

With regard to the preferred type of education according to the area of residence, Jordan was split into three regions (North, Central, and South), which is the division adopted by the official authorities. Regions that preferred distance or mixed education more than the others tended to have higher-quality Internet services and governorates with determining social and economic factors.

As for the educational level of the students, the results of the study indicated that the respondents who had younger children (from first to sixth grade) mostly preferred face-to-face education. This result can be understood considering the requirements of the developmental stage for children that age, where constant movement is required, and during which they acquire basic learning skills (recognition of letters, pen writing, basic writing skills), learning and innovation skills (such as critical thinking and problem solving), and communication and cooperation skills, which they learn thanks to interactions with their teacher and classmates. The development of creativity and innovation skills, life skills (flexibility in thinking, ability to adapt and handle situations, showing initiative and self-direction, social interaction skills, and so on) could not be provided for with only distance education.

As for the last question of the questionnaire, which was about the preferred style of education in general, its results were consistent with the previous variables, and indicated that 1,382 participants (85%) preferred face-to-face education, followed by 158 (10%) preferring mixed education, and 90 (5%) preferring distance education.

b. Study recommendations

Despite stressing the importance of observing health requirements, such as social distancing, wearing masks and paying attention to the smallest details of personal hygiene, and despite the possibility of returning to face-to-face education in schools, we believe that in the future it is necessary to:

- Work on preparing students psychologically and academically for the possibility of returning to face-to-face education.
- Work to compensate students for educational losses by focusing on the critical cognitive products associated with each subject in each grade.
- Help students to stop relying on non-educational practices associated with distance education, such as relying on others to solve assignments, exchanging homework solutions and exam questions in inappropriate ways, and counting on the Internet to obtain ready-made knowledge without making an effort to acquire it.
- Help students (re)acquire appropriate educational practices in which the Internet is used as a general source of knowledge and in which students plays the role of critical researchers, while teachers act as mentors and advisors.
- Build on the student's experiences, according to how they individually perceived distance education, by strengthening their independence and teaching them to learn and study by themselves, as well as giving them new responsibilities in the house based on their age (cleaning the room, taking care of the younger children, etc).
- Build and improve the relationship between schools and parents to get rid of the negative social effects of the lockdowns, and get students out of isolation and away from the Internet by having them participate in extracurricular activities, sports clubs, family visits and social events and voluntary work.
- Rebuild the relationship between students and teachers, between students and schools, and between students and students.

Conclusion

Regardless of the negative opinions about distance education shown by the study, we believe that this type of education is now a part of the education sector, and will not entirely disappear from schools – especially now that we live in a changing world, in which many emergencies may occur related to diseases, epidemics or weather conditions. We must therefore try to learn from our experience in distance education and build on it, so that this type of education becomes a true, concrete alternative to face-to-face education.

Father Imad Twal